ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: CRITICAL MONTESSORI EDUCATION: CENTERING BIPOC MONTESSORI EDUCATORS AND THEIR ANTI-RACIST TEACHING PRACTICES

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While many BIPOC Montessori educators engage in anti-racist and culturally responsive teaching, Montessori education remains predominantly race-evasive. As a philosophy, it is rooted in colorblind perspectives in its focus on "all children" and lack of explicit centering of BIPOC students' experiences. Teaching must account for race and racial lived realities in order to better support BIPOC students' ways of knowing in culturally relevant and sustaining ways. This study seeks to center the voices of BIPOC Montessori educators and disrupt the pattern of Montessori research conducted without a critical racial lens. Framed by Critical Race Theory, this study focuses on the strengths, assets, and anti-racist teaching practices that one BIPOC educator brings to her classroom. I use critical ethnographic methods to better understand how a BIPOC Montessori teacher at a public charter Montessori school interprets and enacts the Montessori method to support BIPOC students. I consider how her racial identity informs her practices, and the structural barriers she faces at her school when enacting anti-racist and strength-based approaches. The guiding research questions of this study are: *How does a Black Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? How does she practice the Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices? What are the structural barriers that continue to challenge her as a Black*

educator doing her work? My analysis suggests that the teacher maintains her classroom space as a tangible and intangible cultural space that reflects and maintains her students' identities; that her own identity as a Black woman deeply contribute to the school's work around anti-racism and culturally responsive pedagogy; and that there are external barriers that both the teacher and the school face, that prevent them both from fully achieving culturally responsive teaching practices. At the core of the study, I seek to understand the possibilities and challenges of Montessori education from the perspective of BIPOC Montessori educators, and how we could learn from them to better support BIPOC students. I hope to begin a path toward more counter-stories in the Montessori community to specifically support BIPOC Montessori educators and understand the structural barriers they face to anti-racist teaching in Montessori programs in the United States.

CRITICAL MONTESSORI EDUCATION: CENTERING BIPOC MONTESSORI EDUCATORS AND THEIR ANTI-RACIST TEACHING PRACTICES

by

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A Note to the Reader

I began my career as a Montessori teacher by opening a public charter Montessori school in a major city on the east coast of the United States. Despite my qualms about charter schools, I knew I wanted to be faithful to the Montessori method while making it accessible to the general public, without requiring tuition. My school served children from grades PK3 through first grade, and we grew with the children; it now serves students up through sixth grade. Being a public charter school, the students who attended came from a range of backgrounds in race and economic status. When we opened, I was the only lead teacher of color. The other lead teachers were all white, and the other staff members of color were either classroom assistants or support staff, with the exception of one Black administrator. As the school grew, the staff demographic changed, and although most of the teachers were white when I left after five years of teaching, that number grew to three lead teachers of color out of nine as of Fall 2021, making 33 percent of the lead teaching staff individuals of color. As I went through my teaching career at that school, I had multiple experiences of BIPOC colleagues telling me they wanted their children in my class because of my own identity as a Montessori educator of color[1]. When asked why, they would say things like, "you know what you're doing" or "my child needs a teacher like you." I did not doubt that the other lead teachers also knew what they were doing, but, being in the early stages of my own racial identity development (Tatum, 1992), I did not yet grasp that it was because I was a fellow educator of color. It was not until a conversation with a Black colleague of mine that I began to understand. She had a young child who would be in PK3 in the next couple of years,

[1] The term BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It implies a focus on and prioritization of understanding the systemic racism and oppression inflicted on BIPOC community members by white supremacy in the United States, and acknowledges the need to address this oppression (The BIPOC Project, 2016).

and wanted him to be in my class. She elaborated slightly, telling me that I "got it" in a way that my colleagues did not, before moving the conversation along.

In this study, I will use “BIPOC” to refer to Black, Indigenous, and people of color. The term BIPOC, in particular, recognizes the differential racialization of people who are not racialized as white in the U.S. it is necessary to acknowledge that our differential racializations are connected to systems of antiblackness and anti-indigeneity and histories of enslavement, land theft, and genocide. More specifically, racialization is the process by which racial meaning is extended to previously uncategorized groups (Omi & Winant, 2014). The term "BIPOC" acknowledges Black and Indigenous people of color and the specific systems of oppression they face and have historically faced in the United States. While the experiences of people of color are different, they are also interconnected, which is why BIPOC includes multiple groups of people of color. I acknowledge the differences in racialization for different groups of people of color. Although I employ the term "BIPOC" as an onto-epistemological perspective, throughout the study I will do my best to specify the racial groups to which individuals belong. Additionally, I want to specify that racial groups are not the same as ethnic groups, but rather are related to how we are racialized (and not what we choose) (Omi & Winant, 2014).

My experience as an Indian American woman differs from that of my Black colleague who told me I “got it.” I, as an Indian American woman, am racialized differently from my Black colleague (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Liu et al, 2022). Within systems of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, types of racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014) such as the model minority use Asian Americans as pawns in white supremacy; Asian Americans are

afforded certain opportunities that Black Americans are not[2] (Museus, 2013). Granting contingent benefits to some individuals of color and not others promote the idea that racism does not exist anymore. However, Asian Americans are only afforded such opportunities to the extent that it benefits white institutions and structures and thus, white people (Liu et al, 2019). As a South Asian American woman, my own racial identity allows me to see and notice certain things, but not others, which affects how I see and interpret data. These forms of racialization fall under the Critical Race Theory idea of differential racialization (Omi & Winant, 2014), in which dominant (white) institutions and structures categorize and racialize different BIPOC groups in different ways, based on the needs of the white supremacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). While this paper looks at BIPOC Montessori educators as a community, it is important to note that not all BIPOC individuals are racialized the same way (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Years later, having studied BIPOC educators and students in extant literature, I have come to understand that my specific experience as an educator of color influenced me to teach in a particular way, preparing my BIPOC students for a world that saw them differently than their white counterparts, and holding them to high standards. My experience as an educator of color in a predominantly white institutional structure taught me how to navigate schools built around white norms. This skill of navigation can be understood as navigational capital, a form of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). CCW encompasses various abilities, skills, and sets of knowledge BIPOC individuals possess that are often overlooked by white dominant culture (Yosso, 2005). I learned to rely on my fellow BIPOC educators and community members as social and support networks. My awareness of my racial identity included strategies for existing

[2] While I used Critical Race Theory to frame this literature review, I acknowledge that AsianCrit, an offshoot of Critical Race Theory, is the theory that specifically asserts that Asians are racialized differently (Museus, 2013).

and succeeding in white structures, and countering racism. This awareness and strategies are called "racial literacy" (Twine, 2016). Racial literacy refers to the awareness of what it means to be a racialized person in white society and knowing how to navigate it (Twine, 2004). Racial literacy acknowledges the contextual nature of racism (how there is no universally applicable solution), the relationship between race and power, and the relationship between race and other variables such as gender, class, and geography (Guinier, 2004). Racial literacy suggests that racialized hierarchies reflect the way power and resources are distributed in society (Guinier, 2004). One way of practicing racial literacy in schools is by acknowledging that being racialized as a BIPOC individual is a way of knowing; the community cultural wealth (CCW) framework acknowledges racialized ways of knowing otherwise negated or frowned upon by the structures of white dominant society. CCW refers to the various kinds of cultural capital BIPOC individuals possess, ranging from resistant capital (to resist oppressive structures) to social capital (having networks of support in their communities).[3]

My experience as an Indian American woman has taught me my own set of cultural wealth practices. My CCW seeped into my teaching practice in a noticeable way; I had high standards for all of my students, especially my BIPOC students. When I was a young child, I rarely saw myself reflected in the tangible classroom materials; as an educator, I made sure to include art, stories, and books reflecting the children in the class. Additionally, I was hyper-aware of the racial dynamics in the classroom and made a concerted effort to address questions

[3] Yosso (2005) describes wealth as the extent of a person's accumulated assets. Various forms of cultural capital include: aspirational capital (the resilient ability to maintain hope for the future despite barriers), familial capital (the cultural knowledge acquired through family and community), social capital (the network of community resources, peers, and social networks), navigational capital (the ability to maneuver through social institutions such as schools or the health care system), resistant capital (skills that challenge inequity and developed through resistance and opposition to oppression), and linguistic capital (the ability to communicate in more than one style or language). All of these forms accumulate to make up that individual's community cultural wealth.

and comments about race with the children. Research shows that BIPOC educators tend to hold their BIPOC students to higher standards, have stronger student attendance, and higher student achievement than their white educator counterparts (McCarthy et al., 2020). I know that I am not the only Montessori educator of color to use my CCW to enhance my teaching practice and approach with children. BIPOC educators who are aware of the CCW they possess can and do use it as a pedagogical tool. However, little existing research documents the CCW BIPOC Montessori educators possess and bring to their work with BIPOC students around the United States, and the literature that does actually diminishes the work of BIPOC teachers (for the purposes of this paper I will focus on the U.S.) (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018).

While various organizations are doing important work to address racism and bias in Montessori schools, there are little to no counter-stories in the zeitgeist that demonstrate the success of BIPOC Montessori educators with BIPOC students. Counter-stories are stories that give voice to those historically oppressed due to racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The purpose of counter-stories is to disrupt dominant (white) narratives and the truths resulting from those dominant narratives. Addressing bias and racism in schools must be more than identifying it and the problems surrounding it; without a model or idea of what *is* working for children, educators are left with few models of successful anti-racist teaching. Additionally, there is little published literature about BIPOC Montessori educators specifically and their successful pedagogical practices. With BIPOC educators leaving the education field at higher rates than white teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2018), it is crucial to examine their experiences in Montessori schools. I use the term "educators" rather than "teachers" to shed light on the importance of assistants, aides, support staff, and administrative staff in schools (Littlecott et al, 2018; Sosinsky, 2011).

My own teaching experience has shown me that educators other than lead teachers can have a strong impact on students. I have seen BIPOC assistants and aftercare staff have stronger relationships with children than their lead teachers. While teachers are the ones who most directly impact the students, examining the other educators who have relationships with students portrays a more holistic view of a student's experience. Thus, when I use the word "educator" I refer to any adult staff member in a Montessori school.

The Montessori method is one that can be implemented in a critical racial way. The individualized approach and strong relationship between student and teacher that it requires lends itself well to other humanizing pedagogies such as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CRP, CSP) (Lillard, in press). CRP refers to a method of teaching that includes content relevant to student experiences through art, lessons, and books (Hammond, 2015). CRP is the predecessor to CSP, which emphasizes not only including relevant content, but sustaining students' knowledge, language, and identities (Paris, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to CRP/CSP together, with the assumption that Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is the pedagogy to most likely be used by educators, while Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy is more aspirational. I know these pedagogical strategies can exist in a Montessori setting, and that the Montessori method can be liberatory when implemented critically. However, there are few studies centering BIPOC Montessori educators and students; the few that exist focus mostly on academic achievement and discipline. While there are papers on racial discipline disproportionality and the differences in academic achievement between white children and Black children, few papers focus on the strengths and positive narratives of BIPOC Montessori educators and children. In fact, the only paper I found that would fit this mold was accepted for publication in 2021 (Lillard, in press).

The Montessori community faces similar challenges to conventional schools when it comes to race; we are not immune to problems such as racial discipline disproportionality (Brown & Steele, 2015). Even in Montessori schools, BIPOC children and educators face prejudice and the consequences that come with racism. Critical BIPOC educators find ways of using CRP and CSP to honor their students' identities and experiences (Doucet, 2019). BIPOC educators' encounters with racism lead them to anti-racist work in their schools to support their students (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018a). Existing literature on conventional[4] educators shows that BIPOC educators who are intentional about supporting their BIPOC students and who possess a level of critical consciousness teach with an understanding of the systemic and racist barriers their students face (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; McCarthy et al, 2020). However, their teaching experiences are often fraught with racial stress, hostile school climates, and white norms used to evaluate their teaching methods (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Kohli, 2018a; McCarthy et al, 2020). Due to limited literature on BIPOC Montessori educators, this area of research remains sparse. Montessori schools provide a unique context in which BIPOC educators are enacting anti-racist work to support their BIPOC students. BIPOC Montessori educators who use their CCW in their work with children create a culturally sustaining environment for students and bring in their resistant capital to create racially just spaces. Without examining them, the Montessori and wider education communities are missing out on their strengths, the various lived experiences that make them crucial members of creating culturally sustaining spaces, and the massive impact they have on BIPOC students.

[4] The Montessori community often uses the term "conventional" or "traditional" to refer to the education system and methods used in public K-12 schools in the U.S., in juxtaposition to alternative or progressive education philosophies such as the Montessori method.

Due to the growing population of public Montessori schools and the access they provide to more BIPOC families, Montessori is poised to be a transformative educational method for BIPOC families and students. Its commitment to holistic education lends itself well to combining Montessori and culturally sustaining teaching. Research shows BIPOC Montessori educators specifically may be uniquely suited to create racial identity-affirming spaces for their BIPOC students compared to their white counterparts (Lillard, in press) (although a question that remains after the study is whether or not those BIPOC Montessori educators need to be critically conscious about their racial identities to create such spaces). It is my hope that my study revealing the teaching strengths of one BIPOC Montessori teacher will further contribute to the literature about the ways BIPOC Montessori educators use their strengths to practice anti-racist teaching and affirm their BIPOC students' racialized experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The research that has been conducted in the Montessori community thus far focuses on the Montessori materials, demographics of Montessori charter schools in the U.S., executive function and child development, and longitudinal outcomes of children that have attended Montessori schools (Debs, 2016; Debs, 2019; Lillard, 2008; Lillard, 2011; Lillard, 2019). More recently, a few studies have examined differences in discipline practices in Montessori schools based on children's race, and the Iens of Black former Montessori students reflecting on their experiences (Brown & Steele, 2015; Lillard et al, in press). However, little research centers the experiences and strengths of BIPOC Montessori educators. With over 282,000 BIPOC Montessori educators in the U.S. (Zippia, 2021), there is hardly a shortage of BIPOC Montessori experiences. Montessori aside, there are many BIPOC educators who do critical racial work to support their BIPOC students' identities by understanding structural inequities, doing asset-based teaching, and critically reflecting on their teaching practices (Kohli et al, 2019). By examining the teaching practices of critically conscious BIPOC Montessori educators who support BIPOC students' identities, we can learn from them and understand how to improve the Montessori experience for our BIPOC Montessori students (Kohli et al, 2019).

Montessori: A Person, Philosophy, Pedagogy, and Curriculum

Montessori is a philosophy, pedagogy, and curriculum originally created by Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman doctor in Italy who lived from 1870-1952 (Association Montessori International, n.d.). In the 1900s, she was approached by community members of San Lorenzo, a low-income neighborhood in Rome, and

asked to work with a group of children who could not attend school or access academic content. From descriptions of these children, we can now deduce they were students with exceptional needs. Through observation and trial-and-error, Dr. Montessori developed a method to support student learning as well as their holistic development. The students in her classroom, the Casa dei Bambini, were independent, resolved conflict themselves, and progressed academically.

The Montessori method became renowned and began to garner attention locally and internationally. When Benito Mussolini wanted to use the Montessori method to indoctrinate Italian children, Dr. Montessori fled the country. Her time abroad in countries such as India and the Netherlands influenced her work as she observed children in other countries also take to the Montessori method.

As a philosophy, Montessori is an approach to being with children. The phrase "the forgotten citizen" is often used in regard to children, to refer to the idea that children are often left out, isolated, diminished, and excluded from society (Montessori, 2007). Montessori philosophy regards children as full human beings with their own thoughts, opinions, and experiences. The philosophy is one of peace education and is built around respect for the self, others, and the environment. Students learn to respect their own work, realize their own interests, take care of the space around them, and care for themselves physically (for young children, this means putting on their own shoes and preparing their own snacks; for older children this means deciding how to use their work time to complete lessons). For all its focus on the full humanity of children, however, Montessori philosophy does not explicitly consider problems of asymmetrical power dynamics in racialized contexts such as

schools in the U.S. Without considering how children are affected by power dynamics and racial hierarchies, we deny them the acknowledgment of their full lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

An example of denying students' lived experiences is the lack of explicit acknowledgment of race in Montessori classrooms. In Montessori classrooms, students learn how to resolve conflict with one another. While in conventional classrooms, the educators often resolve conflict for the students, and tell them how a disagreement should end, Montessori educators make space for students to talk about and resolve their problems. In younger grades, educators use role play (called Grace and Courtesy lessons) to teach children how to participate in society (such as waiting in a line for the bathroom or wishing a friend a happy birthday). Montessori classroom environments are made up of mixed age groups, with three grades together in one space. However, the assumption in many Montessori classrooms is that the collaboration and social skills learned through conflict resolution and Grace and Courtesy lessons will organically bring to light any questions or thoughts students have about race or, in the case of BIPOC students, their racialized experiences. In various Montessori spaces, I have heard Montessori educators explain that they will address race if the children bring it up but will not actively bring it up themselves. This creates a problem; it presumes a race-less society and BIPOC students then receive the implicit message that race is unimportant, and the racialized and lived experiences that make them who they are remain unacknowledged. Colorblind assumptions, and the opinion that conversations about race should only happen if students ask, create barriers in acknowledging the full humanity of BIPOC

Montessori students. Race is one variable among many others that could affect students' realities and lived experiences.

As a pedagogy, Montessori takes the form of individualized lessons. The phrase "follow the child" is often used by Montessori educators to describe the way the adult meets the child where they are, developmentally, academically, and socially. Rather than teach one lesson to the entire class, the teacher moves throughout the classroom, giving individual or small group lessons, and then giving students space and time to practice or complete the lesson. Individualized and small group lessons offer opportunities for Montessori educators to acknowledge and discuss the lived racialized experiences of BIPOC students. Students have uninterrupted work time in the mornings and afternoons to spend ample time practicing lessons until they are ready to progress to the next lesson. The teacher has a thorough understanding of child development and observes the students to know when they are ready for the next lesson. Montessori teachers are trained in child development, observation, how to give lessons, which lessons to give, and how to support an interactive classroom environment. Montessori training supports decision-making, collaboration, and cooperative learning in the classroom environment. It is a hands-on method that supports teacher modeling, and harmonious interpersonal relationships through individualized and small group instruction. While individualized lessons are built into the Montessori curriculum, discussions of BIPOC students' racialized experiences are not.

Yet, while Montessori educators are trained to support children in discovering their personalities and identities as whole human beings from birth to adolescence,

which are often multi-faceted, there is no explicit discussion about racial or ethnic identity development in the Montessori setting and how adults can support those specific aspects of development in children (D'Cruz, in press). Organizations such as Embracing Equity and Montessori for Social Justice support social justice work and its intersection with Montessori. While social justice work emphasizes a sense of equality (The San Diego Foundation, 2016), anti-racist work explicitly supports racial and ethnic identities and pushes back against racially oppressive systems and practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). Anti-racist work requires racial knowledge, and understanding the construct of race and how it appears in structures, institutions, policies, and practices in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). There is little universal, pedagogical support of anti-racist work or work explicitly supporting racial or ethnic identities in Montessori classrooms.

Montessori is also a curriculum. Contrary to popular belief, Montessori is actually a standardized method in that there are prerequisites, requirements, and a general progression of how the curriculum flows. There is a standard set of Montessori materials researched and proven to be effective when teachers use them the way they were trained to (Lillard, 2017). Because "Montessori" is not a patented name or method, any school or teacher can use the term without adhering to any particular standards. Lillard's (2017) years of research demonstrated that simply having Montessori materials is not enough; they have to be taught the way the teacher was trained to use them to be most effective. In addition to the materials, there is a general, standard progression of lessons. While there is room for flexibility depending on student interests, teachers still follow a general scope and sequence, and lessons

have prerequisites and requirements for moving forward. What is lacking in this standardized curriculum, however, is the acknowledgement of BIPOC students' racialized experiences and identities. Teachers are not trained to explicitly notice students' racial and cultural literacies. In fact, although Montessori educators are trained to incorporate global perspectives in the form of tangible materials, such as geographical folders depicting life on each continent, there are few universal teachings to support Montessori educators' culturally relevant teaching practices, racial knowledge, or anti-racist teaching practices, specifically when working with BIPOC students (D'Cruz, in press). To be clear, culturally relevant teaching does not only refer to tangible classroom materials such as art and books, but it also involves an understanding of how to view BIPOC students' strengths and abilities, deconstructing white dominant norms, and acknowledging students' lived experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Additionally, cultural competence does not automatically equal racial knowledge or anti-racist teaching. Montessori educators are not universally trained[5] to view the philosophy critically, and to view the merits and faults of Montessori education, the gaps of which include clear, concrete ways of viewing BIPOC educators' and students' abilities, valuing their experiences, and working toward dismantling racism. While there is a set of standard Montessori materials shown to be most effective (Lillard, 2017), the attitudes of the adults toward Montessori students

[5] There are various Montessori training organizations around the world. The oldest organization, founded by Dr. Maria Montessori herself, is called the Association Montessori International (AMI). AMI training covers infant/toddler education (ages 0-2 years), primary education (ages 2.5-6), elementary education (ages 6-12), and adolescent education (12-18).

contribute to the classroom climate and also serve as part of the curriculum (D'Cruz, in press). This element of Montessori pedagogy offers opportunities for educators to connect with students and incorporate their lived experiences into their teaching. Taking on a critical race stance is necessary to interrogate unequal power structures that uphold and value (or devalue) white cultural practices and values over BIPOC cultural practices and values. This means acknowledging the voices and experiences of BIPOC Montessori students *and* educators to reveal racist structures that continue to be reified in Montessori schools and classrooms.

It is commonly thought that Montessori education is for the white and wealthy members of U.S. society. Contrary to popular belief, many BIPOC communities from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds have had access to Montessori education for decades. Due to the centuries-long explicit commitment to child development and respect for children, Montessori education is poised to be a tool for liberation for BIPOC communities. As noted, because Montessori remains race evasive, teachers and administrators are less equipped to support BIPOC students. In February 2021, the head of a Montessori school in Utah sent a letter to families saying they could opt out of Black History Month activities if they chose (The Associated Press, 2021). When questioned about it later, the head of school expressed remorse and regret, saying a few families in the school had asked not to participate in any instruction related to Black History Month (The Associated Press, 2021). The choice to opt out of Black History Month suggests that Black history is not the problem of those that do not want to acknowledge it. Giving families the choice to opt out of Black history makes anti-Black racism a topic of individual prejudice, rather

than a structural problem to be addressed in the curriculum (Moses & Wilson, 2020). In February 2022, a teacher at a Montessori daycare had toddlers in the school make blackface masks and hold them up to their faces, claiming it as an activity to honor Black History Month (NBC, 2022). The website of the daycare indicates that they are now closed (NBC, 2022). The blackface mask activity was a form of curriculum violence, which occurs when educators or curriculum writers create and use lessons damaging to students in intellectual or emotional ways (Jones, 2020). Even when educators have good intentions, they can still cause harm to students in emotionally destructive ways (Jones, 2020). Both of these examples demonstrate the lack of a critical racial lens in Montessori practice. Because Montessori is not a patented name or method, any school can use it; it is difficult to know whether the above schools practiced high-fidelity Montessori[6]. Nonetheless, the fact that there are schools claiming the Montessori method but are actively harming children is problematic and harmful to BIPOC students (specifically Black students due to differential racialization) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Jones, 2020).

The high numbers of BIPOC students attending public Montessori schools (Debs, 2016) and the current racial and political climates require a more critical

[6] High-fidelity Montessori refers to the practices in a school using a complete set of Montessori materials in the most effective ways, per Lillard's studies (2011, 2017). The Utah school's charter explains that teachers must be trained in a program certified by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), but does not specify any more about where and how teachers should be trained. The school's website does not discuss any specific organizations' Montessori training.
The Boston daycare does not have any information on the website aside from a photo on the homepage, which includes 3-4 visible Montessori materials (Lillard, 2017) and far more conventional materials.

examination of Montessori theory, pedagogy, and practice. A study on the racial and economic makeup of public Montessori schools showed 55 percent of all public Montessori students are made up of BIPOC students (compared to 54 percent of conventional public schools) (Debs, 2016). Black students make up 22 percent of students in public Montessori schools, and 15 percent of students in conventional public schools (Debs, 2016). Students in public Montessori schools are more likely to attend racial diverse schools than conventional public schools, and analysis of 300 public Montessori programs showed that these programs served between 25 to 75 percent BIPOC students (Debs, 2016). While many public Montessori programs (specifically charter schools) cite racial diversity as the main goal of their school, the number of white public Montessori students has increased significantly in the past 20 years, while the number of Black students has not significantly changed (Debs, 2016). Some public Montessori charter school applications have even been denied due to concerns about disproportionately white student enrollment[7] (Debs & Brown, 2017). A critical racial Montessori framework helps expose the universality of whiteness as the norm in Montessori programs.

While there is disproportionality between BIPOC and white students in discipline (BIPOC students are more likely to be disciplined or seen as behaving poorly) (Brown & Steele, 2015), there is also research showing the positive experiences of BIPOC students, specifically Black students, in their Montessori

[7] Structurally, public school systems and public funding often serve as barriers to less wealthy families' access to public Montessori schools (Debs & Brown, 2017). For example, public Montessori schools in states where there is no preschool funding charge preschool tuition, restricting the students who can attend those schools (Debs & Brown, 2017). While this study focuses on the racial demographics in Montessori schools, it is important to note that income affects access to Montessori programs.

classrooms (Lillard, in press). The role of BIPOC educators in the positive experiences of BIPOC students is new in Montessori literature, but not new to the Montessori community (Murray et al, 2020). More research centering BIPOC Montessori students and educators is required to further demonstrate their strengths and abilities in academic literature (D'Cruz, in press).

Regarding teachers, the public Montessori teacher population echoes the overall public school teacher population; public Montessori teachers are disproportionately white (and identify as female) (Debs & Brown, 2017). The proportion of white to BIPOC Montessori educators reflects the conventional education world, with over 60 percent of Montessori trained teachers being white (DATA USA, n.d.). A survey of public resumes showed that 73 percent of Montessori teachers are white, 11.8 percent are Hispanic or Latino, 9.8 percent are Black, 3.3 percent are Asian, 0.6 percent are American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1.5 percent are unknown in race (Zippia, 2021). Three of the large Montessori organizations that facilitate the majority of the U.S. Montessori teacher trainings do not gather data on the race or ethnicity of their teacher trainees or their organizational membership (Debs & Brown, 2017). Having a majority of white teachers is significant due to education research demonstrating that white teachers may show cultural biases when working with BIPOC students and have lower expectations for their BIPOC students than BIPOC teachers might (Debs & Brown, 2017).

Montessori training programs' effectiveness in preparing teachers to teach racially diverse students is unknown (Debs & Brown, 2017). An organization called the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) established

Montessori training standards and included criteria for Culturally Responsive Teaching, but it is unclear whether and how Montessori training programs use these criteria (MACTE, 2018; Debs & Brown, 2017). Historically, Montessori teacher training has focused on training teachers for private Montessori schools; the majority of U.S. Montessori schools are private (Debs & Brown, 2017). Public Montessori teachers need more support and training to balance public school requirements and demands, such as understanding Common Core, the special education process, and which services students have access to under public school funding (Debs & Brown, 2017). There has been a steady increase over the past 5 years of growing support for public Montessori teachers through organizations such as the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector and Public Montessori in Action International. Such programs support public Montessori teachers and instructional coaches in high-fidelity Montessori practice while also developing tools to help schools adhere both to Montessori principles and state requirements. Some schools serving indigenous populations use the Montessori method; further investigation into these schools might shed light on how Montessori teachers could support anti-racist teaching and a racially diverse student body in their schools (Debs & Brown, 2017).

Research shows that Black students who attended Montessori schools scored higher on their math and science assessments, and that Latinx children in Montessori scored higher on school readiness measures than Latinx children in conventional schools (Lillard, in press). Theoretically, Montessori is aligned with Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy (CRP/CSP), and a study of former Montessori students who attended a primarily Black Montessori preschool showed that students'

experiences in the Montessori program were more aligned with CRP/CSP than when they transitioned to conventional schools (Lillard, in press). Additionally, Black children thrived in Montessori in academic achievement and self-sufficiency (Lillard, in press). While the former students in Lillard's study discussed their Blac' teacher's race, there is little to no research centering BIPOC Montessori educators. And while there is a history of Montessori education in Black communities (Debs, 2019; Murray et al, 2020), it is not fully represented in academic literature. Upon the introduction of Montessori to the United States in t[he] mid-20th century, it was mostly for middle class families (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). As Montessori schools began to increase in the private school sector, it became accessible to mostly white, affluent families (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2018).

Additionally, much of the existing Montessori research is conducted by white scholars. While there is some research on BIPOC Montessori students, there is even less research on BIPOC Montessori educators; however, BIPOC Montessori educators are known to be effective in their teaching and relationship-building, especially with BIPOC students (Lillard, in press).

In short, the Montessori community (and literature surrounding Montessori education) centers around whiteness and white epistemologies. There is little to no explicit discussion in Montessori training about deconstruction assumptions about the BIPOC community, and acknowledging and valuing their lived experiences, particularly in regard to racism (D'Cruz, in press). As a whole, Montessori does not always recognize the value of BIPOC teachers. Montessori training programs and schools that exist in the U.S. exist within the racist structures baked into the structures

in this country. Because of the way whiteness functions and is assumed to be the norm, it is inescapable unless explicitly addressed and countered (Leonardo, 2009). We must learn from BIPOC Montessori educators who are doing critical racial work to affirm their own and their BIPOC students' lived experiences and understand how they strongly support student success (Lillard, in press).

My own experience as a BIPOC Montessori educator, alongside others, has shown me how Montessori implementation can differ depending on the teacher and their lived experiences. My conversations with BIPOC Montessori educators, and their comments on the ways they infuse CRP/CSP into their teaching practices, led me to my dissertation topic of BIPOC Montessori educators' strengths and assets in their teaching practices, and my questions about the structural barriers they face, even when their schools promote anti-racist work. I use critical ethnographic methods in this study to understand how one lead Black Montessori teacher at a public charter Montessori school interprets and practices the Montessori method to support BIPOC students. I am interested in how her racial lived realities inform her practice, and what structural barriers she faces at school when doing anti-racist and strength-based work in her teaching. My guiding research questions are: *How does a Black[8] Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? How does she practice the Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices? What are the structural barriers that continue to challenge*

[8] While I acknowledge that the teacher is Black and is part of the BIPOC community, I want to emphasize that her experience as a Black woman is not the same as other BIPOC community members. Differential racialization contends that different racial groups are racialized in various ways (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014)

her as a Black educator doing her work? I seek to understand the ways Montessori education can be practiced in a way that better supports BIPOC students. My own experience as a former Montessori teacher is what brought me to this work and guided me toward the questions I pose for this study.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

"You get it": BIPOC educators' strengths in supporting BIPOC students

The purpose of this literature review is to critically examine how BIPOC Montessori educators' racial lived experiences appear in their teaching practices, which often take the form of culturally sustaining teaching methods and anti-racist teaching. In this review, I examine BIPOC educators' racial lived experiences and anti-racist teaching practices. I describe how their racial lived experiences and anti-racist teaching practices are seen and interpreted by themselves and researchers in their school settings.

Due to the lack of scholarship about anti-racist teaching in Montessori classrooms, I expanded the scope of this review to include BIPOC educators in conventional K-12 classrooms. The findings of this literature review suggest the following: (1) BIPOC educators do extra, unpaid work to support their social and racial justice work with students, including using their racial lived experiences and knowledge (including CCW) to connect with their students; (2) BIPOC Montessori educators specifically are successful in combining CRP/CSP and Montessori; (3) BIPOC educators encounter racial stress in schools and need more support, representation and voice; (4) school systems and administrators need to support BIPOC educators by considering their experiences to shape professional development and evaluations; and (5) BIPOC educators need critical affinity spaces. While the first two findings relate directly to BIPOC educators' work in classrooms, the final three relate to the ways they are seen and treated by school structures. The findings demonstrate that, while BIPOC K-12 educators (in conventional and Montessori

spaces) do culturally sustaining and anti-racist teaching in the classroom, outside the classroom they face structures that resist their anti-racist work.

This literature review is in response to myriad studies calling for more race studies in education and a request for more of a focus on BIPOC educators (Gist, 2018; Irizarry & Cohen, 2018; Kohli, 2012, 2019; Kohli et al, 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). It contributes to the existing literature about the experiences of BIPOC educators doing anti-racist teaching (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Jay, 2009; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). My experience as a Montessori educator of color and a budding researcher put me squarely at the meeting point of personal experience and scholarship. My personal investment in the topic has both limitations and strengths, and while I aim to be thorough in my methodology, I know my experience influences the way I interpret research. However, I see my experience as an asset to my work as a scholar (Durden et al, 2014). Being a part of both the academic and Montessori communities brings me to this work with a loving and critical view of the Montessori community. The critical lens I use to conduct and interpret this review focused on K-12 BIPOC educators is Critical Race Theory.

Examining the experiences of BIPOC educators through a Critical Race Theory lens means that I focus on studies that center the perspectives of historically marginalized and oppressed individuals, and that views racism through a structural and systemic lens. My use of this framework affects the language I use (both in this study and in my other scholarship), helped dictate the studies I chose to include here, and influenced my analysis and future directions for research. For example, I chose research written primarily by BIPOC scholars and centering BIPOC individuals. As

an educator using Critical Race Theory, I contend that counter-narratives centering BIPOC individuals are necessary to decenter whiteness in research and education. I interpreted the studies with a careful examination of the methods used and took care to ensure the studies I included used humanizing language about BIPOC individuals and did not generalize or stereotype. Critical Race Theory allows me to honor and center the lived experiences of BIPOC educators as knowledge; however, I also acknowledge that the lived experience of one BIPOC educator (such as that in my study) cannot be generalized to all BIPOC educators. As noted, my use of the term "BIPOC" is intentional, meant to reflect the tenets of Critical Race Theory; and when possible, I seek to name specific racial identities. I use the term “critical" multiple times throughout this review to frame findings through a lens of questioning, acknowledgment of oppressive structures, and confront the socio-historical forces that maintain racism in the U.S.

I began my literature review by searching for articles about the experiences of BIPOC students or educators in public Montessori schools, and then expanding to anti-racist teaching practices of conventional BIPOC educators (due to the limited nature of Montessori research). Of the 42 sources referenced in this literature review, 23 are articles written by BIPOC researchers or centered on the experiences of BIPOC educators (see the Appendix for an organizational chart of the literature). Some articles use narrative inquiry, ethnography, or basic qualitative methods to examine BIPOC educators' practices and experiences in their schools; many of the articles use these methods to tell counter-stories, one of the tenets of Critical Race

Theory. I excluded any articles that were about college students or higher education learning and teaching, and I focused on articles about the United States.

Aside from seminal work in the field, I included articles written only in the past 20 years, which I found had both a more critical lens (acknowledging racial hierarchies and power dynamics) and included many counter-narratives. While I mainly focused on in-service K-12 educators, three studies did focus on pre-service teachers. I chose to include these three particular studies because all of them were about pre-service reflecting on CRP/CSP or race.

Six of the studies I found were quantitative. Two studies used quantitative methods to examine both the racial and economic diversity in public Montessori schools in the United States, and racial discipline rates between Black and white Montessori students (Debs, 2016; Brown & Steele, 2015). Both studies enrich the findings of this review and add additional information to the sparse body of Montessori literature centering race. The third quantitative study surveyed the risk of teacher stress and teacher-student racial/ethnic congruence (when teachers and students share the same racial/ethnic identities) (McCarthy et al, 2020). The fourth study was an analysis of data around teacher turnover, students of color, and teachers of color (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The fifth was about pre-service teachers' reflections on CRP/CSP, while I used the final study to support my recommendation for further studies on race in education. Two of the studies were mixed methods, while 10 were what I categorized as "theoretical or analytical." Theoretical or analytical articles were papers that made suggestions based on a theoretical framework, expanded a theory, or analyzed existing research. The

remaining 22 studies were all qualitative. Finally, I used two sources as references for defining terms or introducing theories (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Paris & Alim, 2017).

Because many BIPOC educators' lived experiences appear in their teaching in the form of culturally relevant and sustaining methods, I begin this literature review by examining studies conducted on CRP/CSP in schools. Then I transition to a discussion of the additional work that BIPOC educators often take on to support their BIPOC students. After discussing the findings about the racial stress that BIPOC educators face, I delve into what Montessori research tells us about BIPOC educators and students in public Montessori schools. Scholars propose specific systemic changes that schools can make to support BIPOC educators in their anti-racist teaching; the final finding details these changes and offers ways to dismantle racist teaching practices in schools. My analysis is woven throughout this review in places where I synthesize and draw conclusions from the literature, and in the final discussion, limitations, and implications of the research.

Studies on Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy in Schools

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) are approaches to teaching developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) and expanded upon by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (2017). Both approaches aim to ensure that the content and method of teaching is relevant to students' experiences and sustains their identities, languages, and literacies. These approaches complement anti-racist teaching practices that work to support students’ ways of knowing and encourage reflexive teaching, while seeing student and teacher life experiences as foundational assets for teaching and learning. Three studies specifically mentioned

the need for more critical CRP/CSP support for teachers (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Durden et al, 2014; Siwatu et al, 2016).

Durden et al (2014) asserted CRP is necessary for young children to develop their socio-cultural identities and requires reflective and intentional teachers. In their ethnographic case study of a preschool program in the Midwest, researchers examined teachers explicitly reflecting on and discussing culture and language in their teaching practices and described this process as "transformative" (Durden et al, 2014). They also found that having a diverse (the authors' term to describe children with various ethnic identities) population of children desensitized some teachers to the cultural identities and strengths of the children. Thus, they argued, more research is needed to explore and understand how future and current teachers are supported in CRP/CSP (Durden et al, 2014). Ninety-eight percent of the 52 educators in this study (the total sample was 88 people, including parents and children) self-identified as white and middle or upper class in socioeconomic status; only one participant identified as male (Durden et al, 2014).

Another study, this one a mixed-methods study about pre-service teachers and their self-efficacy doubts in their abilities to practice CRP/CSP, examined 685 preservice teachers, 72 percent of whom were white (Siwatu et al, 2016). Preservice teachers in this study felt a lack of confidence in their teaching due to their lack of knowledge in CRP/CSP. The study concludes with a call for teacher educators to support future teachers in CRP/CSP, and to model CRP/CSP in college classrooms (Siwatu et al, 2016). Both of the above studies call for more support for teachers in CRP/CSP and suggest ways to support the teachers in the studies, but the majority of

the participants in both studies are white. Durden et al (2014) and Siwatu et al's (2016) research reflects the larger landscape of educational literature in which the majority of participants are white middle-class women educators. Even the research studies about CRP/CSP, that encourage teachers to use culturally relevant and/or sustaining teaching practices, center white voices. The white-centered literature demonstrates that there is a need for more studies that center BIPOC educators and their use of CRP/CSP in their teaching.

Durand & Secakusuma's (2019) study, with 42 percent Black teachers, 16 percent Latinx teachers, and the remaining white teachers, centered families and students historically marginalized due to, "dominant middle-class ideologies, ethnic minority or immigrant status, low socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, or cultural discontinuity and mistrust" (p. 4). Their qualitative study on urban teachers' relationships with families showed a need for schools and families to connect, and to dismantle dominant and harmful structures that were detrimental to the student body (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019). However, they did not differentiate the approaches or results based on educators' racial identities. Of the various studies that do center BIPOC experiences in regard to culturally relevant or anti-racist teaching, many describe the racial stress (stress due to racialized identities) BIPOC educators face in schools (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018a; McCarthy et al, 2020).

To recruit and sustain BIPOC educators, we need to better understand their approaches to teaching, their successes, the challenges they face, and how they attempt to and successfully dismantle or address oppressive structures. While there

are studies and examples of BIPOC educators using CRP/CSP in their classrooms, many studies that examine the BIPOC student experience still center white educator voices, or combine BIPOC and white educators, such as the Durand & Secakusuma (2019) study. The centrality of whiteness has impaired the education system by using whiteness as the standard and comparing all non-white people to white people (Morris, 2016). Whiteness in schools functions to support white, dominant norms, and judge BIPOC educators by norms which are not reflective of their strengths or experiences (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Endo, 2015; Leonardo, 2009; Patton & Jordan, 2017). Systems of whiteness affect BIPOC educators' experiences and imply a superiority of whiteness (Endo, 2015). This leads to racialized comments about BIPOC educators and a lack of support for them as teachers (Endo, 2015). White fragility is the sensitivity and discomfort that white people feel when discussing race; however, this fragility affects people of color as well. When BIPOC educators try to challenge and disrupt systems of whiteness, they often encounter pushback and offense as they navigate these systems (Endo, 2015; Patton & Jordan, 2017). Because whiteness functions to center whiteness at all costs, it includes and excludes racial groups to its benefit (Leonardo, 2009). In chapter 3, I will go more into detail about whiteness and its functions in the Montessori community.

Many Montessori training centers and schools center whiteness by avoiding centering BIPOC individuals' lived experiences. Because of the pervasiveness of whiteness, dismantling it requires, first, an awareness and spotlight on its existence. Whiteness is both flexible and invisible; it others non-white individuals and practices without drawing explicit attention to itself (Leonardo, 2009). Actively centering

BIPOC experiences through counter-stories is one way to raise awareness of whiteness and actively shift the attention away from it (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While there are many studies that consider CRP/CSP, too few of them consider the value BIPOC educators bring to culturally relevant teaching practices. When critically conscious BIPOC educators do practice culturally relevant teaching practices in an effort to promote racial justice, they take on additional unpaid labor (Kohli et al, 2019; McCarthy et al, 2020). Schools create and maintain racially stressful environments (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; McCarthy et al, 2020; Patton & Jordan, 2017); instead, schools must support BIPOC educators by creating critical affinity spaces for critically conscious BIPOC educators to come together and discuss their experiences and teaching approaches (Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). While schools do not always support BIPOC educators' anti-racist teaching practices, some educational methods do; Montessori teachers are uniquely positioned to enact culturally relevant and anti-racist teaching practices if they do so thoughtfully and intentionally (Banks & Maixner, 2016; Debs & Brown, 2017). The remainder of this literature review centers critically conscious BIPOC educators' teaching practices in K-12 schools as they relate to anti-racist teaching and CRP/CSP.

BIPOC Educators' Teaching Experiences in K-12 Schools

Critically Conscious BIPOC Educators Practice Racial Justice Teaching As Unpaid Labor

BIPOC educators often take on additional roles and labor that are not asked of their white colleagues (McCarthy et al, 2020). Critically conscious BIPOC educators

in particular are reflective in their efforts to do racial justice work and uphold their BIPOC students' racial identities (Kohli et al, 2019). They often feel a personal responsibility toward their BIPOC students and work to support students' racial identities in classrooms (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2012, 2018; Kohli et al, 2019). Their life experiences bring them to their work with unique insights about racial inequality and a critical lens through which to analyze their own pedagogical practices (Agarwal et al, 2010; Kohli, 2012; Kohli et al, 2019). Their lives *become* their pedagogies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In Pour-Khorshid's 2016 study about BIPOC educators' strengths, she stated BIPOC educators, "possess transformative resistance capital because [they] embody the first-hand knowledge of the structures of racism and the motivation to transform such oppressive structures" (p. 29). Pour-Khorshid's (2016) study centered the voices of BIPOC educators in a grassroots critical study group. The educators in the group organized themselves for a professional development experience that helped them use the lenses of Critical Race Theory and CRP/CSP in their work. While the educators found solace in the group, Pour-Khorshid noted that the organizers were all volunteer-based and considered the studyy group a "labor of love" (2016). The educators in the study relied on their community cultural wealth (CCW) to connect with students, families, and their school communities (Jimenez, 2019; Kohli, 2012, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pour-Khorshid, 2016).

The connection that critically conscious BIPOC educators form with the BIPOC parents and students in their schools is best described by the term *relationality*. Burciaga & Kohli (2018) gave the example of a BIPOC teacher who felt

a strong relationality with her students and families which led to engagement and trust in her classroom community. BIPOC educators' own experiences enable them to deeply connect with students and families who have similar lives or backgrounds, creating a shared foundation from which to learn. Kohli & Pizarro (2016) described community-oriented BIPOC educators who "come to teaching from an activist standpoint, seeking the creation of strong, critical, intellectual communities (Perry et al, 2003) that honor and row the ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies of their communities" (p. 75). BIPOC educators who used their relationality and CCW to build successful classrooms had a stronger awareness of inequity and injustice (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). They created lessons to actively address student struggles and were more likely to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2012). Their likelihood to do more culturally responsive teaching led to invisible labor in the name of racial justice (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Some schools even saw BIPOC educators' relationality as biased or unprofessional (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Critically conscious BIPOC educators come to teaching from an activist standpoint and often enact critical pedagogy to increase students' critical literacy, defined as:

> a dynamic and reflexive approach to reading the world...that strengthens one's understanding of power, inequity, and injustice (Freire, 1985).

To engage with students in the development of critical pedagogy and critical literacy, teachers must themselves embody complex understandings of

inequity, carry asset-framing of student culture and knowledge, and reflect critically on practice (Kohli et al, 2019, p. 25).

Teaching students critical consciousness is one way of teaching for social justice (Agarwal et al, 2010; Kohli et al, 2019). Another is integrating multiple perspectives into curricula, which BIPOC educators did using their CCW (Agarwal et al, 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Some educators saw teaching for social justice as equal to undoing hierarchies of power, viewing classrooms as reflections of current culture and society (Agarwal et al, 2010). While social justice and racial justice are not the same, the above studies used critical racial lenses to examine BIPOC educators' practices and successes (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Other BIPOC educators used their CCW to connect with their communities, and their experiences to create critical learning environments for students (Agarwal et al, 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Jimenez, 2019; Kohli, 2012; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Montessori classrooms are subcultures in and of themselves; each teacher has their own style and way of running their classroom. As lead teachers in Montessori classrooms typically have the freedom to set the norms, ways of being, and value systems in their classrooms, Montessori spaces are opportunities to exist as counter-spaces that resist dominant hierarchies of power.

In addition to the labor in schools, BIPOC educators also engaged in liberatory work beyond their school walls (Kohli et al, 2019). Kohli et al (2019) described the positionality BIPOC educators (all women) developed and used to cultivate their teaching, engage in activist education, and sustain their work as teachers. They participated in critical spaces in their undergraduate experiences,

through critical meeting groups with other educators, and through their own lives as BIPOC women (Kohli et al, 2019). Their work came from their way of existing in a world of oppressive structures (Kohli et al, 2019). The experiences of BIPOC educators led to their ability to reimagine schooling and transform their classrooms. Relationality, community orientations, and CCW all came together in the above studies to strengthen BIPOC educators' teaching; however, these strengths involved unpaid and often unseen labor not placed upon their white counterparts (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018; Kohli et al, 2019).

While schools in the aforementioned studies hired BIPOC educators and benefitted from their connections with BIPOC students and culturally responsive classrooms, the educators were often excluded, marginalized, or silenced (Agarwal et al, 2010; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Patton & Jordan, 2017. They faced a "double bind" as they reconciled their personal values with the systemic racist barriers they encountered in their schools (Gist, 2018). As demonstrated above, BIPOC educators in the studies did additional work compared to white educators; white educators were not asked to take on the burden of additional work (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018; Kohli et al, 2019). As lead Montessori teachers often have the freedom to determine their individualized and small group lesson plans, the dynamic in the conventional classrooms in above studies can easily be replicated in Montessori classrooms. Some Montessori teachers may decide to do critical racial work with students, while others do not. Schools provide the structures in which teachers do or do not support critical racial work in classrooms. In the following

section, I further detail BIPOC educators' experiences of encountering racial stress due to racist barriers in their schools.

Schools are Racially Stressful Environments for BIPOC Educators

While BIPOC educators' relational strengths provide a mutual benefit for them and their students, the labor involved in protecting or defending relationality is often stressful. They face specific challenges in their work with students. Research demonstrated these challenges ranged from interpersonal racism and hostile work environments to structural barriers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). BIPOC educators are held to standards based around white norms, both in behavior and in curriculum (Kohli, 2018a; McCarthy et al., 2020; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). They are often silenced or marginalized for discussing or using their experiences to teach their students or advocate for them and are expected to teach in a way that conflicts with their CCW (Kohli, 2018, 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Additionally, the lack of affinity spaces or racial caucusing adds to the isolation BIPOC educators experience.

Gist (2018) wrote specifically about Black educators, advocating for their BIPOC students and viewing those moments of advocacy as resistance. Gist (2018 found, "The mindset of a fighter appeared to be one of the most dominant coping strategies taken by aspiring and current Black educators...The coping strategy is to take up the fight. This means not to run, but to engage...coping...was connected to a historical legacy of oppression...coping with vulnerability and stress required a fighter mindset" (p. 208-209). Black educators had to defend their pedagogical choices to administrators who wanted to micromanage their teaching practices (Gist, 2018). Drawing from their strengths and CCW, the educators leaned on their experiences

when coping with challenges in their teaching (Gist, 2018). Another study, by Patton & Jordan (2017), told the story of a Black woman administrator who set up a series of professional development sessions to encourage her colleagues to have dialogues about social justice work. Following the sessions, several teachers "became emotional and spoke of how the social justice efforts had traumatized them" (Patton & Jordan, 2017, p. 87). After hearing this, the administrator felt silenced, and sat quietly as the only person of color in the room (Patton & Jordan, 2017). BIPOC educators teach in schools built around white culture, which protects white fragility and white staff, creating additional demands for BIPOC educators and adding stress to their work (McCarthy et al, 2020; Patton & Jordan, 2017). As demonstrated in Gist's (2018) and Patton & Jordan's (2017) studies, Black educators in particular did extra labor, and administrators and white staff members micromanaged, devalued, and silenced them.

BIPOC educators and students also face a lack of representation in curricula (Kohli, 2012). Kohli's (2012) study examined the conversations between BIPOC teachers in a teacher education program. The teachers discussed their experiences and observations in their program. One teacher, Sonia, shared that she internalized bias from the history curriculum, feeling a lack of self esteem and a sense of inferiority (Kohli, 2012). Another, Juliana, stated the neglect of her own Latinx history in school led to feelings of shame and embarrassment around not knowing enough about her heritage (Kohli, 2012). Without a curriculum reflective of their own experiences, future teachers remembered the personal ramifications of the Eurocentric curriculum on their identities and experiences (Kohli, 2012). Pizarro & Kohli (2018) wrote,

"prescriptive curriculum and depoliticized nature of teacher development results in environments that work against the needs...of students of color" (p. 13).

While there is flexibility within the Montessori curriculum, there is still a standardized curriculum in which teachers are trained. The elementary curriculum has a particular way history is taught, and the teachers make the decisions whether to include content that can affirm their BIPOC students' identities. The curriculum is one way in which the Montessori method has opportunities for doing critical racial work by affirming BIPOC student identities and critiquing unequal systems of power. I recall when a former BIPOC colleague was doing her elementary Montessori training and had concerns about the way history was being framed; the training center did not change anything. Another colleague of mine did the Montessori Assistants to Infancy (ages 0-3) training and was given a lecture containing content that hinted at eugenics; my colleague said she was going to completely disregard her notes from that lecture. Clearly, there are curricular problems in Montessori training that need to be addressed, lest they continue harming students and educators, not only by upholding systems of whiteness, but also by actively disregarding the BIPOC lived experience and perspective.

While students were affected by the curriculum in Pizarro & Kohli's (2018) study, educators felt exhausted, overwhelmed, and alone while also hyper visible. In Kohli's (2019) and McCarthy et al's (2020) findings, teacher preparation programs emphasized the experiences of white, middle-class teachers and neglected those of BIPOC educators. In fact, some did not explicitly resist racial ideologies about BIPOC students, thus passing on harmful ideas to future educators (Kohli, 2019).

Racially biased definitions of teacher quality negatively affect BIPOC educators in their evaluations, as they are held to stereotypical standards or asked to speak on behalf of stereotypical experiences or knowledge (Kohli, 2019). Even in racial justice work in schools, the interests of the dominant (white) group are privileged, and BIPOC educators' interests cast aside (Fujiyoshi, 2015; Kohli, 2019). By creating and perpetuating a disconnect between the experiences of BIPOC educators and what they are expected to teach through oppressive policies and practices, both BIPOC educators and students are pushed out of schools (Kohli, 2019).

In addition to the white norms and expectations schools hold BIPOC educators to, when they do speak up or use their CCW with students, they are often silenced or made to feel undervalued (Fujiyoshi, 2015; Kohli, 2018, 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Schools ignore or devalue CCW, thus devaluing the strengths that educators bring to their work and use to connect with students (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Ignoring educators' CCW limits how BIPOC educators' teaching practices are interpreted and evaluated (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). In fact, some administrators even see CCW or relationality as a deficit rather than a strength (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

Liza, a teacher in Pizarro & Kohli's (2018) study, described her connection to her students of Color while telling the story of a student who had passed away. She described her administrators saying, "You're just taking it too personal. You need to distance yourself. You need to find a balance or if you can't handle this, this is the job, then maybe you should find another job" (p. 16). Liza's administrators saw her

connection and concern for her students and their/her grief as an obstacle to her work, rather than as an asset and a strength (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). While Liza used her connection to her students and their families to advocate for them, she was simultaneously racialized and experienced microaggressions from staff (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

While schools expect educators to achieve racial justice in their classrooms, the structural barriers schools maintain make it impossible for racial justice to be achieved in schools (Kohli, 2019). Even inside the classroom, schools do not give BIPOC educators the support they need to further their critical teaching (Kohli, 2012). While BIPOC educators are encouraged and expected to do the extra work of addressing racism, they do so as lone advocates, or while being overlooked by peers, furthering a sense of isolation (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; McCarthy et al, 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Fujiyoshi (2015) described the challenge of isolation while doing racial justice work as follows: "To do this work is incredibly exhausting. As a person of color hired to bring balance to Whiteness, it is not an easy task to...call out institutionalized racism" (p. 4). Although Fujiyoshi wrote specifically about a temporary position focusing on social justice work, the impact is the same. The challenge of being expected to engage in racial justice work while being ignored or made to feel invisible left BIPOC educators unable to teach how they wanted to and kept from growth and success in their teaching (Kohli, 2019; Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

Schools' hostile work environments, rife with micro and macro aggressions toward BIPOC educators stand in the way of the very racial justice they ask BIPOC

educators to manage and achieve (Kohli, 2018; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Kohli & Pizarro (2016) described the nature of conflict between school culture and BIPOC teachers. Their participants described the school's power structure and how it was used to challenge teachers' ideologies and maintain (and often intensify) racism in the school (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). The norms of the school did not align with BIPOC teachers' goals of creating liberatory learning experiences for their students (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). This misalignment and conflict between school power structure and BIPOC teachers only added to the marginalization and isolation the teachers faced (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

Another contributing factor to the isolation experienced by BIPOC educators is structural; it is due to the lack of BIPOC educators in schools. BIPOC educators are 24 percent more likely than white educators to leave teaching each year (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). Teachers need a thorough understanding of and time to reflect on their own identities to effectively teach students with various life experiences and backgrounds (Pearson, 2016). Without seeing their experiences reflected in teacher training or in curricula, BIPOC educators are unlikely to remain in the teaching profession.

The Montessori method invites reflection and emotional and mental preparation for the educator. Its principle of being a “prepared adult” means being physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually prepared to work with children to support their identities and development. It is built on the idea that the educator must observe students and critically reflect on their own teaching to most effectively educate students. However, there is little universal Montessori training or agreed-

upon principle to explicitly address anti-racist pedagogy, and the teacher's own or the student's racial identity (Brunold-Conesa, 2019; Christensen, 2018). In the following section, I describe what anti-racist teaching and CRP/CSP look like in Montessori settings and how these approaches create more relatable and healing teaching and learning environments for BIPOC students and educators (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016).

Critically Conscious BIPOC Montessori Educators Combine CRP/CSP and Montessori

The majority of public Montessori educators in the U.S. are disproportionately white women, similar to the population of conventional U.S. educators (Debs & Brown, 2017). Public Montessori schools often aim to specifically serve BIPOC communities. Debs (2016) elaborated, "for many public Montessori schools, enrolling a diverse population is not only a social good, but also a matter of remaining faithful to their original mission" (p. 26). In the U.S., the number of Black and Brown students attending public Montessori schools is growing (Debs, 2016). With increased access to public Montessori programs in the U.S., more BIPOC families are choosing to send their children to Montessori schools; this gives Montessori schools the opportunity to be strong carriers for racial justice education (Banks & Maixner, 2016). While there is little evidence of explicit Montessori training or principles to specifically address anti-racist teaching, CRP/CSP receives acknowledgments in some Montessori literature (Brunold-Conesa, 2019; Christensen, 2018; Lillard, in press).

While knowing anti-racist education helps teachers develop their awareness of structural, systemic, and interpersonal racism, and advocate for their students, a

strong framework or approach combining anti-racist education with Montessori is lacking (Banks & Maixner, 2016; Brunold-Conesa, 2019; Debs & Brown, 2017). Despite the lack of explicit anti-racist Montessori teaching, there are already BIPOC Montessori educators successfully combining CRP/CSP with the Montessori method. For example, Debs & Brown (2017) state, "a small but significant cohort of Montessori teachers of color work in public and private Montessori schools, often combining the Montessori Method with cultural pride and social-justice teaching" (p. 6). Successful culturally competent educators differentiate for students to use their own learning tools (Brunold-Conesa, 2019). Specifically in regard to anti-racist teaching, successful culturally responsive/sustaining educators utilize students' CCW and strengths to further their learning. The lack of existing literature prompts the need for more studies to be conducted about successful BIPOC Montessori educators' practices.

Lillard et al (in press) conducted a mixed-methods study with 12 Black adults who had attended Montessori schools as young children. The study used a CRP/CSP framework to view the participants' Montessori experiences. Concluding that CRP/CSP lends itself well to Montessori pedagogy, and can be implemented almost seamlessly, without sacrificing the principles of either method, the authors noted that participants felt the race of the teacher (a Black woman) was perhaps the most influential (Lillard et al, in press). All of the participants stated being very satisfied in their lives and looked back on their Montessori experiences fondly (Lillard et al, in press). Participants remembered learning about mutual respect, how to collaborate with one another, and how to have positive social experiences (Lillard et al, in press).

Several participants made a point to mention the racial identity of their teacher and her impact on their education: "Mrs. Crestview, by being a Black woman and being a Black female leader definitely had a positive, indelible imprint on my life and my personhood ...later I would always kind of yearn for a teacher who looked like me" (Lillard, in press, p. 23). However, while the study participants were all Black, its main focus was the implementation of CRP/CSP in Montessori classrooms, and not o' participants' or the teacher's racial identities. While participants discussed freedom, self-empowerment, and ownership over learning in the classroom, neither they nor their teacher were asked about the role of race in their Montessori experiences (Lillard et al, in press). Critical Race Theory necessitates a focus on race and racism; without acknowledging race, CRP/CSP do not function as practices of Critical Race Theory, and instead take on a colorblind approach.

Similarly to the conventional BIPOC educators described earlier in this review, BIPOC Montessori educators have few (if any) chances to talk about race in regard to the Montessori method (Debs & Brown, 2017). Scholars call for more research centering BIPOC Montessori educators, the methods and approaches they use to combine anti-racist and Montessori teaching and oversampling for students of color (as families who responded to participated in most research studies were predominantly white) (Banks & Maixner, 2016). Conventional education scholars call for similar research centering BIPOC educators and make specific recommendations for institutions as well as individuals. However, Montessori educators are uniquely poised to integrate anti-racist practices with Montessori teaching due to the open-ended and individualized nature of Montessori education. Montessori educators have

the freedom to follow students' needs, which creates space for the necessary anti-racist work recommended by scholars. In the final findings section, I describe the systemic and structural changes researchers call for to center BIPOC educators and support anti-racist teaching in schools.

Schools Need to Support BIPOC Educators

I combine the two themes of community building and school support into one final finding as both, together, are required to support BIPOC educators in their roles in schools. In affinity spaces, BIPOC educators build community, find solace, and develop critical teaching practices. However, systemic changes such as actively increasing the number of BIPOC educators, taking time to learn from them, or valuing and prioritizing using CCW to teach, are also necessary for BIPOC educators to thrive (Durden et al, 2014; Kohli, 2018). Kohli (2012) sums up the combination of support for educators succinctly, writing, "schools must not only acknowledge and appreciate the wealth of [BIPOC educators'] experiences but must also support their development to navigate the racial climate of schools and successfully teach in diverse classrooms" (p. 194). In the remainder of this section, I describe the various systemic changes recommended by scholars. The systemic changes have two components: building off of BIPOC educators' experiences to influence professional development and evaluations; and actively supporting CRP/CSP in classrooms (Vilson, 2015).

One systemic change recommended by scholars is that administrators should value and learn from BIPOC educators' experiences and successful teaching practices (Jay, 2009; Kohli, 2012, 2019). Administrators should consider building professional

development and evaluative measures off of the CCW of BIPOC educators, rather than defaulting to white teaching norms (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli et al, 2019). These default norms are not only biased, but push BIPOC educators out of schools because of white definitions of "quality teaching" (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). In a counterstory in Burciaga & Kohli's (2018) article, a teacher called Naomi implemented a time period during class when students in her class could shout out answers, based on her observations of her students' participation styles. Naomi recalled her principal criticizing her decision to follow her students' styles, and reprimanding her for explaining homework to her students in Spanish, their primary language (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Other white measures of quality teaching included authoritarian structures and apolitical pedagogies (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Additionally, many BIPOC teachers felt their relationality and connection to students were considered unprofessional (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Administrators have the power to view BIPOC educators' strengths and assets through an empowering lens rather than a deficit one. In regard to evaluations and professional development programs, administrators often cannot make such significant changes alone; school boards and districts must commit to changing evaluation processes and approaches to professional development for system-wide change.

Another change recommended by various authors is to actively develop and support CRP/CSP in classrooms (Durden et al, 2014; Gay, 2010). CRP invites students' to bring their CCW into the classroom; the process of CRP also involves educators' own reflections on their identities, cultural beliefs, and values (Durden et al, 2014; Gay, 2010; Jimenez, 2019; Pearson, 2016; Whitaker, 2019). Many educators

already use their CCW to influence their culturally responsive teaching practices, inviting students to share their own knowledge, and building community (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Gay, 2010; Whitaker, 2019). While many successful BIPOC educators already use their CCW to inform their CRP/CSP practice in their classrooms, their school administrators do not always value their practices, and often even see them as detrimental, as mentioned in the earlier example about Liza (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2016). Administrators should not only value BIPOC educators' CCW and its influence on their teaching, but actively create spaces (in professional development or other similar spaces) for all teachers to reflect on how their strengths and experiences contribute to or detract from their teaching practices (Durden et al, 2014; Kohli, 2012, 2018). By supporting educators in their own identity development, they will have the tools and knowledge to enact CRP/CSP more regularly in their classrooms, which Durden et al (2014) claimed was "critical in our emerging global society and essential to maximizing children's learning experiences and future success" (p. 231). Scholars recommend such learning spaces be affinity spaces, or racial caucus groups, that specifically address inequities and racial injustice in schools (Fujiyoshi, 2015; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Pearson, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Zygmunt & Cipollone, 2019).

BIPOC Educators Need Critical Affinity Spaces

The need for critical affinity spaces, or racial caucus groups, for BIPOC educators is the final finding of this review. Critical affinity spaces are used to discuss pedagogy, counter racial stress, and decrease isolation. The willingness and space to reflect on social identities and structures of power affecting BIPOC educators and

students are what make such spaces critical. Spending time with like-minded communities is one tool of resistance BIPOC educators use to survive in or adapt to hostile racial climates in schools (Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). Often, these affinity spaces are used to workshop lessons, engage in critical dialogue about education, and address inequities in schools (Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014). In Kohli's (2012) study centering BIPOC future teachers, when in a dialogue, the teachers created lessons to teach about racial injustice and cross-cultural understanding. They collaborated to improve their lessons and engage their students more.

As BIPOC educators see themselves intertwined with addressing the injustices faced by their BIPOC students, critical affinity spaces that support BIPOC identities are crucial in BIPOC educator identity development (Acuff, 2018; Kohli, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Affinity spaces are used to analyze racial oppression, connect with other BIPOC educators, envision racial justice, and practice resilience (Fujiyoshi, 2015; Kohli, 2019; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Farima Pour-Khorshid (2018) calls these critical affinity spaces *fugitive spaces*. A fugitive space “refutes capitalist logic and societal control mechanisms" and allows educators to “heal, learn, laugh, and thrive in solidarity” (p. 325-326). Such spaces not only combat feelings of isolation, but allow for self-care and empowerment (Acuff, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). When BIPOC educators engage in self-care and empowerment, students benefit; teaching from a place of courage, vulnerability, and identity awareness invites students to be vulnerable and think critically (Acuff, 2018).

Acuff's (2018) part-autoethnography, part-literature review detailed the stress she faced as a Black woman experiencing racism every day. Her explorations of reality pedagogy and a pedagogy of vulnerability led her to make the choice to be vulnerable and reflect critically on her social identity and its impact on her teaching (Acuff, 2018). When educators reflect critically on their social identities in an effort to combat racial stress and exhaustion, they "destabilize hegemonic understandings of teacher identity that require teachers of color to be disconnected from their authentic selves and perform in deracialized ways'' (Acuff, 2018, p.177). Acuff's decision to use courage and vulnerability as teaching tools served as an antidote to her racial battle fatigue and stress. Critical reflection offers respite from isolation and racial stress, and leads to connection and healing (Acuff, 2018; Kohli, 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). The cost of not offering spaces for critical reflection and self-care is a decrease in desire to do racial justice work in schools (Acuff, 2018).

The most cited reason for affinity groups in the literature I reviewed was to provide a healing space where BIPOC educators can connect and decrease their feelings of isolation (Kohli et al, 2019; Pearson, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2016, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2016). Healing community spaces are not an optional component of support for BIPOC educators; they are necessary to further teaching practices and visions of transformative education. Pizarro & Kohli (2018) elaborate, describing an affinity space from their study as, "psychologically and emotionally healing as it...nurtured a collective sharing of experiences and resources [and refocused] their energy toward transformative...approaches to the schooling of students of color" (p. 20). While such spaces might only occur one time (Kohli, 2012), many authors who

examined successful BIPOC educator spaces noted groups or networks that met with more frequency were incredibly powerful and sustaining for its members (Pour-Khorshid, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2016).

For example, Farima Pour-Khorshid (2018), in her analysis of fugitive and sacred healing spaces, discussed the significance of regular, ongoing critical spaces where BIPOC educators could find mutual support with others. Due to the racist, capitalist, and patriarchal system“ of oppression in the U.S., such spaces, "helped [educators] to process some of the complexities of aspiring to create liberatory learning spaces within inherently oppressive education institutions" (p. 326). Without critical affinity spaces as part of systemic change to support BIPOC educators, they will continue to be pushed out of schools and their experiences will remain devalued, in addition to their contributions toward racial equity and support for their BIPOC students.

In considering critical affinity spaces, I also consider how the critical ethnographic research process might serve as a kind of critical affinity space. As a BIPOC researcher, I consider my willingness and ability to create and sustain a critical affinity space in my interviews, participant-observation experiences, and other parts of my research process. For this reason, I will conduct multiple interviews, multiple observations, and perhaps open up interviews to BIPOC educators other than the lead teacher in my study. As my use of Critical Race Theory and a critical ethnographic lens allow me to center BIPOC voices, that applies not only to the data and analysis, but the process of research itself. The final sections of this paper discuss

limitations and describe the implications and future directions of research centering BIPOC educators.

Discussion and Limitations

The goal of this review was to consider and understand how BIPOC educators' racial lived experiences and anti-racist teaching approaches appear in their roles as educators, and how their teaching practices are seen and interpreted in their school settings. The findings showed: (1) BIPOC educators do extra, unpaid work to support their racial justice work with students, including using CCW to connect with their students; (2) BIPOC educators encounter racial stress in schools and need more support, representation and voice; (3) BIPOC Montessori educators specifically are successful in combining CRP/CSP and Montessori; (4) school systems and administrators need to support BIPOC educators by considering their experiences to shape professional development and evaluations; and (5) BIPOC educators need critical affinity spaces.

By using a Critical Race Theory lens, I selected a majority of articles that were written by or centered the viewpoints of BIPOC researchers and educators. I used the remaining articles to describe the dialogue around anti-racist teaching. Upon examining three studies about CSP/CRP through a critical racial lens, I found the studies centered white teachers' experiences. I found BIPOC educators do extra work in their schools to develop their teaching practices and support their BIPOC students. They take the time to connect with their school communities, feel a responsibility to serve on committees or projects to support BIPOC students, and organize to critique and improve their own teaching practices. They teach with a critical consciousness,

holding their students to high standards and using their and their students' experiences to build a strong foundation for learning.

However, the additional work put forth by BIPOC educators is often devalued or diminished by their administrators. Administrators often use white norms to measure quality teaching, or tell BIPOC educators their ways of connecting with students and families are too informal or an obstacle to their work. BIPOC educators are often alone, or one of few, in their schools, leading to feelings of isolation. A Eurocentric (i.e., white epistemological) curriculum contributes to feelings of isolation (Kohli, 2012). While many BIPOC educators relive their own K-12 experiences while teaching curricula that do not reflect their own histories, they face microaggressions and are often pushed out of schools or silenced when they voice concerns (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Jay, 2009). Black educators in particular are silenced, marginalized, and devalued, despite their CCW and relationships with their students (Acuff, 2018; Gist, 2018). With little BIPOC educator support in schools, there are few (if any) opportunities for educators to reflect on their racial identities' effects on their teaching.

In Montessori schools specifically, there are few BIPOC educators (naturally leading to a sense of isolation) and few opportunities to discuss racial identity (Debs & Brown, 2017). The majority-white Montessori teacher population and lack of framework to examine Montessori through a critical or racial lens contribute to a lack of BIPOC Montessori educator representation in the literature. The few studies that center BIPOC educators and students are written by white scholars, and do not centralize BIPOC racial identities or strengths or use a critical racial lens, which

positions BIPOC educators without acknowledging the systemic oppression they face; this positioning disregards their racialized lived experiences (Debs & Brown, 2017; Lillard et al, in press).

The fourth finding describes systemic support for BIPOC educators to combat their sense of isolation. Schools must shift their evaluation measures and ideas of what is considered quality teaching, so educators' CCW and relationality are seen as the strengths they are, used to connect with families and build strong relationships with students. Schools should listen to BIPOC educator voices to develop and implement critical professional development plans or sessions, rather than silence them when they do not fit into white norms and measures of quality teaching.
The final finding shows administrators and school systems must provide more space to critically discuss social identities, race, and CRP/CSP. Critical affinity spaces give BIPOC educators spaces to collaborate and discuss pedagogy. While being opportunities to reflect on and improve teaching, such spaces also offer respite from racial stress and counter feelings of isolation. Without critical affinity spaces, schools risk losing BIPOC educators or shutting down the strengths they bring in their teaching and relationships with students and families.

Above all, the literature calls for an increase in studies on anti-racist teaching, with a focus on the successful teaching practices of BIPOC educators and how to support them (Durand & Secaksuma, 2019; Kohli, 2012). While many of the studies cited did focus on BIPOC educators, still others centered white teachers and/or a whitewashed approach to racial justice rather than a critical one. Five of the articles either centered the white perspective or white interpretation of social justice teaching

(disregarding racial justice altogether) (Christensen, 2018; Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk, 2014; Siwatu et al, 2016). However, my decision to include them was to understand the dominant (white) ways of interpreting and enacting CRP/CSP to demonstrate how white teaching norms affect BIPOC educators.

Additionally, the limited studies about Montessori and CRP/CSP make it difficult to truly understand the Montessori BIPOC educator or student experience. The study from Lillard et al (in press), while focusing on the tenets of CRP/CSP and Black Montessori alumni, does not take a critical racial look at the pedagogies. Even though the purpose of the paper is to examine pedagogy and not racial identity, to discuss the experiences of Black Montessori alumni without discussing their racial identity development (particularly having had a Black teacher) lacks criticality given the emphasis of CRP/CSP on identity. The Lillard et al (in press) study, while demonstrating the successful positive experiences of Black former Montessori students, describes the tenets of CRP/CSP from a more liberal and less critical racial lens (according to Critical Race Theory, liberalism means a slower, more cautious approach to civil rights matters). Having a critical racial lens is crucial if attempting to use CRP/CSP to teach anti-racism in the classroom. Additionally, the Lillard et al (in press) study as well as multiple others demonstrate that the classroom experience alone is not enough when examining CRP/CSP. The entire educator experience affects attrition, relationships with students and families, and whether a school is successfully enacting anti-racist practices (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

Future Directions for Research

Due to the limited number of studies centering BIPOC educators, one future direction for research is to increase the counter-narratives and BIPOC-centered studies in the education field. Many of the studies cited in this review are specifically about classroom-related experiences. Future studies might examine BIPOC educators' entire experiences in schools, including spaces such as recess or lunch duty or interactions with students outside the classrooms. Analyzing the systems affecting BIPOC educators would add to our understanding of what systemic changes are necessary to create a shift to support BIPOC educators and their strengths. Additionally, it is crucial for future research to examine the experiences of Black educators specifically. Because of anti-Blackness and its influence on white supremacy in the U.S., Black educators face challenges and barriers specific to them, distinct from other members of the BIPOC community.

As previously discussed, a number of articles used a white liberal view of race. I propose a critical Montessori model to help scholars, policymakers, and educators to examine Montessori teaching practices. Such a framework would take a holistic view of Montessori and the BIPOC Montessori educator experience. The framework would consider social identities of educators and students, the socio-cultural climate, relationship-building between educator and student, CCW, and centering student experiences.

To conclude, there is a gap in the literature to be filled with research centering BIPOC Montessori educators, specifically in regard to their anti-racist teaching practices. CRP/CSP research does not always take on a critical lens, and much of the existing CRP/CSP literature centers white viewpoints. White-centered research

excludes the entire lived experiences of BIPOC individuals, not only alienating BIPOC individuals, but also showing an inaccurate portrayal of culturally relevant and sustaining practices in Montessori classrooms. Counter-narratives are necessary to center BIPOC Montessori educators' and students' experiences. While existing research about conventional K-12 BIPOC educators shows their additional labor, commitments to racial justice work, and racial stress, there is not enough Montessori research to encompass the same topics. Additionally, existing Montessori research lacks a focus on BIPOC Montessori educators' strengths and teaching approaches. With an increase in public Montessori in the U.S., and some research showing that BIPOC Montessori educators have lasting impacts on BIPOC students (Lillard et al, in press), more studies are required to better understand the BIPOC Montessori educator experience. Montessori schools, with their racially diverse student populations and open-ended curricula, are in a unique position to understand BIPOC Montessori educator experiences and use those experiences to disrupt racism in schools. Such research requires a focus on educators' successful practices and strengths, as well as a critical racial lens to view Montessori to make sure it is implemented critically and in a way that reflects and builds on the experiences of BIPOC educators and students. My research seeks to fill the gap in the literature and center BIPOC educators' experiences and successes in the classroom.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I propose a framework and lens through which to view BIPOC students and educators that values their perspectives, views their experiences as strengths, and describes how to implement Montessori practice in a critical racial way. The Critical Montessori Model (CMM) is a critical racial model for interpreting and practicing Montessori methods. Framed by Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1993) and critiques of white epistemologies (Leonardo, 2009), I developed the CMM as a way for the Montessori community to view BIPOC students and educators that values their strengths, assets, and lived experiences. My proposed model explicitly centers race and the racialized experiences of BIPOC students, educators, and their communities, and thus, disrupts the white epistemological assumptions of colorblindness and individualism (Leonardo, 2009) within current Montessori methods. This framework will guide me through my critical ethnographic examination of a Montessori classroom, and in particular, how one Black teacher employs the Montessori method in culturally relevant and sustaining ways: *How does a Black Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? How does she practice the Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices? What are the structural barriers that continue to challenge her as a Black educator doing her work?*

In the following sections, I begin with a theoretical overview of whiteness in U.S. education, and I contextualize this discussion around the assumptions and normalization of white epistemologies in Montessori methods. Second, I discuss Critical Race Theory and how it forefronts the experiential knowledge of BIPOCs,

and thus helps frame the CMM. Next, I discuss how Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), Culturally Relevant Pedagogy/Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CRP/CSP), and counter-storytelling extend Critical Race Theory into classroom practice and could help educators and teacher trainers interpret and practice the Montessori method in critical racial and identity-affirming ways. I conclude with a description of the Critical Montessori Model that brings together the above theories to create a lens through which I interpret the Montessori method and shape this study.

The Normalization of Whiteness in U.S. Education and the Montessori Community

Leonardo (2009) describes racial privilege as the idea that white individuals are advantaged simply by being racially constructed as white. White individuals, or individuals who possess aspects of whiteness (through culture, language, hair texture, and more), benefit from racial privilege whether they are aware of it or not, and despite any attempts to distance themselves from whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). Whiteness is a social construct that values a particular (white) skin color, in addition to the systems that give privileges and advantages to white people, and place value on white cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviors, so much so that it pervades U.S. society to the point where it becomes invisible (Leonardo, 2009). Because of the way racial privilege functions, without consent or awareness, systems of whiteness (which functions to preserve and privilege whiteness or characteristics of whiteness) are recreated and perpetuated by white individuals and institutions (Leonardo, 2009). In fact, whiteness has historically been reorganized and redefined to perpetuate its existence and benefit any individuals who were permitted to be part of whiteness as a

construct (Leonardo, 2009). White individuals may not realize they are perpetuating whiteness, since they do not have to actively opt into the benefits of white racial privilege (Leonardo, 2009). Thus, white individuals assume whiteness as the norm, which further distances them from a critical examination of race and racism (Leonardo, 2009). The perpetuation of white racial privilege and systems of white supremacy appears in multiple ways, one of them being color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). This color-blindness appears in the Montessori community through the curriculum taught during Montessori teacher training, and the lack of representation of BIPOC Montessori educator and student voices. Whiteness appears through color-blindness as well as the demographics of the public Montessori community and whose voices are represented in it.

The structural nature of racism in the U.S. is inescapable for the education system (Leonardo, 2009), and pervades Montessori as well as conventional schools. As noted, current Montessori programs assume white epistemologies that normalize white ways of knowing, or white racial knowledge. These programs lack consistent anti-racist practices including honoring the lived experiences and racial knowledge of the BIPOC community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Framed by white epistemologies, Montessori training, accreditation programs, and schools continue to function in the historically white and racist education system.

I come to this study with these theoretical assumptions about current Montessori education. I contend that if Montessori philosophy centralized race (and the experiences of BIPOC students and educators), it could address hierarchical and oppressive systems while uplifting students' racial identities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Because of the lack of explicit centering of race in Montessori, Montessori spaces, culturally, are not always spaces inclusive of BIPOC educators and students, and require active work to become inclusive spaces.

Critical Race Theory and Montessori Education

In order to disrupt the pervasiveness of whiteness in Montessori education, I propose the Critical Montessori Model, grounded in Critical Race Theory. As mentioned, this model will guide my research examining the strengths and practices of a BlPOC teacher in a Montessori classroom, as well as critique the structural challenges that she faces in her efforts to center BIPOC students in her teaching and practices. To understand how the model works, I first discuss its theoretical underpinnings, followed by a discussion on how such a critical racial lens informs my understanding of the Montessori methods and its possibilities.

Critical Race Theory is based on the following tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Harris,93; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Omi & Winant, 2014):

1. Critical Race Theory uses storytelling and experiential knowledge of

oppression to analyze the aspects of culture that normalize the lower status of minoritized groups. The lived experiences of minoritized groups are considered knowledge.

2. Racism is a normal and permanent part of the United States.

3. Whiteness is considered property, centers whiteness as the norm, and perpetuates systems of white supremacy.

4. Critical Race Theory critiques liberalism, which is the idea that the process of civil rights is by nature a slow and cautious process.

5. Interest convergence is the impetus for civil rights change. The white community must also benefit if the BIPOC community is to make any racial progress.

6. Critical Race Theory assumes a commitment to social justice.

7. Critical Race Theory acknowledges differential racializations; different minoritized groups experience racism differently and are racialized differently to benefit whiteness.

Bell's (1993) work around the permanent nature of racism asserts that racism is not only endemic to the United States, but is so pervasive, and permeates so much of U.S. society, that it is permanent. This permanence of racism in society presents itself in the Montessori community, through teaching practices and training centers. Critical Race Theory allows me to assume that racism is built into U.S. society and thus also the structures of Montessori in the U.S. This means that racism appears in teaching practices, classrooms, and training centers around the U.S. because racism is inherent in the way that institutions function.

Additionally, Bell (1993) maintains that interest convergence is how and why change occurs for the BIPOC community, meaning that the BIPOC community does not progress and has not historically progressed unless the white community also benefited. In the context of the Montessori community, this means that the only way progress would occur for BIPOC individuals would be if white individuals also benefited. The critique of liberalism is a critique of racial progress (which maintains

that change in the racial constructs in the U.S. will happen slowly and over time); by critiquing it as a tenet of Critical Race Theory, critical race theorists push for radical and monumental changes (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I interpret the critique of liberalism as a critique of the small, surface-level actions in Montessori classrooms (such as making sure art and books are representative of the students). While representation is important, it is not enough to stop there; due to the nature of interest convergence and the critique of liberalism, only explicit anti-racist teaching can benefit BIPOC Montessori educators and students; anything else is insufficient and performative.

The use of storytelling and counter-storytelling emphasize the importance of lived experiences as knowledge. Counter-storytelling is a method that centers the stories of those historically oppressed due to racialization and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In my research, counter-storytelling and experiential knowledge means examining the experiences and practices of BIPOC Montessori educators, and considering their experiences to be knowledge. I consider BIPOC Montessori educators the experts in their own lives and practices, and emphasize their experiences to understand their anti-racist teaching practices.

Finally, Harris' (1999) work describes whiteness as property; those who "possess" whiteness benefit from the way U.S. society is structured (Harris, 1993). Historically, individuals benefiting from white racial privilege received benefits in intangible property such as status, customs, or respect for their values (whereas groups not benefitting from whiteness, such as Native Americans, had customs and values that were disregarded and replaced by white dominant rules) (Harris, 1993).

Whiteness eventually became the norm around which everything else was measured, and still is today. In a Montessori context, whiteness as property appears through the idea that whiteness is the norm; that anything non-white (language, customs, art, belief systems) is a "cultural" item, photo, or object. Thus, Montessori training is passed down using whiteness at its core as the center around which other "cultural" items or concepts are added on afterwards.

I acknowledge that forms of systemic racism show up differently; BIPOC individuals experience racism differently based on their different racializations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). For the purposes of my study, I examine racialization in more general terms of how racism functions in school structures. I chose Critical Race Theory because my research question specifically asks about BIPOC educators (and in this study, specifically a Black lead teacher). My use of Critical Race Theory in this paper allows me to acknowledge anti-Blackness and how it is woven into U.S. society[9]. While Critical Race Theory does not explicitly discuss anti-Blackness, Bell's (1993) work addresses the ongoing oppression specifically directed toward Black individuals. He writes, "Modern discrimination is…not practiced indiscriminately…Black people, then, are caught in a double bind…even when nonracist practices might bring a benefit, whites may rely on discrimination against

[9] Anti-Blackness is one unique form of racism; the anti-Blackness that is embedded in U.S. culture, society, and systems functions to protect and amplify whiteness (Dumas, 2016). Beneath whiteness is an anti-Black sentiment that causes rifts not only between the white and BIPOC community, but serves to divide the racial groups within the BIPOC community (Dumas, 2016). Even when it appears that the United States is making racial progress, the interests and rights of Black individuals are always subject to destruction (Bell, 1993). Bell (1993) describes the anti-Black racism in the United States as something that will never disappear; that even small events that look like progress will function to maintain white dominance. BlackCrit is a theoretical framework that was born out of Critical Race Theory specifically to center anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016).

blacks as a unifying factor" (Bell, 1993). Bell (1993) describes the unique racism that Black individuals face in the United States, despite the semblance of racial progress. While there are differences in how Black and non-Black individuals of color experience racialization and racism[10] (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007), for the purposes of this conversation I examine white and non-white students.

Critical Race Theory provides a foundation to examine the aspects of race and power included (or excluded) in the Montessori method. Critical Race Theory as a surrounding framework affects the way I view and interpret Montessori theory and the method. For example, normalization is a term used in the Montessori community to refer to a child who is peaceful and balanced. Normalization (in the Montessori context) occurs once a child has been able to work uninterrupted, forms habits such as concentration and focus, and understands how to function in their classroom and with peers (understanding the norms, rules, and ways of being in their class). The concept of normalization has no mention of race or societal structures. As I consider normalization with a Critical Race Theory lens, I am left with questions such as: How do whiteness and racism present in the classroom, and in children's relationships? Can children truly normalize if their classroom or school mimics racist structures? What

[10] As anti-Blackness functions specifically to continue oppressing Black individuals despite the appearance of racial progress (Bell, 1993), it also means that non-Black people of color can participate in systems of anti-Blackness. For example, non-Black people of color can benefit from the illusory racial progress in which white individuals benefit through interest convergence, but Black individuals are diminished. Non-Black people of color can also perpetuate anti-Blackness, especially by internalizing beliefs and assumptions about Black individuals that are upheld by white supremacy (Lee et al, 2022). For example, when non-Black people of color who are immigrants are connected to anti-Black perspectives, they can internalize racism and exacerbate prejudices (Lee et al, 2022). Additionally, because the function of anti-Blackness is to oppress Black individuals specifically, it can also allow for non-Black individuals of color to progress or gain benefits to promote the illusion of racial progress, when in reality, it still serves to oppress Black individuals.

does normalization look like if we consider oppressive systems that inevitably show up in the classroom? These questions surely affect the children's ability to normalize, as the way they function in their classroom will be affected by racism (either in the classroom itself, in the school, or outside the school). While normalization is only one example of a Montessori concept, that alone is enough to demonstrate the critical racial questions asked about Montessori education. Someone not using Critical Race Theory does not consider racial structures and how they (re)appear in classrooms and schools. Additionally, the Montessori method was developed internationally; Maria Montessori did not explicitly consider racist structures or how racist structures affect BIPOC individuals. Without using a critical racial lens, Montessori theory is left to be, and often is, interpreted through a lens of whiteness, which serves as the "standard" in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). As noted, the Montessori method does not explicitly center race as a dimension of identity, thus making a colorblind lens the norm. While there are Montessori educators doing critical racial work in the United States, the Montessori method takes a stance akin to the liberalism critiqued by Critical Race Theory. For example, many Montessori teachers will be sure to include art and books that represent their students. While this is helpful to the students in the classroom, it does not explicitly teach anti-racism or acknowledge students' lived experiences. The example of normalization above serves to demonstrate how significantly a Critical Race Theory lens affects the interpretation of Montessori theory. Additionally, the emphasis on counter-storytelling in Critical Race Theory means that the Critical Montessori Model must center the voices of BIPOC

educators and students to counter dominant white narratives about how BIPOC students and educators experience and embody Montessori philosophy.

The core assumption of CMM is that the Montessori method must be practiced with a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, with an overarching framework of Critical Race Theory, and employs the following theoretical elements: The use of CCW to support BIPOC Montessori students' and educators' racial identities, the use of CSP to value student knowledge and their racial identities, and the specific emphasis on counter-storytelling for valuing student knowledge and BIPOC Montessori educators' voices. When considering Critical Race Theory in education, Ladson-Billings (1998) describes the relationship between the two with five different examples: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. The Critical Montessori Model specifically addresses the examples of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Critical Race Theory views curriculum as an artifact maintained to preserve white supremacy, and that current instructional practices are race-neutral and assume that African American students are deficient (Ladson-Billings, 1998). By possessing a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, educators can re-define what the curriculum is and looks like. Community Cultural Wealth and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy allows educators to reinterpret and redefine instructional practices to support their students' various ways of knowing and strengths. Historically, assessments have been used to strategically elevate white students' "achievements" while oppressing Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). By using Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to value student knowledge, educators are

able to see what students do know, and use a variety of ways to assess them, rather than relying solely on assessments that ask students to give specific answers on a test rather than show what they know. Below, I explain four main aspects of the Montessori method and how Critical Race Theory supports anti-racist Montessori practice. While Critical Race Theory is the overarching theory, it supports a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, which I describe in the following section.

A Critical Racial understanding and Implementation of the Montessori Method

A thorough understanding and implementation of the Montessori method is crucial to CMM. All of the other theoretical elements of the model serve as a support to a critical racial understanding and implementation of the method. Lillard (2019) stresses the importance of examining authentic Montessori practices to ensure there are measurable standards used to compare Montessori schools and practices. There are four smaller elements essential for authentic Montessori practice: Montessori materials, an understanding of child development, observation as a learning tool, and respect for and relationships with children. Using a critical racial lens to examine the elements of authentic Montessori practice requires an interrogation and interruption of structures of whiteness.

Montessori Materials

The Montessori materials serve as the curriculum. In the younger ages, the materials are manipulatives. The self-correcting materials invite children to learn and practice with the materials until they see they have completed the material (and thus, the lesson) successfully. As children get older, the curriculum adapts to fit the

children's needs. Older students work in small groups, and social relationships are seen as a part of the curriculum as much as manipulatives and academic lessons. Lillard's (2011) study describes the impacts of various materials in Montessori classrooms; Lillard (2011) developed a list of materials shown to be most impactful for children's development and academic growth when used appropriately (how teachers were shown the materials in their training). While there are many Montessori training organizations around the world, a few stand out as major authorities on Montessori. One such authority is AMI, the Association Montessori International.

AMI is an international Montessori organization founded by Dr. Montessori and her son, Mario Montessori. AMI trains teachers and furthers Montessori philosophy and practices by doing international outreach, supporting Montessori schools around the world, developing Montessori practices to support all ages (including those experiencing dementia), and providing resources to practicing Montessori teachers and schools. AMI claims to "[preserve] the legacy of Maria Montessori's vision whilst continuing to innovate and increase the impact and reach of Montessori principles and practice" (Association Montessori International USA, n.d.). AMI has a U.S. branch, called AMI USA, that specifically serves the U.S. Montessori community. AMI has a list of materials and a specific training that shows teachers how to give children lessons on the materials. In addition to the materials, there are particular aspects of theory that teachers are required to learn and use to guide their work with children. It is a rigorous training process resulting in an international diploma (I myself am AMI-trained). While there are other larger organizations serving as authorities on Montessori, AMI is the one I am most familiar

with, and greatly influences how I frame and interpret "authentic Montessori practices" throughout this paper. A full list of Montessori materials approved by AMI can be found in Appendix B (Lillard, 2011).

Acquiring and maintaining a complete set of Montessori materials relates directly to the amount of money and resources a school possesses. The materials are as essential to the curriculum as textbooks, worksheets, and paper are in a conventional school. There are such few Montessori material-making companies that they have monopolies on the Montessori materials; and only some companies are approved by organizations such as AMI. If a school wants AMI-approved materials, they must purchase them from the required company or build the materials themselves, which is an unrealistic task for public school teachers who are often left to their own devices to prepare and plan for their individual classrooms (Walker, 2019). There is a wealth disparity in access to Montessori materials. Historically, BIPOC students have been denied access to wealth, and are more subjected to inequity in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Students who attend public Montessori schools are no less subject to educational debt than students who attend conventional schools. I have seen many public Montessori schools that do not have complete sets of materials, or if they do, have broken or damaged materials they are unable to replace due to budgetary constraints. Critical Race Theory allows me to critique the monopolies and lack of access around Montessori materials that often lead to inequities in Montessori practice.

Child Development

Using the Montessori method requires the adult to have a thorough knowledge of child development, to create spaces (tangible and intangible) for children to develop naturally. Montessori philosophy outlines four stages of development (4 Planes of Development), and establishes basic Human Tendencies. Montessori teachers use these Four Planes of Development and Human Tendencies to determine where children are in their holistic development (academic, physical, social, etc.) and which materials or content they are ready for. Sensitive Periods refer to certain periods of time when children are more susceptible to particular skills such as learning language, exploring the senses, or being more aware of order and organization.

Child development is strongly connected to Montessori materials. In Montessori schools, teachers use their knowledge of child development to know which Montessori materials particular children are ready to be introduced to, in an individualized learning plan. Educators consider children's Sensitive Periods to know how and when to introduce particular lessons. Interpreting child development through a Critical Montessori Model means expanding the view of a child's life experience and asking questions directly related to their racialized experience in society: How does the world view and racialize that child? How does racism affect that child's family? How does that then affect that child's pace of development? In addition to academic, physical, and social development, children in Montessori classrooms are thought to be developing their personalities and identities. How does a child's racial identity affect the development of their personality and identity? These are only a few

examples of the questions to ask when using a Critical Montessori Model to examine child development.

Structurally, whiteness also plays a role in how public Montessori educators interpret their child development training. The lens of whiteness is used to set educational goals and objectives (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). Assessments set by school districts prioritize particular aspects of child development, such as social and emotional learning (SEL). Many SEL objectives center whiteness and hold a deficit narrative of BIPOC youth (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). Uncritical discussions or assumptions of SEL or child development may flag BIPOC youth as lacking in particular areas, without considering how whiteness affects how SEL objectives are determined (Jagers et al, 2018). For example, whiteness and wealth are often conflated and accepted as indicators of success in the SEL area of self-awareness (Jagers et al, 2018). The characteristics considered part of self-awareness, such as labeling one's own feelings and optimism, are based on dominant (white) norms, which leads to white racial entitlement and negative biases about BIPOC individuals (Jagers et al, 2018). Structurally, public Montessori educators are inhibited by the whiteness affecting SEL assessments in public schools. When districts and states set SEL objectives, Montessori educators must then interpret their training through the funnel of predetermined goals that do not include a critical awareness of BIPOC student experiences and identities. While psychologists have found strong ethnic and racial identity and emotional well-being to be related, whiteness and structural racism negate the benefits of a strong ethnic and racial identity for BIPOC students (Jagers et al, 2018, Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020).

Current research about SEL calls for an awareness of whiteness, and an integration of Culturally Responsive Teaching in setting and assessing SEL standards (Jagers et al, 2018, Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). This awareness and integration require educators to critically examine racist structures and inequities in the U.S (Jagers et al, 2018). Shifting the way SEL standards are set also extends to the assessment tools used (Jagers et al, 2018). SEL assessment tools must reflect culturally responsive SEL standards (Jagers et al, 2018). The data on SEL can be extended to child development in Montessori education; Critical Race Theory demands an awareness of whiteness and structural racism and how they impact how Montessori educators interpret child development and assess it.

Observation as a Learning Tool

The third aspect is the use of observation as a learning tool. This aspect can be used in any setting. When I use the term observation, I refer to a specific, protected, time when an educator can observe their classroom, or a particular child, without intervening or interrupting (unless there is an emergency). Observation shows the educator the child's interests and strengths. Adults using the Montessori method must learn to observe children in an attempt to understand their personalities, interests, and to see what they can and will do when given an appropriate amount of freedom. Observation is a key tool used to meet children where they are. Montessori training touts observation as an objective process; however, lived experiences affect one's ontology, or perceptions on reality or being. Researchers found that what and how teachers notice is shaped by racist systems in the U.S. (Louie et al, 2021). For example, a math teacher who organizes their work around the racial achievement gap

in the effort to close it frames Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic students as lacking, and sets white student achievement as the standard (Louie et al, 2021). National and local standards and assessments also have structural impacts on what teachers notice (Louie et al, 2021). Per Critical Race Theory, because lived experiences shape how we understand and view the world, objective observation is impossible (Crenshaw, 2011). The educator who is observing must also be aware of how their lived experiences affect what they observe and how they interpret their observations. What one educator might see as a problem or challenge, another educator might see as a strength or an adaptive behavior.

Respect for and Relationships with Children

The final aspect of authentic Montessori practice is respect for and relationships with children. This can look like not interrupting their work, following their interests, and being aware of the power dynamic between adult and child and mitigating that while also establishing appropriate limits. Dr. Montessori's phrase "the forgotten citizen" referred to the way children's abilities are often discounted by adults, and the fact that they too have opinions, relationships, voices, and capabilities (Montessori, 1949/2007). Rather than dismiss children, talk about them as though they are not present (when they are), and underestimate their abilities, respect for children means acknowledging their full humanity, addressing problems with them, and giving them the freedom to demonstrate their strengths. The Montessori educator's role is to connect with a child by observing their interests, and engaging them to connect to the Montessori curriculum. Having an understanding of the many ways that children demonstrate their strengths is an essential part of respecting and

forming relationships with children. In the following section of this paper, I describe the role of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) in CMM.

Using CCW to Support BIPOC Educator and Student Lived Experiences

An element of the Critical Montessori Model is the acknowledgment and use of CCW to support BIPOC Montessori students' and educators' racialized lived experiences. In Montessori philosophy, the term "the prepared adult" refers to the professional, scientific, and spiritual preparation required of the adult before working with children (Bettmann, 2013). Professional preparation refers to characteristics generally required of teachers, such as confidentiality, attendance and punctuality, communication, appropriate attire, and flexibility (Bettmann, 2013). Scientific preparation refers to knowledge of child development, how to set up an appropriate Montessori space (with engaging materials, an organized space, and intentional decor), and how to observe children and draw conclusions based on where children are in their development (Bettmann, 2013). Spiritual preparation refers to personality characteristics such as empathy, sensitivity, respect, and responsiveness (Bettmann, 2013). Spiritual preparation also includes understanding that children have something to teach adults (Bettmann, 2013). The role of the adult is to support children and respond to mistakes with humility and flexibility, and refrain from giving unnecessary help (Bettmann, 2013). I propose being a prepared adult includes having an understanding of one's own personal identity and strengths, and being able to notice the strengths and abilities of children that are not acknowledged by dominant white culture (Yosso, 2005; Louie et al, 2021). I draw from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework to emphasize how and why valuing lived

experiences is a crucial element of Critical Montessori Theory, and how to use CCW to center BIPOC students. Using a CCW lens not only brings to light BIPOC communities' cultural wealth, but resists dominant white narratives of what is considered valuable knowledge (Yosso, 2005). It is not only a lens, but an active way to resist power dynamics that disempower BIPOC communities.

Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework serves to counteract deficit thinking in U.S. schools. Yosso (2005) highlights race and its role in schooling; schools often view racial differences as "cultural differences" and interpret culture in various ways. Yosso (2005) builds off of Bourdieu's work to describe a term called "cultural wealth." Cultural wealth, or capital, "refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society...The dominant groups within society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital for social mobility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). By using a Critical Race Theory framework, thus acknowledging that cultural wealth exists, BIPOC communities' cultures, strengths, and skills, are empowered rather than discouraged or devalued. The 6 forms of CCW are: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Below, I describe how critical Montessori educators can acknowledge and use CCW (as a lens or as their own form of capital) to support BIPOC students and educators.

Aspirational Capital

Students and educators with aspirational capital maintain a sense of hope and possibility despite the systems that oppress them (Yosso, 2005). Being aware of

aspirational capital means also being aware of systemic barriers and one's place in them. For example, a BIPOC educator who is aware of their aspirational capital might face hostile racial climates in their school, but still maintain hope for their work with their students.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital refers not only to the skills of speaking another language entirely, but also speaking in more than one style (Yosso, 2005). BIPOC students who possess linguistic capital have multiple communication and language skills, and use these skills in their daily lives (Yosso, 2005). Acknowledging linguistic capital through a Montessori lens means encouraging BIPOC Montessori educators possessing linguistic capital to use it in varying ways, using sources other than books or readings to teach content. They also might tell stories, or assign work that involves various mediums. Educators would also recognize that linguistic capital means having intangible social skills such as cross-cultural awareness (Yosso, 2005). A Montessori educator could use this cross-cultural awareness and social skills to inform the way they assess and teach social skills (Grace and Courtesy lessons in the Montessori community). By using CCW to inform how we interpret and practice Montessori, both BIPOC educators' and students; forms of capital are valued and sustained.

Familial Capital

Familial capital is a form of cultural wealth that encompasses the cultural knowledge nurtured among families and communities (Yosso, 2005). An educator who knows about or possesses familial capital understands that a student's home life

affects how that student connects with others. Rather than face a challenge alone, a student with familial capital might be more likely to engage others to take on problems with them and collaborate to find solutions. In a primary Montessori classroom environment, where students ages 3-6 engage primarily in individual work, possessing or being aware of familial capital can help educators understand why particular children may be drawn to others and spend less time working independently, and support that quality while also offering them independent lessons and work time. Additionally, many Montessori schools do student home visits, especially in the younger grades. A Critical Montessori educator using a CCW lens to understand Montessori could interpret what they see and learn during a home visit as a set of assets a student and their family possess, using the home visit to acknowledge the student's lived experience and reality.

Social Capital

Social capital expands on familial capital, referring to social networks and community resources. Social capital is an aspect of CCW that reflects the BIPOC educator's lived experience more so than the BIPOC student's. An educator familiar with social capital knows students have communities and networks outside the school and can encourage their students to utilize these networks. BIPOC Montessori educators with social capital can also use their own networks to create opportunities for their students, simultaneously modeling the benefits of social capital.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital is the set of skills acquired while navigating through systems and social institutions that do not center BIPOC individuals (Yosso, 2005).

Educators with navigational capital can identify it in their students as a form of knowledge, and even build on it to help students navigate schools and other systems such as the job market. An educator could support navigational capital by making their students aware of the skills necessary to maneuver unsupportive or hostile social institutions. In the Montessori primary grades, this could be through Grace and Courtesy (social skills) lessons. In the Montessori elementary and middle grades, raising awareness around navigational capital could take place through true stories and critical conversations. I have seen BIPOC Montessori educators use their navigational capital in their jobs in schools. A BIPOC Montessori educator possessing navigational capital is empowered to participate in the Montessori community while also acknowledging how whiteness perpetuates hostile racial climates in schools. A Montessori school using a Critical Montessori lens could have programs or connections to community resources or family information sessions that empower their BIPOC students and families to navigate the racist systems that serve to exclude them from certain opportunities.

Resistant Capital

The final form of CCW is resistant capital. Resistant capital is the knowledge and skills students or teachers possess that others often interpret as oppositional behavior. One way an educator might demonstrate resistant capital is through upholding the aforementioned forms of cultural wealth or by supporting BIPOC students' self-reliance and self-value in the racist, patriarchal structures they face (Yosso, 2005). In a Montessori setting, where Grace and Courtesy (social role play) lessons are given to help children know how to function in the world, an educator

could create Grace and Courtesy lessons around children's resistant capital, teac'ing how to consciously talk about, identify, or defend one's own cultural capital. Additionally, a Critical Montessori educator could use the lens of resistant capital to try and understand student behavior that, at first glance, might be deemed as "problematic." A school that uses a Critical Montessori lens could support educators who integrate critical racial conversations about identity and how to navigate this racist society int their teaching, rather than teach anti-racist work as an "add-on" to the Montessori curriculum.

As previously stated, the notion of being a prepared adult ready to work with children means understanding one's lived experience as a strength. An educator who can understand their own strengths and lived experiences can more easily observe those strengths in children. Once a Montessori educator internalizes cultural competence and relevance, their role as a facilitator of learning strengthens in the student-centered Montessori environment (Brunold-Conesa, 2019). Educators must be aware of the multiple facets of their identities and experiences to support their students' varying capitals (Durden, Escalante, & Blitch, 2015; Brown & Steele, 2015). Learning about cultural patterns of learning and behavior can help educators disrupt their constructions of racial discourse and introduce them to a different lens for framing student (and their own) strengths and abilities in the form of CCW (Nash & Miller, 2015). The forms of capital above often remain unacknowledged by dominant white culture, and even frowned upon. Educators who are cognizant of CCW can build on their own strengths and recognize the knowledge students and

their families already possess, centering their lived experiences and continuing the Montessori tradition of a strengths-based pedagogy.

Using CSP and CRP to Value Educators' and Students' Community Cultural Wealth

This model also hinges on the belief that children have something to teach us, and that using CSP to inform Montessori practice provides the space to value student and educator racial identities and uplift student knowledge. This element is directly informed by Paris' (2012) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) and centers more tangible elements in teaching such as curriculum. CSP focuses specifically on supporting racial and ethnic identity development; these are aspects left out of universal Montessori training. CSP provides a way for teachers to help children connect (and remain connected) with their identities and feel confident in who they are (Paris, 2012). While CSP is the ideal pedagogy for sustaining student knowledge, realistically it is incredibly challenging for educators to include all students' languages, backgrounds, and experiences as the groundwork for their teaching. Additionally, CSP is an inherently anti-racist framework due to its counter-hegemonic approach (Paris, 2021). For the purposes of this theoretical element, I will focus on Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), the predecessor to CSP.

CRP in Montessori Education

CRP emphasizes representation of student identities in curriculum and teaching methods that center students' experiences. It explicitly combats deficit thinking, instead acknowledging institutional racism, racialization, language discrimination, and skin color privilege (Hammond, 2015). The cost of not using CRP

is high: students who are unable to connect with course content will not learn it, and lead to a sense of frustration and inability to fully process content (Hammond, 2015). Hammond's work details the implications of considering culturally responsive teaching and its effects on the brain and learning (2015). Hammond describes five principles, or "brain rules," to understand the role of culture in learning (2015). The first is that the brain seeks to minimize threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others (Hammond, 2015). Students need to feel safe and happy to learn (Hammond, 2015). When students face microaggressions, for example, their amygdala stays on alert, trying to detect other microaggressions, and leading to "the unconscious safety-threat detection system" to engage, detracting from a focus on school content (Hammond, 2015, p. 47). The second principle is that positive relationships help the amygdala stay calm so other parts of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) can focus on higher order learning and thinking (Hammond, 2015). Third, culture guides how we process information (Hammond, 2015). Learning will be most effective if processed using common cultural learning aids specific to a student (Hammond, 2015). Fourth, attention drives learning; using culturally relevant methods (oral traditions, music, call and response) grab the learner's attention and engage them actively in the learning process (Hammond, 2015). Another key principle is that new information must be paired with students' existing knowledge to make sense of new content (Hammond, 2015). Finally, the brain physically grows through challenges (Hammond, 2015). Creating independent learners while challenging students involves introducing them to relevant work involving problem-solving (Hammond, 2015). Hammond describes culture as the brain's software, and

explains that deep culture, above and beyond representation in books and art, is necessary for teaching to be culturally responsive or sustaining (2015). Without incorporating students' cultures and experiences into teaching, students' cognitive processing is inhibited (Hammond, 2015), thus also limiting the efficacy of the Montessori method.

Montessori literature shows that public Montessori may be limited by the lack of diversity of teaching staff as well as cultural responsiveness of teacher education (D'Cruz, in press; Debs & Brown, 2017). The Montessori method naturally lends itself well to elements of CRP, such as culturally relevant art and true cultural stories, and the nature of a student-centered environment. Despite the potential to combine Montessori and CRP smoothly, there are no explicit teachings that all Montessori teachers learn to do so (D'Cruz, in press). One way to support student identity development is through schools that move explicitly toward CRP and CSP (D'Cruz, in press). Montessori training should also support and explicitly include CRP and CSP. While it can be challenging to realistically implement CSP, the research on how to do so is in process (Doucet, 2019). Doucet (2019) outlines various ways to implement CSP specifically in schools. Doucet (2019) suggests that educators make six commitments for culturally sustaining early childhood environments: increasing diversity knowledge, building classrooms as a community of trust, involving families and communities in education, combatting prejudice and discrimination, addressing diversity in its full complexity, and promoting global perspectives. Fostering cultural competency, supporting teachers' inner reflection and work, and identifying ways to sustain students' cultures and knowledge is an essential part of student-centered

Montessori education (D'Cruz, in press). Below, I describe how each commitment for culturally sustaining classrooms (Doucet, 2019) can be realized through a Critical Montessori lens.

Increasing Diversity Knowledge

While the term "diversity" implies a white-centered perspective in which non-white individuals are considered the "other," Doucet (2019) uses it to refer to a lack of knowledge of institutional racism and how it affects BIPOC students. However, BIPOC educators who are aware of racism can increase their students' knowledge about it. Doucet (2019) suggests strategies such as representation in books and art, developing critical media literacy skills (being conscious and critical consumers of media) in both educators and students, and using popular culture and community resources to reflect students' own cultures and teach them about unfamiliar ones. Montessori materials such as cultural or geography folders and the emphasis on a variety of art fulfill part of Doucet's (2019) suggestion. However, there is room for Montessori training to acknowledge critical media literacy and how Montessori educators can more intentionally address racism in their work with students.

Building Classrooms as a Community of Trust

Doucet's (2019) explanation of building a community of trust mimics the idea of social cohesion, respect, and relationship-building in Montessori philosophy. As previously discussed in the section entitled "respect for and relationships with children," educators should model respect for their students and build a warm classroom climate. Doucet's (2019) examples include self-reflective practices for educators, storytelling, small group work, and consistency, the final three of which

are essential elements of Montessori instruction. A critical Montessori educator needs time to self-reflect and note what changes or learning might be necessary to support anti-racist teaching and a critical Montessori classroom that explicitly uplifts BIPOC students. It is the role of the school to provide the time and mental space for self-reflection.

Involving Families and Communities in Education

Involving families and communities requires educators to connect with families as partners in their work to support students. Educators can make connections between familial knowledge and the school curriculum (Doucet, 2019). Utilizing families' skills and knowledge to involve them in the school contributes to a culturally sustaining approach to schooling (Doucet, 2019). In a Montessori setting, educators might ask family members to help in repairing broken materials, connecting them to community resources and knowledge, or giving their input as to which Grace and Courtesy lessons they see as necessary for their children. Home visits are a common Montessori practice in which educators visit families in their homes or nearby common areas to get to know them outside the classroom. Additionally, Montessori students often bring in photos from their childhood on their birthdays, sharing parts of their upbringing with their classmates. While these practices are common, there is still much work to do in involving communities in children's education; Critical Montessori educators can be creative about how to involve and include families in children's education outside the classroom.

Combating Prejudice and Discrimination

Doucet's (2019) fourth commitment for culturally sustaining practices expands the idea of representation. Students must be exposed not only to representation of themselves in books and art, but must know how prejudice and discrimination operate, and how to recognize and discuss them. For example, Doucet (2019) suggests peace protests or other such exercises to show students how they can support their communities through battling discrimination. Many educators do not feel prepared to talk about racism in their classrooms (Doucet, 2019). Again, Doucet (2019) suggests self-reflection for educators. Doucet describes observation as a helpful process for educators to become familiar with students' behaviors and the classroom dynamic (2019). As with Montessori observation, Doucet suggests educators describe what they see (2019). However, Doucet (2019) does not acknowledge the impossibility of objectivity in standard observation, in which the observer writes a description of what they see. Ethnographic observation, however, may serve as a way for the educator-observer to identify their own thoughts and opinions in their observation notes (Doucet, 2019). A Critical Montessori educator could review their observation notes and identify any biased or discriminatory comments, or note any patterns in their notes, encouraging further self-reflection and thought about students' strengths and needs. They could use their notes to address harmful classroom dynamics and to actively support students' racial and ethnic identities.

Addressing Diversity in its Full Complexity

Building on her own use of the word "diversity," Doucet's fifth commitment is to addressing diversity by understanding intersectionality (2019). Doucet describes

what it could look like to see students in their full identities, giving the example of, "a student with a learning disability [who] could also be a multilingual immigrant with extraordinary mathematics skills" (2019, p. 164). Suggestions to address diversity and acknowledge intersectionality include educator reflection and using art or games to introduce students to different facets of identities. While there is no specific Montessori material or exercise for addressing diversity and intersectionality, the open-ended nature of movement activities, cultural and true stories, games, and artwork in the Montessori curriculum makes way for such activities. It is then the responsibility of Critical Montessori educators, administrators, and teacher trainers to introduce and acknowledge intersectionality.

Promoting Global Perspectives

Doucet's (2019) final commitment is to educate about global perspectives, ranging from displaying world maps to building international partnerships with other teachers. Acknowledging students' linguistic capital is one way of promoting global perspectives. Doucet (2019) cautions educators in using global interactions specifically to address crises or provide charity, which can portray other countries in negative or deficit ways. As mentioned in the first commitment, "increasing diversity knowledge," Montessori geography folders are one way of exposing students to global perspectives. Sharing stories, photographs, and inviting students to share about their lives are other ways educators can support students' identities.

Educators have an ethical responsibility to engage in CSP (Doucet, 2019). As demonstrated above, the 6 commitments serve as examples of CSP, and how the Montessori curriculum *must* make way for CSP in schools to counteract dominant,

white-centered, deficit lenses and instead promote anti-racist teaching and school environments that support students' racial and ethnic identity development. In the following section, I describe counter-storytelling and its role in supporting critical racial Montessori teaching practices.

Using Counter-Storytelling to Support BIPOC Lived Experiences

The final theory I use is counter-storytelling to support BIPOC student and educator lived experiences. As described above, Doucet suggests using storytelling to help build trusting classroom communities (2019). Critical Race Theory takes storytelling a step further, emphasizing counter-stories, "stories of those people whose experiences are not often told…[tools] for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the…stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) propose gathering various forms of counter-stories: personal stories which describe individual experiences with forms of racism in relation to larger systems (such as the education system), other people's stories which also reveal racism in larger systems, and composite stories which draw from various sources to convey racialized experiences of BIPOC individuals. Counter-stories can build community among BIPOC individuals, challenge established dominant (white) systems accepted as the norm, show that there are a multitude of lived experiences, and illuminate reality through combining elements of existing and new stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A critical Montessori school that emphasizes counter-storytelling can value experiences and stories of its BIPOC educators that reveal how racism exists and perpetuates itself in a

school. Self-reflection is a part of implementing CSP in Montessori schools; by providing time and space for self-reflection, a school could invite BIPOC educators to write or narrate their own counter-stories. As a Montessori community, we would do well to create space for BIPOC Montessori educators' counter-stories, and note how and where racism appears in our schools and wider community.

Counter-storytelling offers an opportunity to center and understand BIPOC experiences in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using counter-stories places importance on voices historically silenced and oppressed, in this case, BIPOC educators and students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Gathering and sharing counter-stories that resist dominant (white) narratives thus reveal systems of whiteness and racism that plague the education system (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In the following section, I describe how the above theories and practices (Critical Race Theory, Community Cultural Wealth, Culturally Sustaining/Relevant Pedagogies, and counter-storytelling) come together to form the Critical Montessori Model.

What is the Critical Montessori Model (CMM)?

I seek to examine and confront the historical and ideological structures that both provide a strong foundation for the method, and constrain it in certain aspects. I use Montessori specifically because of its centuries-long, explicit, commitment to whole-child development, and the framework can be used both in classrooms as well as in research and education policy. My own experience as a Montessori educator showed me the benefits to children when Montessori was applied in a critical way. For five years, I worked in a public charter Montessori school with children ages three to six. My time spent working in a Montessori school, as an Indian-American

lead teacher, is what led me to my scholarship in critical Montessori work. By acknowledging children's lived experiences outside the classroom, their experience inside the classroom has the potential to be transformative.

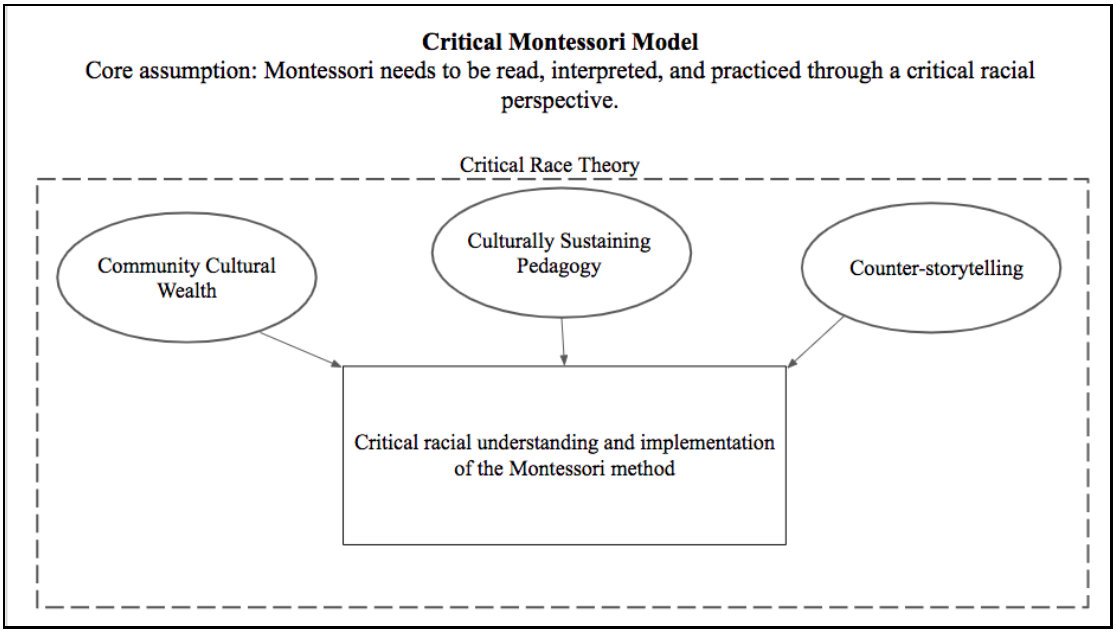
This proposed framework specifically includes important Montessori principles such as the materials, shared language and understanding of child development, the use and purpose of observation, and the relationships between adults and children. The shared language and understanding of child development is, ideologically, what distinguishes Montessori from other alternative or holistic methods. Montessori educators use a distinctly Montessori lens to view child and student development. While other frameworks could be used to interpret Montessori, they do not fully encompass all aspects of Montessori principles. Thus, I propose a lens to change the way we (Montessori educators) look at the Montessori method, that centers the voices and experiences of BIPOC educators and students.

The core assumption of the Critical Montessori Model (CMM) is that Montessori needs to be read, interpreted, and practiced through a critical racial perspective. Critical racial implementation considers the racial power structures and white supremacy that BIPOC educators and students face (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Figure 1, below, provides a visual for the Critical Montessori Model. In this study, I used the model to guide the research questions and process. When I observed, I used the lens of the CMM to determine which interactions or observations seemed significant or noteworthy. I also used the CMM in the deductive coding and data analysis processes. When looking through the data, I used CMM to determine which data were significant through the lens of the theoretical model. In Chapter 4,

Methods, I further describe how I used the model to shape this study and analyze the data.

Figure 1

The Critical Montessori Model



Chapter 4: Methods

Pilot Study

The research methods and design for this study were based on the findings from a pilot study I did previously. In a pilot study in Fall 2020, I did a focus group with two BIPOC Montessori educators: two Black women who work in public Montessori schools in a major city on the east coast. I used semi-structured interview questions to facilitate a conversation between myself and the participants about their experiences as BIPOC Montessori educators, specifically their identities as Black women, and their connections to Montessori philosophy. One initial finding from that focus group showed that both Black Montessori educators wanted to discuss their experiences as educators when they are together; both educators cited a sense of relief and joy around being able to spend some time reflecting on their experiences in Montessori schools. The participants continually built off and affirmed one another's statements.

The second finding was that both Black Montessori educators demonstrated strengths in their work with children and families. Both educators discussed incorporating practices such as call and response songs to their racial identities, and described the comfort that BIPOC families felt while working with the educators. Both educators demonstrated that their cultural capital enhanced the experiences of the families and children with whom they work.

The final finding of the pilot study was that Black Montessori educators disrupted and resisted the notion that Montessori in the United States is for white and upper- and middle-class Americans, but that Black Montessori educators face unique

racialized challenges. Both educators expressed frustration at having heard the idea that Montessori is not or does not work for Black students. They both asserted that if the Montessori method is used correctly, it can work for Black students, but that there are still cultural and structural barriers that complicate implementation. One participant referred to the anti-Blackness ingrained in U.S. society that prevents Black children from experiencing freedom and joy in the same way that white children (and sometimes non-white racial groups) do. The other participant also referred to the misunderstood principles of the philosophy; generally, folks who are not familiar with the method often misconstrue various Montessori principles. One participant discussed her experience in her Montessori training of witnessing racial discrimination through the experiences of her other BIPOC classmates, who were picked on for things such as their language, the way that they interacted with Montessori materials, and their album (curriculum)[11] content. The participants also offered a critique of the Montessori community that there is not enough critical analysis of Montessori from a racial lens. Plenty of Montessori educators think about their lessons and presentation of Montessori materials, but do not specifically consider the experiences of their BIPOC students. Through the pilot study, the participants identified three groups (BIPOC Montessori educators, BIPOC Montessori students, and BIPOC Montessori families) that are clearly affected by the ways whiteness pervades Montessori training and through the lack of critical analysis and implementation of the method. The pilot study strengthened my argument that

[11] In Montessori training, teachers construct "albums" which are binders that contain the Montessori curriculum, including the progression of lessons. Montessori teachers refer to their albums to help them plan and teach lessons.

whiteness has a strong presence in the Montessori community, and that there are BIPOC educators doing anti-racist and culturally relevant work with their students. The findings from the pilot study informed how I designed the CMM and my dissertation study as a whole. My research questions about how Lauren interprets Montessori to do culturally relevant and anti-racist teaching stem from the conversation with the two aforementioned educators, and their discussions of the culturally relevant work they did. Additionally, I drew from the pilot study findings to write semi-structured interview questions (specifically about classroom practices).

Research Design

This critical ethnographic study about the practices of a Black Montessori teacher involved three months of critical ethnographic data collection; I was a participant-observer in a Primary Montessori classroom (grades PK3, PK4, and Kindergarten). I spent two full days each week immersed in the classroom environment, taking critical ethnographic field notes. Based on my guiding research questions and observations, I wrote semi-structured interview questions to ask the lead teacher, who is a Black woman[12]. She and I met for one hour every other week to discuss how she uses her racial identity and knowledge to teach, as well as structural barriers she faces in her work. As a reminder, the guiding research questions of this study are: *How does a Black Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? How does she practice the*

[12] Again, I wish to emphasize that while Lauren is part of the larger BIPOC community, all BIPOC community members do not experience racism and racialization in the same ways (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). I too am part of the BIPOC community, but due to my racialization as an Asian woman, I do not experience the same anti-Blackness that Lauren does (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Dumas, 2016; Liu et al, 2022).

Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices? What are the structural barriers that continue to challenge her as a Black educator doing her work?

I draw from Madison's (2005) methods of critical ethnography. Madison (2005) describe critical ethnography as a method in which the researcher "feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing…conditions toward greater freedom and equity" (2005, p. 5). This research is done through being "on the ground," or embedding oneself in a community (in this case, a Montessori classroom led by a Black teacher) (Madison, 2005). My goal as a critical ethnographic researcher is to contribute to social justice discourse and to make visible the experiences and voices of individuals whose work often remains in the shadows, in this ca'e, through a counter-narrative (Madison, 2005). In Madison's approach, the critical ethnographer takes on a clear position in intervening in dominant practices and advocates for change (2005). In this project, my goal was to bring to light the anti-racist teaching practices of a Black educator, thus making clear to the Montessori community that anti-racist teaching is not only possible in Montessori classrooms, but is also a responsibility as we work with BIPOC students.

Setting

The setting of this study is a public Montessori school in a major city on the east coast, which I will refer to as Arborville. For the purposes of this study and for confidentiality, I will refer to the school as Acorn Montessori Public Charter School (AMPCS). AMPCS was founded in 2014 with the goal of closing the opportunity gap in Arborville. The first campus currently serves 250 students from grades PK3-6th

grade. The school opened a second campus in 2019 and serves 120 PK3-1st grade students, and adds a grade each year as the children grow. This study took place at the first campus of AMPCS. This campus is located in a residential area that is rapidly adding more housing, with more restaurants and shops being built nearby as well. It is accessible by local public transportation.

AMPCS cites a commitment to equity and claims to pair Montessori with anti-racist and anti-bias practices. Its first campus is on one of the top 10 waitlists for elementary charter schools in Arborville. It is also recognized by the Association Montessori International-USA branch, making it the only public elementary school fully recognized by AMI-USA in Arborville. The teachers are supported by instructional coaches, and have regular grade-level meetings to support authentic Montessori teaching practices. When the school opened, only one of its four lead teachers, me, was a teacher of color. Currently, five of its 10 lead teachers are teachers of color, increasing the number of lead teachers of color from 25 percent to 50 percent in the past eight years. About 73 percent of current classroom staff are individuals of color. The leadership team at the school is 75 percent white (three out of four leaders are white). The school has made explicit commitments to further anti-bias, anti-racism (ABAR) work, including forming an ABAR curriculum committee made up of teachers across both campuses of the school. They are attempting to shift the structures of the school to support anti-racist teaching, which began with hiring more BIPOC educators.

Participants

The main participant in this study is Lauren[13], a Black lead Primary teacher at AMPCS. She transitioned into the full-time teacher in my own classroom, the Oak Community, in January 2019 and has been with the class ever since. Her two assistants, a Latina woman and a Black woman, have been part of the classroom team during Lauren's entire time at AMPCS. Lauren did her Montessori training at a local AMI training center. One of the reasons I asked Lauren to be the participant is because of our existing relationship from working together. As a researcher, I acknowledge the existing rapport we have from working together as she slowly took over my classroom (Madison, 2005). After she became the lead teacher in my classroom, I was her instructional coach. Thus, we already had the shared experience of making time for meetings, sitting down together, and talking about her classroom practice from the perspective of collaboration. We had practice problem-solving, brainstorming, and trying out new strategies in her classroom as a team. For me, this translated into the rapport-building and sustaining strategies of active listening, being mindful of Lauren's comfort and trust during our conversations, confidentiality, and gentle probing to delve more deeply into Lauren's comments or reflections (Madison, 2005). Additionally, we both had practice with a status difference (Madison, 2005) in that I was her coach for a period of time. While by the time of the study we had almost the exact same amount of teaching experience, I was aware of my status as a founding teacher at the school. I know that part of the reason I gained access to the site and to Lauren so easily was because of my status as a founder. For this reason, I

[13] Lauren is a pseudonym. For confidentiality, all names of individuals, the school, and other identifying characteristics (the city, etc.) will be changed.

was especially mindful of ethical conduct and needed to take great care to not exploit, take advantage of, or assume I had unlimited or unrestricted access to Lauren, staff members, or school resources.

Another reason I chose to work with Lauren is that she is one of the teachers on the school's ABAR curriculum committee (a committee made up of teachers who design anti-racism and anti-bias lessons for classrooms), and working toward anti-racist teaching practices. Her commitment to anti-racist teaching makes her a critically conscious educator in that she is reflective and intentional about anti-racist teaching in her classroom, and wants to promote anti-racist teaching across Montessori classrooms in the school.

While I primarily observed Lauren and her interactions with her students and other educators, and interviewed her every other week, additional interviews with the Head of School helped inform the research questions. The Head of School was able to speak to the structural challenges Lauren faces, either due to the school structures or the limitations placed on public charter schools in Arborville. Montessori schools differ in their practices, even when having a shared teaching method. By speaking with an Oak Community administrator, I better understood the classroom as a subculture within the school. While this study focused on Lauren's teaching practices, other conversations helped me understand the context within which she was working.

Researcher Positionality

I am an Asian American (Indian) woman of color, born and raised in North Carolina. I come to my research with a critical and loving view of the Montessori method. I completed my AMI Primary training (for ages two and a half to six) in

2014 and spent five years working at a public charter Montessori school in a major city on the east coast. I am interested in the experiences of BIPOC educators and children, specifically those involved in Montessori education. Due to my background, I have an insider perspective; however, as a doctoral student, I have not been consistently working in a school for over two years, and I am aware that this distance from the school environment has affected the way I saw and interpreted my observations. I also acknowledge the power dynamic in my being a Montessori diploma-holder possibly working with and interviewing adults who do not hold Montessori diplomas. Although this does not discount or diminish the experiences of the educators (having a different role leads to a different experience), it is something that has been a point of contention in Montessori schools and communities in the past, and one I have witnessed in various Montessori settings.

My own Montessori training and teaching experience grant me insider status, as well as my years of experience as a school employee and the previous teacher in Lauren's classroom. Because I am no longer in the school or the classroom as an employee, I simultaneously occupied the role of an outsider. I did not know the changes in procedures or norms that have occurred since I left the school. I am no longer the lead teacher, and I did not know the children or their families. Additionally, my positionality as an Indian American woman made me an outsider to Lauren's experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I took on both the emic and etic perspectives, I was aware that I needed to be reflexive during the research process. I needed to acknowledge my insider status and perspective while still centering Lauren and her experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

My interest in researching the experiences of Montessori educators and children of color is, in part, simply because I was one. I was a Brown Montessori child, and then a Brown Montessori educator. Part of my reasoning for exploring these experiences is to gain a better understanding of my own experience. However, I am keenly aware that my experience as an Indian American woman is starkly different from other members in the BIPOC community; we are all racialized differently and serve different roles in society in ways that benefit whiteness (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014). While I am a member of the BIPOC community, I often benefit from whiteness and what I am able to accomplish due to my status as an Asian American individual, while other racial groups (e.g., Black, Latinx, and Indigenous individuals) may face different structural barriers (Yi & Museus, 2016).

The second reason is that I am deeply invested in elevating the voices of those Montessorians who are successful in their work, but whose work or efforts are overlooked. The final reason is that I am interested and committed to research as a healing process. I want my research process to be as important (if not more) than the product that emerges at the end. For this reason, my theoretical model, the CMM, emphasizes counter-stories and seeing the strengths and CCW of BIPOC individuals.

My Role as Ethnographic Researcher in the Classroom

Winn & Ubiles describe "worthy witnessing" as a way to enter into and exist in a space while creating space for critical dialogue (2011). This process includes upholding the humanity and confidentiality of the members in a space, meaning that there may be interactions, exchanges, or observations I chose not to include because

the classroom space ultimately was not one that belonged to me; it belonged to the adults and children in the class. Similarly to the experiences of Winn & Ubiles (2011), it was the decision of the community members whether I will truly gain full access to the classroom dynamic; my decision to be in the space and help where I can was born out of the effort to build relationships with the children and adults in the space. I drew from Winn & Ubiles' four phases of ethnographic inquiry to guide my entry into the space and maintain trust between myself and the classroom community (2011). The first phase, *admission*, happened in two phases: the first, entry into the school and physical classroom; the second, entry into the awareness of the children and adults in the class. Consistently arriving on time, following the norms of the classroom (using a soft voice, not interrupting children or adults' work, walking around children's work, etc.), and refraining from interfering in daily classroom activities all led to a sense of trust among myself and the classroom members.

My entry into the site was the easiest part of this project; as I already had a relationship with the lead teacher, as well as the head of school, simply asking and explaining what I would be doing was enough for me to gain access to the school and the classroom. I spent two full days each week in Lauren's classroom. I either sat inside the classroom itself, or observed her from the hallway if there were too many people in the classroom (in addition to the 27 students, there are four educators in the classroom).

My decision to enter the site before formal data collection was to begin the declaration phase of critical ethnographic inquiry (Winn & Ubiles, 2011). The *declaration* phase describes when the researcher introduces themself and their ideas. I

informed the teacher, Lauren, about my ideas and guiding research questions before asking for admission to her classroom. I chose to enter the site prior to formally gathering data so the children and adults in the classroom would become accustomed to my presence. Children often notice when even one small detail in their classroom has changed, let alone the addition of another adult in their space every week. My hope was that they became used to seeing me each week and go about their school days without giving much additional attention or thought to me. While being at Acorn Montessori, in the first few weeks, some children approached me and had conversations with me. They began to learn my name and greet me when they saw me in the mornings; they allowed me to help them during fire drills or on rainy days when they had to rush to put on extra layers of clothing. This led to the third phase, *revelation*, which describes a sense of mutual acceptance and respect, and occurs through the researchers' participation in the classroom community (Winn & Ubiles, 2011).

Given that I observed in the classroom where I used to teach, there was some sense of comfort and familiarity with the adults. I hoped to move into the revelation phase primarily during interviews and conversations with Lauren. I hoped that our conversations would provide space for us to think alongside one another, rather than be formal interview spaces where I was directing the conversation. My existing relationship and rapport with Lauren influenced my ethnographic research process. Our conversations throughout the day centered the children, events that had happened during the school day, and how Lauren succeeded and struggled in supporting her students. When preparing the classroom in the mornings, or after the children went to

recess midday, Lauren, her assistants, and I would naturally discuss the events and interactions that occurred during the morning work cycle. Throughout data collection, our conversations reflected those that Lauren and I engaged in when I worked at the school. Our interviews were conversational and comfortable. While I asked Lauren questions, the dynamic felt more like one of colleagues exchanging ideas than a researcher interviewing a participant. Between interview questions and responses, we would laugh and joke, weaving our personal relationship throughout each interview. When Lauren and I had lunch together or supervised recess, we would discuss the challenges some students might be facing and brainstormed ideas for them. While I occupied the role of researcher, Lauren and I also experienced the dynamic of once again being thought partners in service of the children in the Oak Classroom.

The final phase, *confidentiality*, was one I considered during the data collection and analysis processes (Winn & Ubiles, 2011). I read through my field notes and gathered artifacts (or photos of artifacts) each week, during which I made the decision whether there are certain notes to exclude. During this study, I made sure to protect the participants by omitting certain details. I also wanted to ensure that the research itself was reliable. I did member-checking during each interview determine confidentiality and accuracy; if there were conversations or topics deemed private, they do not appear in this study. I also sent my findings to both interview participants after I wrote them to get their feedback and find out if anything I wrote felt untrue or inaccurate. While this might be considered a limitation, it is my responsibility as a critical ethnography researcher to respect Lauren's experience, including when she does not want information to be shared (Madison, 2005). Additionally, because I

have an ongoing relationship with the Montessori community, and for the sake of future research, it was crucial that I consistently questioned my methods (to avoid exploitation), what I chose to include, and how I would present my findings to truly focus on Lauren's successes in her classroom (Madison, 2005).

Part of my responsibility as a researcher using critical ethnographic methods meant that I did not simply disappear from the community once my research concluded (Madison, 2005). While my participation in the Montessori community is ongoing, I also made sure to continue contact with Lauren and the Head of School and other staff members at AMPCS. To ensure that I was conducting research in an ethical manner, I was very transparent with the staff members at AMPCS about the purpose of my study, who it would affect, and who would see the results (Madison, 2005). As a critical ethnographer, I also participated in the community to lend support whenever it was appropriate, whether it was helping in the Oak Classroom, or helping in other classrooms from time to time. Part of my role as a researcher using critical ethnographic methods in a classroom was to step in to offer support when needed, and help the community when necessary (Madison, 2005), especially if one of the adults in the class was absent. Additionally, I helped clean the classroom upon arrival each morning I was there, dusting shelves, straightening classroom materials, and doing whatever else I could to contribute to the classroom running smoothly. To contribute to the school, I also filled in for duties when staff are absent, including helping with recess or lunch duty, or any other duties that arose. I continue to make myself available to the AMPCS community as a colleague and thought partner.

Data Collection and Analysis

My data sources include the following: participant observation, field notes, a researcher's journal (which included my own reflections), ethnographic semi-structured interviews, and artifacts (photos, documents, records) from the classroom. I observed Lauren, the way she used her racial identity and knowledge to teach, and any potential structural barriers she faced in her work. Interview questions pertained particularly to her teaching decisions, interactions with students, and experiences teaching or doing anti-racist work in her classroom. As with interviews, my observations of her anti-racist teaching practices extended also to the assistants in the classroom; while I focused on Lauren, I examined how she had her assistants support anti-racist work in the class. I continued collecting data throughout my time in the classroom, and stopped when I had exhausted all data sources, or when I arrived at the point of saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the case of artifacts and physical items, I stopped when there were no more physical items I could photograph. In the case of interviews and observations, I stopped when similar codes continued to arise, and the observations I made and conversations I had with Lauren continued to lead to the overlapping or similar codes through multiple data sources.

I used the Critical Montessori Model to guide what I observed, noticed, and recorded, and to guide the data analysis process. Given the overwhelming amount of data, I first separated the data into categories by general sources: interviews, observations, and artifacts (including art) (Madison, 2005). After reading through and familiarizing myself with each data source, I then looked at all of the data as one comprehensive set, identifying where the data informed and verified one another. As I

combed through the data, it began weaving itself back together, overlapping in themes as I put together my findings (see Appendix C for the Coding Guide), as I used the Critical Montessori Model to guide my coding process. As I continued to code the data, I noticed the same codes repeating themselves. Once that began happening, I knew I had reached the point of saturation, where I could stop the coding process and move onto sifting codes into themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Because I planned to meet with Lauren multiple times, I used each week's observation, artifacts, and interview data to inform the questions I asked in upcoming interviews, and to talk to Lauren about themes I noticed. Thus, weekly analysis played a role in continued data collection during my study. After gathering my data, I analyzed it by using inductive coding methods. I parsed through the data and noted any particular themes that arose. While the inductive coding process was relatively open-ended, I still used the CMM to inform the process. I employed the CMM to interpret my data, and I allowed the data to inform the themes. The CMM influenced which themes I noted as significant, and which data seemed noteworthy. For example, as I looked for themes in my notes, I paid particular attention to any notes about anti-racist or culturally responsive artifacts or practices in Lauren's classroom. As such, while I used inductive coding methods, they were still informed by the CMM. Using critical ethnographic methods meant that every part of this study was guided by theory, and was not purely open-ended. I performed most of the data analysis using inductive coding methods informed by the CMM. However, I also used deductive coding methods; based on the CMM framework, I identified important concepts and themes, and searched for them in my notes and artifacts. My own

experience, in addition to the CMM, informed which concepts stood out to me as important. My own experience as a Brown, multilingual, Montessori educator influenced which artifacts, observations, comments, and moments in the classroom stood out to me. While I used specific methods to aid in the coding and analysis processes, my own perspective was also a part of those methods.

Additionally, I triangulated the data by using multiple data sources to confirm one another and answer my research questions, to ensure that I was not drawing conclusions from single sources of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Reeves et al, 2008). For example, when I observed an interaction between students that appeared to be culturally responsive or sustaining, I would then ask Lauren about the interaction to further understand it and find out if it confirmed what I observed. In some cases, books or artifacts also played a role in the triangulation process. For example, I noticed books that represented the BIPOC students in the classroom, saw lessons that Lauren wrote that affirmed BIPOC students' and adults' identities, saw artwork that was representative of BIPOC students, and listened to Lauren talk about her conversations with her students about skin color. All of these sources of data combined to contribute to the finding that Lauren creates and maintains a culturally responsive and sustaining classroom culture. Additionally, I used both my analysis of the school's website and my conversation with the Head of School to confirm what the school's approach was in communicating its values to families.

Data Collection: Classroom Observations

I took handwritten field notes in a journal during my classroom observations. I wrote down descriptions of interactions Lauren had in whole-group settings, such as

reading aloud or singing with the entire class, as well as interactions with her BIPOC students. The descriptions included dialogue I overheard, and the behaviors of Lauren and her students. Ethnographic research necessitates “thick description,” or observation notes that convey meaning through the behaviors, events, and context of a culture (in this study, the subculture of Lauren's classroom) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The notes I took will be based on culture; in this setting, I identified cultural practices through classroom norms, routines, rituals, and behaviors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My field notes included a description of the physical classroom environment. I also described the demographics of the classroom, and used Lillard's (2011) work to take inventory of the Montessori materials in Lauren’s classroom. I also observed Lauren’s nonverbal communication with the children and other adults in the classroom, including hand gestures, movements, and other physical cues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My field notes included sections for my own personal notes and reflections. I kept a journal in which I wrote down my observation notes alongside my own personal thoughts, which I kept separate by using one side of the journal for observations, and another side of the journal for my own reflections. I also went through the journal periodically and highlighted elements in the field notes that actually belonged in the reflective journal portion. The reflective journal included feelings, judgments, or thoughts that came up for me during my observations, and any interactions I had with children who approached me. The reflective journal also served as a reflexive journal, in that I had to constantly examine my observations and try to identify any biases or judgments they might have included. While I as the researcher also served as the research instrument, my journal helped me to keep the

data in perspective and not lose sight of the research questions and purpose of this study.

Additionally, I wrote down anything Lauren does that appears to be an anti-racist teaching practice, or supporting anti-racist teaching among the adults on her classroom team. This included specific interventions or how adults speak about children when they were not present. I also wrote down the specific language she used and encouraged among the other adults to support anti-racist teaching. If there were key words or phrases I notice Lauren saying or repeating, I indicated as such in my field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There are no computers or screens in primary Montessori classrooms, and in an effort to honor and uphold the integrity of the classroom, I hand-wrote my field notes in a notebook. The notes were organized by date and time of day. Because Montessori classrooms have two- to three-hour unstructured work periods, I wrote down the times that I wrote field notes. I re-read my field notes once a week, noting any themes that began to appear. I highlighted those themes, coding as I observed each week, and began looking for the themes in the classroom. During my weekly review of my field notes, I typed them up. Anything I added into my typed field notes after the observation were marked as details or notes that were recalled (rather than observed in the moment).

Data Collection: Interviews

The ethnographic interviews with Lauren took place every other week, before school. They took place in the form of personal narratives, in which I invited Lauren to share her perspectives and expressions of any particular events or experiences

during previous weeks (Madison, 2005). The interviews also included oral history, when I asked Lauren about why she did a particular practice or more specific, pointed questions about her anti-racist practices (Madison, 2005). I recorded the interviews, which were virtual, and then transcribed them using a transcription service. I also took notes during interviews of any themes I notice arising. I used the Patton Model (Madison, 2005) for structuring my interview questions, which include questions about behaviors, experiences, values, personal feelings, knowledge, sensory experiences, and demographics (Madison, 2005). I chose this model because the questions center the experiences of the interviewee, rather than the validity of a particular event or phenomenon (Madison, 2005). Lauren's practices and behaviors shape the value system in her classroom; her class is a subculture within the Montessori culture. My goal through interviews, observations, and artifact-gathering was to understand Lauren's teaching practices and how she supports anti-racist teaching practice as a value in the subculture of her classroom.

The interviews with Lauren also served as member checks to ensure validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During interviews, I brought up any themes I noticed in my conversations with Lauren as a way to solicit feedback on initial findings and ensure Lauren felt that her voice and experience were accurately portrayed through my writing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The combination of interviews with Lauren, field notes during observations, and collection of artifacts all served as multiple sources of data I can triangulate during my analysis to understand Lauren's culturally relevant teaching practices as thoroughly as possible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Because I used the Critical Montessori Model (CMM) to guide my research, I prioritized the voices and experiences of BIPOC individuals. My observations were centered on the CCW Lauren and other BIPOC individuals brought to their teaching, and how they combat racism in their own way, in their classrooms. Additionally, I paid close attention to any practices that met the definition of Culturally Responsive or Sustaining Pedagogy, and noted those. On multiple occasions there was overlap between the elements of the Critical Montessori Model; for example, in a scenario where Lauren was valuing and uplifting students' linguistic capital, she was simultaneously engaging in Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy by inviting and allowing them the space to express their linguistic abilities. I shared my results with Lauren as well as the head of school at AMPCS in hopes that the information gathered could further the anti-racism work AMPCS strives toward. I am aware that my role as participant may have affected the data in that children or adults may have behaved differently when I, an adult not part of the classroom community, was present. I am hopeful that my consistent presence encouraged the classroom community to become accustomed to me, but anticipated that individuals may have acted differently when I was present (especially in the first few weeks of my fieldwork), particularly because I was taking notes.

Data Analysis: Observations and Interviews

While collecting data, I routinely read through my observation notes and wrote memos as I collected my notes. While writing field notes, I also wrote down my own thoughts about how or why I might have chosen to write down specific observations. For example, I noted that anytime Spanish was spoken in the classroom,

I would write it down, because it stood out to me as a way that the classroom culture supported students' linguistic capital. As someone who was raised bilingual, moments where a language other than English was supported stood out to me as significant and outside the norm of what I have experienced myself and typically seen in many Montessori classrooms. I continued analyzing the data after I had finished all interviews and observations (see Appendix C). I started with open-ended coding, using inductive methods. As I looked through the interview transcripts, observation data, and artifacts, I identified recurring concepts, actions, or terms related to the research questions (Saldaña, 2013), and noted them via annotations and analytic memos. While analytic memos are meant to help researchers reflect on the data in a narrative way, they also helped me identify emergent patterns, categories, codes, and themes in the data (Saldaña, 2013). For example, I noticed multiple situations where Lauren encouraged children to act and think independently, and reflect on the decisions they had made or were about to make. While independence is a significant element of the Montessori method, I have observed many teachers pass up opportunities to encourage students to think and act of their own volition; seeing Lauren do so consistently stood out to me as a consistent embodiment of Montessori philosophy. I wrote an analytic memo reflecting on these observations, and continued to consult and add to the memo throughout the coding process. Like independence, critical thinking as a whole is also an element of the Montessori method; however, similarly, opportunities for students to exercise critical thinking skills are often overlooked by teachers. Lauren consistently took advantage of situations where she could encourage students to deeply consider their options and make informed

decisions on their own. Eventually, these initial observations turned into the finding that Lauren fully embodies Montessori philosophy by encouraging critical thinking.

While reviewing the interview data, I used In Vivo coding, which Saldaña defines as identifying "words and phrases that seem to call for bolding…vocal emphasis if spoken aloud. Their salience may be attributed to such features as impacting nouns, action-oriented verbs, evocative word choices, clever or ironic phrases, similes and metaphors, etc" (2009). For example, Lauren said to me, "**I'm not gonna be like, pointed out because I might have more information about this Black child** like no, like, like we all have, have children like this let's not even make it a big deal." I chose to bold the first part of her statement because it stood out to me as a way she was racialized in her school community, which I thought might be a potential challenge in her work (see Appendix C for more examples). Additionally, BIPOC educators are often relied upon to have the answers for their BIPOC students, and Lauren's experience reflected existing literature (Kohli, 2019). As I looked through my observation and interview notes, and continued In Vivo coding, I began to notice patterns and repetition. I engaged in one initial round of In Vivo coding, and then a second round informed by the previous to ensure I did not miss any important statements or phrases.

I also used values coding to guide my data analysis, although primarily did so while gathering data through conducting interviews. For example, when Lauren would mention a particular value or thought (which she usually did in relation to Montessori or anti-racism work), I would ask her to describe her emotions or thoughts about that value in depth. As I used ethnographic methods, and ethnographic studies

become richer by keeping "emotions in the foreground of field notes and cultural interactions," (Saldaña, 2013) I drew my attention to her emotions and thoughts about her own values and teaching practice. As the values coding guided the interview processes and questions, the results showed up primarily in analytic memos.

Holistic coding helped me to group certain codes together to create initial themes and findings. The decision to code and organize the data as I read through it led me to the aforementioned methods of coding, which all came together in a non-linear process to lead me to my findings. I found myself repeatedly moving back and forth between the interview notes, to observations, to artifacts, and the analytic memos as I interpreted and made sense of the data in the context of my research questions. As I went through the interview data and identified themes, I also identified similar themes in my observation notes. Additionally, as recurring themes came up, I also cross-referenced them with artifacts I saw in the classroom. I went through the entire process of holistic coding twice.

Data Collection: Artifacts

When students were not present, I examined and took photos of relevant artifacts that added to the study. I gathered photos of and used artifacts both to represent how Lauren used specific items to support her anti-racist teaching practices, and to prompt interview questions about why or how she used particular items. The artifacts that first came to mind were books and artwork; Montessori lead teachers have complete say over which books they make accessible to their students, and which art goes on the walls. Montessori educators often rotate books and artwork, and I documented the variety of books and artwork in the classroom throughout the

semester. While some ethnographers collect physical artifacts, I took photos so as not to disturb the classroom space (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The books in Lauren's classroom, like many Montessori primary classrooms, are in a library corner. During my time there, children were allowed to sit in a beanbag chair and look at the books laid out on a shelf for them. The educators in the classroom also took books from the library corner to read to the children, in small groups or in a larger group. Lauren also read from a chapter book each day to the older children in the class. The artwork in the classroom was there to adorn the walls and engage the children; they often discussed the artwork together, or an educator would tell a story or make a comment about the art. I asked Lauren how and why she chose particular books and artwork, and what prompted her decisions to rotate something or keep it in the classroom for a longer period of time. A final, intangible artifact, was the music in the classroom (including songs). Music is another domain which the Montessori educator has complete control over. While I could not take photos of physical items, I wrote down the words to songs, and took photos of the playlists or musical albums Lauren played as the children entered the classroom each morning. Because Montessori lead teachers have control over which art, books, and songs they include in their classrooms, I considered these artifacts representative of the classroom community Lauren sought to build and maintain. The art and music contributed to the ambiance in the classroom; in Lauren's case, an anti-racist space. The books provided opportunities for children to see their own and others' cultures represented. I examined not only the artifacts themselves, but how they reflected the children in the classroom and Lauren's culturally relevant and anti-racist practices.

Other artifacts I gathered included photos of the classroom materials, including Montessori materials shown to be most effective per Lillard's (2011) work, and any additional materials Lauren added into the classroom. The Montessori materials are what make a Montessori classroom a space that is faithful to the Montessori method. The materials in Lauren's classroom served as the curriculum, and framed the children's daily activities, the adults' upkeep of the classroom space, and the lessons Lauren gave. The artifacts in the space, such as artwork, served as active elements of the curriculum in the Oak Classroom; Lauren's space itself served as a text and curricular materials with which students engaged Because the artifacts I gathered were not specifically made for research purposes, I used my own lens and judgment to analyze them; the CMM model played a large role in how I organized, categorized, and understood the meanings and values of the artifacts I gathered.

Data Analysis: Artifacts

Categories of Artwork

The Montessori classroom is often referred to as a *prepared environment*, which implies that classroom spaces are curated spaces to support the interests and development of the students. Instead of gathering physical artifacts or art pieces, I took photos of items, as I did not want to remove anything from the classroom. The 21 art pieces and artifacts in Lauren's classrooms fall into three categories: representative art, cultural items, and decoration (see Appendix C for the coding guide and a table demonstrating the categorization of art and artifacts). I created these categories after noticing the common themes of representation, cultural items, and decoration come up after I did inductive coding. For example, when I looked through

my photographs of the artwork and artifacts, I went through and categorized them by topic. I was able to categorize the majority of the artwork and artifacts into the three categories, despite some overlap. For example, when I looked at the artwork item below, I noticed that it fell into multiple categories (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2

Artwork from the Oak Classroom

The above artwork serves as decoration, but simultaneously as representative art as it depicts Black individuals.

Representative art refers to the artwork in Lauren's classroom that encompasses the identities of the adults and children in the classroom. I categorized any artwork that reflected the identities of the individuals in the classroom as "representative art." There was also specific "fro Centric art in"the classroom, which I included in the "representative art" category. Out of 21 art pieces and artifacts around Lauren's classroom, eight of them fell into the category of "representative art." More specifically, multiple pieces of artwork reflected the Black members of the Oak Community; one painting depicted a woman wearing a head wrap, which reflects the identities and experiences of the individuals in the classroom (interpreted as "representative art"). In addition to representing the identities of the Oak Classroom

students and adults, “representative art” created a space where community members could visually see themselves reflected in the classroom. Children saw paintings and portraits of Black women and children, which, in contrast to many other classroom environments I have seen, depicted their own skin tones, hair textures, and hair styles, de-centering whiteness as the norm. “Representative art” actively de-centered whiteness by re-centering images of BIPOC individuals. As a child who grew up without ever seeing myself reflected in my classroom spaces (other than textbooks) , the category of “representative art” was particularly noteworthy.

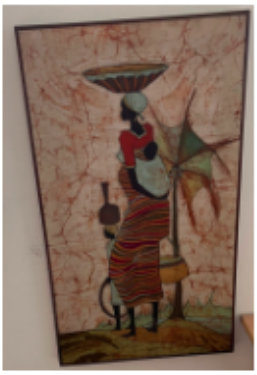
Eight more items fell into the category of “cultural items.” The term “cultural items” refers to artifacts that also encompass the identities of the adults and children in the Oak classroom. The items represent cultures from around the world, many of them gifts or items that Lauren purchased from members of those cult“res. While tea”hers can still tell stories about artwork, "cultural items" are more artifacts than pieces of art that hang on the wall. Lauren also told stories about various cultural items, either that I observed or that she described to me. For example, Lauren had a set of Nepali prayer flags in her classroom. While there were not any Nepali students in the Oak Classroom while I was there, Lauren referenced the flags when gathering the students in a group, explaining where they were from and their purpose. The cultural items function to create a space where students are both reflected and see perspectives and cultures that are new or unfamiliar to them. “Cultural items” were explicitly used to teach students. While “representative art” actively supported student identities, “cultural items” were frequently referenced by the adults in the spaces to tell stories or share experiences with students.

The final category of art and artifacts I identified is “decoration.” While many of Lauren’s decorative items, such as the above two items, also fell into the “representative art” category, I chose to identify “decoration” as its own category because there were items that served as decoration without explicitly representing the identities of any of the classroom community members. I also bore in mind that Montessori teachers are explicitly trained to include artwork of various mediums, sizes, colors, and themes in their classrooms. Some of these art pieces and artifacts, that do not also fall into the categories of representative art and cultural items (because both representative art and cultural items *also* serve as decorations), serve to adorn the space and make it feel more curated and personal. For example, in a Montessori school, there may be artwork in the bathroom. W’ile it may be unusual to see artwork hanging in a children's bathroom in a school, decorative art also has a function in Montessori spaces. Just as we hang art in our own homes to show that we value and care about the space and those in it, the decorations in a Montessori classroom have a similar meaning, in addition to emphasizing the idea that children are equally as deserving of beauty and decorations as adults are. Five of the 21 art pieces and artifacts fall into the “decoration” category. Most of the items Lauren chose to decorate her classroom are representative of her and her students’ identities (16 out of 21 are either representative art or cultural items). Figure 3, below, is an excerpt of how I organized the photos of the classroom artwork, their category, and their purpose (the numbers in each table refer to the photo number; see more in Appendix C).

Figure 3

Example of Categorization of Oak Classroom Artwork

Art and Artifacts (21 total)

Identifier	Category	Purpose
2975: 3-panel art 	Representative art (Afro centric)	Wall art; representative of students and adults in the classroom
2962: Woman with basket on head 	Representative art (Afro centric)	Wall art; representative of students and adults in the classroom, but simultaneously serves as an item about which Lauren could tell a story about how different cultures transport materials and items.
2973: Maraca 	Cultural item	Artifact (that could potentially also serve as representative); item about which Lauren could tell a story to introduce children to something new. Can also function as a musical instrument to use when singing as a group.
2972: Medicine / singing bowl 	Cultural item	Artifact; item to introduce children to something unfamiliar or outside their experience. *Observed: Lauren telling a story about the singing bowl to the class.*

Categories of Books

The books Lauren chose for her classroom also function to create a culturally responsive space. While the school has its own small library, Lauren also has her own classroom library full of 80 books either given to her by families or that she purchased herself. The books fall into four categories: representation, social-emotional learning (SEL) books, nonfiction, and fiction books. I determined these categories similarly to the art and artifacts categories. While looking through the books, I was able to categorize them first by genre and topic, and then group them into the four categories listed above. The “representation” category serves a similar function as the above “representative art” category. The books in this category reflect the identities and experiences of the classroom community. 29 books fall into the category of representation, with multiple books overlapping the categories of non-fiction and SEL books. Five books were in Spanish. Figure 4, below, depicts two examples of books that fell into the "representation" category.

Figure 4

Representative Books from the Oak Classroom

The above books reflect the identities of the children and adults in the classroom, both encompassing students and adults who are familiar with or wear hijab, and students and adults who speak Spanish.

Of all the books in the Oak Classroom library, 11 of them fall into the SEL category, and some overlap with the representation and fiction categories. The SEL books serve to affirm all of the Oak students' emotions, emotional responses, and to prepare them for moments where they may need to tap into their emotions or resolve social conflicts. For example, a book entitled *Just* Ask is about teaching students to embrace themselves, even if they are differently abled from others. The book functions not only to teach students about others' different abilities, but also to en'ourage dialogue among them. Its role in affirming students' emotions places it squarely in the SEL category.

Both nonfiction and fiction books are standard in Montessori Primary classrooms. While they serve different purposes (early research versus storytelling),

their inclusion does not set them apart from any other typical Montessori Primary class. 34 of the 80 books were either nonfiction or fiction books.

In some cases, both the nonfiction and fiction books overlapped with categories of representation and SEL. The children's book *Hidden Figures* is both a nonfiction book that represents Black women, while the book *Good Morning, Snowplow* only fits into the fiction category. Figure 5, below, shows an excerpt of the categorization of the classroom books, depicting photos of the books, the category, and the purpose or function of the book (see more in Appendix C).

Figure 5

Example of Categorization of Oak Classroom Books

Identifier	Category	Purpose/Function
2996 		
We are in a book	Fiction	Storytelling
One and only Ivan	Fiction	Storytelling
Cookbook	NF: Informational	Practical use: recipes
Yasmin the superhero	Representation	Storytelling; representative of students/adults in the class
2979 		
Just ask	SEL	About different abilities
I promise	Representation	Story; representative of students/adults
Bottlecaps to Brushes	NF: Music/Art	Practical use: art activities
Old lady who swallowed a cow	Fiction	Storytelling

Additional artifacts I consulted were a map Lauren gave me that port'ayed the layout of her classroom, a class list, the school's website (digitally) and an example of a lesson that Lauren wrote (also digitally). While the map and class list helped me in my own understanding of the classroom, the school's website and the example lesson

contributed more to the findings in this study. The inductive coding process helped inform the deductive coding process, the next stage in data analysis.

Deductive Coding

After doing open-ended coding, I moved on to deductive coding. Using my research questions and theoretical model (the Critical Montessori Model), I read through the interviews and looked for concepts that answered my questions. For example, in some of the interviews, I explicitly asked Lauren how she interpreted certain aspects of Montessori philosophy. I then looked for examples of Lauren's own interpretations of Montessori philosophy in her practice, by searching my observation notes. Conversely, I also looked through my observation notes and explicitly designed some interview questions around Lauren's actions. The responses to those questions, which provided context for her actions, then also became part of my findings. For example, I observed a scenario in which two Spanish-speaking children were assigned to the same lunch table, and observed repeated guided interactions in which Lauren encouraged the two children to work together. When I asked Lauren about these scenarios in our interviews, she explained that she'd noticed the two children discovering that they both spoke Spanish, and had been curious about whether they would be more social or more inclined to work if they worked together. While Lauren did not explicitly state that she was aiming to use culturally sustaining practices, the act of making space for children in her class to speak their first languages, which were other than English, was a culturally sustaining action.

The Critical Montessori Model

CMM served as a lens through which to identify which information was valuable, whose voices were amplified, and how to interpret and present data. Due to the emphasis of the CMM on counter-storytelling, I chose to focus this research study on the lived experiences of a Black Montessori teacher. To be a critical Montessori researcher, I had to determine an intentional research process that centered the voice and experiences of the teacher. Finally, I interpreted the data by examining the ways Montessori education can be practiced in a critical racial way. I chose to apply this model in the context of my study by concluding with examples of how a Black Montessori educator did anti-racist work in her classroom.

As noted, the core assumption of CMM is that the Montessori method must be practiced with a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, with an overarching framework of Critical Race Theory, and employs the following theoretical elements: the use of CCW to support BIPOC Montessori students' and educators' racial identities, the use of CSP to value student knowledge and their racial identities, and the specific emphasis on counter-storytelling for valuing student knowledge and BIPOC Montessori educators' voices. The theoretical aspects of the framework support interpreting and implementing Montessori to acknowledge the oppressive hierarchies in which BIPOC individuals exist, and center their lived experiences. The purpose of the Critical Montessori Model is to offer a critical racial lens specifically for BIPOC Montessori educators and students. The model strongly influenced the data I gathered and how I understood and analyzed it.

The Critical Montessori Model informed the way I performed deductive coding in this study. Because the core assumption of the model is a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, the model allowed me to focus on ways that Lauren elevated her students' lived experiences as knowledge. This element of the model also allowed me to emphasize the significance of Lauren's classroom space as a counter-space in which BIPOC students' identities were elevated. The ways that Lauren respects her students and sees how they demonstrate their strengths (through opportunities for independence and problem-solving, and multilingual abilities) also exemplify how Lauren implements the Montessori method in a critical racial way.

Additional elements of the model are the use of Community Cultural Wealth to support BIPOC educator and student lived experiences, and the use of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to value student knowledge and racial identities. Using these two elements allowed me to identify particular interactions between Lauren and her students as significant. Anytime that Lauren invited or created space for her multilingual students to speak a non-English language at school, she was not only valuing their linguistic capital, but also creating a classroom that sustained their identities. Additionally, Lauren uses and increases her and her students' "diversity knowledge" (Doucet, 2019) by including materials in her classroom (such as books, art, and stories) that reflect her students' cultures and teach them about unfamiliar ones.

The final element of the Critical Montessori Model is the specific emphasis on counter-storytelling for valuing student knowledge and BIPOC Montessori educators'

voices. As this study centers Lauren's racialized experience in her school, it serves as a counter-story. Additionally, at times I found that the school also emphasized counter-storytelling by valuing the experiences of BIPOC educators, specifically Lauren's, and building off of them to inform students' learning. However, there is a fine line between valuing educators' experiences and benefitting from them, as we see in the following section. Figure 6, below, shows a few brief examples of how I used the Critical Montessori Model as a lens through which to focus on particular observations, conversations, and artifacts.

Figure 6

Use of the Critical Montessori Model in the Data Analysis Process

Critical Montessori Model element	**How Lauren (and her classroom) embodied the element**
Overarching assumption: Critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method (through examining Montessori through a Critical Race Theory lens)	• Observation: Lauren's narration of her actions to model and encourage students to work independently • Quote: Lauren's quote about when students need her and what she wants them to be able to do on their own ("Do you need me for a piece of paper?")
Community Cultural Wealth to support BIPOC identities	• Observations: Uplifting students' linguistic capital through valuing their Spanish language skills and inviting them to use their Spanish even while learning other topics in the classroom
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to value student identities	• Observation/artifacts: Including Spanish books in the classroom • Observation: Seating Spanish-speaking students together at lunchtime • Observation: Creating a space where Spanish-speaking adults can also speak Spanish with students • Artifacts: Including books that not only represent her students, but often serve multiple functions

	(for example, representative books that are also informational texts about individuals' accomplishments, such as *Hidden Figures*)
Counter-storytelling	• (This study itself functions as a counter-story as it centers Lauren's experience)

Overall, the Critical Montessori Model allowed me to identify particular aspects of Lauren's classroom practice and space that centered the voices and experiences of BIPOC educators and students.

Bringing the Data Together through Analytic Memos

In both coding processes, I wrote analytic memos as I progressed (see examples in Appendix C). These memos were a way of gathering my thoughts around the data; many of the memos became part of my findings. As I wrote the memos, I reflected on the research questions as well as how my experience affected the way I interpreted data (Saldaña, 2009). By reflecting on the research questions, I was able to weave all of the data together. I went through each research question to identify any data that might respond to or answer that research question. After including data that I initially thought might respond to the research question at hand, I wrote down notes about how I made sense of the data, after which I identified some codes. After going through the process of making sense of the data and coding it, I was able to organize the codes into the final themes. Figure 7, below, shows one example of how I brought the data together to respond to the first research question (see more examples in Appendix C).

Figure 7

Example from Coding Guide: Coding all of the Data Together

Coding all of the Data Together

Data that responded/related to or answered the Research Question	How I made sense of data	Codes	Final theme/finding
How does a Black Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? (Finding 2)			
• Understanding that Montessori was writing for her time and place: *"I had to basically find myself and like picture myself, um, understanding what Montessori is saying, and also what that would look like in the classroom for the child of now, of today of different cultures and races, you know, and the reason why I, I really do love Montessori is because I understand where she, um, was seeing what she was observing and what she was trying to do for the child of her time, at, at her age and at where she was"* (7:50, Int 1) *"I had to understand that this was not made for that-it probably was not intended for people of color to be doing this type of teaching or people, not even people of color, but people who were not in Europe in, um, the early 1900s…I say that because of her writings….and because of the way the trainers train us"* (13:53-14:18 Int 1) • "Sterile" view of Montessori, "white pedagogy" (19:56, Int 1)	• Lauren does not change who she is to "fit" into Montessori pedagogy and philosophy. She believes the children deserve to know who she is, including the way that she speaks and her interests. (1)	• (1) True to self • (1) Lauren's interpretation	• Lauren's interpretation and enactment of the Montessori method
• Critique of Montessori training as something that doesn't consider children of today (trauma, varying family structures, etc.) (17:26, Int 1)	• Lauren knows that Montessori was writing for her time, and that while there are applicable elements, there are aspects of modern life and children that Montessori's writings do not necessarily address. (2)	• (2) Application	• Sub-themes: Lauren practices the method for today's children Montessori has some universal applications
• Lauren encourages critical thinking and independent work in her students *"I see Montessori as having like support. I see it as, um, giving children lessons that will help them later on in life"* (25:18, Int 1)	• Lauren interprets the philosophy to support independent thinking in her students. (3)	• (3) Independent thinking • (3) Lauren's interpretation	• Lauren interprets Montessori to support/empower her students

Additionally, certain data are not reflected in themes or findings because I wanted to protect the anonymity and reputation of the school. Because the Montessori community is so small, and due to my relationships within the community, it was

important that, as a Montessori researcher, I maintained the trust and cooperation of the school and staff. This did not mean that I strayed away from critiquing the school; rather, that there were certain details and anecdotes I chose not to share publicly to protect my relationship with the school and the wider Montessori community. However, confidentiality alone does not make a researcher a *worthy* witness. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the phases of worthy witnessing continued to be present in this research process. The combination of confidentiality and responsibility together lay on my shoulders as a critical ethnographic researcher. Winn & Ubiles (2011) describe responsibility in the form of accountability, dependability, and advocacy. While ethnography includes participant observation, being a *worthy* witness means actively engaging with the community, which I continue to do as a Montessori educator and researcher (Winn & Ubiles, 2011).

Chapter 5: Findings

Looking around Lauren's classroom, there is a drawing of a young Black girl wearing glasses near the snack table. Near the language area is a small painting of a Black man playing the saxophone, and a larger painting of a brown-skinned woman dancing. A fan from Nigeria sits on a shelf near Lauren's clipboard, and a triptych near the library depicts bright colors, musical symbols, and a Black woman playing piano keys.

Lauren maintains her classroom space as a culturally responsive space. She maintains this culturally responsive space to the extent that it is within her locus of control, specifically her physical classroom space, how she interprets Montessori philosophy and her enactment of it, and the intangible elements of her space (such as relationships among children, and between children and adults). Lauren's interpretation of Montessori philosophy translates to her practice of highlighting students' cultural knowledge. She also uses her own life experiences and time to contribute to school-wide anti-racist work; and certain external structures of the school serve as barriers to Lauren's anti-racist work. The first finding is the most dense; it was the finding I saw the most through all of the data and over time. The other two findings were also incredibly important, and showed up in various contexts. However, because of my focus on Lauren's work in doing culturally sustaining pedagogy, the first finding is the most prominent. All in all, the findings of this study reflect the themes of Lauren's experience in the classroom. Her experiences directly inform what the following findings are.

Lauren is an educator who is deeply committed to Montessori philosophy and practice. She constantly thinks about how she can improve on embodying Montessori philosophy, and is deeply grounded in Montessori theory. Lauren and I would talk daily about how the morning work cycle had gone, and she frequently referenced her training and Maria Montessori's writings. She also seamlessly incorporates who she is into her classroom. The stories she tells children are about events or experiences in her life; the artwork displayed reflects places she has visited or gifts she has received.

Lauren Maintains her Classroom Space as a Culturally Responsive Space

"It's me": Lauren's Physical Classroom Space

As described above, simply sitting in Lauren's classroom and looking around, it is easily noticeable how much Lauren uplifts Afrocentric art in her classroom. When I asked her about her artwork and how she chooses to decorate her classroom, she replied simply, "it's me." She explains that she gets art based on where she chooses to go, the stores she frequents, and that they are representative of her experience. Much of artwork is Afrocentric and reflects Lauren's interests and identity. The artifacts in her classroom are from Lauren's own travels and experiences, and she uses them to engage with students. When I looked around Lauren's classroom, I did not only see a Montessori classroom, but I saw Lauren's identity woven throughout the space. Her physical classroom space is a culturally responsive space. The artwork, artifacts, and books in her classroom library all represent the students and adults in the classroom community (see Figure 8 below). Lauren's classroom space itself functions as a part of the curriculum; children and adults engage with the physical classroom space and use it to learn and teach.

Figure 8

Art, Artifacts, and Books in the Oak Classroom

Artifacts and Stories

One morning in March, Lauren gathered the children in a group at the end of their morning work cycle. She began to play a singing bowl (Figure 9), explaining that she bought it from a man from Nepal while she was traveling. After playing, Lauren asked the children, “was it a harsh noise or a soothing noise?” to which they responded with a resounding “soothing!” She explained how different sized singing

bowls play lower notes, and pointed out a Nepali prayer flag hanging across the room. This scenario demonstrates how Lauren tells stories about the artifacts in her classroom; rather than simply used for decoration, the artifacts serve as an active part of students' learning. These items serve to create a space both where students are reflected and can see perspectives and cultures that they may not encounter each day.

Figure 9

Singing Bowl

Lauren intentionally chose each item to create and maintain a culturally responsive space. Additionally, Lauren actively used the artifacts in her classroom as opportunities for culturally responsive and sustaining teaching. She told me a story about an interaction among students in which children were being mean to their friends. To address the conflict, she referred to a picture of a Sankofa bird, a Ghanaian symbol for being kind and not leaving anyone behind, and described its meaning to the children to emphasize kindness and mutual support going forward. While this was not a planned lesson, Lauren took an opportunity to use the art in her classroom to teach the children about the importance of kindness in their community.

Spanish Language Books

Lauren's inclusion and use of Spanish language books also demonstrate her culturally sustaining teaching practices. There were a variety of Spanish language books in Lauren's classroom, which both children and adults often read from. When I asked Lauren about the Spanish books (Figure 10), she said, "...I do have Spanish books and I got those books, because I wanted to see if my Spanish speakers would respond more to Spanish books than they do to the English books." Not only did Lauren find that the Spanish-speaking children responded warmly to the books in Spanish, but the rest of the classroom community did as well: "I've noticed that [the Spanish-speaking students] responded to the person…who speaks Spanish in here in Spanish…and then the children who don't speak Spanish they were really into the book too, because after she was reading in Spanish she like summarized it in English. And they were really into it." In wanting to specifically support her Spanish-speaking students, Lauren also subtly invited her non-Spanish-speaking students to also embrace the language. Her inclusion of Spanish language books in the classroom library reflects her willingness and desire to make the books accessible to all of her students, regardless of their home languages. One day, I observed an Assistant gather a small group of children, including both Spanish-speaking and non-Spanish-speaking children. The Assistant had selected a book in Spanish, and proceeded to read it in Spanish to the small group. Afterwards, the small group discussed the book in English, and the Assistant asked the children questions about the events in the story, and answered any questions they had. While Lauren includes Spanish books to uplift the identities of her Spanish-speaking students, non-Spanish-speakers still have

access to them; she normalizes the books as part of her classroom, thus incorporating the Spanish language as a part of the Oak Classroom community.

Figure 10

Spanish Language Books

"I think it's a great foundation": Lauren's interpretation and enactment of Montessori philosophy and its tensions with ABAR work

Lauren Practices the Montessori Method to Fit the Children of Today

Lauren's interpretation of Montessori philosophy and the way she enacts it contribute to the way Lauren practices the Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices. Lauren is clear about the ways that her racial

identity is or is not acknowledged in Montessori philosophy. She describes how she sees Maria Montessori's writings as written for the 1900s, but explains that they do not capture the experiences of children and people at present:

> I had to basically find myself and like picture myself, um, understanding what Montessori is saying, and also what that would look like in the classroom for the child of now, of today of different cultures and races, you know, and the reason why I, I really do love Montessori is because I understand where she, um, was seeing what she was observing and what she was trying to do for the child of her time, at, at her age and at where she was…I had to understand that this was not made for that - it probably was not intended for people of color to be doing this type of teaching or people, not even people of color, but people who were not in Europe in, um, the early 1900s…I say that because of her writings….and because of the way the trainers train us" (excerpts of interview transcripts are presented in the Coding Guide in Appendix C).

Lauren's critique of Montessori training is that it does not consider the "children of today," whose lives have different traumas and family structures compared to the lives of children that existed when Montessori was developing her philosophy and pedagogy. Because of this critique, Lauren must do additional labor to create a culturally sustaining classroom space for her students. The additional labor she does requires her to lean on her own experiences and observations to support "the children of today." Lauren also discussed elements of training that she did not follow, such as modifying the way she speaks. Montessori Primary training encourages teachers to

enunciate with particular clarity, so as to support students' later writing habits (the reasoning being that children will write what they hear). This often requires Montessori teachers to change their manner of speaking or language to fit the expectations of Montessori training. In my own Montessori training, I recall classmates having to practice speaking differently, or trying to remove their accents from their speech, to meet the expectations around speech. Looking back, I can see that while the intention is to support children's writing and oral language development, it promotes the erasure of adult identities. Lauren explicitly pushes back against this pressure, stating, "the way I speak to children or and people in general, it has my personality in it, and so…I don't normally change up the way I speak, which you are kind of like taught to do because you're talking to children…and I don't say any like you know negative words and things like that. But I have a lot more personality…when I speak to them." Lauren equates the pressure to change one's speech with a removal of one's personality. Her resistance to distance part of her personality (via her speech) from her Montessori practice displays the tensions between her interpretations of various elements of Montessori philosophy. Montessori philosophy contends that children are deserving of adults' full attention, beautiful, developmentally-appropriate spaces prepared specifically for them, and respect for their work. Lauren extends this to her belief that her students deserve to know who she is, which she explained in one of our conversations. I interpreted this belief to mean that Lauren believes that part of having respect for children means that they deserve to see classroom adults' full selves and personalities, and that if adults erase elements of who they are in front of the children, then they are not practicing the

reverence for children that Montessori philosophy promotes. The idea of children *deserving* to know about adults' full experiences is something that is not explicitly promoted in Montessori training. While, in my Primary training, teachers were encouraged to share stories about our lives, we did not have many deeper discussions about what it meant and could look like to have our identities reflected in the tangible or intangible spaces in the classroom. Lauren is a highly perceptive person; her ability to see who her students and the other classroom adults are means that she does additional reflection and labor to include their full experiences and personalities in the classroom space. Lauren's critique of and pushback against elements of the training coexist with her interpretations of Montessori philosophy and her efforts to enact it to support her current students.

Interpreting Montessori to Empower Students

As an observer in Lauren's classroom, I frequently noticed the way she embodies Montessori philosophy, in her words, movements, and actions with the children and other adults. She moves around her classroom intentionally, waits before intervening in children's conflicts or disagreements, and chooses her words carefully to address children with the utmost respect. When I asked Lauren about how she views and uses Montessori in her classroom, she said:

> I see Montessori as having like support. I see it as, um, giving children lessons that will help them later on in life…I use it with my children in a way that makes us feel good about ourselves. You know, that makes us feel like we can do something.

Lauren interprets Montessori philosophy in a way that empowers her students and encourages their autonomy. One of the core elements of Montessori theory is to uplift children to become independent and self-sufficient. Lauren encourages this independence in her classroom as well. One aspect of culturally responsive teaching is to create independent learners who attempt new tasks and engage in problem-solving (Hammond, 2015). The Montessori method lends itself well to this aspect of culturally responsive teaching. Lauren describes her desire to create a community where children can think and solve problems independently: "I really strive so that in the community, they don't have to come to me for like support…when you don't really need me. Like, you don't need me when someone takes your paper." For example, in working with a child on a math material, Lauren narrated her thinking process, saying, “What’s this one? Do I remember? I have to count,” followed by counting out loud. She also prompts children to think instead of giving them the answers. In a case where a student had forgotten to put away his work, she asked him what he had forgotten, instead of simply telling him that he needed to put his work away. These scenarios demonstrate strong culturally responsive teaching practices, but they stem from Lauren’s belief in empowering her students and thinking about who she wants them to be as they grow older. While actions such as narrating one’s thoughts and asking open-ended questions are generally considered good teaching practices, for Lauren, Montessori philosophy is the main driver behind these practices. In the Montessori community, education is considered a preparation for life; Lauren internalizes this message to engage in teaching practices that are both part of the Montessori method and culturally responsive. These scenarios illuminate

the many ways Lauren supports critical thinking skills in her students, which undergird their path toward more independence. The existence of culturally responsive teaching practices in Montessori philosophy demonstrate that Montessori is poised to be a powerful pedagogical tool for uplifting students' racial identities (if fully implemented, as evidenced in Lauren's classroom).

Montessori and its Universal Application

A third way that Lauren understands Montessori philosophy is that, despite some of its drawbacks, it is still universally applicable. Lauren says, "everything that she was saying can be placed in a different part of the world, can be used for like most children of the world." This universal application, however, comes with its challenges. She describes her stance on Montessori as a strong foundation: "I still do appreciate the Montessori way. I love like, you know, um, being able to work on your own level, make your own schedule…like working for the enjoyment…working to be a good member of society…I think it's a great foundation. And I, but I think now for me, it's like, I can take that information and kind of alter it a little bit so that it fits the children that I have now. And so that it fits me so that I fit within Montessori." Lauren described her love of Montessori and its simultaneous need for amendments and additions to reflect her students. While Lauren maintains that Montessori is a strong place to build from, she believes that there are shifts and changes that have to be made within the philosophy to be applicable to both her and her students.

Tensions Between Montessori and Culturally Responsive Teaching

One of the tensions Lauren has had to grapple with is with the tension between the Montessori method and teaching in a culturally responsive way. Because

there are no formal lessons in the Montessori curriculum about anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) topics, or culturally relevant topics, the responsibility of teaching these topics remains in the hands of schools and individual teachers. In the Montessori classroom, the parts of the day when the teacher gives lessons are fluid; all students are working on various subjects at different times throughout the day. At Acorn Montessori, the school uses the term "ABAR lessons" to refer both to lessons about anti-bias, anti-racist topics, but also lessons that are meant to sustain and respond to students' identities and cultural knowledge[14]. While Lauren does not schedule out her entire morning for the children by time, she does use the time to hold her to the ABAR lessons: "we do a timeline like every every…at 10:45 we clean up, at 11 we're doing SEL/ABAR, you know…and that's really, because if we don't when is it gonna get done it's you know it's hard to keep track of." She describes the challenges of incorporating culturally responsive and anti-bias, anti-racist lessons into the flow of the Montessori day:

> when you're in a room you don't know what is that time you're going to give the lesson…and that's that's because, like it's Montessori like we're not on like a timeline kind of thing...So it's more fluid…So [an ABAR lesson] kind of' like clashes with everything else that we do, 'ut then also it's still new…And I think maybe sometimes when it's new you do need to say on this day at this time I'm gonna do [this lesson]…so that it becomes a habit and then, then you can stop thinking about it, and then you just do it naturally.

[14] For the purpose of this paper, whenever I use the term ABAR lessons, I am referring to this grouping of lessons that includes culturally sustaining and responsive topics; culturally sustaining pedagogy is inherently anti-racist (Paris, 2021).

Lauren's faith in both the Montessori method and the importance of culturally responsive and anti-bias, anti-racist work are evident in her efforts to consistently give lessons while maintaining a Montessori classroom. This tension between culturally responsive and anti-bias, anti-racist lessons and Montessori combine to push Lauren's thinking and teaching practice, so that her classroom remains a culturally responsive and anti-racist learning space.

Intangible spaces

The final example of how Lauren maintains her classroom as a culturally responsive space is intangibly reflected through the interactions between adults and students, among adults, and the classroom community itself. All reflect the welcoming and identity-affirming community Lauren cultivated. On my first day of observations, the classroom assistant (who is a Spanish speaker) sat with a Spanish-speaking student, reviewing numbers (see translations in brackets).

Assistant: Four. Cuatro. Four.

Child: Dos. [Two.]

Assistant: Do you know how to say it in English?

Child: Two!

(Both discuss the number two and how to trace it.)

Child: Arriba, abajo… [Up, down…]

Assistant: Abajo. [Down.]

(The two continue to mix Spanish and English as she helps him.)

This example shows how Lauren maintains a community in which both adults and children feel welcome and comfortable mixing the various languages they speak to

connect and further the children's learning. While the Assistant drew the child's attention back to his work, she continued to engage with him in both Spanish and English. In another scenario, two children mixed Spanish and English after Lauren paired them up to review letters (Figure 11) together.

> Lauren: [Child 1], [Child 2] is here to help you. *(To Child 2)* Hold it like this, so [Child 1] can see.
>
> Child 2: Dame "a," dame "a." [Give me "a," give me "a."]
>
> *(Lauren watches as Child 2 asks Child 1 to give him letters. She shows Child 2 how to test Child 1's knowledge of the letters.)*
>
> Lauren: Ready for the next step? *(Lauren shows Child 2 how to sit on a stool and have Child 1 bring him various letters)*
>
> Child 2: Este, [Child 1]! Guárdalo, [Child 1]! [Child 1]. Búscame "o"! Guarda "o"!
>
> Busca "d"! [This one, [Child 1]! Put it away, [Child 1]. Find me "o"! Put away "o"! Look for "d"!]
>
> *(Lauren watches Child 1 and 2 for a few moments and then moves on to help others.)*

Figure 11

Montessori Sandpaper Letters

In this example, as Lauren encouraged children to collaborate in their learning, they automatically began speaking Spanish. By not explicitly addressing the fact that the children are speaking Spanish, their language abilities are normalized in the classroom. Lauren simply continues working with the children and then moves on, thus actively sustaining their culture and language. Lauren also actively supports children in wanting to speak other languages. I observed her working with some students one day near the end of the morning work cycle, just before recess.

(Lauren works with students and the Golden Bead material)

Child: Can I count them in Spanish?

Lauren: If you choose to.

(Child counts material in Spanish.)

Lauren's balance of implicitly and explicitly supporting children in their desires and tendencies to speak the other languages they know posits her as a culturally responsive and sustaining educator. This balance of bilingualism in the classroom is part of a pedagogical theory called translanguaging (Vogel & García, 2017). Translanguaging leverages learners' multilingual abilities to deepen their

understanding of and engagement in content, as seen in the scenarios above (Vogel & García, 2017). Translanguaging assumes that all people have one single linguistic repertoire, rather than multiple, siloed bodies of language (Vogel & García, 2017). By supporting student-led translanguaging[15] in her classroom, Lauren acknowledges that her students enter the classroom with their own set of knowledge. That the children spontaneously speak Spanish with one another, often without asking adults' permission, shows that the Oak Classroom is an identity- and culture-affirming space.

Multiple studies have shown the importance of including culturally relevant books in classrooms, particularly in bilingual classrooms (Rodriguez, 2014). While Lauren's classroom is not a bilingual classroom, she explicitly selected books in Spanish to support her bilingual students. Christ & Sharma (2018) found that culturally relevant texts and pedagogy supported students' literacy outcomes, motivation, and positive identity formation, and suggested that teachers learn about their students' cultures to select relevant texts. While including relevant texts show one way that Lauren embodies culturally responsive teaching, she also creates contexts in which students can empower themselves, which Bartolomé (1994) describes when she refers to teachers as "cultural mentors." By supporting translanguaging in her classroom, Lauren also sustains students' identities, demonstrating her use of culturally sustaining pedagogy in her teaching (Paris, 2012). Teaching methods combined with curricular choices are what combine to help

[15] Much of the translanguaging in classrooms is student-led, but there is a recent surge in teacher-led translanguaging, in which leverage students' multiple languages to help them understand key concepts, bond with their students, and provide the space for students to challenge language hierarchies (Vogel & García, 2017).

students understand and deepen their learning (Bartolomé, 1994, Hammond, 2015). Through Lauren's text and art selections, she encourages and supports students' identities and abilities in her classroom. The way that Lauren interprets Montessori philosophy results in her ability to highlight students' cultural knowledge and capital.

Lauren's Life Experiences and Time Contribute to School-wide Anti-racist Work

Lauren Invests her Time and Resources in the School's ABAR Committee

The second finding was that Lauren's life experiences and time contributed to school-wide anti-racist work. While Lauren has less control over the school-wide work, she is still able to exert her influence and use her experiences to inform the work on the school's anti-racist, anti-bias (ABAR) committee. A fellow staff member of Lauren's invited her to join the school's ABAR committee to help create ABAR lessons for the classrooms. While Lauren explained, "I wasn't actively looking to do something else," she also described her desire to increase her school involvement: "I didn't want to just…be someone who didn't do something else. I wanted to like challenge myself. I wanted to be more part of the school." In addition to the ABAR committee, Lauren was also asked to join the parent committee, a group of both staff and families that discussed families' grievances and concerns to some of the ABAR content. When Lauren told me the story of how she was invited to join the parent committee, she explained, "I think I was asked, because…I was a part of the curriculum team for primary, which is where the lessons were coming from…*and I was someone of color* (emphasis mine)." Lauren added that one of the reasons she

thinks she was invited to join this committee was, in part, due to her identity as a person of color.

When I asked Lauren how she spends her time in committee meetings, she described actively listening and writing the lessons. Lauren uses the Montessori format of lessons to create ABAR lessons, and draws on her own experiences to inspire them. It is evident that Lauren's connection to her classroom environment is strong. In addition to her time, Lauren also spends her own money on books and items for the classroom. In her words, this is because she is impatient, and that even though the items are for the school, the items remain in her classroom, so she still feels as though the items are hers. Further evidence of how Lauren uses her own life experiences and time for anti-racist work in the school lie in the examples I describe in the following sections: the way Lauren's identity as a Black woman informs her work, and how the ABAR curriculum has affected Lauren personally.

Lauren's Identity as a Black Woman Informs her Work

One way that Lauren's life experiences contribute to her work is the way her identity as a Black woman informs her own work and her experiences in the school. While I observed many moments where Lauren implemented high-fidelity Montessori practices (through giving lessons, engaging the students as members of the community, and embodying mutual respect), on multiple occasions in our interviews she expressed uncertainty in her own abilities:

> Because a lot of times, I wonder if [the children] recognize that I am a Black person…I do, I wonder if they recognize that, you know, because a lot of them…don't talk about, like, race….some of [the children] talk about skin

> color. They say like, I'm Brown, like, Yeah, I'm Brown too. So and then for the parents, I do always wonder if it's just me being in my own mind. And, you know, looking at the way people talk to me, or like, how they interact with me, and, you know, just the vibe I get…do they think that I'm not doing ' good job? Because they're not reading yet? Or they think that I'm not smart enough?...I always wonder…would they…rather not have a Black teacher. And I only think this because I don't know why I just think that because race is just always in my mind, in a sense…are they saying…this Black lady isn't smart enough to teach my child…

While Lauren's uncertainty does not appear explicitly in her teaching practice, she is attune to families' potential skepticism about her, and connects it to her racial identity.

Challenging Assumptions

Another way that Lauren's identity informs her experience in the school is the assumption that she knows more about Black children because she is a Black woman. She described a scenario in which she was sitting in a level meeting discussing ways to support a particular Black student (who was not in her class). When they discussed ideas for the student, and ways to support them, she explained, "I [did] feel like I'm obligated to respond because I was the only person of color for just a little bit of time." At Acorn Montessori, each classroom has a lead teacher, who is in charge of planning and giving lessons, and an assistant, who supports maintaining the classroom materials and environment. Lauren is now one of six lead teachers of color at her school (out of 11 lead teachers total). When she took over her classroom she

was one of two. Lauren emphasized to me that for the time when she was the only person of color, she felt that she had to be a spokesperson of sorts; however, now that there are more lead teachers of color, it changes the way she feels and functions as a Black woman in her space. When Lauren described the increase in racial representation in the school, we discussed how that impacted her experiences in the school.

> Lauren: It makes me feel…more included in a sense…I don't stand out, you know…I don't like standing out and I'm like, okay, like this is normal…I'm not gonna be like, pointed out because I might have more information about this Black child like no…we all have, have children like this let's not even make it a big deal…Let's all give ideas about what to do with this child, you know?
>
> Genevieve: Do you…lean on your other colleagues who are people of color or they lean on you or…do you feel like there's any sense of…explicit connection or community…?
>
> Lauren: It's more of a subtle thing…we're not like best friends, anything like that, but we can like email each other, talk to one another…come together and like share our ideas…it's just like, like we are part of the same group because we are all primary teachers, you know, so it's more like that and our race and age or anything…doesn't stand out as much.

Lauren's perception is that the increase in teachers of color affects pedagogical conversations more than conversations or exchanges about racial representation.

When the teachers come together, they tend to discuss materials and Montessori concepts over explicit discussions of race. However, Lauren does acknowledge feeling more included in that she does not feel called upon or pointed out due to her race.

Experiences Impact Lessons

Lauren's identity also impacts the lessons she writes and gives to students as a member of the ABAR curriculum committee. While she sometimes questions whether certain experiences of hers are "important enough to be…written down on paper to…go into a lesson," she did explain to me that she wrote lessons about hair because of her own experience with her hair as a child (see Appendix G for the hair lessons, see Figures 12-14 below for excerpts and images).

Figure 12

Image from Hair Lessons: Introduction

Figure 13

Excerpt from Hair Lessons: Purpose and Essential Terms

Hair is a natural occurrence in humans. Different hair textures, lengths, and colors are present throughout different races and ethnicities. It is common for single racial groups to have similar *and* different hair types due to complex lineages. A person's hair type can be a mixture of the different textures, and a person's race cannot be determined on hair type alone. The following activities are intended to introduce hair types and hair care for its properties and the role it plays as an attribute in our daily lives. Continued conversations with children that explore a connection between hair and race will expand their own viewpoint and meaning on the topic.

Essential Terms:
Hair- Fine threadlike strands growing from the skin of humans, and some other animals.
Straight- Extending or moving all together in one direction. No bends or curves.
Wavy- A form that has smooth curves going in and out
Curly- A form that has defined curves and bends
Coily/Kinky hair- Tightly curled and can bend in all directions
Keratin - the tough protein that makes up hair and nails

Figure 14

Image from Hair Lessons: Photos

Lauren named her experience with her hair as traumatic when she was growing up.

This experience and its effect on her identity led her to create lessons that explicitly

name the various kinds and textures of hair and their care. Lauren expressed her feelings about seeing others give hair lessons:

> [To] have it be produced by another by another adult…and the first time that that happened like I had written the lesson on hair and I saw 'he lesson being played out…I was like I wrote this down and she's doing it. And that was definitely…like different from my own experience, I was like wow like [the] children are learning…from my own personal experience with hair growing up.

The hair lessons affirm the different hair types of students in the school and create different experiences for students from what she had growing up.

The ABAR Curriculum Committee has Affected Lauren Personally

The Adult as the Instrument

> Lauren's work on the ABAR committee at her school has also affected her personal life and experiences outside of her role as a teacher. She elaborates: I will say that I've learned to be a little bit more open I've learned about my own biases that I wasn't aware of, and you learn how, when you do become uncomfortable you're like oh, I'm uncomfortable what happened…Why did it happen…because, in order to give a lesson you kind of have to face what you're giving and…you have to...feel like what you're giving to the children is right.

Lauren explains the importance of facing her own discomfort when teaching children lessons that uplift and affirm their identities, and introduce them to others' identities. When she gives them lessons, she is not removed from the lessons; just as in

qualitative research, where the researcher is the instrument, in teaching, the teacher is the instrument. Lauren is the instrument by which the children learn, and she is aware of how important it is to do the self-work necessary to authentically present culturally responsive and sustaining lessons. After reading a book to the class about cherry blossom gifts around the world, she asked the group, "Countries can be friends…is it the same as people? How can countries be friends?...We send people to represent us…to say I trust you…and sign papers." She went on to discuss allyship and the meaning of gift-giving between countries. While Lauren could have finished the book and moved on to the next part of the day, she chose to take some time to discuss the deeper meaning of cherry blossom gifts, what they represent, and to put it into terms that the children could grasp.

The Adult's Necessary Self-Work

Lauren also believes that adults' lack of self-work or experience should not limit children's exposure to certain topics. She gave the example of teaching a lesson about Judaism and being unfamiliar with it; Lauren not only did her own work to learn about the lesson, but also invited a parent from the community to talk about Judaism to the class. Lauren's flexibility and humility allow for a classroom space that supports various facets of children's identities and experiences.

Overall, Lauren's life experiences and identity strongly contributed to school-wide anti-racist work in addition to her own culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices. Maye and Day (2012) found that teachers' abilities to identify their cultural identities and relate to life experiences resulted in more effective culturally relevant teaching. Studies show that teachers' awareness of their own racial

identity allows them to more deeply understand their students' experiences with race and successfully teach their students (Liggett, 2008; Ryan, 2006). Additionally, teachers who understand their own racial identities as social constructs increase their ability to use methods of culturally responsive pedagogy such as high expectations (Ryan, 2006), which I saw in Lauren's interactions with and support of her students, and the way she described what she wanted her students to be able to do independently.

External Structures of the School Serve as Barriers to ABAR Work and Practices

Some of the structural barriers that serve as challenges to Lauren's work are outside her classroom, but still part of her school community. The barriers include the school structures themselves and a lack of resources. However, the school itself also faces public school system requirements they must meet to remain open.

There is a Lack of School Structures Meant to Support Teachers' Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

One of the challenges Lauren described was a lack of coaching around culturally responsive teaching specifically. There are not many trainings about how to implement culturally responsive teaching practices, and it appears to Lauren that it is difficult for the school to implement training that will explain how to give a lesson, what kind of language to use, and how to discuss race instead of avoiding it due to discomfort. Unless teachers have personal experiences with certain topics, they do not know how to give culturally responsive lessons; Lauren and her colleagues seek out outside information to write culturally responsive lessons:

> It's not a first person experience and so when it's not you have to get the information and make sure that you're sharing the right information. And right language with the children…it appears to be hard for the school to give out trainings that will help the problem of…how to give [a] lesson in a sense of what language to use…If it's dealing with skin color how to…approach race and not feel uncomfortable or not feel like you don't know what you're talking about.

When I asked Lauren about how teachers' weekly professional development time was used, she explained that it was primarily time to work in classrooms and have meetings. On one occasion, the school did promote an online (not Montessori-specific) training about gender identity, but it required time outside of working hours. Lauren explained the benefit of moving away from Montessori-specific trainings when it comes to culturally responsive teaching practices; it is challenging for Montessori teachers to find conventional education trainings because they are part of different communities. Lauren emphasized the importance of teachers being proactive in looking for trainings; even within the Montessori community, if there are culturally responsive trainings, they are difficult to identify unless somebody shares information with school leaders.

There is a Lack of Resources to Support Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Another barrier is the lack of resources to support culturally responsive teaching practices at Acorn Montessori. Lauren described a particular scenario in which multiple teachers may be trying to give the same lesson using a book:

> Sometimes there is still still only one book, you know…And I think the hard part is that since we're week by week…And one teacher might have that book…They may not have the book for everyone…I think [that's what the] problem is…if…you give a lesson when you're ready or even can make your own schedule, then the books will be available in the library…Because like yesterday someone was asking me for the book for this week and I said no I don't have it…it's having enough books to go around to be used, at the same time…like we will have the books but they may be only one copy. There may be only two copies, and…people are giving the lesson at the same time, but if that wasn't happening, then it would be fine because there would still be books in the library available to do something else.

In this situation, the tensions between a lack of resources and the schedule of lessons combine to create a problem in which classrooms are unable to give particular lessons at all. While this is a structural barrier, the school does still put an emphasis on getting particular resources that classrooms and teachers need. Lauren did feel as though she was supported by the school, and that the challenge was not necessarily a lack of support from the school. Rather, the school has not been writing culturally responsive lessons long enough to know which changes and adaptations are required to create a thorough lesson plan for classrooms. Lauren explained that she and her colleagues are realizing their needs as they go, because it is the first time they are writing and giving these culturally responsive lessons.

The School Balances Time, Compliance, and Family Communication

Time and Compliance as Barriers

In an interview with Mila, the Academic Director of the school, I asked about what changes would be necessary to do more ABAR work or to remove obstacles to ABAR work for teachers. Like Lauren, Mila mentioned time as a barrier, with the added challenge of compliance to public school requirements. Time seemed to be the barrier to teachers giving lessons, while compliance regulations are the barrier to curriculum creation. With more time, the school would be able to focus on making sure ABAR lessons are implemented with fidelity and consistency among classrooms. Without as many requirements from the school district, the school would be able to focus more on ABAR curriculum delivery. Additionally the school not only faces the requirements as a barrier, but standardized tests required by most states and districts do not even highlight the strengths and knowledge of students of color (Cunningham, 2018). Thus, not only are the tests barriers in that they require time and energy that the school could spend supporting their ABAR lessons and work, but the tests themselves center whiteness as the norm and undermine the experiences and ways of knowing students could be demonstrating (Cunningham, 2018).

Because of requirements for assessments and reporting, compliance and time combine to create a challenge for the school in supporting ABAR work as thoroughly as they would like to. Mila also discussed money as a barrier, although more so as a challenge in the past. In the past few years, the school has dedicated leadership-level positions to focus on equity work and curriculum-writing.

Open Communication with Families

At Acorn Montessori, the school shares their mission and vision with families in open house sessions, back to school night and other family events, and clearly on the school's website, which includes the following statements: "[Acorn] Montessori exists to create a more just, liberated world…We are a diverse and interconnected community that redefines high-quality education by pairing Montessori with Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist practices." I asked Mila how the school balances who the school wants to be, and the families that are part of the community. Mila discussed two different avenues: content and communication. When it comes to content, the school takes the stance of being the expert. The school does family presentations about what is developmentally and age-appropriate, and stands firmly when it comes to the curriculum. However, to maintain strong communication ties, the school does take in feedback from families. Acorn Montessori also makes much of the curriculum readily available to families through the school website and a third-party platform that families use to track their students' lessons. In the third-party platform, families can learn about individual lessons, the purpose of the lesson, why it's given, and how families can support learning at home.

Overlapping Barriers

While the classrooms and teachers face barriers within the school, the school also faces barriers within the public education system. Within the classroom, Lauren enacts culturally responsive and sustaining teaching practices, and allows her identity to shape and inform her work with children. Within the school, Lauren's participation in the ABAR and parent committees allow her to infuse her experience into level-wide lessons, but she and other teachers still face barriers such as a lack of resources

or consistency. The school itself also faces barriers of time and compliance requirements that affect how much support they can give teachers. Ultimately, Lauren's work inside the classroom and school combine with the school's challenges, resulting in a tension between public school requirements, Montessori practices, and culturally responsive and sustaining practices.

While studies show that there are teachers who are successful in culturally responsive teaching, within the limits of systemic barriers (Ladson-Billings, 1995a), the standardization of curricula and assessments do not allow for teachers to easily teach and view their students through a holistic lens (Royal & Gibson, 2017). The systemic requirements of school districts do not allow for teachers to see knowledge and assessment in a way that uplifts their students' abilities (Royal & Gibson, 2017); rather, teachers who want to use culturally responsive teaching methods must do so in addition to district requirements. Lauren is one example of an educator who uses culturally responsive and sustaining teaching methods while functioning in a space that does not build in the time and space to do such work. She does the additional labor required to support her students' needs.

Chapter 6: Discussion

With the high number of BIPOC Montessori educators in the United States, research studies about the experiences of those educators are few and far between. Few, if any, published studies specifically look at how some BIPOC Montessori educators successfully navigate the tensions between Montessori practice and culturally responsive and anti-racist teaching. This study examined how one Black educator, Lauren, in a public Montessori school interpreted Montessori philosophy to support the racialized identities and cultural knowledge of her students by creating and maintaining her classroom as a culturally responsive space. This culturally responsive space includes elements of culturally sustaining pedagogy and contributes to Lauren's anti-racist teaching practices. While Lauren's life experiences contribute to school-wide anti-racism work, the data shows that she also grapples with the external structures of the school as barriers to her work. In this final chapter, I will review what I found through my conversations with and observations of Lauren, explain how the Critical Montessori Model affected the process of this study, discuss the implications and limitations of this study, and end with recommendations for researchers interested in critically conscious BIPOC Montessori educators' teaching practices.

The Locus of Control: From Classroom to District

Working inside the classroom

Lauren is keenly aware of the time and place in which Maria Montessori developed her method and philosophy, and critiques Montessori training for its lack of consideration of current-day children. While Lauren loves Montessori philosophy,

she is still able to critique certain elements of it and push against it in support of her students. Her refusal to change her speech to fit with Montessori training demonstrates this loving critique. She also places great importance on ABAR lessons, which at Acorn Montessori are meant to sustain students' identities and cultural knowledge. While Lauren prioritizes ABAR lessons, she names the challenge in doing so in a Montessori classroom. While Montessori philosophy, in theory, supports students' identities and cultural knowledge, the responsibility of supporting students' identities remains with individual schools and teachers. Despite Lauren's struggles with some elements of Montessori philosophy, she still identifies it as a universally applicable, strong foundation for learning. Her interpretation of Montessori philosophy results in independent learners who can solve problems on their own. Lauren's prioritization of students' identities is evident in her classroom decor; the artwork, artifacts, and books in the classroom all represent the students and adults in the Oak classroom.

Lauren created a classroom space in which students' racial identities are affirmed, uplifted, and sustained. While she practices high-fidelity Montessori, using all of the Montessori materials, and using Montessori philosophy to guide her actions, she simultaneously incorporates the full identities of the students and adults in the classroom community. Her classroom is not only a Montessori space, but one which is racially inclusive and affirming. By using translanguaging to balance students' bilingualism, Lauren affirms her students and encourages them to bring their cultural knowledge into the classroom. Her classroom goes beyond the surface-level, physical décor and branches into intangible spaces and practices in which she protects and

sustains students' cultural knowledge and identities. Lauren's belief that students deserve to know who the adults and the other students in the classroom truly are results in the additional labor she does to create such spaces and practices. Whenever I stepped into Lauren's classroom, I knew that I was in a space that acknowledged racial identities, and saw many examples of that both in the physical items in the class and the interactions among community members.

As someone who endeavored to do similar things in my own classroom, Lauren's efforts and successes in supporting racial identities in her class stood out to me. This is not the case for every Montessori classroom that I have observed; Lauren's classroom and teaching practices are examples of how Montessori educators could interpret Montessori philosophy to acknowledge and sustain their students' racial identities. While one educator's experience is not generalizable to all educators, Lauren's practices still serve as learning opportunities for other Montessori educators striving to create racially supportive and affirming classroom communities. Teachers can (and should) identify ways to not only include representative art in their classrooms, but to do so carefully, considering the many facets of racial identity. Cultural items should be paired with conversations, stories, and lessons. Like Lauren did, teachers should learn about their students' varying linguistic abilities and try to support them, whether through creating spaces where students can practice and share the languages they speak, seeking out art and books that represent those students' abilities, or even inviting families to share their linguistic capital with the classroom community. When observing, administrators, teacher coaches, and teacher evaluators

could look for ways that teachers actively support student racial identities (in addition to the materials used and lessons presented).

Working within the school

If we step back slightly, we can move from Lauren's experience in the classroom to her experience in the larger school setting. Lauren is an active participant in the ABAR committee, creating lessons to implement in the classroom, and a parent committee, a space for collaboration between staff and families. Her identity as a Black woman informs her work in the school. She identifies families' skepticism about her and connects it to her racial identity, and describes her experience in a meeting during which other staff members assumed she knew more about Black children because of her own identity. Despite the challenges Lauren named, she also explained that her identity impacts the lessons she writes as part of the ABAR committee. Conversely, her experience on the ABAR committee also impacts her personally. In the larger school setting, her participation on the committee positions her to face her own discomfort and uncertainty in supporting children's identities.

Lauren's experience within the school reflects the literature; BIPOC educators need more supportive school environments and critical affinity spaces (Acuff, 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Their experiences need to be valued as contributions to the school community (Acuff, 2018; Gist, 2018). Additionally, schools should compensate the additional labor (not only with time, but also emotional labor) that BIPOC educators contribute to schools via their experiences and identities, that often go unnamed (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Kohli, 2018; Kohli et al,

2019). Finally, it cannot be assumed that BIPOC educators have all the answers in how to support their BIPOC students (Kohli, 2019). This positions educators to feel uncertain or lack confidence, rather than relying on a strengths-based approach to teaching and learning, which is what Montessori endeavors to be. For a school to be a "Montessori school" as a whole and not only a school that includes Montessori classrooms, the method should be uplifted not only with students, but also with the adult community members.

School structures

The more autonomy Lauren has in a space, the more she can sustain children's identities and cultural knowledge. Stepping back further, and examining the external structures of the school, Lauren has the least amount of autonomy compared to her classroom and her participation in school committees. One of the challenges that teachers in the school face is a lack of specialized coaching around culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, there is sometimes a lack of resources (such as books) to support culturally responsive lessons at Acorn Montessori. Lauren mentioned that one of the reasons for this lack of resources is because many lessons are new, and the teachers writing the lessons realize their needs as they go. Both Lauren and the Academic Director of the school, Mila, named time as another barrier to culturally sustaining work. While time stood in the way of teachers being able to give enough lessons, public school compliance requirements stood in the way of creating the lessons themselves. In addition to having to balance time and compliance, Mila also noted the amount of family communication the school does to ensure families are aware of the lessons presented to students. While the school has a

robust approach to family communication, it still takes up the time and resources of the school leaders, perhaps taking away from the time that could be spent coaching teachers.

As we move from inside the classroom, to inside the school, to the challenges the school faces, Lauren has less and less autonomy. The tension between public school requirements, Montessori practices, and culturally responsive and sustaining practices combine to create a setting in which the individual teacher controls how culturally sustaining a space is (as seen in Lauren's experience). Not only does this contribute pressure to an already-stressful job as a teacher, but there is a lack of systemic support for work in schools that supports students' racial identities (McCarthy et al, 2020; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Without any (or with only very little) systems or structures that support critical racial work in classrooms, it is difficult to sustain, and the onus sits squarely on the shoulders of educators, usually BIPOC educators who already face stressors in schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Both individual schools *and* school districts should consider the literature (now including this study) which points to the need for structural support for critical racial work in schools and the creation and maintenance of systems that provide this support (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). One way schools and districts could do this is to reconsider what "good teaching" looks like. If teachers were measured in the ways they uplifted student racial identities and practice culturally responsive and sustaining teaching, it would not only place more value on educators who are already doing critical racial work, but would indicate to all educators the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices and its role in

student learning (Hammond, 2015). Additionally, structures supporting culturally responsive work would also require curricula to reflect and support the identities of BIPOC students, an element of Montessori philosophy that is theoretically supported but not often fully realized (Kohli, 2012; Pizarro & Kohli, 2018).

The Critical Montessori Model in this Study

The core assumption of CMM is that the Montessori method must be practiced with a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori method, with an overarching framework of Critical Race Theory, and employs the following theories: CCW, CSP, and counter-storytelling for valuing student knowledge and BIPOC Montessori educators' voices. In this study, the Critical Montessori Model informed the research questions I asked, the observations and interview excerpts I noted as significant, and the findings I identified as responses to the research questions. As I explained in the Data Analysis chapter, the Critical Montessori Model allowed me to identify particular observations, quotes, and aspects of the classroom as significant and relevant to this study.

In re-examining the core elements of the Critical Montessori Model, I find that Lauren's experience appears in each element. She possesses a thorough understanding of the Montessori method, as evidenced by her adherence to the Montessori materials, her critical understanding of child development, and her respect for and relationships with her students. She also uses Community Cultural Wealth to support her own and her students' lived experiences, through supporting their linguistic capital, using her social capital to identify her own support networks within the school, and understanding her own lived experiences to support her own students'

various capitals. Lauren also uses Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies to value her own and her students' Community Cultural Wealth. Her particular emphasis on creating independent learners while incorporating students' cultures into teaching, she supports her students' cognitive processing (Hammond, 2015). She increases the "diversity knowledge" in her classroom through the materials and the stories she tells, and her own awareness that she has her own learning to do to teach culturally sustaining lessons shows that she knows she needs to reflect to address diversity in its full complexity (Doucet, 2019). Additionally, because there are few studies that encapsulate the BIPOC Montessori educator's experience, this study in and of itself serves as a counter-story, as it emphasizes the challenges that Lauren faces, in part due to her racialized identity.

In sum, the findings I identified were because of the framework I used for this study. In my observations, I noted not only Lauren's interactions with students, but the students' interactions with one another. The way I interpreted the data centers Lauren's experience and identified some of the ways she practices Montessori education in a critical racial way. Additionally, my decision to include and exclude certain anecdotes and details to protect my relationship with the school and the Montessori community was based on conversations and member-checking with the participants of this study.

Implications

This study intentionally focused on what Lauren did well when she created and maintained her classroom as a cultural space. Pollock (2008) describes classrooms as cultures, explaining, "they are regularly convened communities of

practice, where people's actions intertwine in patterned ways to shape outcomes for young people." Seeing the classroom as a culture means that educators do not only view and respond to students' outside experiences, but also consider how they view and interact with children inside their classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 1997, as cited in Pollock, 2008; Pollock, 2008). By noticing how Lauren uplifts her multilingual students, and encourages their use of Spanish in the classroom, she is giving them the space to demonstrate content knowledge in their home language, knowledge that may otherwise have laid dormant under the students' growing English language abilities. Her assessment of their abilities "incorporates multiple forms of excellence," which Ladson-Billings (1995b) includes as an example of how culturally responsive teachers thought about and viewed knowledge.

There is much to be learned about how Black women teachers are doing culturally sustaining work well; there are many studies that focus on deficits and the challenges that Black teachers face in schools (Milner, 2008; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2003), and this study is meant to amplify what works, while highlighting that there are limitations and my portrayal of Lauren is not meant to essentialize or romanticize her as exceptional. Rather, this study is meant to be a jumping off point for future research about BIPOC Montessori educators. As a Black educator, Lauren brings a unique perspective to this study from her lived experience within white supremacist and anti-Black systems. While this study paints the portrait of one teacher, if we broaden our view we can see that it is a portrait of a classroom culture that she has created. While we see a teacher who pushes spaces (tangible and intangible) to be culturally relevant and sustaining, and extends the Montessori

method to reflect her students, we see not only an individual teacher but the classroom culture she maintains. Her classroom culture is one that is welcoming of BIPOC staff and students by helping them feel visible through the artwork and books, while also acknowledging their lived experiences. Lauren not only recognizes students' experiences outside the classroom, but uplifts them within the classroom. The interactions between adults and students, and among students, illustrate the ways they feel affirmed in their identities, knowledge, and language abilities. The social norms in the classroom, that allow for students to fully express their identities, contribute to a culture that explicitly welcomes BIPOC students.

The questions I am left with after this study is: What can we take away from this study? What is the larger question that helps us understand how to sustain work like Lauren's? So much of Lauren's work in her classroom and school are not directly derived from her Montessori training, but instead from her experience. How does this impact the way we view training? Can we broaden our criteria for what a "Montessori environment" should look like, to allow the lived experiences of the adults to uplift the children's identities? The criteria for a high-fidelity Montessori classroom *alone* do not do justice to Lauren's work. As a community, we must also look at how Lauren interprets the theoretical idea of supporting student identities and transforms it into tangible classroom artifacts and intangible but observable practices, thus creating a space that is high-fidelity Montessori while also culturally responsive.

In addition to seeing Lauren's classroom as a culture, we also see the example of someone who can successfully create and maintain a culturally sustaining classroom, even with the barriers of the school and school district. Part of how Lauren

does this is by integrating her identity throughout the space. She sees the classroom space through the lens of her life. As she mentioned, the places she goes and experiences she has influence the items she chooses to put in her classroom, and the stories she shares with the children, such as the story about the Nepali singing bowl. This integration of her identity also allows her to sustain her work; she does not change how she speaks or who she is around the children. By assuming that her students deserve to know who she is as an educator, Lauren is able to be her full self in her classroom. Speaking from experience, I and some of my fellow Montessori teachers have frequently felt as though we had to put on a mask or a persona to teach in a Montessori classroom. While, for many of us, the Montessori persona eventually informed our own personalities, it seems that Lauren does the opposite. She embodies her full self and allows her personality to inform her embodiment of the Montessori method. For example, her understanding of the connection between speech and personality led her to resist changing the way she speaks. Lauren's resistance to changing her way of speaking according to Montessori training demonstrates the way she chooses to practice the Montessori method, and the way she shows up as a Montessori educator. Without generalizing, other educators should view Lauren's space as a model for culturally sustaining teaching. They could use their own life experiences to inform their classrooms, and reflect the students' experiences in their spaces.

The results of this study were successfully able to answer the research questions I posed. They build on the existing research (about conventional K-12 educators) that critically conscious BIPOC educators practice racial justice teaching.

Lauren's experience of being specifically asked to join the ABAR committee, and her guess that the invitation was due to her identity as a BIPOC educator, contributes to the research about educators' unpaid additional labor. The literature review in this study showed that schools are racially stressful for BIPOC educators. Lauren did describe resisting some of the elements of Montessori training in her teaching practice (for example, not modifying her speech). The data in this study also contribute to the literature that demonstrates that critically conscious BIPOC Montessori educators combine Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies and the Montessori method (Debs & Brown, 2017). Lauren also disclosed to me that she did not have many opportunities to discuss race as it relates to the Montessori method, which further supports Debs & Brown's (2017) findings that educators have few opportunities to have such discussions.

Challenges BIPOC Educators Face in the Classroom

Previous research showed that schools need to support BIPOC educators, specifically that administrators should value and learn from BIPOC educators' experiences and teaching practices, and that schools should develop and support Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogies in the classroom. While the school is in the process of these efforts, this study also highlighted the challenges that the school faces within the greater public school system and its many curricular and logistical requirements. These results should be considered when considering how schools should support their BIPOC educators, as it appears that Acorn Montessori in particular struggles with the balance between the desire to create and maintain

culturally sustaining classrooms and the need to follow certain requirements to exist within the public school system.

Lauren's work at Acorn Montessori

This study shows that Lauren can do successful critical racial Montessori work, regardless of outside systems, when it comes to her own classroom. She uses her life experiences to inform her work and contribute to school-wide efforts. It is a combination of her commitment to anti-racist and culturally sustaining teaching practices *and* high-fidelity Montessori practices that make her an educator who maintains an affirming, welcoming, classroom environment for her BIPOC students. Lauren created a culture within her classroom. Despite the lack of explicit direction in Montessori training about how to create and sustain students' cultures and abilities, Lauren does so. Milner (2011) writes, "Teachers practice culturally relevant pedagogy because they believe in it, and they believe it is the right practice to foster, support, create, and enable students' learning opportunities."

We also see that Acorn Montessori is committed to doing culturally sustaining and anti-racist work, despite the challenges of the public school system. The very requirements intended to assess schools' quality are getting in the way of equitable and anti-racist teaching practices, which implies that the systemic requirements are not actually what is best for students of color. While Lauren is one example of an educator who creates and sustains a culturally sustaining classroom space and culture, she does so despite the structural barriers of the school and district. Ultimately, without systemic protections (such as fewer requirements around testing or prioritizing students' experiences being reflected in their classrooms), Lauren will

remain an educator who must push back against the constraints and barriers she faces. Imagining a system without such barriers would potentially allow more educators to create critical Montessori classroom spaces like Lauren's, which uplift their own and their students' identities.

Study Limitations and Strengths

There are several limitations to this study. While there are a number of limitations in this study, there are also a number of significant strengths. Some of the limitations are double-edged, and include strengths. The first limitation is that the findings are based on only one teacher's experience. While this study builds on existing studies, there may be BIPOC Montessori educators in other schools who have different experiences. Nevertheless, qualitative research based on the perspective of the individual or group being studied, is a powerful way to improve teaching practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study focused on understanding Lauren's experience, her cultural context, and the context of the school. Because in qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument in data collection, my own onto-epistemological perspective appeared multiple times throughout the data collection and analysis processes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With the research questions centered around understanding an experience, this study centered Lauren's perspective and experience while also aiming to improve teaching practices.

Another limitation was my background as an AMI-trained primary Montessori teacher. This, which often disregards conventional educational methods, may have biased how I took notes, what I chose to include, and how I chose to phrase and ask interview questions. However, my background as a Montessori educator also

functioned as a strength in the way I existed in the classroom space. I knew how to be in the classroom unobtrusively (as evidenced by my decision to handwrite notes and refrain from interrupting lessons, and rarely, if ever, getting out of the observation chair while students were present). Additionally, I knew the objectives of particular lessons and the curriculum, and could recognize the value of adult actions. Because of my deep understanding of the emphasis on Montessori materials as teachers, I could understand why adults might have chosen to observe versus intervene in certain scenarios.

This study was the first to use the Critical Montessori Model (CMM) as a guiding framework, laying a foundation for potential future use in research as well as in schools. The power of CMM lies in its versatility. CMM can be used in academia, either theoretically, or tangibly in research studies. Additionally, it can be applied to larger systems, ranging from administrations to educational policies. CMM offers a transformative lens through which to interpret and implement Montessori philosophy, and can serve to dismantle the racist structures that are often reified in Montessori practice and teaching. While CMM offers a critical lens through which to view Montessori philosophy and teaching, this was the first time it was used in academic research, which created yet another limitation for this study. However, this was the first time that a critical racial model was explicitly used in a Montessori research study, and will hopefully serve as an example of what critical racial Montessori research can look like. One of the strengths of the CMM is that it views children's experiences as capital, which influenced the strengths-based lens I used in this study. My experience as a critical person of color who is a former educator and coach led

me to a closer examinations of interactions, rather than making assumptions, and I often looked for the reasons or functions behind behaviors and exchanges.

Another limitation of this study is that I worked for 5 years in the school where I conducted my research. While this gave me certain advantages in terms of having existing rapport with school staff, I have made assumptions and failed to question particular aspects of school practices due to my high level of comfort in the school. Again, this limitation also functioned as a strength at times, as I knew about the routines and procedures of the school, and was able to more quickly understand the rhythm of the day and school procedures

Finally, this study is focused on white supremacy and whiteness, rather than systems of anti-Blackness. My experiential understandings are limited by my positionality as a South Asian American woman. The challenge of being a South Asian American woman of color studying a Black woman educator serves as a limitation due to our different positioning to white supremacy. As a South Asian Montessori educator of color, I do not share and cannot fully understand Lauren's experiences as a Black woman (particularly experiences of anti-Blackness). While I do not share the same racial identity as Lauren, my identity as an Indian American Montessori educator who grew up bilingual allowed me to identify particular situations in the classroom as significant. My own background allowed me to use the CMM more seamlessly because I was seeing a classroom space that I personally would have benefitted from as a young Brown child. However, a thorough examination of anti-Blackness would be necessary in future studies, particulary those that center the experiences of Black educators.

Recommendations for the Montessori Community

To conclude, there is a gap in the literature to be filled with research centering BIPOC Montessori educators, specifically in regard to their anti-racist and culturally relevant teaching practices. While existing research about conventional K-12 BIPOC educators shows their additional labor and racial stress, there is not enough Montessori research to encompass the same topics. Additionally, existing Montessori research lacks a focus on BIPOC Montessori educators' strengths and teaching approaches. The research that mentions BIPOC Montessori individuals' experiences is mostly written by white women. Thus, much of the foundational literature I used was written through a white lens. Much of my research about BIPOC educators is written by and for the BIPOC community, and includes counter-stories. The Montessori-specific literature that refers to BIPOC Montessori educators or students does not center them through a critical racial lens. While there is little Montessori research on which to build a foundation, this does mean my study is one of the first to use a critical racial lens to center BIPOC Montessori educators' experiences. The gap in research about BIPOC Montessori educators' experiences reflects the lack of emphasis on the strengths of their experiences. As conventional education literature shows, BIPOC educators bring a wealth of knowledge to the table when it comes to supporting students' racial identities and experiences. However, conventional education does not take on the same philosophical framework as Montessori education. Without specific research about Montessori education and how it can be used as a culturally responsive teaching method that affirms racial identities, the

Montessori community is left to rely on research that does not acknowledge its base philosophy.

With an increase in public Montessori in the U.S., and research showing that BIPOC Montessori educators have lasting impacts on BIPOC students (Lillard et al, in press), more studies are required to better understand the BIPOC Montessori educator experience. Such research requires a focus on educators' successful practices and strengths, as well as a critical racial lens to view Montessori to make sure it is implemented in a way that reflects and builds on the experiences of BIPOC educators and students. My research seeks to close the gap in research centering BIPOC Montessori educators and the CCW they display and use to support their student outcomes and identity development.

The ultimate goal of my research is to center, support, and empower BIPOC Montessori educators, to uplift the ways they already practice critical Montessori and anti-racist teaching, and reveal the structural barriers BIPOC Montessori educators face in their schools as they carry out their work affirming BIPOC students. Above all, this study seeks to contribute to the larger conversations about equity in education, and whose voices are upheld.

This research is aimed at both the academic community and practitioners in Montessori education. Montessori administrators and educators should learn from this study and the ways one Black Montessori educator supports her own and her students' racial identities, and which structural barriers schools may be unknowingly maintaining. Montessori trainers, schools, and practitioners should use this study to inform how to practice Montessori pedagogy in a critical racial way. As Lauren’s

practices go beyond the surface level of simply representing students' identities, but actively uplift them, Montessori training centers and schools could use Lauren's practices as ways to interpret Montessori in critical racial identity-affirming ways. This study not only furthers the content and knowledge in the education field, but also provides a new framework (through use of the Critical Montessori Model) to shape research methods.

Future researchers could use the Critical Montessori Model similarly to guide their studies. A caution to researchers interested in using the Critical Montessori Model is to ensure that it guides the entirety of the study; the initial research questions, the research design and process, interview questions (if there are any), interpretations of data, data analysis, and member-checking. Without focusing on the model throughout the study, it is easy to forget about it altogether. A researcher using the model should also be aware of their own researcher identity and how it may impact the questions they ask and the data they collect. A critical racial understanding of oneself is a crucial part of using this model, as it is encompassed by Critical Race Theory. The CMM can also be used by policymakers and legislators (in determining what assessments look like and how knowledge is measured), school leaders (in examining teacher practices), and even educators (to reflect on their own teaching practices). While it is still new, it provides a baseline lens of how to interpret and practice Montessori to affirm racial identities.

While studies show that teachers who are aware of their racial identities are able to address and uplift the racial realities of their students' experiences (Ryan, 2006), I would caution other researchers to generalize the findings of this study, as

experiences cannot be generalized. Rather, I would recommend that anyone interested in similar content could ask similar research questions to a variety of BIPOC Montessori educators. This study shows how much we must learn from critical BIPOC Montessori educators and their teaching practices that affirm their BIPOC students' identities. We need more, similar, studies to see if these teaching practices are common among critical BIPOC Montessori educators, or unique to Lauren. An increase in studies about BIPOC Montessori educators doing culturally responsive work would also more examples of various ways to interpret and practice Montessori in a critical racial way.

Further studies examining such teaching practices could teach us more about various ways that educators are currently supporting their BIPOC students. I would also be curious to learn how educators do this work in schools that do not explicitly state a support for equity or anti-racist work. Are BIPOC Montessori educators still able to create affirming spaces for their BIPOC students? What additional challenges might they face? Ladson-Billings (1995b) states, "research grounded in the practice of exemplary teachers will form a significant part of the knowledge base on which we build teacher preparation." More studies about successful educators supporting BIPOC students are what will enable Montessori leaders and trainers to incorporate and highlight the practices of successful culturally responsive and sustaining educators. Future studies should examine BIPOC educators' entire experiences in schools, including spaces such as recess or lunch duty or interactions with students outside the classrooms. Additionally, it is crucial for future research to examine the experiences of Black educators specifically. Because of anti-Blackness and its

influence on white supremacy in the U.S., Black educators face challenges and barriers specific to them, due to differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007).

Ultimately, I urge Montessori researchers in particular to consider conducting research studies in a critical racial way; using a critical racial lens to interpret each element of Montessori practice in schools can lead us to teaching practices that will help validate and support our BIPOC Montessori students' identities and our BIPOC educators' experiences. At the time of this study, there were no other published studies about the teaching practices of BIPOC Montessori educators. Due to the large number of BIPOC Montessori educators in the United States, and the efforts of many schools and organizations to affirm BIPOC Montessori students, the research community is poised to contribute significantly to these efforts.

Recommendations for Policymakers and School Districts

This study also adds to the research aimed at policymakers and legislators involved in decision-making around school and educator accountability, standardization, and curricular requirements. Currently, the bulk of the work of culturally responsive teaching rests on the shoulders of educators. Many studies that address culturally responsive education focus on teaching practices (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). However, the realities of implementing culturally responsive pedagogy are intertwined with systemic barriers and district requirements, as Mila described in her experience at Acorn Montessori. This is not the first study to call for a removal or decrease in unyielding district requirements that do not consider the abilities of BIPOC students.

When it comes to school systems and districts, a decrease in the rigid standardization and accountability systems currently in place would allow educators to engage in culturally responsive teaching practices (Parkhous et al, 2022). Standardized tests themselves continue to further racial inequality in schools and center whiteness as the norm (Au, 2016; Cunningham, 2018). In fact, Au (2016) suggests that standardized testing is a part of the process of racialization. Using different methods to assess students' abilities can center students' various ways of knowing and decenter whiteness. Additionally, culturally responsive teaching practices have been shown to be effective for students, especially Black students (Howard & Terry, 2011; Ruffin, 2020). This study supports Parkhouse et al's (2022) call for school districts to consider culturally responsive education practices as evidence-based teaching practice, and reassess their practices and policies (such as reconsidering the curricular standards and requirements, accountability processes, and teacher evaluation systems). School districts could also use the CMM to evaluate their assessments and teacher evaluations; the CMM lens would automatically place an emphasis on the lived experiences and cultural capital of students and teachers, and would allow for districts to actively look for and value culturally responsive and sustaining practices.

My final recommendation for researchers, journals, and the Montessori community, is to seek out Montessori research conducted by and for Montessori educators of color. This study is only one example of such research, thus disrupting the Montessori literature predominantly overshadowed by white scholars. There are few researchers of color doing Montessori research at all. Because the researcher is

the instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, their (our) experiences also contribute to how we conduct research studies and present data. Without researchers of color doing critical racial Montessori research, the Montessori community is missing out on their (our) valuable lived experiences.

Conclusion

My own investment in this area of study arose out of my own teaching experience, as well as my investment in evidence-based Montessori teaching practices. While I am committed to high-fidelity Montessori practices (Lillard 2011, 2017), little published Montessori research refers to successful culturally responsive and sustaining teaching within a high-fidelity Montessori context. Additionally, as a scholar who keeps up with Montessori research, I have noticed the great lack of Montessori researchers of color. Employing the Critical Montessori Model as a theoretical perspective means seeking out and privileging Montessori research written by and about critical Montessori educators of color.

One of the main goals of Montessori education is to seek out peace in the world through education. This can only be done if the educator, the prepared adult, has done the work necessary to support an environment that affirms students and acknowledges the society in which they exist. Every adult involved in a student's education needs to be prepared, including the classroom teachers, school administrators, district leaders, and education researchers who influence the educational community. Individuals who dictate or oversee curricula affect whether students feel seen and valued in their classrooms. In my interpretation, a prepared Montessori educator or researcher has the ability to see and interpret Montessori

philosophy with great care and respect, while being able to offer critiques of the philosophy and explicitly supports those historically marginalized in education, such as BIPOC students and educators. Montessori wrote, “The real preparation for education is the study of one’s self…It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit” (Montessori, 2012). While she writes about the work of the individual, it is also the combination of individuals’ efforts to disrupt systemic white supremacy in Montessori spaces that could ultimately support BIPOC Montessori educators and students in healing, feeling valued, and in being given the space to practice a truly liberatory version of Montessori education.

Appendix A

Sources by Research Category and Contents

The Critical Race Theory/Justification category states which Critical Race Theory criteria the source met, or, if it did not fall into the Critical Race Theory framework, why it was included.

Article	**Category**	**Critical Race Theory/Justification**
Acuff, J. (2018).	Qualitative (Autoethnography)	BIPOC author and participant.
Agarwal, R., Epstein, S., Oppenhein, R., Oyler, C., & Sonu, D. (2010).	Qualitative	2 out of 3 participants were teachers of color.
Banks, K.H. & Maixner, R.A. (2016).	Qualitative	Montessori research.
Brown, K.E. & Steele, A.S.L. (2015).	Quantitative	Montessori research.
Brunold-Conesa, C. (2019).	Theoretical/analysis	Montessori research.
Burciaga, R. & Kohli, R. (2018).	Qualitative	Written by and about BIPOC individuals.

Carver-Thomas, D. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017).	Quantitative	Written by 1 BIPOC author, 1 white author. Contains statistics about BIPOC teacher attrition.
Christensen, O. (2018).	Qualitative: (Phenomenology)	Montessori research.
Dávila, D. (2011).	Qualitative	BIPOC author.
Debs, M.C. (2016).	Quantitative	Montessori research.
Debs, M.E. & Brown, K.E. (2017).	Theoretical/Analysis	Montessori research; about BIPOC students.
Doucet, F. (2019).	Theoretical/Analysis	Suggestions for CSP in early childhood education.
Durand, T.M. & Secakusuma, M. (2019).	Qualitative	About BIPOC students and families.
Durden, T.R., Escalante, E., Blitch, K. (2015).	Qualitative (Ethnographic case study)	Study about CRP/CSP in early childhood education.
Fujiyoshi, K.F. (2015).	Qualitative (Autoethnography)	BIPOC author.
Gay, G. (2010).	Theoretical/Analysis	BIPOC author; about CRP/CSP.

Gist, C.D. (2018).	Qualitative	BIPOC author.
Gulati-Partee, G. & Potapchuk, M. (2014).	Theoretical/Analysis	Suggestions for racial equity. 1 BIPOC author.
Irizarry, Y. & Cohen, E.D. (2018).	Quantitative	1 BIPOC author; about BIPOC students.
Jay, M. (2009).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.
Jimenez, R.M. (2019).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; counter-narrative.
Kohli, R. (2012).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.
Kohli, R. (2018).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.
Kohli, R. (2018).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.
Kohli, R. & Pizarro, M. (2016).	Qualitative	BIPOC authors; about BIPOC educators.
Kohli, R., Lin, Y., Ha, N., Jose, A., & Shini, C. (2019).	Qualitative	BIPOC authors; about BIPOC educators.

Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017).	Theoretical/Analysis	BIPOC authors; about racism in schools.
Ladson-Billings, G. (1998).	Theoretical/Analysis	Seminal piece on Critical Race Theory in education; BIPOC author.
Lillard et al (2021).	Mixed methods	Montessori and CRP/CSP research; about BIPOC Montessori alumni.
McCarthy, C.J., Dillard, J., Fitchett, P.G., Boyle, L., & Lambert, R.G. (2020).	Quantitative	About BIPOC students and teachers.
Paris, D. & Alim, H.S. (2017)	Qualitative	BIPOC authors; about CRP/CSP.
Patton, L.D. & Jordan, J.L. (2017).	Qualitative	BIPOC authors; about a BIPOC educator.
Pearson, N. (2016).	Qualitative	About BIPOC educators.
Pizarro, M. & Kohli, R. (2018).	Qualitative	BIPOC authors; about BIPOC educators.
Pour-Khorshid, F. (2016).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.

Pour-Khorshid, F. (2018).	Qualitative	BIPOC author; about BIPOC educators.
Siwatu, K.O., Chesnut, S.R., Alejandro, A.Y., & Young, H.A. (2016).	Quantitative	BIPOC authors; about CRP/CSP.
Solórzano, D.G. & Yosso, T.J. (2002).	Theoretical/Analysis	BIPOC authors; seminal piece about counter-storytelling in education.
Whitaker, M.C. (2010).	Theoretical/Analysis	About aspects of CRP/CSP in education.
Yosso, T. (2005).	Theoretical/Analysis	BIPOC author; seminal piece on CCW and Critical Race Theory.
Zygmunt, E.M. & Cipollone, K. (2019).	Theoretical/Analysis	About social justice teaching.

Appendix B

Montessori Primary Materials & List of Materials (Lillard, 2011)

AMI USA states, "In order to ensure a prepared environment that is consistent with AMI standards, each Montessori classroom must be equipped with a complete set of Montessori materials. These materials should be purchased from an AMI authorized manufacturer. A “complete” set of Montessori materials is all materials needed by AMI trained lead teachers to present the lessons in their albums in the way that their training intended." (AMI USA, n.d.) Below, I list the necessary Montessori Primary materials (ages 2.5-6 or grades PK3, PK4, and K). While there is no academic research listing the necessary Montessori Elementary materials, Lillard (2008) asserts that there are many considerations and questions for materials that go outside the scope of what Montessori Elementary teachers are trained to teach.

Lillard (2011) surveyed Montessori teacher trainers to determine which materials were considered necessary and led to Montessori classrooms outperforming conventional classrooms. Lillard surveyed teachers who trained under the Association Montessori International (AMI) and the American Montessori Society (AMS)[16]. The materials below are listed based on the area of the classroom. I include materials that were deemed necessary by both AMI and AMS trainers as well as desirable or acceptable materials for AMI trainers.

The Practical Life materials are exercises that are purposeful and help children learn to care for themselves, each other, and their classroom environments. The following activities were deemed to be necessary in the Practical Life area:

- Walking on the Line
- Silence
- Grace & Courtesy
- Dusting
- Table Washing
- Sweeping
- Folding Clothes
- Pouring Liquid
- Pouring Solid
- Polishing
- Scissors Exercises

[16] AMI is an international organization that runs Montessori training and awards a Montessori diploma that can be used all over the world (Association Montessori International, n.d.). AMI was founded in 1929 by Dr. Maria Montessori and her son, Mario Montessori (Association Montessori International, n.d.). AMI USA is the United States branch of AMI. AMS is a U.S.-based organization founded in 1960 by a group of parent-advocates in Connecticut (American Montessori Society, n.d.). There are various other training programs in the Montessori community. Some programs undergo an accreditation process through MACTE (Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education) to demonstrate consistency in Montessori certification in the U.S (Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education, n.d.).

- Dressing Frames
- Arranging Flowers
- Dish Washing
- Food Preparation
- Care of Plants
- Washing Hands

Other agreed-upon materials were Table Setting and Cloth Washing. The following activities were not universally agreed upon as necessary, but mostly acceptable: Braiding, Weaving, Tools (hammer, screwdriver), Spooning beans, Using a sponge, and Opening/closing jars and bottles.

The Sensorial materials are meant to support the development of the five senses in young children. The necessary Sensorial materials are:

- Wooden Cylinders (4 sets)
- Pink Tower
- Brown Stair
- Red Rods
- Knobless Cylinders
- Color Tablets
- Geometry Cabinet
- Sound Boxes/Cylinders
- Rough & Smooth Boards
- Smelling Bottles
- Fabric Box
- Mystery Bag
- Geometric Solids
- Sorting Exercises
- Constructive Triangles
- Binomial Cube
- Trinomial Cube

Most trainers also endorsed the Inscribed/Concentric Circles, Musical Boards and Notes, Tone Bars, and Pressure Cylinders, with some discrepancy around whether they were Primary or Elementary appropriate materials (Lillard, 2011).

The language materials in Primary classrooms teach literacy and writing concepts from learning letters all the way to parts of speech and grammar. The necessary language materials are:

- Vocabulary Cards
- Sandpaper Letters
- Moveable Alphabet
- Metal Insets
- Chalkboards for Writing
- Phonetic/Phonogram Objects
- Phonetic Cards
- Phonogram Booklets & Cards
- Puzzle Word Cards
- Realistic Books

Other materials noted were Writing on Lined and Unlined Paper, The Farm, Punctuation Exercises, Reading Analysis, Word Study, Detective Adjective Game, and Grammar Symbols. Grammar Boxes were a material that also had discrepancies around whether it belonged in a Primary or Elementary classroom.

The Math materials in a Montessori classroom begin at numeracy and number recognition and go all the way up through all four operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. The majority manipulative lessons teach children to go from concrete math concepts to the abstract. Necessary Math area materials are:

- Number Rods & Cards
- Sandpaper Numbers
- Spindle Boxes
- Cards & Counters
- Golden Beads (1 & 2)
- Decimal Numeral Cards
- Teen Boards & Beads
- Ten Boards & Beads
- Unit Division Board
- Strip Boards
- Linear Chains with Squaring Labels
- Linear Chains with Cubing Labels
- Snake Game
- Multiplication Board
- Multiplication with Beads

Other noteworthy materials that were agreed-upon were The Stamp Game, Small Bead Frame, and Fraction Insets (Lillard, 2011). Views of Equation Booklets, Dot Game, Finger Charts & Equations, Large Bead Frame, Story Problems, and Racks and Tubes varied between AMI and AMS trainers (Lillard, 2011).

Some training centers include Geography and Science materials as part of the Sensorial area, whereas others separate them. Regardless of categorization, four geography materials were considered necessary by all of the trainers surveyed:

- Sandpaper Globe
- Land & Water Forms
- Painted Globe
- Puzzle Maps

Other agreed-upon materials were Geography Cards and Folders/Boxes and the Botany Cabinet (Lillard, 2011).

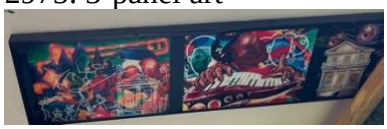
Art materials included Paints and the Easel. Pastels and Chalk were also agreed upon as desirable or necessary, and Crayons for Drawing had varied responses. AMI trainers were more likely to support the use of clay, while AMS trainers thought it acceptable to have playdough (Lillard, 2011).

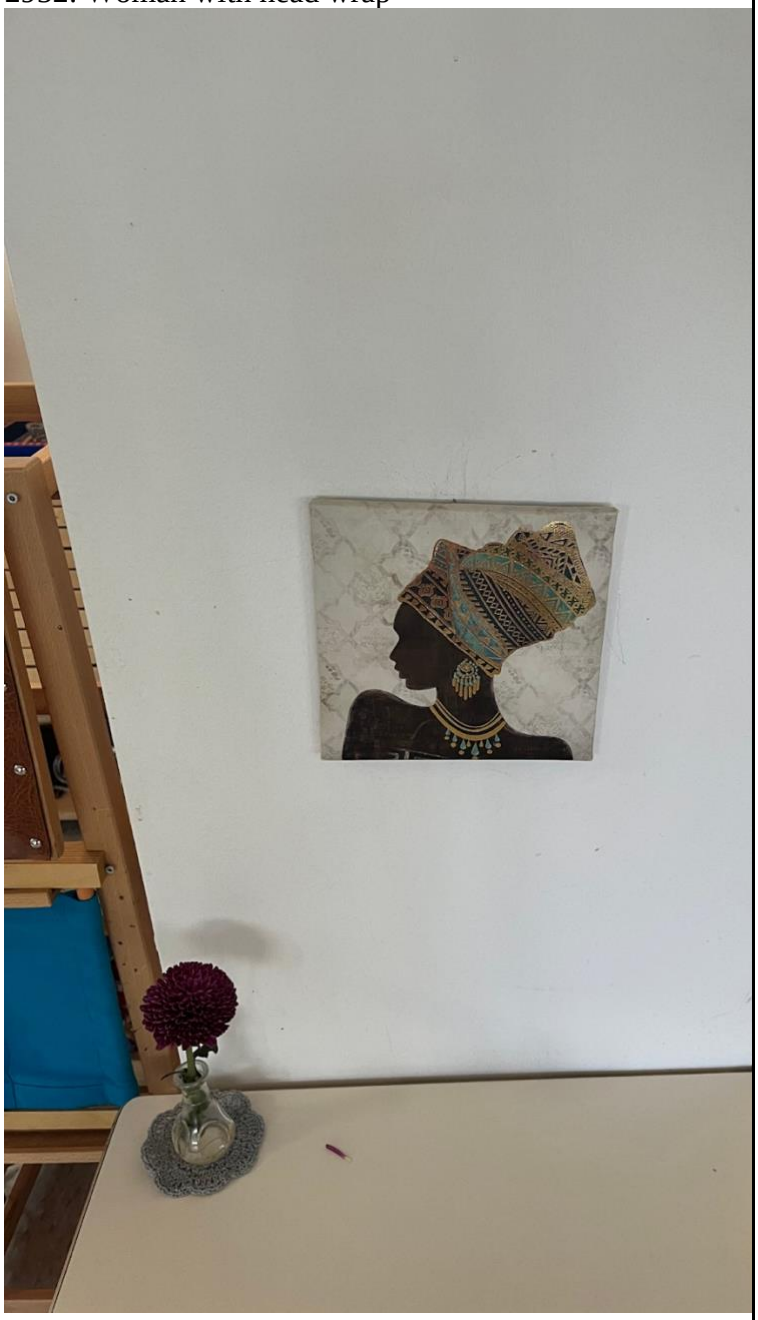
Appendix C

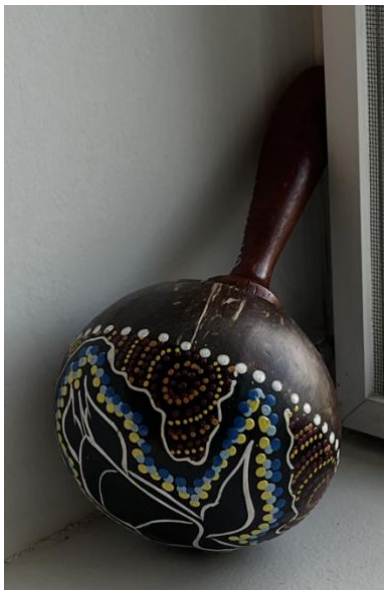
Coding Guide

This Coding Guide shows examples of how I coded my data; while it does not include every piece of data, it illustrates how I understood and interpreted notes from my observations, interviews, and artifacts. After seeing each category of items separately, I wove them together to identify larger themes. The numbers in each table refer to the photo number, and have no other significance.

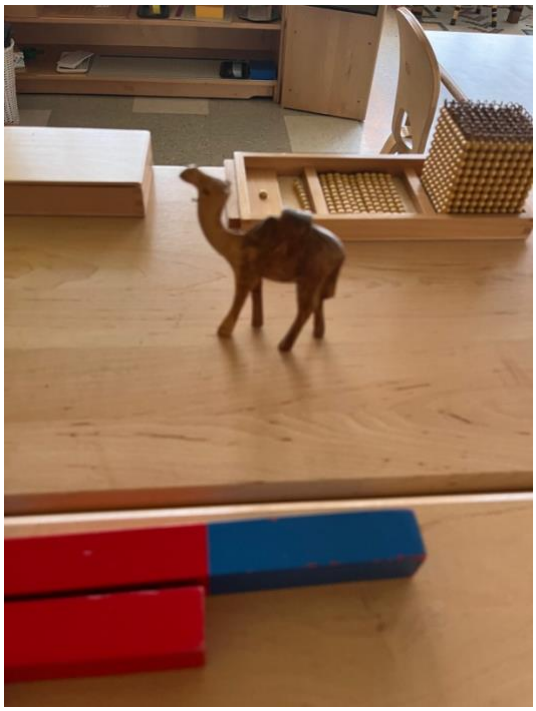
Art and Artifacts (21 total)

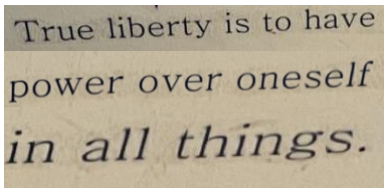
Identifier	Category	Purpose
2975: 3-panel art 	Representative art (Afro centric)	Wall art; representative of students and adults in the classroom
2962: Woman with basket on head 	Representative art (Afro centric)	Wall art; representative of students and adults in the classroom, but simultaneously serves as an item about which Lauren could tell a story about how different cultures transport materials and items.

2952: Woman with head wrap 	Representative art (Afro centric)	Wall art; representative of adults and students in the classroom either who were Black and/or familiar with or who used head wraps.
2974: Boomerang	Cultural item	Art and artifact; serves as an item about which Lauren could tell a

		story about boomerangs or Australia; to introduce children to something unfamiliar or outside their experience.
2973: Maraca 	Cultural item	Artifact (that could potentially also serve as representative); item about which Lauren could tell a story to introduce children to something new. Can also function as a musical instrument to use when singing as a group.
2972: Medicine / singing bowl	Cultural item	Artifact; item to introduce children to something unfamiliar or outside

		their experience. *Observed: Lauren telling a story about the singing bowl to the class.*
2963: Dreamcatcher 	Cultural item	Art and artifact; no Native American children in the class at the time, so it serves as a cultural item about which Lauren could tell a story to introduce children to something new or unfamiliar that may be outside their identity or experience.
2959: Nigerian fan	Cultural item / practical use	Artifact that was also representative (of Nigerian adults or

		students in the class) and practical; Lauren used it to fan herself when the classroom was hot, but it is also an item she could use to tell the children a story about Nigeria.
2960: Wooden camel 	Cultural item	Artifact; item to introduce children to something unfamiliar or outside their experience ; could be used to talk about animals in other countries and their purposes.
2971: Quote	Decoration	Quote that also serves

		as a wall decoration/ art.
2983, 2984: Bathroom floral art 	Decoration	Wall art; functions to decorate the children's bathrooms and show that the adults have taken care to adorn the space, to show that the children are deserving of beautiful spaces and create a more home-like environment.

Books in the Classroom Library (80 total)

Identifier	Category	Purpose/Function
2996		

We are in a book	Fiction	Storytelling
One and only Ivan	Fiction	Storytelling
Cookbook	NF: Informational	Practical use: recipes
Yasmin the superhero	Representation	Storytelling; representative of students/adults in the class

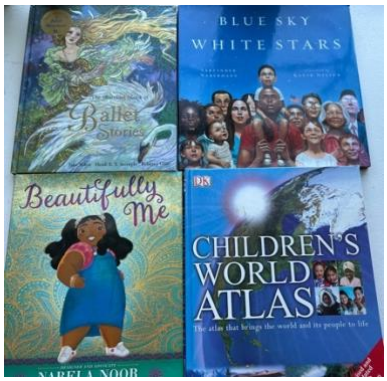
2979

Just ask	SEL	About different abilities
I promise	Representation	Story; representative of students/adults
Bottlecaps to Brushes	NF: Music/Art	Practical use: art activities
Old lady who swallowed a cow	Fiction	Storytelling

2977

Jorge el curioso	Spanish	Story: representative
Animal babies	NF: Informational	Story/practical: about baby animals
Se venden gorras	Spanish	Story; representative of Spanish speakers
Sílbale a Willie	Spanish	Story; representative of Spanish speakers
Diego and the Baby Sea Turtles	Fiction/Representation	Story; representative of Latinx adults/students

2994



Ballet Stories	NF: Music/Art	Story; related to well-known ballets
Blue sky, white stars	Representation	Story; representative
Beautifully Me	Representation/Race	Story; representative

Children's Atlas	NF: Informational	Practical use: Used for map-making, research, and sharing information about geography
2985 		
La la la	Representation/SEL	Story; trying to find friendship (could be used for children struggling to make friends)
Do frogs drink hot chocolate?	NF: Informational	Information; how animals keep warm
Where are you from?	Representation	Story; representative for children who may be asked that/don't always have a straightforward answer
Silly wonderful you	SEL	Story; about how life changes when there is a baby
2991 		
Good night/Buenas Noches	Spanish	Story; representative of Spanish speakers
El gallo no se callaba	Spanish	Story; representative of Spanish speakers

Proudest blue	Representation	Story; representative of students/adults who wear hijab
Giraffes can't dance	Fiction	Story
2991: Good night / Buenas Noches El gallo no se callaba Proudest blue Giraffes can't dance	Spanish Spanish Representation Fiction	

Excerpted Notes from Interviews (emphasis mine)

Interview 1

- Our conversations start light. We're giggling, there's some interjecting here and there, it's a comfortable virtual environment. We're familiar with each other.
- **Expected to know more about a particular child because they share the same racial background** (29:30): "**I'm not gonna be like, pointed out because I might have more information about this Black child** like no, like, like we all have, have children like this let's not even make it a big deal."
- If someone asks her to share her perspective about being a POC, she thinks about how to respond to someone without being offensive **(taking care of others' feelings)**
- **Trainers train with an assumption of a child who is "normal"**
    - Normal: "Lo: (16:56) As in a typical child who's coming in at three, leaving at six, they've had, you know, um, like regular nights of sleep. They've had, you know, meals. They don't have, they have probably like two parents, you know, like there's nothing in their life that has been uprooted. Like, no one's moving, no one has lost a friend…"
    - **Upper-middle class, historically white, assumptions of children.**
- **What it means to be a Black woman enacting Montessori/what is L's definition of Montessori** "Lauren: (24:49) And I believe that if I get to know the child, if I get, if they get to know me, **if we feel like we can communicate, then I can be that Montessori, like view** where it's really just having the, um, the openness to give them as much support as they need"

Interview Questions after Interview 1

- You mentioned Montessori's writings and philosophy were written originally centering European children. How do you navigate using a white woman's education philosophy as a non-white person, as a Black person? **In a school with white leadership that is attempting their hand at ABAR work? What do you think that looks like? What does that look/feel like in your classroom?**
- You talked about Montessori as a foundation you can alter a bit to fit the children you have. What do you mean by that and what does that look like?
- You said you totally think Montessori can exist now and include things like race and religion and other things. How do you think a pedagogy developed by a white woman in Europe can be used in a racist society like the U.S. to benefit and support BIPOC children? And BIPOC teachers?
- You said the way that Montessori trainers train, they're not talking about the child of today. Can you talk about that a little more? What is 'the child of today?' Did you see any hints of them talking about the child of today? Did you or anyone in your cohort ask about that?

Interview 2

- **Feeling like you have to face your own biases/intersecting identities showing up:**
    - "Lauren: To be a little bit more open **I've learned about my own biases** that I wasn't aware of, and you learn how, when you do become uncomfortable you're like oh, I'm uncomfortable what happened, like Why did it happen like you know, um,
    - Lauren: Because, in order to give a lesson you kind of have to face what you're giving and you kind of not believe, but you have to **kind of like in your soul feel like what you're giving to the children is right**."
- **Montessori as a place from which to grow personally and professionally:**
    - Lauren: and have the right language to share with them, so it makes it, **I feel like it made me grow** It made me see what I didn't know.

Notes after 4 Interviews

3 buckets I'm seeing:

1. Lauren's physical classroom space
    1. What it looks like, how she runs it, what she does in chaos
    2. Structures in multiple ways: how she cultivates/re-creates her own structure in spaces she can control
    3. This one could work with #2 a bit
    4. Centered because she has the most agency in her own classroom
2. Her participation on the ABAR committee on her own time
    1. Get artifacts? Examples of lessons
    2. Her use/incorporation of her own life experiences into ABAR lessons, conversations with children, etc.

3. Structural barriers of school/families to the ABAR work/practices (external structure, and maybe even divided into school community and family community)
    1. Lauren: Getting school involved has been a barrier (barrier of knowledge) - we may be writing up a lesson but it's not a first person experience, so we have to gather the info on our own to share right info/language w/ the children
    2. Not a lot of trainings at the school; appears to be hard for school to give out trainings that will help problem, how to give a lesson, what language to use, when to say something, etc. How to approach race and not feel uncomfortable
    3. PD days: time to work in classroom, regular meetings, adding on trainings. No more equity PD since the last time (when I was there)
    4. School gave option to sign up for online training about gender (not Montessori), but you had to do it personally (out of work hours).
    5. There is a benefit of going to non-Montessori trainings about ABAR (it's hard for us Montessorians to find conventional PD b/c we're not on their platforms).
    6. Guides have to be proactive in looking for trainings; Mont community is still small (if smaller groups w/in community do those trainings, we don't know unless they tell the principal)

School Website Notes

- ABAR language:
    - Explicitly mention "pairing Montessori with Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist practices"
    - Commitment to DEI page
        - "Anti-Bias/Anti Racist Education & Practice"
        - "Commitment to Staff Diversity"
    - Page about the school generally
        - Commitment to Equity paragraph
    - Sponsorship of training page
        - Building on core values of Equity and Growth
        - "Priority will be given to traditionally underrepresented candidates"
    - "Mission & Values" page
        - "redefines high-quality education by pairing Montessori with Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist practices"
        - Values - Equity "acknowledge the outsized, generational impact of white supremacy on historically underserved communities"

- Grace - "we strive to treat children, families, and staff with the utmost grace at all times…in exchange, we ask that families extend grace to school staff and other families as well"
    - **Asking for mutual grace**

Coding all of the Data Together

Data that responded/related to or answered the Research Question	How I made sense of data	Codes	Final theme/finding
How does a Black Montessori teacher interpret the Montessori philosophy to more relevantly support her BIPOC students? (Finding 2)			
• Understanding that Montessori was writing for her time and place: *"I had to basically find myself and like picture myself, um, understanding what Montessori is saying, and also what that would look like in the classroom for the child of now, of today of different cultures and races, you know, and the reason why I, I really do love Montessori is because I understand where she, um, was seeing what she was observing and what she was trying to do for the child of her time, at, at her age and at where she was"* (7:50, Int 1) *"I had to understand that this was not made for that-it probably was not intended for people of color to be doing this type of teaching or people, not even people of color, but people who were not in Europe in, um, the early 1900s…I say that because of her writings….and because of the way the trainers train us"* (13:53-14:18 Int 1) • "Sterile" view of Montessori, "white pedagogy" (19:56, Int 1)	• Lauren does not change who she is to "fit" into Montessori pedagogy and philosophy. She believes the children deserve to know who she is, including the way that she speaks and her interests. (1)	• (1) True to self • (1) Lauren's interpretation	• Lauren's interpretation and enactment of the Montessori method

• Critique of Montessori training as something that doesn't consider children of today (trauma, varying family structures, etc.) (17:26, Int 1)	• Lauren knows that Montessori was writing for her time, and that while there are applicable elements, there are aspects of modern life and children that Montessori's writings do not necessarily address. (2)	• (2) Application	• Sub-themes: Lauren practices the method for today's children Montessori has some universal applications
• Lauren encourages critical thinking and independent work in her students *"I see Montessori as having like support. I see it as, um, giving children lessons that will help them later on in life"* (25:18, Int 1)	• Lauren interprets the philosophy to support independent thinking in her students. (3)	• (3) Independent thinking • (3) Lauren's interpretation	• Lauren interprets Montessori to support/empower her students
• Lauren encourages critical thinking and independent work in her students *"I use it with my children in a way that makes us feel good about ourselves. You know, that makes us feel like we can do something"* (25:52, Int 1) *"I really strive so that in the community, they don't have to come to me for like support in a sense of like, when you don't really need me. Like, you*	• The way Lauren interprets and enacts Montessori philosophy (in a culturally sustaining and responsive way) in support	• (4) CSP/CRP • (4) Lauren's interpretation	• Lauren interprets Montessori to support/empower her students

don't need me when someone takes your paper." (26:58, Int 1)	of ABAR work supports her BIPOC students. This interpretation also contributes to the second research question below, because the way Lauren enacts the philosophy also demonstrates how she engages in culturally responsive and sustaining practices. (4)		
How does she practice the Montessori method through culturally relevant and sustaining practices? (Finding 1)			
• Books, artifacts, and artwork that represent Lauren and her students (Spanish language books, observation of Nepali singing bowl story, the artwork that Lauren said is from her travels and where she goes on her own time). See the other table that organizes the books, artifacts, and art.	• Lauren's interpretation of philosophy contributes to how she practices Montessori	• (1) True to self • (1) Art	• Lauren's **physical space** demonstrates her culturally relevant and sustaining practices: books, artifacts, and artwork.

	through CRP/CSP. (1)		
• Books, artifacts, and artwork that represent Lauren and her students (Spanish language books, observation of Nepali singing bowl story, the artwork that Lauren said is from her travels and where she goes on her own time). See the other table that organizes the books, artifacts, and art.	• Representative art: encompass the identities of Lauren and the students in the classroom. By using Afro Centric art, Lauren is pushing back against the norm of whiteness and centering Blackness in her classroom. (2)	• (2) Resistance • (2) Art	• Lauren's **physical space** demonstrates her culturally relevant and sustaining practices: books, artifacts, and artwork.
• Interactions between Spanish-speaking students and adults, interactions among Spanish-speaking students ○ Support of translanguaging *(Lauren works with students and the Golden Bead material)* *Child: Can I count them in Spanish?*	• When Lauren and the other adults support their students' translanguaging abilities, they are showing that they value	• (3) Spanish	• Lauren also practices culturally relevant and sustaining practices by **maintaining intangible spaces** that

Lauren: If you choose to. *(Child counts material in Spanish.)*	the children's various ways of knowing (such as linguistic capital). (3)		support and reflect her students (such as supporting translanguaging in the classroom).
• Spanish books (see book table above)	• When I asked Lauren why she included Spanish books, she explicitly explained that she wanted to see if her Spanish-speaking students would respond better to them. (4)	• (4) Spanish	• Lauren's **physical space** demonstrates her culturally relevant and sustaining practices: books, artifacts, and artwork.
What are the structural barriers that continue to challenge her as a Black educator doing her work? (Finding 3)			
• Professional development time does not always include discussion about or teaching about ABAR lessons	• There are barriers within the school that the school might be able to control. (1)	• Inside barriers (1)	• There are structures outside the classroom, but within the school, that make ABAR practices/lessons challenging.
• *There are not always enough books or resources to go around: "Sometimes there is still still only one book, you know…And I think the hard part is that since we're week by week…And one teacher might have that book…They may not have the book for everyone"*	• There are barriers within the school that the school might be able to control, such as providing enough resources. (2)	• Inside barriers (2)	• There are structures outside the classroom, but within the school, that make ABAR practices/lessons challenging.
• Mila described additional barriers to ABAR work: time, public school compliance.	• There are barriers outside of the school's control such as assessments and reporting. (3)	• (3) Balance • (3) Compliance	• The school faces outside barriers to ABAR work.
• Mila described that the school positions themselves as the experts when it comes to ABAR work and families.	• The school communicates with families about ABAR work. (4)	• (4) Families • (4) Communication	• The school has to balance communication with families with outside barriers that they cannot control (such as compliance).
• School website (describes ABAR	• The school is	• (5) Families	• The school has

commitment) shows examples of ABAR lessons.	open to communication from families about lessons. (5)	• (5) Communication	to balance communication with families with outside barriers.

Data that did not fall under a particular research question	Narrative about my interpretation of data	Code	Final theme/finding
• "When you're in a room you don't know what is that time you're going to give the lesson…and that's that's because, like it's Montessori like we're not on like a timeline kind of thing...So it's more fluid…So [an ABAR lesson] kind of like clashes with everything else that we do, but then also it's still new…And I think maybe sometimes when it's new you do need to say on this day at this time I'm gonna do [this lesson]…so that it becomes a habit and then, then you can stop thinking about it, and then you just do it naturally." • Conversations with both Mila and Lauren about the ABAR committees and the work they've done and continue to do.	• There are challenges Lauren faces when trying to do culturally responsive lessons within the Montessori model. (1) • This is mostly because the lessons have to be written, and the teacher training does not explicitly include culturally responsive lessons in any areas. (2)	• Challenges to Montessori (1) • Culturally responsive lessons (2)	• There are tensions within the classroom between culturally responsive work and practicing the Montessori method.
• Lauren spends time on an ABAR committee (she was asked to be on it). • Asked to join ABAR committee (13:01, Interview 1) ○ *"I wasn't actively looking to do something else"* (13:47, Interview 1) • Wanted to challenge self; that's why she joined the committee	• Lauren spends her time on the committee helping to write lessons. She also incorporates her own identity into the lessons (such as in the example of the hair lesson). (1) • Lauren's own identity impacts the lessons she writes (and why she writes them). She incorporates who she is into the larger structures of the school. (2) • Lauren's identity as a Black woman also impacts how others see her and assumptions they make about her. For example, she is sometimes asked during meetings to contribute/know	• Personal experience in ABAR committee (1) • Personal experience in the school (2) • Personal experience in meetings (3) • Asked to bring personal experience in (4) • Self-work (5)	• Lauren sees herself as an integral part of ABAR lessons, and that she must face discomfort to give authentic ABAR lessons. • Lauren believes that being unfamiliar with a topic is not an excuse to keep children from being exposed to lessons and topics. She believes adults need to do the work necessary to give ABAR lessons authentically. • Lauren's experiences

○ *"I didn't want to just not be someone who didn't do something else. I wanted to like challenge myself. I wanted to be more part of the school."* (14:20, Int1) ○ Asked to be on the parent committee • Listens to committee meetings, actively writes lessons • Hair lesson - she wrote it based on her experience • "I'm not gonna be like, pointed out because I might have more information about this Black child like no…we all have, have children like this let's not even make it a big	more about Black students simply because she is also Black. She has to grapple with this and rejects that notion. (3) • In addition to being *asked* to join the ABAR committee, she is also *asked* to bring her own life experience into the work to try and speak for the experience of Black children. (4) • Lauren believes she needs to do the work necessary to teach ABAR lessons to students, and that if she does not know about particular topics, then it is her responsibility to learn about them and bring in outside resources. (5)		impact her lessons.

deal…Let's all give ideas about what to do with this child, you know?" • Lauren has had to face her own biases on the ABAR committee: "in order to give a lesson you kind of have to face what you're giving and…you have to...feel like what you're giving to the children is right." • When Lauren wanted to do a lesson about Judaism and was unfamiliar, she invited a parent to do a presentation.			

The themes in the final (right side) column each became the findings of the study. Some themes (such as "the school faces outside barriers to ABAR work") were the same wording as the findings, while others changed in wording. For example, "Lauren's experiences impact her lessons" became "experiences impact lessons"

under the sub-heading of “Lauren’s identity as a Black woman informs her work” in the second finding, entitled, “Lauren’s life experiences and time contribute to School-wide anti-racist work.”

Appendix D: Recruitment Emails

Sample email script to invite contacts to participate in the study:

Hello, _____!
I hope you are well. I wanted to ask if you would be willing and able to participate in my research study. It's for my dissertation and is about the racialized experiences of Montessori educators of color. Basically, I want to understand how your school provides a context for supporting Montessori students' racialized identities, and how you feel like your racialized identity is or is not supported in your work with students. Basically, the study would just involve one interview with you, about an hour long (whenever it is convenient for you), either in-person or on Zoom. If we meet in person, we could meet in your classroom, or find an empty office in the school that isn't being used. The interview would be optionally recorded (audio only).*
If you're interested, I'd love to set up a time for us to talk! Please let me know.

Warmly,
Genevieve D'Cruz
University of Maryland
gdcruz@umd.edu

**Primary participant will receive additional information:*
My study would involve me coming into the classroom 1-2 days a week during the school year to observe how you support your students' racialized identities. I'd be sitting in an observation chair and taking handwritten notes, and taking photos of any relevant books, artwork, or other items that support your students' identities.
I'd love to meet with you every other week for about an hour or so to debrief and ask you interview questions about the study and what I'm noticing. We'd be meeting 6-8 times for an hour each meeting until I start to see repeating themes emerge in the data and from our conversations.

**Only secondary participants will receive the information that they will be asked to do one interview only.*

Sample in-person script to invite contacts to participate in the study:

Hi, _____! I'm Genevieve D'Cruz, from the University of Maryland. Would you be willing to let me interview you for my research study? It's about the racialized experiences of Montessori educators of color. Basically, I want to understand how your school provides a context for supporting Montessori students' racialized identities, and how you feel like your racialized identity is or is not supported in your

work with students. Basically, the study would just involve an hour-long interview with you (whenever it is convenient for you), either in-person or on Zoom. If we meet in person, we could meet in your classroom, or find an empty office in the school that isn't being used. I'd audio record the interviews if you would be open to it – it's optional.*

Is that something you'd be willing and able to do? If so, when would be a good time for us to chat? If you have other questions and you want to think about it, you can contact me by emailing me at gdcruz@umd.edu .

**Primary participant will receive additional information:*
My study would involve me coming into the classroom 1-2 days a week during the school year to observe how you support your students' racialized identities. I'd be sitting in an observation chair and taking handwritten notes, and taking photos of any relevant books, artwork, or other items that support your students' identities.
I'd love to meet with you every other week for about an hour or so to debrief and ask you interview questions about the study and what I'm noticing.
We'd be meeting 6-8 times for an hour each meeting until I start to see repeating themes emerge in the data and from our conversations.

**Only secondary participants will receive the information that they will be asked to do one interview only.*

Appendix E: Consent Forms

Primary Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Montessori Educators of Color and their Racialized Perspectives and Experiences*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Genevieve D'Cruz** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Montessori educator. The purpose of this research project is to understand the possibilities and challenges of Montessori education from the perspective of BIPOC Montessori educators, and how we could learn from them to better support BIPOC students.*
Procedures	*The procedures involve observation in the classroom and semi-structured interviews. I will take photographs of the classroom materials (I will not collect any physical materials; they will remain in the classroom for the students' use).* *Interviews will also serve the purpose of member checks. There will be one-hour interviews, and no less than 6 interviews, and up to 8, until repeated themes start to emerge. The topics covered will include racialized experiences in the classroom, how you interpret Montessori philosophy, and the ways you support students' racialized identities (through explicit lessons about race, interactions with students, classroom materials that support students' racialized identities, and how your classroom team interact with and discuss race with students and each other).* *Interviews will be recorded (for the audio only). I will also be taking handwritten notes during the interviews. If you wish for interviews not to be recorded, I will not, and will only hand-write notes.* *I will be in the school 2 full school days each week. Our interviews will take place in your classroom or on zoom, if school is not in session the day of our interview.* *I will be observing the primary participant only.* *Secondary participants will receive the following information:*

	I will interview you one time about the how students' racialized identities are supported in the school as a whole. Our interview will last around an hour and will take place in your classroom or an administrative office in the school building, or on zoom if school is not in session the day of our interview. Audio recording is optional; if you do not want me to audio record our interviews, I will take handwritten notes only during our interview.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	*Potential discomforts include discomfort around talking about racialized experiences in the classroom.* *Potential risks to you are some possible discomfort around talking about race and racialization in regards to teaching. These risks will be mitigated by disclosing to you that you are welcome at any time to refuse to answer a question, or request that your response(s) remain private/be deleted. There is no more than minimal risk to you.* *Please note: There may be increased risk by coming to campus due to the state of the COVID-19 pandemic. We take a number of precautions to minimize this risk, including the use of face coverings, allowing the area to settle between participants, and sanitizing all surfaces after each participant. We also sanitize the computer and other surfaces touched by the researcher between launching the experiment and the participant using the area. However, the risks cannot be entirely eliminated despite these precautions.* .

Potential Benefits	*There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how we can learn about ways to interpret and practice Montessori through an anti-racist lens to benefit BIPOC Montessori students.*
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by keeping notes with me at all times and password protecting the computer and phone where photos of artifacts and other notes are stored. Pseudonyms will be used for the location, name of the school, and names of individuals.* *All names (of location, individuals, and school) will be anonymized. Pseudonyms will be used. Member checks will help me, the researcher, determine what information to include in the analysis of my study. Any information you do not want shared will be kept confidential (all relevant notes, documents, etc. will be destroyed to protect confidentiality). I will create pseudonyms for you and any other participants and create an identification key. I will be keeping all information about the study on my password-protected computer. After the study and my dissertation are complete, identifiable information will be deleted. Only I will have access to the data.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*

Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no positive or negative impact on your employability or relationship with your school or the district.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Genevieve D'Cruz*** ***3942 Campus Drive*** ***College Park, MD 20742*** ***gdcruz@umd.edu*** ***919-951-5028***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* *University of Maryland College Park* *Institutional Review Board Office* *1204 Marie Mount Hall* *College Park, Maryland, 20742* *E-mail: irb@umd.edu* *Telephone: 301-405-0678* *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*

Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Primary Participant Consent to Include Amendment

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Montessori Educators of Color and their Racialized Perspectives and Experiences*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Genevieve D'Cruz** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Montessori educator. The purpose of this research project is to understand the possibilities and challenges of Montessori education from the perspective of BIPOC Montessori educators, and how we could learn from them to better support BIPOC students.*
Procedures	*This form is to obtain consent for handwritten observational notes starting from March 10, 2022, taken for non-research purposes. The observational data is only of the primary participant in the study. Observational data include how the teacher acts, speaks, and behaves in the classroom space.*

Potential Risks and Discomforts	*There are no known risks or discomforts to the primary participant by including the handwritten notes.* *Please note: There may be increased risk by coming to campus due to the state of the COVID-19 pandemic. We take a number of precautions to minimize this risk, including the use of face coverings, allowing the area to settle between participants, and sanitizing all surfaces after each participant. We also sanitize the computer and other surfaces touched by the researcher between launching the experiment and the participant using the area. However, the risks cannot be entirely eliminated despite these precautions.* .
Potential Benefits	*There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how we can learn about ways to interpret and practice Montessori through an anti-racist lens to benefit BIPOC Montessori students.*
Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by keeping notes with me at all times and password protecting the computer and phone where photos of artifacts and other notes are stored. Pseudonyms will be used for the location, name of the school, and names of individuals.* *All names (of location, individuals, and school) will be anonymized. Pseudonyms will be used. Member checks will help me, the researcher, determine what information to include in the analysis of my study. Any information you do not want shared will be kept confidential (all relevant notes, documents, etc. will be destroyed to protect confidentiality). I will create pseudonyms for you and any other participants and create an identification key. I will be keeping all information about the study on my password-protected computer. After the study and my dissertation are complete, identifiable information will be deleted. Only I will have access to the data.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*

Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no positive or negative impact on your employability or relationship with your school or the district.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Genevieve D'Cruz*** ***3942 Campus Drive*** ***College Park, MD 20742*** ***gdcruz@umd.edu*** ***919-951-5028***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* *University of Maryland College Park* *Institutional Review Board Office* *1204 Marie Mount Hall* *College Park, Maryland, 20742* *E-mail: irb@umd.edu* *Telephone: 301-405-0678* *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*

Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Secondary Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Project Title	*Montessori Educators of Color and their Racialized Perspectives and Experiences*
Purpose of the Study	*This research is being conducted by **Genevieve D'Cruz** at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Montessori educator. The purpose of this research project is to understand the possibilities and challenges of Montessori education from the perspective of BIPOC Montessori educators, and how we could learn from them to better support BIPOC students.*
Procedures	*I will interview you one time about the how students' racialized identities are supported in the school as a whole. Our interview will last around an hour and will take place in your classroom or an administrative office in the school building, or on zoom if school is not in session the day of our interview. Audio recording is optional; if you do not want me to audio record our interviews, I will take handwritten notes only during our interview.*

Potential Risks and Discomforts	*Potential discomforts include discomfort around talking about racialized experiences in the classroom.* *Potential risks to you are some possible discomfort around talking about race and racialization in regards to teaching. These risks will be mitigated by disclosing to you that you are welcome at any time to refuse to answer a question, or request that your response(s) remain private/be deleted. There is no more than minimal risk to you.* *Please note: There may be increased risk by coming to campus due to the state of the COVID-19 pandemic. We take a number of precautions to minimize this risk, including the use of face coverings, allowing the area to settle between participants, and sanitizing all surfaces after each participant. We also sanitize the computer and other surfaces touched by the researcher between launching the experiment and the participant using the area. However, the risks cannot be entirely eliminated despite these precautions.* .
Potential Benefits	*There are no direct benefits from participating in this research. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how we can learn about ways to interpret and practice Montessori through an anti-racist lens to benefit BIPOC Montessori students.*

Confidentiality	*Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by keeping notes with me at all times and password protecting the computer and phone where photos of artifacts and other notes are stored. Pseudonyms will be used for the location, name of the school, and names of individuals.* *All names (of location, individuals, and school) will be anonymized. Pseudonyms will be used. Member checks will help me, the researcher, determine what information to include in the analysis of my study. Any information you do not want shared will be kept confidential (all relevant notes, documents, etc. will be destroyed to protect confidentiality). I will create pseudonyms for you and any other participants and create an identification key. I will be keeping all information about the study on my password-protected computer. After the study and my dissertation are complete, identifiable information will be deleted. Only I will have access to the data.* *If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.*
Right to Withdraw and Questions	*Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.* *Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will have no positive or negative impact on your employability or relationship with your school or the district.* *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* ***Genevieve D'Cruz*** ***3942 Campus Drive*** ***College Park, MD 20742***

	gdcruz@umd.edu ***919-951-5028***
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* *University of Maryland College Park* *Institutional Review Board Office* *1204 Marie Mount Hall* *College Park, Maryland, 20742* *E-mail: irb@umd.edu* *Telephone: 301-405-0678* *For more information regarding participant rights, please visit:* https://research.umd.edu/research-resources/research-compliance/institutional-review-board-irb/research-participants *This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.*

Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF PARTICIPANT** **[Please Print]**	
	SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT	
	DATE	

Appendix F: Semi-structured interview questions

Example Interview Questions (from IRB application)

The same, or similarly worded, questions will be asked of each participant I interview in the study. These are example interview questions. Because the study uses critical ethnographic methods, observations will lead to more interview questions; for that reason, it is not possible for all potential interview questions to be written here, as the data have yet to be completely gathered.

1. What brought you to Montessori education?
2. How do you think your own racial identity plays a role in how you teach?
    a. How you interpret Montessori theory?
3. How does your racial identity impact your interactions with your BIPOC students?
    a. With your white students?
    b. With your assistants?
4. What kinds of practices/materials do you include in your classroom that support your students' racial identities?
5. Do you/how do you talk about race and racial identity in the classroom?
6. Are there/what are the challenges you face in trying to support students' racial identities?
7. You are on the Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist curriculum committee; what challenges has the committee faced either from the parent community or school administration in trying to implement ABAR curriculum in the classrooms?

Potential follow-up questions:

1. You mentioned the last time we spoke about a particular way you interpret Montessori theory. Can you expand more on that?
2. I witnessed an event where you were practicing a way you interpret Montessori theory through your racialized identity. Can you tell me more about that?

Other Interview Questions

Questions for Primary Participant

- What other kinds of work does admin have to do to prime/work with parents on ABAR committee stuff?
- Some question about her second-guessing herself with parents (and thinking if it's because of her race)
- You mentioned Montessori's writings and philosophy were written originally centering European children. How do you navigate using a white woman's education philosophy as a non-white person, as a Black person? **In a school with white leadership that is attempting their hand at ABAR work? What**

do you think that looks like? What does that look/feel like in your classroom?

- You talked about Montessori as a foundation you can alter a bit to fit the children you have. What do you mean by that and what does that look like?
- You said you totally think Montessori can exist now and include things like race and religion and other things. How do you think a pedagogy developed by a white woman in Europe can be used in a racist society like the U.S. to benefit and support BIPOC children? And BIPOC teachers?
- You talked about being in a community being at the core of Montessori.
- You talked about Montessori not being created for POC to use it. How have you adapted/understood it to work for you in a way that it makes sense for you to use it? What do you think it could/should look like in a school that does shift Montessori to center and fit POC?
- You said the way that Montessori trainers train, they're not talking about the child of today. Can you talk about that a little more? What is 'the child of today?' Did you see any hints of them talking about the child of today? Did you or anyone in your cohort ask about that?
- You said you never talk about Montessori and belonging in it, the conversation we had last time, to anybody. Why do you think that is? Would you, if you were given the opportunity?
- How much do they value her? Is it just about interest convergence?
- Does she have some agency? Some localized agency where she can use that power to exact or request do some kind of anti-racist work? If so, what's the implication of individualized power and efforts?
- "The child of today" - what does that mean to her?
- Interview 4: Member-checking
- What, if anything, do you think stands in the way of ABAR work?
- Code about interpretation of Montessori - there are 2 ways of being / tensions: changing and re-interpreting Montessori, and changing yourself to fit Montessori. Thoughts?
- What do you see as structural barriers to ABAR work?
- What is your own experience doing ABAR work?

Questions for Secondary Participant

- What do you think there would need to be less of to do more ABAR work? What would need to change? If you could remove any barrier/obstacle, what would it be?
- Initial findings/codes - share and member-check. What else stands out? Does this ring true?
- How do you know the lessons are “working?”
- Do different Guides face different challenges and why?
- How do you balance who the school wants to be and families?
- When was the website last updated? Did that happen before/after the debacle with ABAR committee and [concerned] parents?

- How frequently/in how many ways are Guides supposed to give ABAR lessons? Who's following up? Is anyone supposed to be observing/following up with guides to make sure they're doing it?
- How do you measure ABAR work being done? Is there any sort of framework or guidelines you use to make sure you're using ABAR with Montessori?
- Are guides being compensated for their extra time/labor put into ABAR committee work? Are there resources to compensate them?
- Are there/what are the barriers to doing the ABAR work? Is it a lack of resources, a lack of funding, a lack of expertise?
- Is the ABAR work where you, as a school leader, would want it to be?
- What are the biggest challenges right now?
- How was ABAR info introduced to families? What was in the email? Can I have a copy of the first emails that defined ABAR, talked about what the school was going to be doing?
    - How was ABAR introduced to prospective families?
- How were families introduced to this? How do they feel about it?
- What was the racial makeup of families against gender lessons?

Appendix G: ABAR "Hair" Lesson and Classroom Materials

Small Group Hair Lessons

Hair is a natural occurrence in humans. Different hair textures, lengths, and colors are present throughout different races and ethnicities. It is common for single racial groups to have similar *and* different hair types due to complex lineages. A person's hair type can be a mixture of the different textures, and a person's race cannot be determined on hair type alone. The following activities are intended to introduce hair types and hair care for its properties and the role it plays as an attribute in our daily lives. Continued conversations with children that explore a connection between hair and race will expand their own viewpoint and meaning on the topic.

Essential Terms:

Hair- Fine threadlike strands growing from the skin of humans, and some other animals. Straight- Extending or moving all together in one direction. No bends or curves. Wavy- A form that has smooth curves going in and out
Curly- A form that has defined curves and bends
Coily/Kinky hair- Tightly curled and can bend in all directions
Keratin - the tough protein that makes up hair and nails

SEL Community Meeting #46 [redacted]

Agenda	**Topic: Hair Types**
Opening: Greeting/Icebreaker	● Good mornings & typical greeting ● Opening rituals

Framing: Introduce topic or objective, community expectations	● “We recently spoke about how we have different shades of skin color, and the many things we can do, and be in our skin. ● “We also have hair on our bodies! ● “Hair can grow on different parts of our bodies. You can see hair on your arms, legs, face, and on your head. Hair protects our body from harmful bacteria, dust, and has the ability to keep us warm...especially the hair on our head. ● “Hair comes in different colors and textures. ○ Hair texture means the way your hair feels. You may have curly, straight, wavy, or coily hair. ● “You, your teachers, classmates, and friends may have different or similar types of hair between each of you. ● “Some of us may have black and straight hair where others of us may have blonde and curly hair. ○ What color is your hair? ○ What texture is it?

	● “Hair can also be something that lets us show off who we are! [Share something you love about your hair, or a style you love wearing].” ○ What do you like about your hair?

Activity: Text, video, plan for offline activity, discussion	● Let's see a book that shows us the differences that many people can have ● Hair Like Mine by Latashia M. Perry ○ What are the differences seen? ■ Tall / small ■ Freckles / no freckles ■ Hair, nose, eyes, toes ○ What is she (the protagonist: main character) trying to find throughout the book? ○ How did she feel about being different? ○ What does she realize at the end of the day? ● No two people are the same and that is okay! We are all unique which allows us to celebrate who we are and our differences. ● Hair is an attribute, something that is a part of us. It is a part of our identity, but it does not tell us who we are...it is only one aspect or part. ● Like we've learned, some of us like to be loud while others prefer to be quiet. We see we all have different shades of skin color. Some of us like to sing, dance, write, paint, read, bake, and so much more. Many things, including hair, make up our identity. ● Hair is a part of our bodies, and just like the rest of our bodies, we have to get someone's consent...they must say yes, before we touch someone or their belongings.
Closing: Debrief, check-in on expectations, next steps, appreciations	● Thank students for their participation and sharing ● Closing rituals

SEL Community Meeting #47[redacted]

Agenda	Topic: Hair Care
Opening: Greeting/Icebreaker	● Good mornings & typical greeting ● Opening rituals
Framing: Introduce topic or objective, community expectations	● "On Monday, we spoke about different hair types. We saw different hair colors, lengths, and hair textures. ● "Depending on the type of hair, we will have different routines and practices on how we treat and take care of our hair.
Activity: Text, video, plan for offline activity, discussion	● "Let's see a book that speaks about a girl and her hair journey. ● Read - Hair Love by Mathew Cherry & Vashti Harrison ● "In the book we see what the main character's family does to take care of her hair. ● "We take care of our hair in different and in similar ways. ● "We all may wash our hair, comb or brush, and style or not style. ● [Share a personal story of what type of hair you have and what you do to take care of it...do you wash at home? or do you go to a salon where someone else does? Do you comb through your hair at any point...before, during, or after you wash? Do you use conditioner and moisturizer? or do you go to the barber shop to get a haircut?] ● Now, give time for children to share. Ask... ○ What are some of the things you do to take care of your hair? Or, How do you take care of your hair? ○ Who helps you take care of your hair? ○ What are your favorite ways to take care of your hair? ○ What kind of hairstyles do you like? ○ How do you feel when you have a new hair cut or new hair style?

Closing: Debrief, check-in on expectations, next steps, appreciations	● Thank students for their participation and sharing ● Closing ritual

Small Group Follow-up*

Classified Cards: Conversation around what types of hair you see.

Child brings:

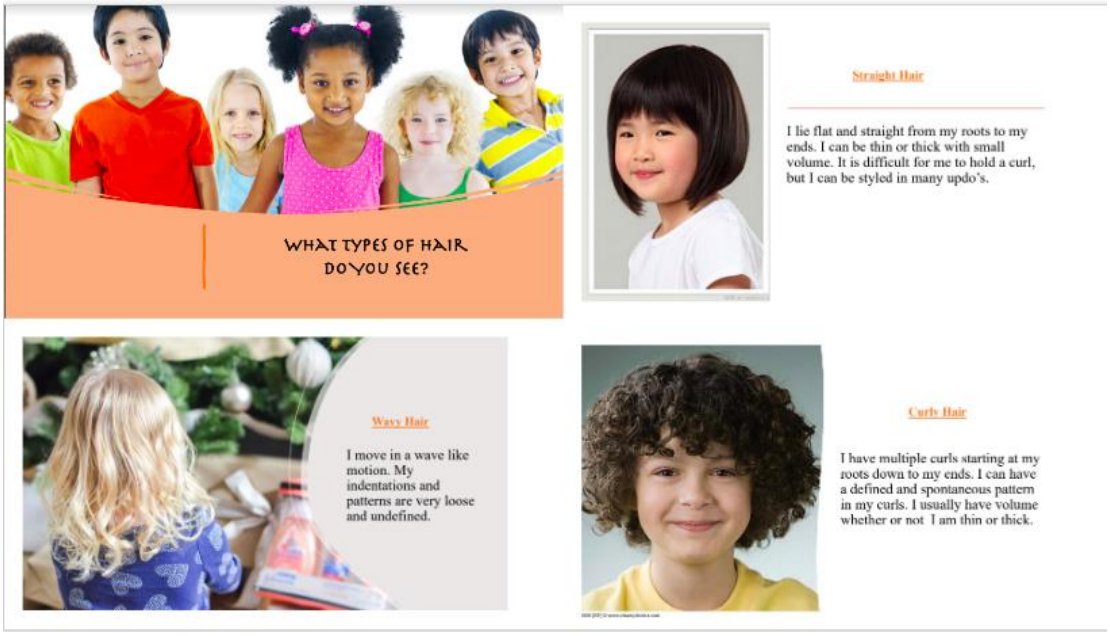
- Blank sheet of paper/art paper
- A few crayons, colored pencils, markers, **or** a pencil

“Many people have hair on their body, especially on their head. Hair grows in different textures and lengths. There are four main types of hair : Straight, Wavy, Curly, Kinky. Some people have a combination of different hair types and colors.

“Let’s look at some pictures where we will see the four main types of hair. At the end, you will be able to draw your hair or the hair you see around you!

Hair Type Slides

- Present your screen and show the PDF. Read each page. Bring their attention to the hair (type, color, etc.) in the pictures.
- Once you come to the drawing slide, tell children they are free to draw their own hair, the hair in their family, or the hair of your friends and your hair.



Kinky Hair

I am tightly coiled with a zig zag motion. I usually have a large amount of volume. My kinky curls wind up and out beginning from my roots all the way to my ends.

Hair Cultural Pictures

Washing The Hair

Hair Relaxer/ Perm

Blow drying the hair

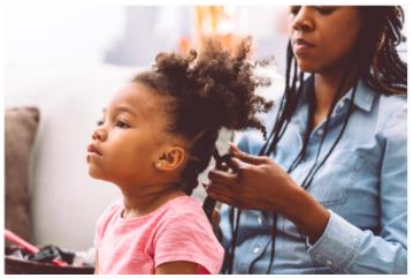
Combing and brushing the hair

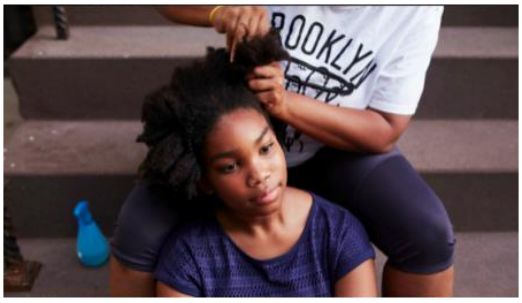
Styling the hair - Ponies

Hairstyling - Ponytails

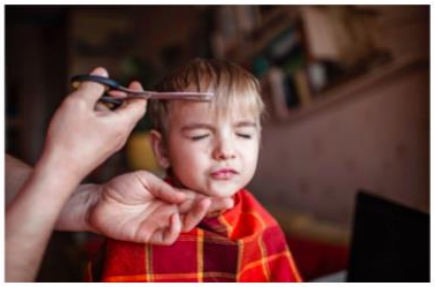
Styling The Hair- Straightening

Styling The Hair - Braiding




ROOKLY


paktales



Glossary

I provide this glossary to explain how I understand, make sense of, and use the following terms in my work. While some of the following terms may have alternate or additional meanings, the ways I define them below are how I guide my research design, theoretical framework, and analysis.

- **Anti-racist teaching:** Explicit support of racial and ethnic identities; pushing back against racially oppressive systems and practices and teaching students how to dismantle them. Anti-racist teaching requires knowledge of race as a construct and how it appears in structures, systems, and institutions in the United States (Lehigh University, 2022; Racial Equity Tools, 2020).
- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. This acronym is used to refer to people of color while emphasizing the systemic racism group members undergo. It acknowledges that Black and Indigenous people in the United States experience specific and targeted violence, racism, and discrimination that is different from the racism that other communities of Color experience (Lehigh University, 2022; Racial Equity Tools, 2020).
- **Conventional education:** The style of education in most K-12 public schools across the U.S. In this paper, conventional education refers to any style or method of education excluding alternative or progressive methods (such as Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, or other alternative methods). Most teacher education programs across the U.S. train its teachers to teach using conventional methods. While some Montessori practitioners use the term

"traditional," I prefer conventional as I would consider Montessori education to be a tradition.

- **Critical:** Using a critical lens means examining its merits and faults (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In this paper, critical also includes an acknowledgment of oppressive systems and hierarchies, such as racism.
- **Cultural competence:** In education, an understanding that the teacher's worldview may not align with their students' worldviews and experiences, and the ability to appreciate differences between different races, nationalities, and ethnicities (Meaney et al, 2008). While important, cultural competence does not address anti-racist teaching or how to dismantle systems of oppression.
- **Cultural stories:** A Montessori lesson in which the educator tells a group of students a story about an item, photograph, or practice of a culture that may be new or unfamiliar to them.
- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** A way of teaching that represents students' cultures and experiences in the curriculum and physical appearance of a classroom space (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015).
- **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy:** A way of teaching that centers students' cultures and seeks to sustain them in the classroom (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017).
- **Grace and Courtesy Lesson:** A Montessori lesson in the primary classroom that takes the form of a role play in which students learn how to participate in the world. Examples include: how to greet someone, how to wait in line, how to welcome a visitor, or how to introduce yourself.

- **Racial literacy:** The knowledge, skills, and awareness necessary to talk about racism and race (Guinier 2004).
- **Social justice teaching:** Social justice emphasizes equality in opportunity and rights. For example, supporting equal housing, employment, and education are ways to enact social justice (TSDF, 2016). Social justice teaching, while aiming to provide for all groups, does not specifically name or word toward racial justice or dismantling racist structures that perpetuate inequality and inequity.
- **Whiteness:** Whiteness is a social construction that centers whiteness as property (Harris, 1995). It presents itself in systems that center whiteness as the norm by highlighting non-white individuals and practices (Leonardo, 2009). Whiteness is flexible in that it adapts and accommodates other racial groups and individuals to preserve its power (Leonardo, 2009).

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