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Montessori as Metonymy: How Montessori Early Childhood Teachers
Approach Race in the Classroom

Teresa Ripple

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education

St. Paul, Minnesota
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Approved by:

Advisor: Dr. Peggy McCormick

Reader: Dr. Jessica Daniels

Reader: Dr. Mary Michener

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how Montessori early childhood teachers approach teaching about race and racial bias in their classrooms. Twenty-four Montessori early childhood teachers participated in an open-ended survey, and five teachers of those 24 participated in a data-informed online semi-structured interview. The interviewees received an infographic with narrative and graphics in which themes of the survey were detailed, a form of graphic elicitation. Surveys and interviews were coded and analyzed for themes. Themes were verified through independent coding by an independent analyst. Several themes that emerged from the surveys and interviews indicated that 1) Montessori early childhood teachers generally hold a race neutral view of early childhood, 2) Most Montessori early childhood teachers believe that young children do not have bias, 3) Most Montessori early childhood teachers believe that teaching about race and racial bias is implicit in their Montessori training on culture, peace, and respect, 4) Montessori early childhood teachers did not receive explicit instruction from their Montessori training or education programs regarding teaching about race and racial bias, and 5) Most Montessori early childhood teachers supplemented their training with books or developed lessons outside of those obtained in training to teach about race. Reasons for participants' beliefs around race, racial bias, prejudice, young children, and teaching are discussed, as well as the implications of these outcomes. The results of this study were used to develop recommendations for Montessori teachers, Montessori teacher education programs, and national Montessori organizations. Recommendations for further research suggest that a broad examination of

demographics along with data on how Montessori teachers are teaching about race and racial bias may yield pertinent information that could further guide educators and trainers.

This dissertation is dedicated to the enduring work of Dr. Maria Montessori, and all the teachers
and trainers who keep that work alive.

*We do not hold that the child should be denied such help as education can give him, but that
there must be a radical change in our own inner state, which prevents us as adults from
understanding him.*

Dr. Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood* (p.114)

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Despite research dating from 1947 through the present day that demonstrates very young children possess and enact racial bias (Aboud, 1988; Beaubien & Williams 2013; Clark & Clark, 1947; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001), most teachers and parents do not address the topic of race with young children in more than a superficial way (Aboud, 1988; Katz, 2003; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Some parents and teachers do not discuss race at all or employ a colorblind approach, ignoring the personal and cultural capital that is important to the developing identity (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Vittrup, 2016). While schools are a setting that could be conducive to conversations about race, evidence suggests these conversations between adults and young children do not often occur, especially in preschools. What parents and teachers could be overlooking is that conversations around racial and ethnic differences are happening between children. Beaubien and Williams (2013) noted:

[for young children] racial conversations occur every day in the preschool classroom.

Often teachers ignore the conversation or take a surface almost passive way around the dialogue, losing the opportunity to open and create the discussion of race in a comfortable, safe, learning space. (p. 82)

Parents may often adhere to the same orientation as these teachers, ignoring the topic until some future date when they feel their child is mature enough to discuss race and racism (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Katz, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vittrup, 2016).

Preschools. Studies on preschool teachers and their approaches to talking about race in the classroom do exist (Ansari & Winsler, 2014; Hensel, 2014; Park, 2011; Vittrup, 2016). Mainstream preschool classrooms are the sites for most of this research, with mainstream defined as typical classrooms that do not employ any specific methodology outside of what an early childhood degree program at most colleges might present. The *Cambridge Online Dictionary* (2018) defines “mainstream” as “of beliefs or behavior common and shared by most people, or representing such beliefs or behavior,” i.e. the mainstream press. The Cambridge Dictionary definition is apart from some educational definitions that define mainstreaming as including a child with special needs in a typical preschool classroom (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2018). References to mainstream in this document refer to typical preschool classrooms outside of those that use specially-designed materials and/or pedagogies, such as Montessori preschool.

Alternative preschools. In addition to mainstream preschools, different methods of preschool pedagogy exist, including Reggio Emilia¹, Waldorf², and Montessori. Exploring these

¹ Reggio Emilia is a form of education originated in Italy after WWII to put emphasis on the importance of children in society and a child-centered form of education unconstrained by formal curriculum (Reggio Emilio, 2015).

² Waldorf Education was developed by Rudolf Steiner, who claimed that children progress through three stages of spirituality in mind, body, and soul. He believed children were on a spiritual journey that unites body and soul (Steiner, Rudolf, 2015).

alternative approaches could yield differing results from the existing studies, as the teachers in alternative education could have disparate methods apart from the mainstream preschool teachers for approaching racial and ethnic differences (Jor'dan, 2018). For example, the Montessori population of teachers may more readily examine race and ethnicity given that Maria Montessori professed that children need a vision of the whole world and Montessori education focuses on world cultures (Montessori, 1992). Mario Montessori, Montessori's son, wrote about prejudice as stereotyping the child in the context of the generation gap, or a mistaken adult perception of children due to a lack of understanding of children's development (Mario Montessori, 1992, pp. 87-88). Maria Montessori included a chapter on "Observations on Prejudice" in *The Discovery of the Child* (1972); however, again the content examined the prejudice of the adult regarding the developing child, and little else in Montessori literature mentions prejudice or race. In the existing peer-reviewed studies on approaches of preschool teachers to race, there is a dearth of current information specific to Montessori early childhood teachers, although master's theses and dissertations point to some interest in the topic (Stansbury, 2012; Wynant, 2016). Considering the lack of peer-reviewed literature on the topic of Montessori early childhood and race, and the possibility that Montessori teachers may be approaching race differently than mainstream teachers, the guiding question for this research study is: how are Montessori teachers approaching race and racial bias in the early childhood environment?

Achievement gap. Racism is a crisis in American education today (Bell, 1997; Delpit, 2006; Gorski, 2013; Milner, 2017a; Sleeter, 2016). Differences in achievement between Black and White students was first noted in the 1960s. Coleman (1966), among others, first discovered that African-American students were educationally achieving at a much lower rate than their

White counterparts. As the schools and the educational system as a whole began to respond to this report, published as *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, 1966; Hartney & Flavin, 2013; Kahlenberg, 2001; Yeh, 2015), different approaches were employed to attempt to narrow the gap, circling from desegregation by forced busing to reconvening neighborhood schools. However, what is now known as the achievement gap remains stubbornly persistent. Since the Coleman Report in 1966, the differences in educational outcomes on tests remains relatively unchanged. Despite the best efforts of teachers, administrators, legislators, and communities, the gap has narrowed only slightly in the United States. Hanushek (2016) reported:

After nearly a half-century of supposed progress in race relations within the United States, the modest improvements in achievement gaps since 1965 can only be called a national embarrassment. Put differently; if we continue to close gaps at the same rate in the future, it will be roughly two and a half centuries before the Black-White math gap closes and over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes. (pp. 21-22)

Obviously, current approaches do not appear to be working. These persistent educational gaps led to increased instruction and testing (prompted by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation of 2002) (Kober, Chudowsky, & Chudowsky, 2012) and the tenets of *Adequate Yearly Progress* (Kober, Chudowsky, & Chudowsky, 2012), as well as the more recent *Every Child Succeeds Act* (Dennis, 2017), a reworking of *No Child Left Behind*, all articulations that were intended to help close the gap. However, progress is slow. Some researchers are now evaluating alternative education to determine if approaches outside of the mainstream better meet the needs of children

of color³ in closing the gap. One of these alternative education approaches includes Montessori schools (Jor'dan, 2018).

Opportunity gap. Perhaps one aspect of the obduracy of this gap is that factors causing the issue are layered. Milner (2015b) characterized the achievement gap as the opportunity gap, for he defined this gap as one of limited opportunity rather than lack of initiative or capability (Gorski, 2013; Milner, 2015b). Milner explained that the gaps in opportunity today derive in part from historical structural inequities dating back to the inception of the United States (2015b). Laws passed to ameliorate unequal opportunities in the past did not produce improved situations for students of color. Bell (1997) stated:

Southern Whites rebelled against the Supreme Court's 1954 decisions declaring school segregation unconstitutional precisely because they felt the long-standing priority of their superior status to Blacks had been unjustly repealed. Today, over forty years since the Court's rejection of the 'separate but equal' doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson* the

³ I will use *children of color* and *people of color* throughout this paper to refer to people other than White. My preference is *people of the global majority* as the term *people of color* excludes White as a raced color. However, *people of the global majority* is not in widespread use so I use the term *people of color* to avoid obfuscating my meaning.

passwords that still exist for the property right in being White include ‘higher test scores,’ ‘seniority,’ and ‘neighborhood schools.’ (p. 600)

Could inequities in outcomes have to do with racism? Do structures in the school related to Whiteness prevent children of color from finding success? Bell (1997) is not alone in the assertion that Whites are favored in the composition and enactment of the American educational system; property taxes literally fund schools and White people have historically owned the prime physical property. In addition, being White can also be a privilege akin to owning property in American society, as well as in how school systems operate to advantage White students. The disparities have multiple sources.

Property as privilege. Prime property has higher tax rates, resulting in greater funding for schools in those areas over schools in poorer neighborhoods (Ikpa, 2016). In addition, teachers who work in high-poverty schools are often the newest teachers with the least experience who then transition to other more affluent districts as quickly as possible, bringing their newly established expertise with them (Milner, 2015b). Furthermore, the idea of property extends to the curriculum of schools as a type of “intellectual property” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 54), which affords a richer variety of courses at certain schools (White and wealthy), while excluding other schools (poor and Black) from the opportunity to participate in that curriculum. Some researchers also note the "Whiteness" of education in both teachers and school systems as factors in educational inequities (Delpit, 2006; Ladson-Billings, & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2015b).

Whiteness of teaching. One ramification of historical structural inequity is that the majority of teachers are White, while the racial composition of the United States is rapidly

changing. Across the United States in 2011-2012, elementary teachers were 82% White, while students were 51% White (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016, p. 6). Between 2014 and 2026, projected enrollment for White children is expected to decrease by 6%, while projected enrollment for Hispanic students is expected to increase by 17% and enrollment for Asian/Pacific Islander students is expected to increase by 18% (Hussar & Bailey, 2018, p.8). Projected enrollment for Black children is expected to increase by 1% during that timeframe.

What this data suggests is that Black and Brown children are the least effectively served by the current educational system, as teachers of color can be role models who deconstruct barriers and stereotypes for children of color, all the while attending to the cultural funds of knowledge that these children possess (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). For the preschool workforce, center based care shows 63% of teachers are White, while 17% are Black (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016). Finding the intersection of the demographic numbers for public preschool proved to be difficult, but inference suggests a range between the preschool rate and the public rate of 63%-83%. Preschool teachers, particularly those in Head Start or without a baccalaureate degree, are more likely to be Black or Hispanic than K-12 educators (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016). However, as public preschool continues to grow, more preschool teachers will need to attend traditional baccalaureate teacher preparation programs to gain the necessary licensure, thus increasing the exposure of preschool teachers to the Whiteness of higher education (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Given these issues, what are the next steps? How can education best serve the needs of all children and might early childhood education be part of the answer?

Components Related to the Problem

Early childhood programs to reduce deficits. Early childhood is an area that receives current attention as a panacea for all sorts of issues—including educational gaps. The Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS) has followed Chicago area high-poverty children since 1979/1980. These children were provided quality early childhood interventions and followed throughout their lives in a program called the Child-Parent Center Program (CPC). Recently, Reynolds, Ou, and Temple (2018) found:

CPC was associated with educational attainment in midlife. We found positive outcomes for 4-year high school graduation, college attendance, and degree completion (associate's degree or higher). Given that educational attainment is the leading social determinant of health, findings demonstrate that school-based early childhood programs, such as the CPC program, have significant potential to advance life-course health and well-being. (p. 253)

Analysis of the CPC by Reynolds suggested that for every one dollar invested in the program, the return was eleven dollars (Early Childhood Investments, 2011). Additionally, this return was realized even before the aforementioned middle life educational attainment. Other researchers have found similar returns from early childhood investments. In 2011, Ben Bernanke, then Federal Reserve Chair, announced in a speech to the Children's Defense fund that early childhood interventions are the most likely to realize economic gain, based on brain and economic research (Prendergast & Diamont-Cohen, 2014).

Other longitudinal interventions have had mixed results. While the Abecedarian project, an early childhood education intervention, was successful in the areas of later life educational

attainment, in other aspects, such as in economic and social benefits, participants realized little additional benefit (Campbell, Pungello, Burchinal, Kainz, Pan, Wasik, Barbarin, Sparling, & Ramsey, 2012). The Ypsilanti HighScope Perry Preschool Project, run from 1962-1967, is another longitudinal study that showed significant gains for high-poverty children enrolled in their preschool program (Derman-Sparks, 2016). Results of the study demonstrated that

although most of the children's cognitive gains disappeared by third grade, Perry Preschool participants had higher grade point averages in high school and higher high school graduation rates. By age 40, they also had higher rates of employment, higher median earnings, and lower lifetime arrest rates than the control group. (Herman-Smith, 2013, p. 68)

What the research uncovered is that regardless of the degree or scope of the success, early childhood interventions did benefit children and by extension, communities.

Neuroscience and early childhood. Another area that increasingly demonstrates the importance of early childhood years for development is neuroscience. According to Cao, Wang, and He (2017):

the structure and function of the brain undergo a highly dynamic and elaborate maturational process from 20 postmenstrual weeks to 5 years of age, corresponding approximately to the period from infancy to early childhood. These precisely regulated changes during this critical phase largely shape subsequent cognitive and behavioral development and lay the foundations for essential skills in later life. (p. 494)

Researchers concur that early childhood is a point in life at which brain function may be positively or negatively irrevocably affected (Bick & Nelson, 2016; Klass, Needlman, &

Zuckerman, 2003; Shonkoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009). O'Connell (2009) suggested that "preventive interventions begun early in life may have comparatively stronger effects because of the malleability of several developmentally central risk factors, such as family relationships, peer interactions, cognitive development, and emotional regulation" (p. 178). Brain development consists of processes that are dependent on time and place, and that show high and rapid growth, as well as loss that corresponds with the closing of sensitive periods (Guyer, Perez-Edgar, & Crone, 2018). Without adequate interventions, missed opportunities for optimal growth and development occur, including the opportunity for socialized equity through early experiences.

Racial Bias and early childhood. Given that interventions begun early in life may have stronger effects on subsequent development, is early childhood a critical time to also begin addressing racial bias? If race is a factor in the achievement gap, could early interventions begin to narrow that gap? Oftentimes parents and teachers are reluctant to discuss race in early childhood because of three primary factors. First, parents and teachers often believe that children do not see race and they are "colorblind" (Katz, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). Second, they possess a perception that children are innocent and introducing the "negative" social aspects of life at this young age is unnecessary (Vittrup, 2016). Third, the adults themselves are often uncomfortable discussing race (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Vittrup, 2016).

Elementary school is often where teachers first address bias and prejudice. At this age and stage, children exhibit behavior that is more social and intentional, leading to the expectation that they are sufficiently mature to discuss prejudice and bias, and perhaps racism (Aboud, 1988; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). However, does research show that the elementary years are

the optimal time to address bias and prejudice with children? More important, do when and how bias and race are discussed have ramifications for future achievement, especially for children of color?

Research indicated that children as young as three months show forms of preference for their own race based on caregivers (Katz, 2003; Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Kang, Gibson, Smith, et al., 2005). By three, White children are predisposed toward their own race when making choices around playmates (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). By five to seven years, White children overwhelmingly prefer children of their own race as playmates, and will overtly exclude children of color from their activities (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Kinzler & Spelke, 2011).

Interestingly, children of color do not show the same biases. Children of color will readily choose playmates of any race. In fact, by age three to six, Black children will begin to favor White children as playmates (Aboud, 1988). By age seven, children of any color start to lose their overt biases, at least when adults are present. Researchers first noted this outward abatement of racial bias as a result of cognitive growth. Researchers believed that children became less prejudicial around age seven because they were maturing, and as a result, becoming more socially astute and concerned with social groupings (Aboud, 1988). Aboud (1988) suggested that at this age, children discern that adults do not outwardly condone racism and bias, and because of the effect of this social perception, children begin to decrease in their biases. Other more recent research found that in the absence of adult presence, children ages seven and older continue to express bias, suggesting that outwardly they recognize that bias is not socially acceptable but that their implicit and explicit biases continue to exist and influence behavior (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Xavier de Franca & Monteiro, 2013). Particularly, children

begin to realize what behavior is socially acceptable and what is not, and act on that knowledge, expressing acceptance while internally the bias of their early years remains active.

Teachers and race. Teachers can play a positive or negative role as children begin to manifest and express bias and prejudice. In early childhood, while many teachers consider anti-bias attitudes as necessary, they do not often overtly teach or present lessons and strategies to children regarding race and racial bias (Beaubien & Williams, 2013). Frequently, teachers tend to promote a “color blind” approach (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012, p. 1164). Colorblind approaches suggest that color does not matter because humans are all part of one race, the human race. While race is a social construct, the dilemma with the colorblind approach is that children, Brown, Black, or White, do not learn to value the myriad of colors and cultures around them, and the dominant White narrative that permeates the United States is implicitly and subtly affirmed to children (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Vittrup, 2016).

Teacher education programs may be at fault for some of the colorblind approach that teachers employ in the early childhood classroom. Even in elementary teacher programs, teachers resist identifying and accepting their own implicit bias (Berchini, 2017; Juarez & Hayes, 2014; Matias & Mackey, 2016; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016).

Yale researchers confirmed implicit bias in preschool teachers, finding these teachers often follow Black boys with their eyes, even as the teachers assert their color neutrality (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). The reality is that Black boys are disciplined and suspended at a higher rate than other children, even in preschool, suggesting that examining bias and privilege in teacher education programs is a necessary precursor to reducing racism in

the classroom (Milner, 2017a). Teachers who examine their identities critically and reflectively can work toward culturally relevant approaches in the classroom that affirm children and their race. Early childhood teachers who ignore the presence of bias and prejudice in young children may be perpetuating the racism that contributes to the education gap in the United States.

Deficits found in educational attainment for children of color demand attention. Since initially noting gaps between the achievement of White children and children of color, the United States has made little progress in addressing this inequity. The possibility exists that deeply embedded stereotypes already exist in children by the time they reach elementary schools and that the adult's implicit bias, as well as the school structure, is confirming those stereotypes. Young children prior to age six have already developed prejudices based on White superiority (Aboud, 1988; Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

As a result, teachers attending to explicitly teaching about race and racial bias at the early childhood level is crucial. Because children from birth to five are in a critical period of brain development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), attitudes and approaches learned during this pre-memory period may irrevocably mold personality and outlook. If children receive a message that they are not smart, capable, or relevant, they may spend a lifetime overcoming those messages (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011, p. 46). Likewise, if children receive an implicit message that Whiteness is a superior way of being, they may retain those messages. In a country where White images, attitudes, and perceptions shape the culture (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011), children may be receiving signals that White is better, smarter, and more entitled than Black or Brown. Conversely, children may believe that Black and Brown children are less

intelligent and less important. These attitudes can persist not only through childhood, but throughout life.

Introduction to Montessori Early Childhood Approach

Maria Montessori opened her first Casa dei Bambini, or House of Children, in Rome in 1907. She persisted in earning her education as a doctor at a time when few women were formally educated (Kramer, 1988). Montessori interacted primarily with the children of the working poor and perceived the possibilities in education as a form of social reform. After opening the first school in the tenements of San Lorenzo, she lectured extensively and eventually brought her methods to America (Kramer, 1988). Montessori returned to Europe after a failed attempt to ignite Montessori education in the United States in the early 20th century (Povell, 2010). In the 1950s after Montessori's death, Mario Montessori, Maria Montessori's son, sent an envoy to stimulate Montessori education in the United States.

Since that time, Montessori education has existed in the United States but at the periphery of mainstream education (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Unlike the San Lorenzo school, which served the working poor in Rome, Montessori preschool education in the United States has long been a primarily White and elite form of preschool education (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Recently, efforts to expose a wider variety and population of children to this method are occurring across the country. Public charter schools have become increasingly popular (Debs, 2016). Montessori education embeds a culturally relevant pedagogy predicated on peace as a product of education. Social justice has long been a mainstay of the approach (Baligadoo, 2014). However, Brown and Steele (2015) found that Montessori schools and teacher preparation programs have work to do in combating institutional racism and fostering

cultural competency in teachers. If other mainstream preschool teachers are occasionally ignoring race, and are intentionally or unintentionally promoting a colorblind approach leading to unequal outcomes and bias, are Montessori teachers doing the same?

Purpose of the Study

Research is limited on Montessori teachers and racial equity, especially at the early childhood level. The purpose of this study was to investigate how Montessori early childhood teachers are approaching the topics of race and racial bias in their classrooms. More specifically, the intent was to identify how Montessori teachers react to and address race talk and/or bias, and what Montessori teachers present or teach to children regarding race and/or racial bias.

Alternatively, if Montessori teachers were not approaching race or racial bias directly, this study examined whether an alternative or indirect means of approaching race and racial bias was used in the classroom. In addition, this study explored whether Montessori teachers received instruction in their training regarding how to approach race and racial bias in the classroom. This study sought to add to the literature on young children and race, and inquired whether culturally relevant approaches that include race talk are realized and/or implemented in the early childhood Montessori environment.

Rationale

Determining the extent to which Montessori early childhood teachers are talking about race and how they are approaching the topic with children will enable teacher education programs to tailor programs that take into account the specific training teachers need to effectively talk to children about race and racial bias. Including practical anti-bias education

methods within a teacher education program may empower Montessori teachers to address race more effectively with children, perhaps a component in reducing educational gaps between White children, and Black and Brown children.

Research Questions

Several questions will be crucial to the study.

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do Montessori ECE teachers talk about race and racial bias with young children?

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do Montessori ECE teachers teach about race and racial bias?

Research Question 3

RQ3: If Montessori ECE teachers do not teach and/or talk directly with children about race and racial bias, what are some ways that race and racial bias are addressed in the classroom?

Research Question 4:

RQ4: What instruction and guidance from their teacher education program did Montessori ECE teachers receive in discussing and addressing race and racial bias?

The significance of the study to Early Childhood Education

Limited information exists on Montessori and race, especially related to the preschool years and early childhood teachers. A peer-reviewed literature search since 2013 through Academic Search Premier, Educator's Reference Complete, Eric, and ProQuest Education Journals on Montessori and race revealed few relevant articles or research studies. Some of the germane findings included a short essay on Montessori culture, race, and diversity in public

schools (Robinson, 2006), racial and cultural diversity in U.S. public schools (Debs, 2016), social justice in an urban Montessori charter school (Banks & Maixner, 2016), public pre-k comparison between a Montessori and a mainstream program (Ansari & Winsler, 2014) and a few tangentially related articles. A search for peer-reviewed articles on Montessori teachers and race resulted in the same materials. A search for Montessori preschool or early childhood teachers and race found no race-related articles. Subsequent searches with disparate terms, such as diversity, culturally relevant practices, bias, and others revealed some opinion articles and studies in elementary and high schools, but no research related to preschool. While it is possible that further research on Montessori preschool teachers and approaches to race in the classroom exist, given that the same search terms without the word Montessori revealed thousands of articles, it is unlikely.

The sociocultural theory promulgated by Vygotsky maintains that children's development is influenced by social interaction and culture (Burkitt, 2006). Given the importance of early childhood social development to future adult dispositions, and the depth of young children's attitudes of bias and prejudice, examining this area of preschool social learning is vital. This study attempted to illuminate how some Montessori preschool teachers are approaching racial differences with the children in their school environments. This study may inspire other researchers to continue to examine the issues of young children, race, bias, and teacher's responses in Montessori and other preschool environments. Furthermore, the results may be useful to teacher education programs to inform educators as to how teachers might most effectively respond to children's explorations surrounding race and ethnicity.

Definition of Terms

While the definitions in use may differ slightly regarding the subsequent terms, the following definitions are utilized for the purpose of this paper. Perhaps the most controversial definition is that of the term “racism.” Some persist in defining racism as prejudice toward another person or group because of color or ethnicity. Currently, most race scholars define racism as prejudice plus power, meaning that those without power (the non-dominant groups) cannot be racist toward the dominant group, in the case of this paper, White groups in the United States (Tatum, 1997, p. 26). Prejudice plus power is the preferred definition for the research that follows.

Colorblindness: “The idea that ignoring or overlooking racial and ethnic differences promotes racial harmony” (Scruggs, 2009, para. 5).

Early Childhood: The time in childhood from birth to age eight (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. xi).

Environment: The classroom in a Montessori school or preschool.

Ethnicity: “Ethnicity denotes groups, such as Irish, Fijian, or Sioux, etc. that share a common identity-based ancestry, language, or culture” (“Race and Ethnicity,” n.d., para. 6).

Implicit Bias: “Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Staats, 2013, p. 6).

Montessori: The term may refer to Dr. Maria Montessori, founder of the Montessori Method of education, or the method itself (American Montessori Society, 2018).

Oppression: “The exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner” (Hoyt, 2012, p.225.)

Power: “The capacity to exert force on or over something or someone” (Hoyt, 2012, p.225).

Prejudice: “Preconceived opinion not based on reason or actual experience; bias, partiality” (Hoyt, 2012, p. 225).

Preschool: A class of 3-5-year-old children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. xi).

Race: “Race is a powerful social category forged historically through oppression, slavery, and conquest” (“Race and Ethnicity,” n.d., para. 2).

Racism: Prejudice plus power leveraged to benefit the dominant social group. In this definition, people of color in the United States cannot be racist, as the dominant group in the United States is White (Hoyt, 2012, p. 225). Stereotype: “A set of relatively fixed, simplistic overgeneralizations about a group or class of people. Here, negative, unfavourable characteristics are emphasized, although some authorities regard positive but biased and inaccurate beliefs as components of a stereotype” (Reber, Allen, & Reber, 2009, para. 2).

White Privilege: Unearned social privileges obtained by being White (McIntosh, 1988).

White Supremacy: "White supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by

white peoples and nations of the European continent; for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.” (Lawrence & Keleher, 2004, p.4)

Whiteness: “The concept of whiteness, when used in a critical context, more correctly refers to a form of cultural capital that accrues to those individuals who most closely conform to the normative subject position rendered intelligible within societies where ‘race’ is treated as a meaningful marker of difference. In western societies, notions of whiteness center the values and beliefs of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied men, and those who approximate this subject position” (Riggs, 2014, p.24).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

A review of the literature is presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three includes a description of the research design, methods, limitations, and ethical considerations. An examination of the results is presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five focuses on the general conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Parents and teachers are often reluctant to address race with young children—either because of the mistaken belief that children do not respond to, envisage, or talk about race in the absence of adult intervention or because of their own adult discomfort over the topic (Johnson & Aboud, 2017; Katz, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vittrup, 2016). Children do see race, and exhibit prejudice and bias at remarkably young ages (Aboud, 1988; Katz, 2003; Kinzler & Spelke, 2011). Despite evidence to the contrary, teachers and parents persist in believing in a stereotype of children as naïve and innocent—a blank slate—a myth unsupported by the research (Aboud, 1988; Johnson & Aboud, 2017; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

In part, the Whiteness of teaching may perpetuate the misperceptions surrounding young children and bias. In 2016, White teachers made up 82% of the teaching force, while 51% of students were White (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). If teacher education programs do address race, White teachers are reported to have difficulty grappling with the complexity of White supremacy and White privilege (Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2016; Matias & Mackay, 2016; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016), which may influence their approach to addressing race with the children in their classrooms. Because White teachers remain in the majority, researchers suggested that teacher education programs require early childhood teachers to address and reflect on their own bias and prejudice in order to guide young children effectively in the areas of race and racism (Kemple, Lee, & Harris, 2016).

A majority of the literature on teachers and teacher education programs pertains to teachers in K-12 settings, however, the expanding inclusion of preschools in public schools might serve as an impetus to address more early childhood (E-12 or P-12) settings in this research. Since 2003, investments in public preschools in the United States have increased over 200% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In addition, the increasing professionalization of the early childhood field (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015) suggests that in the future, rigorous early childhood teacher education programs similar to elementary teacher licensure programs will be required. Currently, educational requirements for most preschool teachers are minimal, ranging from a high school diploma with child care experience, a child development associate certificate, an associate degree in the field, and/or a baccalaureate or higher education degree that may or may not be in the field of early childhood (Whitebook, McLean, & Austin, 2016).

Early childhood comprises only a small subset of the literature on teachers and teacher education programs, and an even more modest amount of research exists on Montessori early childhood teachers and teacher education, particularly in how teachers approach race and racial bias. Some literature exists on the experiences of mainstream early childhood teachers regarding race and racism, but whether those experiences can be extrapolated to Montessori early childhood teachers remains uncertain. Outside of teaching, seminal studies on race and young children serve as guides to early childhood racial development (Aboud, 1988; Clark & Clark, 1947; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

Recently, neuroscience imaging has illuminated past developmental theories on racial cognition and brain development, confirming some and dismissing others (Kiser, 2015; Young,

Hugenberg, Bernstein, & Sacco, 2012). Collectively, the research in early childhood across the fields of social science serves the purpose of explicating the complicated fusion of teachers, parents, and young children around the topic of race. Analyzing how teachers are approaching race and bias with young children is crucial, given that developmental theory points toward the importance of early experiences to future proclivities, both those that are conscious and unconscious in the adult, including attitudes toward race (Nash & Miller, 2015; Park, 2011; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vgotsky, 1978). Educative settings for young children are critical components in their development.

Children, teachers, and parents are participants in school systems. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a pertinent framework to view school systems and the social contexts within which children, especially young children, operate. CRT asserts that structures and institutions in the United States operate with racism inherent in their systems (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The diversity of the population in the United States is growing, thus escalating the need to understand the systemic racism that exists in the United States, especially in the schools that are educating and shaping the minds of children. The United States census numbers show that

in 2014, 52 percent of children are projected to be non-Hispanic White alone, compared with 62 percent of the total population. Thus, among those under age 18, the United States is already nearly a majority-minority nation. By 2060, 64 percent of children will belong to racial and ethnic minorities, compared with 56 percent for the total population. (Colby & Ortman, 2015, pp. 10-11)

To address the needs of these children, confronting racism is necessary. Central to dismantling racism is first accepting that racism is real, prevalent, and destructive. Critical Race Theory provides a schema to orient that discussion.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was a response to Critical Legal Studies' (CLS) inadequacies in answering questions of race and racism in the law (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010; Milner, 2008). Law scholars Derrick A. Bell, Charles Lawrence, Richard Delgado, Lani Guinier, and Kimberle Crenshaw responded to this shortcoming by establishing CRT to confront the racial oppression they saw operationalized in society, particularly in the way the legal system perpetuated racism (Taylor, 2009). CRT is contingent upon the supposition that racism is prevalent in the United States. CRT does not focus on individual racism, but racism as is inherent in the structures and institutions that compose systems. CRT provides a conduit to uphold evidence of how society sustains White ways of being and doing, in law and in institutions. CRT has five major themes: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

CRT is frequently applied to education and educational systems in particular (Allen, 2006; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Leonardo, 2016; Matias, Henry, & Darland, 2017). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) were the first to apply CRT tenets to the educational landscape. In their analysis, three components in addition to the tenets of CRT were crucial to understanding race in the United States as it relates to education. First, race is a significant factor in the inequities that

exist in the United States. Second, the foundation of U.S. society rests on property rights. Third, CRT provides an analytical tool to understand the inequities in schools through the convergence of racism and property (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT in education is not intended to evaluate education through an individual lens, but rather, just as in the legal scholarship that criticized the structures perpetuating inequity, CRT provides a channel to critique an educational system that has perpetuated injustices and oppression (Milner, 2015b).

The concept of the permanence of racism in CRT explicates the authentic history of America, recognizing that racism and White supremacy are dominant components of American society and persist as foundational “mortar” in social, political, and economic structures in the United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Hiraldo, 2010). DeCuir and Dixson (2004) stated “such structures allocate the privileging of Whites and the subsequent Othering of people of color in all arenas” (p. 27). As schools are structures in a racist society, the permanence of racism affects schools. As a result, Whiteness becomes centralized and normalized in schools, and thus produces educational practices identified as neutral but actually dominated, implicitly or not, by institutional Whiteness (Gusa, 2010).

The critique of liberalism from CRT is significant in the analysis of education and schools. Liberalism employs such practices as colorblindness, neutrality under the law, and incremental change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Bonilla-Silva (2018) described “abstract liberalism” as promulgating the idea that we are equal, and will or have equal opportunity. Colorblindness, or the insistence that all are equal regardless of the color of their skin, ignores the years of oppression and inequity experienced by people of color that have resulted in a state of inequality and a society that privileges Whiteness (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Jackson, Bryan,

& Larkin, 2016; Vittrup, 2016). Neutrality under the law assumes that the law, such as civil rights law, offers benefits to all equally, while CRT scholars contend that these laws only uphold the status quo rather than addressing “radical” change (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62).

Liberalism upholds equality rather than equity. The concept of equality does not consider the disparate circumstances created by persistent racism toward people of color. Equality describes an approach that addresses change in ways that systemically benefit White people and oppress people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Equality also withholds redress for past inequities that continue to plague the achievement of people of color. The lens of CRT ensures an examination of practices that encourage colorblindness or equality.

The liberal tenets CRT identifies, such as colorblindness, meritocracy, post-racialism, and other components of White supremacy, manifest in the instructional approaches in the school systems as well as in opportunities and the cultural climate (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Leonardo, 2013). Because of the Whiteness of teaching, CRT offers a relevant framework to scrutinize education as a whole and the specific educational practices of teachers (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Sleeter, 2016; Taylor, 2009). CRT as a framework to study the White orientation in education is justified not only due to the preponderance of White teachers, administrators, and the White-centric curriculum, but in the inequitable outcomes for students of color.

Black children in elementary schools are routinely relegated to less experienced teachers in atmospheres un conducive to learning (Palardy, 2015). Children of color score lower on standardized tests (McDonough, 2015) and discipline occurs at a higher rate for Black children than for White children, with Black boys expelled three times more often than White students

(Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline, 2014). In addition, Black boys are also expelled more often than other children in preschool (Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline, 2014; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). While Black boys make up 18% of the children in preschools, they comprise half of all suspensions (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). Understanding the school system as an oppressive entity for children of color provides the impetus to examine teachers and teaching at any level, but particularly at the early childhood level, where development in all its forms is at its zenith. The inequitable treatment of children of color, from preschool through high school, necessitates the examination of all components and levels of an educational system that routinely discriminates against them.

CRT has been employed by researchers to advocate for revolutionary changes in education and to enact social justice for those who reside at the margins of education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ledesma & Calderon, 2015; Leonardo, 2013; Matias, Henry, & Darland, 2017). Leonardo (2013) suggested that viewing education through CRT is necessary because, “like a fast-moving, heavy train maintains its trajectory without the application of force to the contrary, racism in education becomes indomitable unless it meets with active resistance” (p.17). A substantial responsibility for that “active resistance” is incumbent upon Whites, as the dominant entity in society.

Interest convergence, a component of CRT, maintains that Whites will embrace policies that benefit people of color only if the dominant White culture also benefits. Milner (2008) explained interest convergence as the idea “that racial equality and equity for people of color will be pursued and advanced when they converge with the interests, needs, expectations, and

ideologies of Whites” (p. 333). Understanding the ideologies of Whiteness, given the Whiteness of education, is an important step to scholars intent on changing educational inequities.

Critical Whiteness Studies

Matias and Mackey (2016) stated that “critical whiteness studies uses a transdisciplinary approach to investigate the phenomenon of whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, and maintained, and how it ultimately impacts the state of race relations” (p. 34). Because of the Whiteness of teaching and the institution of education as a structure of White supremacy, Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) is useful for understanding a White experience of race within education. The definition of Whiteness used for these purposes is

a form of cultural capital that accrues to those individuals who most closely conform to the normative subject position rendered intelligible within societies where “race” is treated as a meaningful marker of difference. In western societies, notions of whiteness center the values and beliefs of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied men, and those who approximate this subject position. (Riggs, 2014, p. 2076)

Also noteworthy, both Whites and people of color can put on Whiteness or take on the tenets of Whiteness as their dominant identity, and way of being and understanding (Hayes, 2013). Thus, Whiteness, as displayed in the structural workings of schools, could be enacted by both Whites and people of color.

Understanding Whiteness means examining how engrained White supremacy is in American society. For some, particularly Whites, seeing Whiteness and its effect as anything but the normal way of operating is difficult. Matias, Nishi, and Saredo (2017) acknowledged that

“because Whiteness is said to be so invisible, so ubiquitous that it often goes undetected, the first step to studying Whiteness is to acknowledge its existence” (p. 4). According to Juarez and Hayes (2014), "First, what has to be understood is that racism is an endemic part of American Society. The problem with Whiteness is the refusal to consider the everyday realities of race and racism" (p. 335). Sue (2015) conceptualized Whiteness to Whites as like oxygen, in that it is invisible but always present. When fish derive oxygen from water, the particular way they breathe in oxygen is healthy for the fish, but not necessarily for all organisms (Sue, 2015). Similarly, Whiteness is like oxygen in that the way it is “breathed” in may benefit Whites, but not all people. In order to consider the everyday realities of race and racism, confronting Whiteness as a racial construct is essential.

Many teachers are cognizant of racism, but do not see how it personally is relevant to them and understand the world only through the schema that is White-constructed or to them, “normal” (Applebaum, 2013, pp. 60-61). In example, Matias and Mackey (2016) reported “the teacher candidates in our teacher education program claim awareness that being White indicates racial privilege. Yet, when asked what this racial privilege has accumulated for them, they are at a loss of understanding” (p. 34). Because teachers in preschool are majority White, realizing the implications of their Whiteness as a White identity through CWS is critical to interpreting White positionality. That is, the sifting of a person’s responses occurs through a socialized identity and understanding what may or may not affect that identity will help interpret those responses. Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, and Galindo (2014) posited that “If blackness is a social construction that embraces black culture, language, experiences, identities, and epistemologies, then whiteness is a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology,

racialization, expressions, and experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors” (p. 2).

Critical Whiteness Studies provides context for the enactment of Whiteness in education.

By considering CRT and CWS in an examination of race in a field dominated by Whiteness, both perspectives on race illuminate the issues that may affect White teachers and offer concepts that could serve to enlighten particularly White teachers in their approach to race in schools. Additionally, while CRT is an explanatory framework for the experiences of people of color, CWS explains the racial experience of Whites in a White-dominated society. White researchers need to understand their limited role in utilizing CRT, as the theory was generated by people of color to explicate the experiences of people of color, and could too easily be appropriated and distorted by Whites (Bergerson, 2003). The theory is perhaps most useful to the White researcher as a foundational tenet to support the existence and persistence of the institutional racism that exists in schools and elsewhere (Bergerson, 2003). No theory can capture the experiences of all people, but both CWS and CRT apprehend the experiences of race through the structure of White supremacy (Matias, Henry, & Darland, 2017). Because Whiteness is centered in teacher education (Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016), acknowledging that Whiteness is manifested through systemic and personal privilege is a key component to addressing race, racism, and White supremacy in teaching. Analyzing Whiteness, as it relates to Critical Race Theory, is a way to understand the manifestations of racism in education.

Children and Race

Parents or guardians⁴ are often categorized as the first and best teachers of children. Primary caregivers have enormous influence over young children, and the adult's own dispositions can influence a range of attributes in children from positive to negative. Guyer, Perez-Edgar, and Crone (2018) stated:

for the young child, primary caregivers, including siblings, extended family members, and others who fulfill the child's needs, shape, control, and filter the environment. Thus, the personal and psychosocial characteristics of the child's main caregivers influence how the caregiver interacts with the child. Caregiver behaviors, in turn, shape the child's experienced environment. In this way, caregiver behaviors and personality may affect how infants come to view and approach the world. (p. 694)

Vittrup (2016) found that parents may intentionally convey positive messages around race and diversity, but may be unintentionally promulgating racist beliefs in their implicit attitudes, which are absorbed by their children (p. 669). Implicit bias or attitudes refer to the unconscious beliefs or stereotypes that people hold. Even well-meaning parents can send messages regarding race by

⁴ I will use parents for the remainder of this study, but acknowledge that there are many configurations of caregivers for children who may not be their parents

their reluctance to talk about race with their children. In fact, silence, in the face of the development of children and the societal messages they are receiving, reinforces Whiteness and may send the unintended message that there is something wrong with talking about race (Vittrup, 2016). Kemple, Lee, and Harris (2016) noted that “the messages children receive (and do not receive) about race have the potential to impact their self-concept and attitudes toward others in significant ways” (p. 98). The research suggested that some parents are unaware of the racial/cognitive development of the young child, which leads them to believe that discussing race and/or racism is unnecessary (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2016; Katz, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vittrup, 2016). Boyd (2018) noted

adults should not ‘choose’ what they consider is needed to discuss, but follow the thoughts and questions of the children in their care. If they do not see or hear the issues that need to be discussed, storing them away as too sensitive or complex for young children, they are not allowing the true character of the child to emerge. (p. 235)

One negative effect of “storing” race-related discussions away is imparting to children the unconscious message that discussing race is “wrong” (Vittrup, 2016). Park (2011) contended that “the language we use to talk about racial and ethnic differences is an important tool young children use in learning to understand these differences” (p. 394). Without meaningful race dialogue, children are denied a significant tool for socialization.

Infant preference. One area of investigation into bias is that of infants, their preferences, and how those preferences may manifest. Katz and Downey (2002) found that young children showed a marked preference for certain genders and races as early as three

months. This predilection derives from face preference studies with infants, although even adults show bias in preference for faces from their own race, called the “cross-race effect” (Young, Hugenberg, Bernstein, & Sacco, 2012, p. 11). The central caregivers in the environment can affect the visual face preference of infants. For example, children in the three-month-old range prefer faces based on the gender and the race of their primary caregiver (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Kang, Gibson, Smith, Liezhong, & Pascalis, 2005).

These findings suggest that socialization of infants also includes racial preferences, refuting the idea that children are "race-neutral." For infants whose caregivers are of a single race, the implicit bias toward that race is a building block toward other bias that occurs developmentally. This preference for caregivers of a certain race is called the “cross race effect.” This effect may be the result of seeing more of one race than another as the infant develops (Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Lee, Ge, & Pascalis, 2007; Young et al., 2012). Further research is necessary to discern whether infants are predisposed toward their own race or simply responding to familiarity. Possibly, given the natural categorization that is a basic component of the young child’s brain (Vittrup 2016), organizing by grouping similar ideas, objects, or faces together may be a natural outcome of brain development (Quinn, 2011).

Developmental Theory. Piaget’s theories suggested that children develop sequentially, based on cognitive components discarded as children obtain new levels of cognition and development (Fowler, 2017). Because Piaget’s theories were the prevailing means for understanding young children and development, especially of the preschool age, caregivers and teachers were likely to presume that children did not have the cognitive ability to be biased, or, that children did not yet have sufficient maturity to hold prejudiced views. By contrast,

Vygotsky theorized that children are products of their social environments and that socialization provided the impetus for development (Fowler, 2017). Socialization then helped children reach ever-expanding cognition and understanding, which was continually being constructed and refined, but not discarded.

These Vygotskian ideas coincide with Maria Montessori's theories (1967, p. 15) and others that children are not an empty vessel waiting to be filled, but fully functioning human beings who construct themselves both internally and externally by actions on and within the environment. Park (2011) noted "how Piagetian-developmental theories were applied to the study of children and race tended to overlook the social and cultural nature of learning and development" (p.393). Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) observed that an obvious limitation of Piaget was that he studied children in settings that were invariably dominated by an adult. In addition, they noted that Piaget's theories "allow little room for differences among children by class, racial group, or gender" (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 194).

Criticisms of the Piagetian theory have not yet permeated early childhood settings, as Piagetian theory continues to dominate most developmental understandings of young children (Fowler, 2017). As a result, most teachers, and certainly parents, subscribe to the idea that children are blank slates that only become prejudiced if taught negative attitudes, and that if race or bias is either not overtly transmitted by adults or if adults take a "colorblind" approach, children will not develop prejudice. However, adults do communicate implicit messages, and adults are not the only socializing agents in a child's world. As Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) stated, "The assumption, however implicit, that three- to six-year-old children are naive and guileless beings basically different in mental functioning and social activity from adults should

go the way of the horse and buggy" (p.213). Attention to the inception of prejudice can be critical. Allport (1979), one of the first psychologists to study the underpinnings of prejudice, noted that prejudice could manifest rather harmlessly but grow to be a destructive force.

Children and Bias. Children develop prejudice and bias, even with the best-intentioned adults surrounding them (Katz, 2003). Categorization is a cognitive tool used by children to understand the world around them. Infants categorize based on simple classifications such as recognizing animals, then recognizing dogs or cats, then attributes of dogs or cats, and so on. These categorizations are refined and expanded upon throughout life. Quinn (2011) stated that “infants are thus endowed with the tools to build a foundation for conceptual development, rather than with a preconceptual form that will be discarded once metamorphosis provides mature concepts” (p.147). Thus, bias conceptualized in infancy is not eventually abandoned but utilized to provide foundational understandings for the three to five-year-old. Children as young as three have extensive perceptions, some biased and some not, of racial and ethnic differences, even understandings that are complex, such as that being White affords more privilege in society (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996).

Akin to infants, young children naturally categorize items and objects and endeavor to comprehend the world around them. When confronted with inequities caused by societal racism or prejudice, children apply their own level of understanding, which may engender or activate bias and prejudice (Vittrup, 2016). Because children are social beings, and at approximately age three begin to pay closer attention to friends and socialization (Coppie & Bredekamp, 2009), views on race gleaned implicitly or otherwise will manifest in social situations. Children at this age converse considerably around race and gender, and hold racialized views. Even autistic

children, who have difficulty discerning social cues, hold stereotypes common to those held by adults (Hirschfeld, 2008).

However, early direct experiences with other races, or parents and caregiver messages, do not appear to be the initiating causes of prejudice and stereotypes in children. What does this suggest? Hirschfeld (2008) stated that “race is a potent category of power because it is effortlessly learned, and hence easily shared and stabilized over time” (p. 47). Although adult societal and cultural standards do influence children subconsciously, children’s own “effortless” categorization of those standards drive their thinking, more so than the individual adults around them or any multicultural environments. Göckeritz, Schmidt, and Tomasello (2014) agreed, stating that “Five-year-old children are not only accomplished normative learners who adhere to and enforce adults’ norms; they are also creative inventors of their own social realities and norms (p.93). Thus, even when children do not initially learn racial bias or prejudice overtly from adults, children still exhibit stereotypes and prejudices derived from culture (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011; Hirschfeld, 2008; Nash & Miller, 2014) and their own cognition of social categories.

Aboud and Johnson (2012) found that White bias is difficult to eradicate. They examined positive stories for young children explicitly focused on racial diversity. The researchers discovered that even when the story had positive Black characters with interesting and creative story lines, young children still inferred a pro-White message from the story teller, regardless of that person’s race (Johnson & Aboud, 2012). These types of bias influence behavior. Consequently, while children are often kind and fair, exclusion based on race does occur, particularly with children aged five to six (Park, 2011).

In-groups and Out-groups. What becomes significant about this sort of exclusion is that inter-group bias or in-group bias and preferences begin at a very young age and remain stable throughout life. Inter-group or in-group refers to people demonstrating recognized or unrecognized affiliation to a defining social group that differentiates from other groups by race, religion, social class, or economic status, for example White, upper class, suburban, etc. In contrast, out-group refers to those people or groups outside of a defining social group. In a study with an adapted⁵ implicit association test, a Harvard-developed test that measures bias and prejudice (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), children from the dominant culture manifested high levels of implicit preference for their in-group (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). In that study, researchers found that “white six-year-olds in the US manifested implicit ingroup preference at levels statistically identical to white American adults” (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008, p. 249).

For children, the in-group/out-group preferences and bias exhibited varied from Black children to White children. Dunham, Baron, and Banaji (2008) found that “at no age did black American children exhibit an implicit preference for black relative to white. In other words, by age five, Black children scored strikingly similar to Black adults, who show no in-group

⁵ Adapted for children from the adult version (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008).

preference” (p. 252). The dominant culture exerted power over not only the in-group children, but also the out-group.

Advantaged and disadvantaged groups within both races do differ concerning their implicit attitudes (with White advantaged groups showing higher levels of in-group preference), but in both populations, the mean level of implicit preference was stable across development (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). White children also based their in-group preferences on social standing, power, wealth, and superiority—in other words, on the culture in which White is dominant. Hispanic children showed no significant in-group preference when compared to White children, but when comparing themselves to Black children, in-group preference multiplied (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). Aboud (1988) explained that, “social value is the major determinant of prejudice according to social reflection theories. The social value of a group is its perceived status or power in the society” (p. 65). A Newheiser and Olson study (2012) substantiated the supremacy argument, finding that in-group preferences for White children remained constant whether in a school with a dominant White population or a school with a dominant Black population. This data refuted acculturation claims that if children were in a multi-cultural setting, they would lose in-group bias or prejudice against out-groups. However, Aboud (2003) emphasized that highly positive in-group preferences do not automatically and necessarily connote a negative attitude toward the out-group, but simply a slightly less positive attitude than toward their in-group.

As established previously, while White children and White adults are similar in in-group predilection, Black children and Black adults are not. Clark and Clark (1947) found that young Black children overwhelmingly preferred White, unlike Black adults, and equated White with

good and Black with bad. In the Clark and Clark (1947) research the children had the option of choosing Black or White dolls, based on questions such as “who is good,” or “who is the best student.” Aboud (1988) noted that

because the questions were so simple and straightforward, the answers received by Clark and Clark and by other researchers shocked people into realizing that even very young children could experience prejudice toward other groups as well as aversion toward their own. (pp. 8-9)

Critique of the outcomes of the Clark and Clark (1947) experiment exists, mainly due to the unnatural settings and protocols of the experiments (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). In addition, researchers find that children sometimes respond differently based on the adult facilitator. Johnson and Aboud (2012) discovered that children were actually more pro-White toward facilitators after receiving anti-bias messages from both Black and White adults, hypothesizing that children are unable to make sense of anti-bias messages given their strong intergroup bias. Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) noted that some experiments may not “tap the knowledge that children gain in their own everyday worlds” (pp. 194-105), perhaps indicating that the protocols utilized may be relevant to children

Regardless of the criticism leveled toward the Clark and Clark (1947) experiment, other research studies have replicated the Clark and Clark results, most notably Margaret Beale Spencer in a pilot study for CNN (Smith, 2010). Using printed cartoon figures from light to dark, adults asked children questions similar to the Clark and Clark study. Smith (2010) found strong White bias in children aged four to 10 in the CNN study and what was surprising is that

little difference in bias existed from the younger to the older children. Considering the original Clark research occurred prior to the Brown v. Board of education case that ended de jure segregation⁶ in the schools, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which deemed discrimination in many areas against the law, the persistent preference over time of Black children for White was surprising. Katz (2003) reported that before age three, both Black and White children showed mild in-group preference, but by age three, 86% of White children made same race playmate choices. By contrast, only 32% of Black children made same race choices. Given the pertinacity of racial bias, researchers and educators have implemented various interventions designed to abate racism. One of those interventions is racially diverse settings.

Beaubien and Williams (2013) reported that “research shows us racially diverse environments do not automatically educate students about other races or help students form friendships across racial lines” (p. 83). The racial disparity in preference only increased with age (Beaubien & Williams, 2013). Various studies coincided with these findings, but other research data demonstrated that diverse preschool settings offer the best chance to establish meaningful intergroup friendships that may reduce elementary school bias that emerges around third grade.

⁶ De jure segregation refers to the legal separation of groups in society as opposed to de facto segregation, which is separation by choice or by non-legal means, such as associations in housing (Cox, 2010).

Gaias, Gal, Abry, Taylor, and Granger (2018) maintained that without established friendships established in diverse preschools, prejudice steadily increases in children by third grade.

Aboud, Tredoux, Tropp, Brown, Niens, and Noor (2012) researched interventions designed to reduce prejudice in young children. They found that natural exposure to diversity (where children freely choose and diversity was not by design) was the most successful “intervention” with the addition of media a promising complement. Least successful were designed instructional interventions (Aboud, et al., 2012). However, Aboud (1988) asserted that regardless of preschool class diversity, by age seven, Black children began to show a mild in-group preference analogous to the in-group preference White children exhibit. White preference is not only documented in children, but according to the Racial Implicit Association Test, occurs in 75 % of people in the United States who take the test (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013).

Elementary Age Children and Beyond. When Aboud (1988) first studied racial preferences in children, researchers believed that in-group, or same race preference, decreased around age seven. The evidence cited was that children did not engage in the same level of prejudicial talk as they did before age seven. More recently, researchers have tested this conclusion. Dunham, Baron, and Banaji (2008) found that although *explicit* iterations of bias declined at approximately age seven, *implicit* bias continued at similar levels. The implications are that when children begin to understand that expressing racism, bias, or prejudice is not socially acceptable, they suppress their feelings and views in select situations. Xavier de Franca and Monteiro (2013) reported similar discoveries, stating

older children learn to suppress explicit racial prejudice that is prohibited by the prevailing in-group norms, as well as to express it through indirect or veiled attitudes and

behaviours that protect them from self-blame, reprimand or punishment, namely when a non-racial justification is available or when a normative anti-prejudice pressure is absent. Moreover, older children's ability to manage the use of social norms according to contextual demands seems to be the critical socio-cognitive new skill that directly accounts for the emergence of more concealed and aversive expressions of racial prejudice in middle childhood. (p. 269)

Social transmission of norms of behavior affects not only older children's socio-cognitive identity, but impacts children's perspectives at all stages of childhood.

Construction of meaning and self-identity was also expected to emerge around age seven, just as in in-group preferences and bias (Aboud, 1988). However, social science researchers and theorists discovered that socio-cultural influences affect even young children (Göckeritz, Schmidt, & Tomasello, 2014; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vgotsky, 1978). An essential consideration in comprehending childhood prejudice is the strength social norms have over children's behavior. Research shows that children will exhibit higher levels of prejudice if condoned by their in-group (Rutland & Killen, 2015). These group-constructed social standards require conformity or members of the group risk being abandoned by the community (Göckeritz et al., 2014). In the absence of adults, children are effective at constructing their social norms in a mutually agreed upon set of standards (Göckeritz et al., 2014), much as do the adults in society.

Adult Views of Children and Race

Research on adult interactions pertaining to children and race tend to reveal several similar predilections. First, most adults do not want to introduce the concept of race until

children initiate the topic (Vittrup, 2016). Second, adults often believe that children are “colorblind,” that is, that they do not see race or that race is inconsequential (Aboud, 1988; Beaubien & Williams, 2013; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008; Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2016; Katz, 2003; Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001; Vittrup, 2016). Third, many adults are simply uncomfortable around the topic of race, especially White parents (Katz, 2003). All three of these beliefs and preferences can negatively influence children’s developing racial attitudes.

Colorblindness. Colorblindness is defined as not seeing color or race (Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo, 2017, p.5). Interpretations of colorblind or color neutral ideology characterize all people as similar and conclude that all people should be treated equally. Advocates of colorblindness believe that dismissing color or race is useful for moving past racism (Pahlke et al., 2012). Helms (1992) hearkened back to the 1960s Civil Rights movement and the reverse discrimination climate of the 1980s as the impetus of the colorblind approach. Helms (1992) stated that those who advocate for colorblindness perceive it to be the cessation of “discrimination based on race” (p.1). In contrast, critics of a colorblind approach asserted that professing that one does not see color is akin to ignoring cultural assets and the reality of present-day racism, as well as the long and oppressive history of people of color (Pahlke et al., 2012). Most current researchers and advocates categorize colorblind approaches as inherently racist. Vittrup (2016) stated, “In reality, our society is anything but colorblind, and the silence surrounding the topic of race can leave children without guidelines on how to interpret the stereotypes and examples of inequality to which they are exposed” (p.37). Matias, Nishi, and

Sarcedo (2017) asserted that colorblind racism allows White people to ignore race while upholding the White status quo.

Parents and colorblindness. Vittrup (2016) found that parents do not believe that their children possess bias, thus believing that discussions regarding prejudice, bias, or race are unnecessary. Katz (2003) confirmed that mothers and teachers believe children to be “innocently” colorblind and that children will not notice racial differences unless adults highlight those differences (p. 898). Unfortunately, the failure to initiate conversations encompassing race, along with a child that does not question race, may lead adults to the false assumption that the children in their lives do not possess bias (Pahlke et al., 2012). Adults are often dismayed and shocked to find that children do retain and exhibit bias (Aboud, 1988; Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008). If adults are conveying implicit or unconscious social messages to children in regard to race, the message received may not be what the adult would choose to communicate in a planned and careful conversation. As Derman-Sparks and Ramsey (2011) underscored,

even when families and teachers intentionally provide children with accurate information and challenge prejudiced attitudes, children still absorb stereotypes and misinformation from their larger community (extended family, neighbors, peers, and the media). . . . It takes a great deal of persistence, patience, and persuasion to counteract the racial messages in the larger society. (p. 51)

Without that patient and accurate messaging, children are left to construct their “racial meaning making” in the absence of adults (Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2016, p. 76). Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) noted that particularly in the middle class, White parents give “hushed and careful attention” to race, which draws extra attention from children, the opposite of the parents’ intent

(p. 194). The cautious attitude White parents' exhibit when race is referred to may stem from societal norms. Helms (1992) wrote that "polite white persons do not mention color in public—especially their own" (p.5). However, silence conveys its own message.

Message received. First, when adults are silent regarding race, the implicit message conveyed is that race is a taboo topic (Pahlke, Bigler, & Suizzo, 2012). Broadly, what is communicated to children in the absence of adult guidance are stereotypes and biases around race that exist implicitly and sometimes explicitly in the children's world. The children, without direction from adults, must make sense of prejudicial messages in their own limited socio-cognitive manner as they construct social meaning (Vittrup, 2016). Doucet and Adair (2013) stated that when talk of race is absent, children still notice that some groups of people seem to be more important than other groups. The dearth of adult-initiated conversation can lead children to believe that different races than their own are undesirable, leaving them susceptible to developing prejudice against those races (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2100; Vittrup, 2016).

As an example of what can materialize when children are left to their own meaning making about race is that in the United States, where the dominant culture is White, most children regardless of color tend to associate Whiteness with good and Black with bad (Clark & Clark, 1947; Katz, 2003; Smith, 2010). Vittrup (2016) maintained

without specific language, children likely will not get the intended message, so it is important for parents to understand that their communication about race-related issues (or lack thereof) can influence their children's attitudes and intercultural interactions in the long term. (p. 688)

The language parents use, indeed, adults in general, is crucial for children's language acquisition and understanding around race and ethnic differences (Park, 2011).

Katz (2003) studied White parents and their children in research on children and race. These parents proved reluctant to speak to their children about the subject. Katz (2003) speculated that if these participants, who willingly came forward to participate in the race study, were uncomfortable talking about race, the general population would be even less likely to approach the topic. Parents in the study indicated through a survey that they supported racial diversity; however, results of the study showed that these same parents had children who overwhelmingly chose playmates of the same race over children of color. Katz (2003) stated that

I think it is fair to say that at no point in the study did the children exhibit the Rousseau type of color-blindness that many adults expect. In fact, for some, it looked as if color blinds would have been the better description. (p. 905)

If parents are having difficulty helping their children make sense of race, what might be happening in our schools? Are teachers more effective at talking with young children about race?

Teachers. Often, school might be the first time children have the opportunity to talk about race. Beaubien and Williams (2013) noted that

while much of children's racial socialization and attitudes are grounded in the beliefs that occur in the home as children enter preschool, the school community often presents the first opportunity to join this racial conversation in public space. Racial conversations occur every day in the preschool classroom. Often teachers either ignore the conversation or take a surface almost passive way around the dialogue, losing the

opportunity to open and create the discussion of race in a comfortable, safe, learning space. (p. 82)

What emerges is that teachers of young children hold many of the same beliefs that parents hold—children are not cognizant of race, and any explicit conversation about race may introduce prejudice (Katz, 2003). Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, and Powers-Costello (2011) noted that “in a society filled with pervasive rhetoric on valuing everyone regardless of his or her color, we should not be surprised that teachers have internalized the message that a colorblind stance [is] a desirable one” (p. 335). Vittrup (2016) suggested that since children are constructing ideas and identities around race, teachers of early childhood should enter into “developmentally appropriate conversations” on the topic of race (p.37). Because of the diversity of the population, yet the continuance of segregation in schools, Jackson, Bryan and Larkin (2016) argued that teachers must put down the colorblind approach and engage in educating children in racial literacy.

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity among students in K-12 schools (and the P-12 schools that now dot the educational landscape) and the accompanying lack of diversity among the population of teachers suggest that teachers could have a pivotal role to play in mitigating educational inequities and the achievement gap. Teachers are critical resources in all aspects of the educational process (Jackson, Bryan, & Larkin, 2016). Considering that research indicates that young children are biased and prejudiced, and that bias and prejudice continue throughout childhood, albeit in different forms, teachers must be prepared to address racial understanding.

Interventions. Aboud (1988) suggested the desirability of school intervention programs around race and diversity. A review of interventions found evidence of the need for intentionally

intervening with young children regarding race and bias. In young children “prejudice is self-perpetuating because prejudiced children avoid disconfirming experiences and information” (Aboud, Tredoux, Tropp, Brown, Niens, & Noor, 2012, p. 308). Aboud (1988) also noted that young children tend to categorize their prejudice in terms of good vs. bad. Given that orientation, one potential strategy teachers could use is to assist children in broadening their range of emotion. Consequently, children could then identify more easily with a range of ways of being (Aboud, 1988). A second suggestion was that teachers, on a continuous basis, present and affirm different ways of living (Aboud, 1988).

Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (2012) made significant advances in the area of prejudice reduction with their book for teachers, *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves*. The researchers concurred with Aboud (1988) that children receive conflicting messages about racial identity and racial categories. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2012) asserted that “early childhood educators can foster children’s accurate knowledge and positive feelings about their racial identity and about anti-bias relationships with others” (p. 79). They also acknowledge that in the United States, racism continues to impact children and adults. Young children are making sense of race from external factors that affect their internal reasoning—factors ranging from larger societal influences to families to individual experiences. Teachers also play a role that interacts with the aggregated influences (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2012).

Many teachers and schools are addressing race, even with young children. *City Garden*, a Montessori charter school in St. Louis, Missouri, identifies as part of its mission an anti-bias, anti-racist education (Khadaroo, 2018). The Century Foundation undertook a study to identify

charter schools that they coded as “diverse by design,” by “using three different factors—racial and socioeconomic demographics of schools, school leader responses on a survey, and analysis of charter schools’ websites” (Potter & Quick, 2018, para. 2). Khadaroo (2018) reported that *City Garden* was one of eight Montessori charter schools designated as “diverse by design” by the Century Foundation study. Of all charter schools in the United States, only 2% of charter schools overall met this criteria. Of the eight Montessori charter schools listed in the Century Report, two reported having pre-k students in their public charter schools (Potter & Quick, 2018), a small subset of an already limited number of schools.

Outside of the charter school movement, Pennsylvania State University recently undertook a university wide approach to becoming a more diverse community, and the preschool adopted a “race-conscious, anti-bias” approach to teaching (Hooven, Runkle, Strouse, Woods, & Frankenberg, 2018). The teachers in the early childhood program reported that they “soon found that while it is one thing to voice support for such principles, it is something else entirely to bring them to life in the classroom” (Hooven et al., 2018, p. 62). While this school was supported by the University, Aboud et al. (2012) found that “conditions known to enhance the benefits of contact are not always implemented in community and school settings. Furthermore, the rigorous designs used in small-scale laboratory research are rarely found in evaluations of school programs” (p. 309). Hooven, et al. (2018) emphasized that “teaching practices are notoriously slow to change, as are deep-seated beliefs and assumptions about race” (p. 62).

Inhibiting Beliefs. Milner (2017a) noted what he defined as “opportunity gap strategies,” or the attitudes or beliefs of teachers that prevent children of color from succeeding. They are “colorblindness, the myth of meritocracy, cultural conflicts, deficit mindsets and low

expectations, and social context neutrality” (Milner, 2010) (as quoted in Milner, 2017a, p.3).

What emerged in Milner's list is that the opportunity gap beliefs or attitudes are akin to those that inhibit parents and teachers from addressing race with young children, notably social context neutrality and colorblindness. Again, silence regarding race means children construct their own knowledge and meaning around race. Delpit (2006) stated that when teachers ignore race, they are ignoring children and cause children to question their own worth. Other factors, such as the myth of meritocracy, cultural conflicts, deficit mindsets, and low expectations, can be components of the implicit bias that young children and children, in general, absorb from the adults in their environments. A solution to deficit mindsets and racial inequity may be to better prepare teachers to address race and racism within the classroom. Consequently, are teachers receiving instruction on the educational strategies they need to address diversity and race effectively?

Teacher education programs and race. Given the diversity of the population, teacher education programs are likely cognizant that they must prepare teachers to talk about race. Despite that, Pollack, Deckman, and Shalaby (2011) stated that “teacher educators share no unified definition of what an educator prepared for diversity actually looks like, how such an educator should get prepared, or how his or her preparation could best be assessed” (p. 211). While no unified definition exists, one aspect of preparing teachers necessitates that teachers, particularly White teachers, examine their own biases and prejudices (Matias, Henry, & Darland, 2017; Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo 2017). Ladson-Billings was instrumental as a key teacher educator who incorporated studies of bias and race. Milner (2017a) stated,

An essential finding from her [Ladson-Billing's] research was that teachers from any racial and ethnic background could be successful with any racial group of students when they possessed or developed the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, beliefs, skills, and practices necessary to meet student needs. It is essential to remember that white is a race that should be investigated, just like other racialized categories. (p. 3)

Since in the United States the teaching profession is approximately 82% White (The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce, 2016), investigating the concept of Whiteness is crucial. While those numbers include only elementary, middle and secondary teachers, a 2002 study reported that 78% of all teachers of three to four year olds are White (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Because the population of children is more diverse than that of teachers, developing cultural competency around race, and apprehending that White is a race, with attending cultural components, is a necessary component of meeting student's needs.

Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2016) found that often White student teachers claim race neutrality or colorblindness. A colorblind approach allows White teacher candidates comfort, as the belief allows them to avoid interrogating their own Whiteness in a racialized world. Helms (1992)⁷ defined this stage of White identity as the “contact stage,” which is the first stage in

⁷ Although Helms wrote this book in the 90's, her White racial identity trajectory is still in use.

developing a White racial identity. This stage is “characterized by an innocence and ignorance about race and racial issues...the person assumes that other people are ‘raceless,’ too” (p. 24).

Progressing beyond the contact stage can be challenging for White teacher candidates. DiAngelo (2011) conveyed that “when an educational program does directly address racism and the privileging of whites, common white responses include anger, withdrawal, emotional incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance” (p. 55). Ultimately, disrupting the comfort levels of White teachers is necessary to progress beyond colorblind and race-neutral teaching. Matias, Montoya, and Nishi (2016) maintained that "teacher education must feel uncomfortable talking about White supremacy and the daily manifestations of Whiteness to achieve the ideal of antiracism” (p.15).

Nash and Miller (2015) found that their early childhood teacher candidates responded to issues of race with “discourses to abdicate themselves from responsibility of confronting issues of race and racism (p. 196). Milner (2012) challenged teachers to reject colorblind ideologies, as these orientations prevent teachers from seeing the damaging ways that implicit racism manifests in curriculum and classroom practices. According to Milner (2012), acknowledging race-centric manifestations in everyday life is crucial to teachers’ understanding of their worldview and

outlook. Juarez and Hayes (2014) claimed that “first, what has to be understood is that racism is an endemic part of American Society. The problem with Whiteness is the refusal to consider the everyday realities of race and racism” (p. 335). A lack of attention to race perpetuates a continuation of White privilege and frameworks of Whiteness that define educational experience.

Outside of a White teaching experience, Delpit’s (2006) research revealed the narratives of teacher candidates of color. Delpit found that for student teachers of color, the university curriculum maintained a dominant White-centered discourse while devaluing the experiences and voices of students of color. For many students of color, cultural norms value narrative discourse, and stories are important, as indicated in Critical Race Theory. Discounting narratives means discounting cultures. Delpit (2006) explained that in the university, “discourse is more valued if it reflects independence of context, analysis, and objectification of experience” (p.109) which is correlated with written text. Some university programs center Whiteness as the standard mode for teaching and may be blind that the instructional and curricular approaches they utilize are more appropriate for White students than students of color (Milner, 2015a). The difficulty is compounded because faculty in most university teacher education programs are overwhelmingly White (Delpit, 2006; Matias, Nishi, & Sarcedo 2017; Milner, 2015a).

Whiteness and Teachers. Because educators and students in teacher education are primarily White, difficulties emerge from the dominant, privileged perspective inherent in that Whiteness. Vittrup (2016) found that some White pre-service teachers exhibit discomfort and resistance when presented with “multicultural” coursework. Milner (2016) discovered that White teachers are reluctant to say even the words race, privilege, and oppression, and often felt that race is given too much emphasis in teacher education programs. Matias, Montoya, and

Nishi (2016) added that if teacher education programs are to “break free” from Whiteness, paying attention to racism, and the White supremacy embedded in structures and institutions, particularly in education, is necessary to achieve that end (p. 15). Arguably, if teachers are hesitant to use words like race and privilege, attending to the concept of a cultural racism that permeates American society might be difficult to apprehend.

Milner (2016) suggested that teacher education programs need to change their approach from integrating multicultural content in a few courses to embedding issues of opportunity and racial knowledge throughout all the courses in the curriculum. Delpit (2006) maintained that university teacher education courses must “share what writers and thinkers of diverse cultures have to say among themselves,” in all areas of the liberal arts to abate the overwhelming use of content from White Western men (p. 181). Changing the cultural orientation of teacher education programs may be difficult, partly because of the dominance of White teacher educators, who may not recognize the ways that Whiteness is integrated into their curriculum and systems, and who possibly maintain implicit bias toward the experiences and narratives of students and professors of color (Delpit, 2006; Matias, Montoya, & Nishi, 2016; Sleeter, 2017; Taylor, 2009). Debs and Brown (2017) proposed that in particular, Montessori teacher education programs “supplement their Montessori training with training specifically for teaching diverse learners in public Montessori schools” (p.9).

Montessori

History. Maria Montessori began her work in 1907 in the San Lorenzo tenements, an area of Rome populated by the working poor. She developed her approach to education working

with the children of these tenements, developing not only a philosophy of education but also a full complement of hands-on materials (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). The two world wars Montessori lived through influenced her work greatly, especially her work for peace through education (Povell, 2010). Other influences included her initial commitment to the mentally challenged children that led to her employment in San Lorenzo, and her struggles to gain her education as a doctor (Boyd, 2018). The American Montessori Website (2018a) states that Montessori education “is a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood. Dr. Montessori's Method has been time-tested, with over 100 years of success in diverse cultures throughout the world(para. 1).

Montessori was not only interested in the developmental stages of learning, as in Piaget’s theories, but also in education that was personally individualized according to a child’s needs. She was a proponent of independence, believing that children’s choice, freedom within limits, movement, and peer learning were crucial to their education (Stansbury, 2012). Montessori perceived the need for a holistic education, as much concerned with the spiritual growth of the child as the mental growth. Montessori visualized education as a path to peace, and recognized the child as the conduit through which world peace could be realized, if children were educated with her model of respect, independence, and community collaboration (Stansbury, 2012). Montessori’s social reforms included working for peace and instigating in adults a deep respect for the child.

Montessori lectured extensively on children as the only path to peace in the world, as evidenced by her speeches compiled in *Education and Peace* (2007). She stated that “an education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual

development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live” (Montessori, 2015/1949, p. 27). While she called for “young people to understand the times in which they live,”(2015/1949, p.27) which could be construed as a call to understand racism and discrimination as it exists in the lives of children today, whether or not Montessori teachers would internalize and define the message in that way is unclear. Moretti (2013) concluded that

It is evident that Montessori’s life work of social reform indicates a broad reform agenda that was shaped from her first reform experiences as an adult, fully expecting that education would continue taking on the oppressed and downtrodden. As we consider the origins of social reform, we cannot overlook the power of San Lorenzo as the ultimate foundation for social reform and goal for peace in Montessori’s life. (p. 17)

What can be extrapolated from Montessori’s concept of social reform as it pertains to the issue of racism in the United States is unclear, but her focus on children and education as a means to reform through peace is widely documented.

Because of her focus on children’s individualized education, and her integration of world culture and cultural geography, some see Montessori as a viable alternative for children of all races (Jor’dan, 2018; Stansbury, 2012). However, Stansbury (2012) asserted that Montessori teachers do not always have the cultural needs and competencies of the children in mind when they present cultural subjects. Consequently, ascertaining whether the Montessori classroom is meeting the needs of children of color is difficult.

Montessori Teachers and Schools. While studies exist on Montessori public school settings, particularly at the elementary ages (Debs, 2016; Debs & Brown, 2017), little exists on

Montessori early childhood settings with regard to children of color (Ansari & Winsler, 2014). In addition, none of the three accrediting agencies of Montessori teacher preparation in the United States record teacher candidates' race or ethnicity (Debs & Brown, 2017). Debs and Brown (2017) reported that a survey done by The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector found that 69% of Montessori teacher trainees were White and that 90% were female (p. 7). Ansari and Winsler (2014) noted that most studies of Montessori early childhood settings reflected a White, upper-class orientation and did not take into account children of color, or children from low-income backgrounds (p. 1068). Dating from Montessori's inception in the United States to the present day, proponents of Montessori and the students came from a largely, White, middle class background (Jordan, 2017; Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Currently, the Montessori public charter school and alternative specialty schools movement shows promise for students of color (Debs, 2016; Jordan, 2017). However, the complexity of navigating the school choice protocols can still lead to gentrification and White centrality (Debs, 2016).

Cultural Relevancy of Montessori Curriculum Today. Ansari and Winsler (2014) compared the academic and social gains of Latino and African-American children when

attending schools with the HighScope curriculum⁸ and the Montessori approach. The researchers found that African-American children benefitted from the HighScope curriculum, while Latino children made significant gains in the Montessori curriculum (Ansari & Winsler, 2014). One possible explanation was that the Montessori curriculum incorporated more of the Latino children's culture into the setting, instead of expecting Latino children to linguistically and culturally adapt to a more mainstream context, which is consistent with Montessori's philosophy of incorporating a child's culture into the school environment (Ansari & Winsler, 2014). Banks and Maixner (2016) pointed out that Montessori education, particularly through its emphasis on Cosmic Education (which explains in part that all children have a critical role in the functioning of the universe), proposed to be both culturally and individually inclusive of all students. As such, they reasoned, Montessori schools are an ideal setting to incorporate ideas of social justice, including racial and ethnic equity (Banks & Maixner, 2016).

Banks and Maixner (2016) researched the efforts of one urban, racially, and economically diverse Montessori charter school's attempts to integrate social justice education principles into the curriculum and school environment, finding that although administration was receptive,

⁸ HighScope is an early childhood curriculum and program that offers active, participatory learning and scaffolding. HighScope is a curriculum adapted by many Head Start preschools

parents were resistant. Parents had apprehension over the integration, and defaulted to beliefs in colorblindness or approaches that minimize race (Banks & Maixner, 2016, p.7). The study focused on school administration, and parent experiences and reactions, thus a discussion of teacher's attitudes regarding racial and ethnically equitable approaches was absent. However, the findings regarding parent's apprehensions over discussions and integration of race and ethnicity coincide with studies of other parent and teacher responses to children and race, most of which found that parents and teachers believe that children do not see race.

Stansbury (2012) studied Montessori administrators and teachers to determine what practices they enacted to address the cultural differences of children of color. Stansbury (2012) found that teachers and administrators in the study were unaware of the bias and unconscious racism perpetuated in their environments. Stansbury (2012) pointed out that while other school organizations promote and include training on racial and ethnic equity, the two large Montessori organizations in the United States have just begun to include equity presentations at conferences, and found that leadership has a "lack of awareness" around equity issues (p. 134).

Predominantly, research on Montessori and racial equity revealed either implicit bias or a lack of awareness around race and equity pedagogy. Most teachers and administrators had not received training in racial equity and culturally relevant teaching strategies (Debs & Brown, 2017; Stansbury, 2012), and exhibited signs of implicit bias and colorblindness (Banks & Maixner, 2016; Stansbury, 2012). In one of the few studies focused on Montessori and culturally diverse preschoolers, Montessori education did not improve the learning outcomes of Black, low-income children over mainstream preschool, although it did benefit Latino children (Ansari

& Winsler, 2014). Broadly, scarce information exists on Montessori early childhood teachers and Montessori public and private preschool practices around racial equity and pedagogy.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Montessori early childhood teachers are approaching the topics of race and racial bias in their classrooms. More specifically, the intent was to identify how Montessori teachers react to and address race talk and/or bias, and what Montessori teachers present or teach to children regarding race and/or racial bias. Alternatively, if Montessori teachers were not approaching race or racial bias directly, this study examined whether an alternative or indirect means of approaching race and racial bias was used in the classroom. In addition, this study explored whether Montessori teachers received instruction in their training regarding how to approach race and racial bias in the classroom.

This chapter is divided into eight sections: Research Method and Design, Research Questions, Researcher Positionality, Participant Selection and Setting, Data Collection Procedures, Field Tests, Limitations and Delimitations, and Ethical Considerations.

Research Method and Design

The research methods consisted of a qualitative survey and a data-prompted interview approach. Qualitative surveys differ from quantitative surveys in that they measure diversity rather than means or other such parameters (Jansen, 2010). Qualitative surveys are a relatively new way of structuring qualitative research. The qualitative survey produces data that closely emulates the narrative approach (Kwasnicka, Dombrowski, White, & Sneihotta, 2015). Narrative research is a type of qualitative research that emerged from the humanities. In narrative research, the researcher studies the lives of individuals through their stories (Creswell,

2014; Merriam, 2009). One purpose of this narrative information was to stimulate conversation and evoke memories and ideas in the data-prompted interview. Although the experiences and ideas captured in the surveys would not be stories by definition, they were open-ended narrative stories of the teacher in the classroom.

Many of the queries and prompts developed for the survey were informed by the work of Milner (2017b) and Vittrup (2016). Both researchers developed surveys to gather information on race talk in classrooms. Milner's (2017b) survey sample consisted of preservice and in-service teachers of all academic levels through high school. Vittrup (2016) researched preschool and elementary teachers. Milner (2017b) noted both the difficulty teachers have in engaging in race talk and the belief of most teachers that their teacher education programs did not prepare them well in the areas of race and racial bias. Vittrup (2016) found that many teachers adopted a colorblind approach and did not feel it was their responsibility to address race and racial bias in the classroom. In this study, both researcher's surveys (and their findings) were foundational to the development of the research design.

Erzikova and Berger (2016) successfully employed the technique of survey followed by interview in a study of leadership by first administering a survey and then providing the discoveries from the surveys to interviewees for validation and triangulation of the survey data. For the purposes of this Montessori teacher research, a similar design was employed. The Montessori teacher survey results were coded using MAXQDA, a qualitative coding software program, and the findings were used to inform the questions for the data-prompted semi-structured online interviews. The data-prompted interview was designed to elicit deeper understandings and information regarding the initial survey responses. The coding for the

surveys and interviews proceeded from open coding to axial coding as the categories emerged (Merriam, 2009). As in all qualitative research, the theories emerged through inductive reasoning resulting from analyzing the survey and interview data. The interview was also guided by the additional questions provoked after reviewing the Vittrup (2016) and the Milner (2017b) survey responses.

Data-prompted interviews are part of an approach that use data or objects to obtain more meaningful responses from participants. Graphic elicitation, relational maps, photos, art, and other artifacts are types of data or objects used to evoke sincere interview responses. Copeland and Agnosto (2012) stated that “the use of graphic techniques stimulates participants to recall knowledge and experiences, which can complement and extend data collected through the interviewing process” (p. 514). Kwasnicka, Dombrowski, White, and Sneihotta (2015) described how data-prompted interviews involve participants in more productive interviews by enhancing their memories and inviting deeper participation.

In this study, interviewees received an infographic that represented the themes from the initial coding of the survey data, which may have led to responses that may have been derived from memories and ideas provoked by interactions with the survey. Additionally, the visuals may have elicited deeper responses from some interviewees, while the narrative content of the infographic may have appealed more to others. Initially, interviewees were allowed the opportunity to either disagree, agree, or remain neutral to the information in the infographic, which in itself was a form of data response, and allowed validation of the survey responses.

The data-prompted interview employed the techniques of the semi-structured interview, one of the most common means of gathering qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews “are

generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). The predetermined open-ended questions were formulated from the surveys and initial coding of the survey data. However, semi-structured interviews need not only ask the formulated questions. The questions may be additive, in the moment of the interview, and/or prompted by answers given by the interviewee. If the interviewee was confused by a question, wording was changed to elicit comprehension. Prompts to evoke further information regarding unusual or interesting answers may also be included (Patten, 2014). While semi-structured interviews are typically face-to-face, technology offers the ability to conduct interviews online, as they were in this study.

Online semi-structured interviews are becoming more common (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Online interviews can save time, cost, and overcome geographical barriers (Shapka, Domene, Khan, & Yang, 2016). Shapka, Domene, Khan, and Yang (2016) found that when comparing online and face-to-face interviews, the data collected was equivocal in quality. The researchers did determine that online interviews required more time as opposed to face-to-face interviews, especially to build rapport. Shapka, Domene, Khan, and Yang (2016) cautioned researchers to be cognizant of the additional time and technology requirements, and suggested the researcher build in patience as part of the process. Data-prompted interviews also allow participants to reflect by using the data and graphic to offer guidance to the interviewee during the interview (Kwasnicka, Dombrowski, White, & Sniehotta, 2015). Limitations of the online interview may include depersonalization demonstrated by eye contact and “touch,” or the affective atmosphere (Adams-Hutcheson & Longhurst, 2017). One benefit of the data-prompted

material that may assist overcome or minimize the shortcomings of online interviewing include participants promptly moving to substantive analysis of questions (Kwasnicka, Dombrowski, White, & Sniehotta, 2015).

Although this research framework shared characteristics with grounded theory in that the themes generated attempted to explain Montessori teachers' approaches to race, explanatory theory was initially beyond the scope of the study (Creswell, 2014; Jansen, 2010). However, the survey employed a sample size of 24, which fell in between the 20-30 usually recommended for grounded research (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, as the data collection of the participant responses proceeded from survey to interview, the inductive process of analysis produced connections and findings that coincided with practices that denote grounded theory.

Grounded theory is a research methodology where the end theory emanates from participant responses, thus the resultant theory is "grounded" in data (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). In grounded theory, a core overarching category is developed, under which all the other categories are subsumed and connected (Orcher, 2014). In grounded theory, a description of process explains the relationships of the categories, often illustrated by a diagram (Orcher, 2014). As with other qualitative research, the inductive constant comparative method of data analysis is utilized, the difference being that in grounded theory, the methodology serves to assist the researcher in developing theory, as opposed to methods where the researcher works from a theory (Merriam, 2009). In this study, a shift occurred from descriptive analysis to the grounded method of explanatory theory.

The research in this study did not conform precisely to any other widely recognized subgenre of qualitative research, such as ethnography, case study, or phenomenology, although

all qualitative research implies some degree of phenomenology (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). This study closely aligned with what Merriam (2009) described as a “basic, interpretive study” (p. 22) in that, in attempting to understand how teachers function, and perhaps why, this research was devised to explicate how educational practitioners construct their world (Merriam, 2009). This research was concerned with finding “recurring patterns or themes supported by the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 22-23). The study was bounded, as early childhood teachers from a national database of teachers who are interested in being research participants were the participants. The American Montessori Society maintains this national database.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the question: how are Montessori early childhood teachers approaching teaching and talking about race and racial bias with children in the classroom. Several questions supported the central question:

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do Montessori ECE teachers talk about race and racial bias with young children?

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do Montessori ECE teachers teach about race and racial bias?

Research Question 3

RQ3: If Montessori ECE teachers do not teach and/or talk directly with children about race and racial bias, what are some ways that race is addressed in the classroom?

Research Question 4:

RQ4: What instruction and guidance from their teacher education program did Montessori ECE teachers receive in discussing and addressing race and racial bias?

Researcher Positionality

As a second generation Latinx woman⁹, my own intersections (Cro, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013) informed my positionality. Apart from fully identifying with the in-group of the dominant culture, nor fully a member of the out-group as I can pass for White, my own unease at the edge of the borderland permeated my perceptions. Acknowledging my conflicted identity and interrogating my responses and interpretations were an ongoing aspect of this research, and I acknowledge the possibility of bias in my perceptions. In turn, I am aware of the precariousness of slipping into appropriation in using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a frame and lens. I deferred to those that have built and continue to build the theory as the experts in their own stories and employ CRT as a foundational belief around structural racism. I relied on the scholarship of Bell (1997), Crenshaw (2002), Ladson-Billings (1995), Milner (2015b) and others to guide in my sense making of this theory. In terms of Critical Whiteness Studies, I saw the need for all who are working in a system of White superiority to examine and critically respond to that inequity. Examining White supremacy and a White-racialized identity were necessary

⁹ In this section, the researcher uses first person conventions as the information is personal.

work in understanding how race operates in society and specifically in the schools. Because of the prevalence of Whiteness in teaching and in teacher education, the combination of both frameworks was a necessary funnel for the responses of the participants in this study. In using these frameworks, I in no way meant to diminish or annex a space that is not mine to inhabit.

I am a Montessori educator and as such, may be overly sympathetic to the views and philosophy of Montessori teachers. I worked with young children, and realize the difficulty of attending to all that is required of the early childhood teacher. Care must always be taken to separate what *is* from what *is possible* and desired. Clearly, a professional distance is and was crucial to careful, rigorous, and neutral research. My work in education has led me to believe that dogmatic adherence to any one philosophy does an intellectual disservice to the blossoming of scholarship. Understanding the benefits as well as the limitations of any approach represents a nuanced understanding of the complexity of education and the mind of the young child.

As a teacher educator, educational philosophy is central to my work. With this research, I hoped to aid other teacher educators in developing effective pedagogy in order to enable new and developing teachers to be as effective as possible.

Participant Selection and Setting

Participants were early childhood teachers who responded to the American Montessori Society's call to the American Montessori Society Montessori teacher research panel. In an effort to increase scholarly Montessori research, the American Montessori Society developed this database designed to provide researchers with convenient access to participants. The database has a national, if not international reach, and all except one of the participants for this study were

from the United States. The respondents to this study indicated on the informed consent letter if they would be willing to further participate in the research by answering questions that emerged from survey data through online interviews.

Data Collection Procedures

After IRB approval of the study, informed consent letters were emailed to all potential participants (Appendix A). As soon as consent was obtained, surveys (Appendix B) were developed in Qualtrics and sent to all participants. Subsequently, the answers were coded using MAXQDA, a qualitative coding program. The resulting themes were used to develop an interview protocol (Appendix C). The interviews were conducted online through the Collaborate Ultra platform. Collaborate Ultra was chosen to ensure the privacy of the data, as the researcher had access to a private video conferencing “room” and the resources to convert interviews to MP4s, allowing for the transcription of the original interviews in an expedited timeframe. As soon as possible after the interviews, the researcher hand recorded field notes and memos regarding the interviews to capture any impressions or themes, as well as editing the notes taken during the interview. A confidential transcription service transcribed the interview audio recordings. The researcher compared interview recordings to the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. Once the researcher verified the accuracy of the transcriptions, the researcher sent the drafts of the interviews to the interviewees via email. At this time, the interviewees verified their draft for interview transcription accuracy. All of the interviewees reviewed and authenticated their draft of the interview within a week of receiving the transcription. At that time, the researcher removed all personal identifiers. The MP4s were deleted at the conclusion of the

research. The researcher then began the process of grouping like responses with open and then axial coding using MAXQDA, finally proceeding to overall themes.

Field Tests

Surveys were field tested by three colleagues who are American Montessori Society early childhood teachers. The surveys were sent to those colleagues in an email via Qualtrics, the same survey software that was used in the actual research study. Several questions were changed or revised based on their answers. For example, the question “How do you teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class” was changed to “How do you *explicitly* (italics added) teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class” as answers to that question in the field test elicited responses indicating indirect teaching methods, such as cultural books or geography activities. In addition, the question, “If you don't directly talk or teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class, what are some ways race and racial bias might be addressed in your classroom” was changed to “If you don't *explicitly* (italics added) talk or teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class, what are some ways race and racial bias might be *indirectly* (italics added) addressed in your classroom” (Appendix B) to aid in differentiating that question. Another question, “What messages about race and racial bias do you think early childhood children in your class receive from outside of your classroom” was eliminated, as the answers were predictable and similar. The question, “To what extent do you think children in your class may be racially biased?” was added to elicit more information on whether or not teachers believed young children capable of bias. Finally, the first question, “How did your Montessori training prepare you to teach about race and racial bias with children in early childhood” was moved to the last position on the open-ended portion of the survey.

When the question was in the initial position the participant could not consider the answers from the previous questions for background. The reason for the change was that the participants' ideas around what their training provided may have changed when participants considered their answers to the previous questions.

Race and ethnicity categories from the field-tested document reflect those proposed for the 2020 Census, now under review by the current administration (Wang, 2018). The proposed changes for 2020 include a Middle Eastern or Northern African designation. The researcher also added the designation "sub-Saharan African" to provide a choice beyond African American or Northern African for participants. Beside race and ethnicity, the demographic data questions included age range, region where participant grew up and region where participant now lives, as well as gender. Other questions on the survey included years of teaching, highest degree conferred, and credentialing agency of the participant's Montessori credential. These additional questions were included to allow connections to emerge between the open-ended questions and their resultant themes as related to the demographic information. Although a comparative study of the demographics in relation to survey and interview responses was beyond the scope of this study, possible connections might suggest further research studies.

Based on the answers from the field test, interview questions emerged from the surveys that were field tested on one of the same colleagues (Appendix E). That colleague was invited by email to participate in an online mock interview using Collaborate Ultra, an online conferencing tool. Consequently, the researcher could address procedures and technical issues with Collaborate Ultra prior to the actual interviews with participants in the study. The technology performed as expected and the questions were clear to the mock interviewee.

Data Collection

The researcher first applied to the American Montessori Society for permission to use their database of teachers. When approval was granted, a purposive sample of 218 Montessori early childhood teachers who had consented to participate in research was emailed to the researcher. Of the 218 provided emails, eight were duplicates and 12 were non-deliverable. The remaining potential participants were sent an introductory informed consent letter (Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the study, outlining their unique position to contribute to the study, and inviting them to contribute to the research. The letter also assured the participants of confidentiality and explained the means of assuring confidentiality, including ensuring anonymity by deleting confidential information, the use of confidential transcription services to transcribe interviews, the use of a password protected computer to store data, and the destruction of research materials at the completion of the study. The American Montessori Society (AMS) asked that this additional information be included in the letter:

This project is made possible by the generous support of Montessori educators like yourself who have volunteered to participate in the Montessori Teacher Research Panel. You are making a valuable contribution to research efforts that are critical to the future of Montessori education. If you have any questions about your participation in the Montessori Teacher Research Panel, please contact the AMS Research Coordinator at research@amshq.org. (A. Murray, Personal Communication, August 17, 2018)

The American Montessori Society Research Coordinator also asked that researchers share any dissemination of the findings with AMS.

Once the electronically signed informed consent letters were returned, respondents who answered in the affirmative were sent the survey (Appendix B) via email through Qualtrics. Participants were given a two-week period in which to return the survey. Approximately 25 respondents were desired, according to grounded theory protocols (Creswell, 2014). After the passage of the first week, a reminder letter was emailed (Appendix C). At the end of the second week, 24 survey responses and the resultant information was collected and the initial coding was instituted using the qualitative software MAXQDA.

Following the coding of the survey results in MAXQDA, the themes were noted in an infographic (Appendix D). These themes informed the open-ended interview questions. The infographic was also utilized for verification of the survey results by the interviewees and as necessary for prompts during the interviews (Appendix E). This data in graphic form fulfilled both the criteria for a data-prompted interview and graphic elicitation. Interview selection included those participants who consented to an interview on the initial survey. Because 13 of the 24 participants indicated interest in the interview, and five or six participants were desired, participants were chosen utilizing a simple random sampling process through “Research Randomizer,” an online randomizer. Six participants were chosen for the interview. Sample sizes vary greatly in qualitative research and the appropriate quantity is dependent on the study design (Morse, 2000). Because the survey informed the interview, a sample size of six provided adequate supplementary data. The interview participants were scheduled for interviews with “Signup.com.” In addition, they were sent the infographic via email with a short explanatory note. Five of the six were able to actually be interviewed, as one interviewee had intervening

complications. Interviews occurred over a weekend via Collaborate Ultra. During the interim between the surveys and the interviews, survey data was further analyzed.

After each interview, interview field notes were taken immediately to note any emerging trends, patterns, or themes. Additional questions were added to the interviews based on the field notes. MP4s were made of the interviews and the original interviews on Collaborate Ultra were deleted to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Interview recordings were compared to the transcriptions to ascertain reliability. All personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts, and minor editing occurred due to simple transcription errors. Interview transcripts were then sent to participants to authenticate. After participants authenticated the transcriptions, which required approximately one week, the coding was initiated with the transcripts and field notes, again utilizing MAXQDA.

Data Analysis

The survey results were initially coded with an open coding process, proceeding from broad similarities to more specificity. The survey narratives were comparable to focus group data. As such, the analysis followed a loose grounded theory approach. The survey narratives were first read several times to gain a general sense of the data. The researcher then did a close line by line reading, where broad codes were assigned. Next, those general codes were scrutinized, and more specific categories and subcategories were developed through the axial coding process. During this phase of the process, research notes and journals were again utilized to make connections between and within the categories. Codes were subsequently modified. After this aspect of the coding was finalized, an independent analyst reviewed the coding scheme

and independently coded the data. The code book containing codes and their definitions was provided to the independent analyst along with the survey responses. Intercoder reliability is crucial to verifying the research validity and quality. Typically, 90% agreement between coders indicates a high degree of reliability, and 80% is acceptable for most studies (Cho, 2008).

Initially, agreement between the independent coding analyst and researcher was approximately 80%. Through email and telephone conversations, the researcher and independent analyst came to agreement over the coding. Initially, differences resulted from definitions of what exactly constituted talk or training about race and/or racial bias. After coming to agreement and slightly revising the training code definitions, intercoder reliability was ascertained at approximately 93%, a percentage which equates to a high degree of reliability.

An infographic (see Appendix D) was created from the initial survey coding to inform interview participants of emerging themes prior to the data-prompted interview. This tool was provided to assist the interviewees in reactivating their survey responses and in eliciting more in-depth answers to interview questions. In addition, the information was useful for verifying and triangulating the survey data with the interviewees. The interviews were recorded and the interview mp4s were sent to a professional transcription service, and the transcriptions were approved first by the researcher and then the interviewees. One interview did not record. The researcher compiled the interview notes, sent them to the interviewee, and the interviewee ascertained their accuracy. The transcribed interviews were then coded in an open coding process, utilizing the researcher's interview notes to add context when necessary. To ensure understanding, interview transcripts were read several times prior to coding. Codes were

subsequently modified after closer consideration and additional codes added to more accurately reflect the data.

Analytic coding was the next step in this process. Analytic coding required in-depth reading of and reflection on the interview transcripts and initial coding. After analytic coding was finalized the same process with regard to coding with the survey was followed for the interview transcripts with an independent analyst. The code book was provided to the independent analyst, along with the transcripts of the interviews. The process of verification resulted in several emails to once again clarify the training code, until agreement was reached. The main concern was similar to the survey question, which was what constituted training on race and racial bias. Again, intercoder reliability is crucial to verifying the research validity and quality. Typically, 90% agreement indicates a high degree of reliability, and 80% is acceptable for most studies (Cho, 2008). Intercoder reliability for the interviews was determined to be approximately 90%. After this more focused coding was completed, general themes were determined, which are discussed in Chapter Four.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study explored approaches used by Montessori early childhood teachers concerning race, bias, and race talk in their classrooms. While the study is not widely generalizable based on the small sample size and specificity of the participants, the results may provide teachers and teacher educators information to assist in defining best practice for teaching young children about race and racial bias.

A delimitation of the study is that the researcher chose to use participants in the study who had volunteered to be a part of the American Montessori Society teachers' research panel. Many credentialed Montessori teachers are in practice throughout the United States, including teachers who are American Montessori Society, Association Montessori International, graduates of other Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) accredited teacher education programs, and some educated by non-MACTE approved institutions. Any or all of those teachers outside the panel may have collective or individual insights that differ from the purposive sample. The purposive sample was chosen because of the availability of the American Montessori Society teacher database for researchers.

Additionally, this study was designed for a specific and defined period of time. A longer research period with additional participants may have revealed different results. Further, the added analysis of demographics in conjunction with survey and interview answers might have provided further insight. That comparison was beyond the scope of this particular inquiry. Also, the researcher chose not to measure the impact of the graphic elicitation tool, the infographic. Information of value may have been available.

Limitations included the possibility of implicit bias by the researcher and/or the interviewees. The researcher viewed practices through foundational tenets of Critical Race Theory, which assumes racial bias in institutional structures and in individuals. The teachers could consciously or subconsciously have noted this orientation and adjusted their answers accordingly. In addition, in an attempt to present themselves well, the teachers may have self-reported that they used approaches and orientations that they, in fact, do not normally employ, but chose simply for effect on the surveys and during the interviews. Further, because teachers

who volunteered for the survey and interview understood that the research centered on race and racial bias, their own comfort level with race talk might have been higher than those who did not come forward.

Finally, the researcher herself is an AMS educated Montessori teacher and may have unconscious bias both favorably and unfavorably toward Montessori teaching and AMS teachers specifically. The researcher attempted to avoid bias through close personal reflection and careful attention to questions throughout the study and in coding. Often, this process is called “bracketing” and is more closely identified with phenomenological research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Another name for bracketing is epoche (Merriam, 2009). In epoche or bracketing, the researcher attempts to set aside or “bracket” bias, prejudice, and other belief systems in order to better comprehend the experience of the research. For this study, because the researcher has been a Montessori teacher and continues to teach adults in this field, care was taken to avoid making assumed connections in what the interviewee revealed as opposed to the actual information shared by the interviewee. One specific tactic to employ in bracketing is to keep a journal that notes personal feelings, thoughts, and orientations that may influence the research (Tufford & Newman, 2010). By using a personal journal prior to the interviews, the researcher did uncover potential issues in research bias, such as a favorable bias toward Montessori education and was able to bracket those issues, although unconscious bias can still affect analysis. To compensate for potential implicit bias, the researcher employed more pre-written interview questions and probes than are generally adopted in semi-structured interviews. The researcher also reflected on the importance of avoiding assumptions and bias prior to each interview by noting that personal prompt at the top of the interview question form (Appendix E).

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2014), a plethora of ethical issues exist for researchers to contemplate. In this particular study, concern for the participants was paramount. Respect for the participant teachers as competent professionals was important in that a wide range of experiences and orientations are relevant to the practice of teaching. Because there exists a wide range of personal orientations toward considerations of race and racism, extreme caution was exercised to avoid imposing judgment on teachers' views. The researcher was clear with the participants that the end goal was merely to understand how race and racial bias are approached, and that the researcher was not valuing one approach over another. The researcher conveyed that the honest reflections of the participants was desired and their anonymity was protected.

The possibility existed that interview conversations would illicit uncomfortable feelings around race and racism, especially for White participants. Helms (1992) reported that responses to identification of Whiteness as privilege born of racism can consist of denial, confusion, scapegoating, intellectualization, and confrontation. Some of the self-initiated discoveries may have resulted in confusion and distress. These responses are largely emotional responses to a threatened self-identity, and require understanding of when participants may need a break, when changing or abandoning a line of questioning is necessary, or ultimately, recognizing that the interview needs to be terminated. The participant's right to take breaks, move on to a new questions, or end the interview was reiterated at the beginning of each interview, as noted in the interview guide (Appendix E).

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) exhorted teachers dealing with difficult conversations around race with families to "listen carefully and with an open heart. Remember

that none of us is free from bias” (p. 41), an admonition the researcher considered prior to each interview. Sue (2015) suggested 11 successful strategies for facilitators of race talk. Several suggestions that were useful to addressing emotional responses in these interviews were to acknowledge and admit one’s own racial biases; validate and facilitate discussion of feelings (understanding that certain reactions disguise certain feelings); understand differences in communication styles; and validate, encourage, and express appreciation for a participant’s willingness to talk about a difficult topic. Sue’s book, *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race* (2015) was a key text in the researcher’s preparation for the interviews and for navigating any emotional difficulty experienced in talking about race and racism by the interviewees. In addition, a list with relevant reading and other resources was offered to participants who indicated a desire to learn more about race and racial bias at the close of the interview (Appendix F).

Participants were advised as to how this data was to be used and that multiple perspectives would be reported. The participants were also reassured that their responses will be kept entirely private and anonymous. The participants were informed as to the results of the study via an email link. All survey participants received a \$10 gift card and all interviewees received a \$25 gift card as a thank you for their participation.

The Institutional Research Board (IRB) of the researcher’s university reviewed this research proposal for ethical responsibility. The IRB determined the research protocols met the criteria deemed necessary for ethical research.

While communicating around the topic of race and bias can be fraught with difficulty, the researcher employed several strategies to facilitate the discussions. First, the researcher developed an open-ended survey which furnished participants the time necessary to consider the topic and their responses. Second, the employment of the infographic helped orient the interviewees to the research topic, the vocabulary around race, and the initial findings. Third, the interview was online, which allowed the interviewees to conduct the interview in a comfortable place of their choosing. Finally, the participants were sent gift cards to thank them for their availability, and were also provided with a list of references should they choose to pursue further information about race, racism, and racial bias. All of these components were designed to aid the researcher in obtaining authentic responses.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Montessori early childhood teachers are approaching the topics of race and racial bias in their classrooms. More specifically, the intent was to identify how Montessori teachers react to and address race talk and/or bias, and what Montessori teachers present or teach to children regarding race and/or racial bias. Alternatively, if Montessori teachers were not approaching race or racial bias directly, this study examined whether an alternative or indirect means of approaching race and racial bias was used in the classroom. Finally, this study explored whether Montessori teachers received instruction in their training regarding how to approach race and racial bias in the classroom.

The participants in the study included early childhood Montessori teachers who agreed to participate in a research pool organized by the American Montessori Society. Of the 218 teachers who were part of the original email list, 24 teachers responded within the two week response period. These teachers answered an open-ended survey consisting of five questions regarding race and racial bias within Montessori early childhood classrooms, along with assorted demographic questions. Six participants were randomly selected from the survey pool via "Research Randomizer" (an online tool that randomizes research participants). Five of those six actually participated in an online interview to respond to questions raised from the surveys, as well as either corroborate or contradict survey results. One week prior to the interview, participants were provided with a pictorial and narrative summary of emerging themes from the survey in the form of an infographic (see Appendix D) to aid in eliciting more in-depth responses

to the sensitive topics of race and racial bias. Graphic elicitation is an interview technique designed to provoke memories and deep response (Copeland & Agnosto, 2012; Kwasnicka, Dombrowski, White, & Sneihotta, 2015).

Discussion of the Survey Sample

The 24 survey respondents were all female Montessori early childhood teachers. The represented credentialing institutions of these Montessori teachers included the American Montessori Society (AMS), Association Montessori International (AMI), National Center for Montessori Education (NCME), Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), or "other." These institutions represent the credentialing of the main Montessori training programs in the United States. One of the respondents was from outside of the United States. The remainder of the respondents were from varied regions within the United States (Figure 1).

Fifty-eight percent of the teachers taught 12 or more years, and 25% of the teachers taught four-six years. The remainder taught between 7-12 years. Respondents were 87.5% White, 4.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, with 8.3% identified as "other." While demographic information was collected on all the respondents, detailed analysis and comparison of that information with the responses was beyond the scope of the study. Although race is indeed an essential demographic factor, the focus of this particular study was on how Montessori teachers, in general, are approaching race in the early childhood classroom, with the enactment of the Montessori model in this regard the primary subject of study.

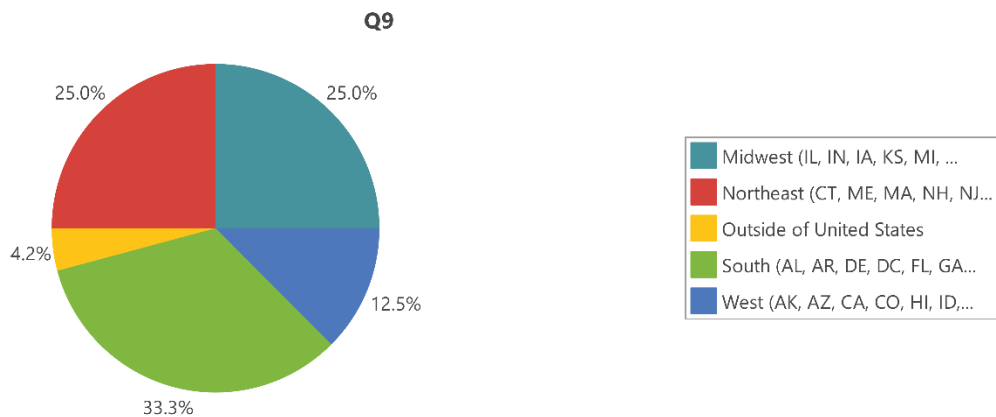


Figure 1. Geographic areas of the 24 survey participants

Respondents ranged in age from 25-64, with the majority falling into the 35-54-year-old designation. Two of the respondents did not yet have a college degree, while the rest had a baccalaureate or master's degree. Again, all had consented to be a part of the American Montessori Society research pool. The survey respondents received a \$10 gift card to Target.

Introduction to Survey Themes

Four main categories emerged from the coded themes (Figure 2). The first was the broad category of *Children and Bias*. Those coded aspects of the main category included *Children Lack Bias*, *Diversity Negates Bias*, *Adults Affect Bias*, and *All Have Bias*. The category of *Teaching* included the coded categories of *Direct Teaching of Race and Bias*, *Indirect Teaching of Race and Bias*, and the subcategories of *Books* and *Teachable Moments*, which were found both in the codes of Direct and Indirect Teaching. The next category that emerged was *Training on Race and Bias*, with the related coded categories including *No Training*, *Implicit Training*, and *Training Outside of Montessori*. The category *Talking About Race* included the

coded categories of *Comfortable*, *Neutral*, and *Uncomfortable*. These categories and the resultant themes are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

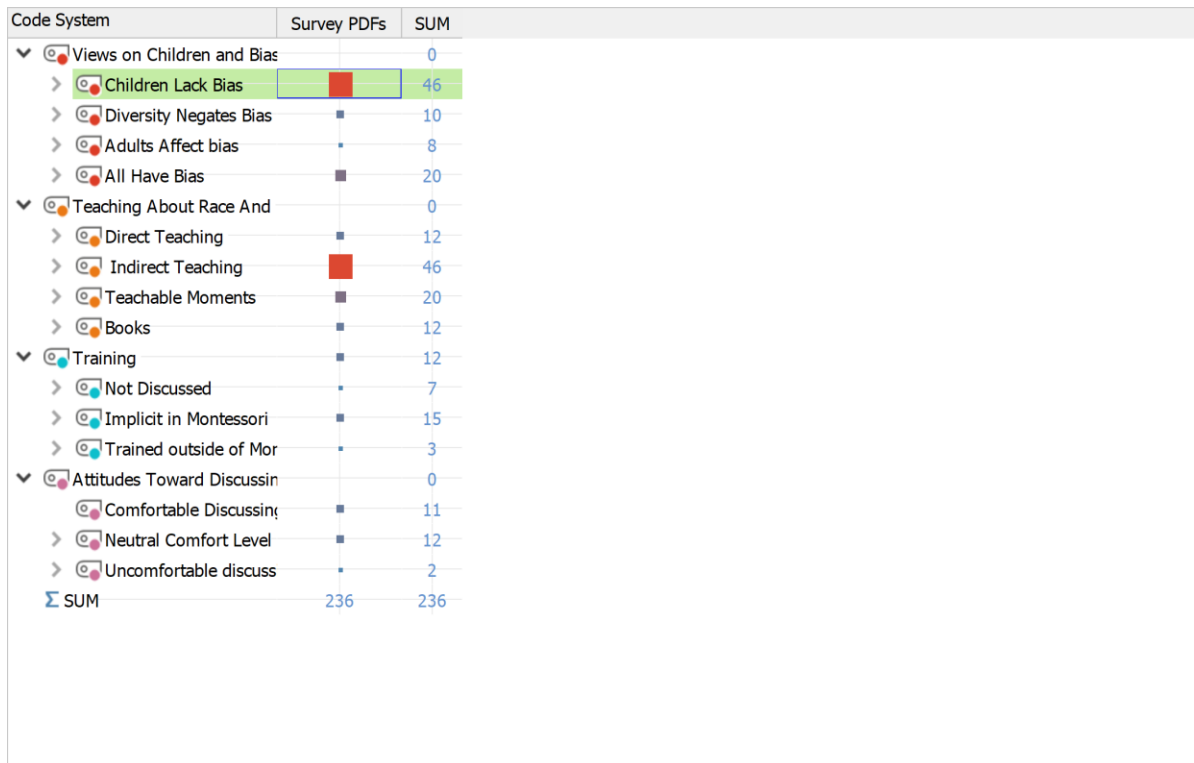


Figure 2. Headings and significant categories from the survey. Squares represent the number of occurrences of the categories and sub-categories. Size reflects frequency.

Views on children and bias. *Views on Children and Bias* were those factors that related to a respondent's ideas about how children either manifest or do not manifest bias. Personal ideation around bias was also included. The following are the definitions from the codebook:

- *Children Lack Bias*: This code was utilized to group responses that stated children do not possess racial bias or prejudice.
 - *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*: This code was a subcategory of *Children Lack Bias* used when respondents did not explicitly teach about race and bias but

noted that they approach race in what they term a developmentally appropriate way. The implication is that children are not sufficiently socially developed to grasp the topic of race or racial bias.

- *Young Children Do Not See Race*: Respondents noted that children simply do not see race.
- *Young Children Are Not Biased*: This subcategory was used when respondents maintained that young children have no bias unless bias is introduced to them through outside influences.
- *Diversity Negates Bias*: This code was used when respondents stated that if a setting was either diverse or homogeneous, that quality negated any racial bias or prejudice from forming in children.
- *Adults Affect Children's Bias*: This code was used when respondents indicated that adults introduce racial bias or prejudice to children.
- *All Have Bias*: This code was applied to statements that all people have racial bias or prejudice, or teachers reported incidents that showed racial bias or prejudice. These respondents acknowledged race and bias in children.

Teaching about race and bias. This category included teaching about race or racial bias, and the manner in which teachers either did or did not introduce race and racial bias.

- *Direct Teaching*: These teachers stated that they directly introduce the concepts of race and racial bias, either using those exact terms or terms that were deemed equal in meaning.

- *Indirect Teaching*: These teachers responded to the question of directly teaching race and racial bias or indirectly teaching race and racial bias with methods that did *not* directly teach about race and racial bias. They may have believed that they were directly addressing race and racial bias, but the methods were indirect.
- *Teachable Moments*: Many of the respondents either named "teachable moments" or described instances which could be called teachable moments about race. These occasions were questions raised by the children in response to an event, a book, a story, or a conversation. Teachable moments occurred in direct and indirect teaching around race and bias.
- *Books*: Respondents mentioned books used as primary teaching tools, both in indirect and direct teaching on race and racial bias. Book selection was not mentioned as being covered in training.

Training. This category included information on whether Montessori training/education did or did not include education on race and racial bias, as well as comments about what equated to education on race and racial bias.

- *Race and Racial Bias Not Discussed*: This code included comments that race and racial bias were not included in training, and occasionally value judgments on the nature of why it was not included.
- *Race and Racial Bias Education Implicit in Montessori Training*: A majority of respondents indicated that teaching about race or racial bias was implicit in Montessori

training, including how to address race and bias through the many areas that both philosophy and presentations covered.

- *Educated on Race Outside of Montessori Training:* These respondents indicated race and racial bias education was not included in their training, and these respondents sought information on addressing race and racial bias outside of their training.

Attitudes toward discussing race. This category included comments that related to how the respondent felt personally about discussing race and/or racial bias.

- *Comfortable:* These respondents commented that they were comfortable discussing race.
- *Neutral:* These respondents were not entirely comfortable for various reasons, but did indicate some comfort level.
- *Uncomfortable:* These respondents related talking about race as being uncomfortable for them for various reasons.

In each category, codes with the most responses emerged as themes. Codes that appeared as themes included *Children are Not Biased* under the category of *Views on Children and Bias*. In the category *Teaching About Race and Racial Bias, Indirect Teaching of Race and Racial Bias*, including the subthemes of using *books* and *teachable moments*, emerged as major themes. In the category of *Montessori Training on Race and Racial Bias, Race and Racial Bias are Implicitly Addressed in Montessori Training* was the primary theme. Within the Category of *Talking About Race*, being *Comfortable Talking About Race* emerged thematically.

Theme 1: Children are not biased. Most¹⁰ respondents indicated that children are not biased. Comments such as “I believe children inherently do not see race” and that children “just want everyone to be friends” were common responses. One respondent remarked that teachers do not see prejudice “in the 3's, there is a recognition later that someone looks different. But I rarely see a racial bias.” Many respondents suggested that if children did possess bias, it came from adults and the adult’s modeling to the children. In example, one respondent stated that the only bias children ever portray is “just what they learn from their families.” Overall, the theme that emerged is children are usually unbiased unless an adult intervenes in a negative way. A few respondents suggested that overtly teaching about race and racial bias introduces prejudice to children who would otherwise remain unbiased. One respondent stated that “in my opinion discussing race (Black White etc.) indirectly teaches racism.” Another respondent maintained that “the more we discuss race and skin color the more of an issue racism becomes.”

Theme 2: Indirect or implicit teaching. Many respondents indicated that the teachings of Montessori on peace, love, and respect indirectly or implicitly taught acceptance for all regardless of color, and that this aspect of Montessori culture addressed the topics of race and

¹⁰ In the descriptions, the following designations were used for quantities: a few (hereafter implies 25% or less), some (hereafter indicating 25-50%), many (hereafter implied as 50-75%), and most or a majority (hereafter implied as 75-100%).

racial bias. Respondents reported being informed by Montessori teachings in their practice even when they used books or teachable moments to address race and racial bias, although they did not often use the terms race or racial bias with children. Respondents reported offering children a vision of equality, in that they often taught that although people may look different on the outside, they are all the same on the inside. Respondents frequently equated the idea of teaching about culture with explicitly teaching about race. Respondents reported using books or stories to teach about race and racial bias, although they did not mention how they chose the books that they used.

As an example of the varied ways respondents explained implicitly teaching about race and bias, one respondent noted that “we use books, each other’s background, and the Story of Dr. Martin Luther King. We also use our Peace Area and Cultural Area to highlight that everyone might be different on the outside but on the inside we all have feelings and are similar.” This quote illustrated the manner many respondents noted that they use cultural presentations, Montessori’s teachings on peace, and books to teach what they considered was teaching about race and racial bias.

Most participants responded with *implicit* presentations and ideas to the question: “How do you *explicitly* teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class?” As an example of an answer to the *explicit* question, a respondent noted “I do this through books, social stories and exploring different cultures,” which are implicit responses. The teacher’s responses denoting *implicit* teaching in the coding were often in response to the questions of *explicitly* teaching about race and racial bias, but they did not overtly note race or racial bias in the answer. In the coding, if the terms or terms deemed equal to race and racial bias were not used in the

response to the question of explicit teaching, and the answer by the respondent to the explicit teaching and indirect teaching questions about race were the same or similar, the answer was coded as implicit teaching.

Regarding using materials particular to Montessori for teaching about race or racial bias, the cultural area of the room and Montessori's model was often mentioned. For example, a respondent stated that “the geography folders are a prime example of introducing children to people that may not look exactly like themselves.” The geography folders are a cultural presentation or lesson that is present in most Montessori rooms, which the teachers create. They contain pictures of people, places, animals, and other aspects of each world continent. A respondent stated she did not directly address race or racial bias in her classroom but noted that “race is indirectly addressed within a multitude of lessons: children around the world in Geography, Parts of the Human Body in Science, Peacemakers and other work in the Peace Area, use of multicultural crayons, pencils and markers in Art and by having diverse books available in our classroom library. We also aspire to show diversity in materials that feature people in any curriculum area.” The peace area, peace education, and cultural areas were repeatedly mentioned by teachers as ways to teach about race and racial bias, along with diverse books.

Another respondent who noted that she did not explicitly teach about race or racial bias did address teachable moments. She answered that

I would not say that I explicitly teach about race and racial bias, however, for children at the primary level, race and racial bias come up in teachable moments in the classroom.

For example, when we have cultural studies or celebrations, there may be a question

regarding race and why or why not certain things are done by all groups of people (based on religion/beliefs/location, etc.). I believe in a Montessori classroom there is a general awareness and inclusiveness that guides ur [sic] teaching of racial awareness.

The subtheme of teachable moments to present race and racial bias permeated all the responses, whether the terms of race and racial bias were used or not. Another respondent noted that the way she explicitly taught about race and racial bias was “mostly through books we read together and reflective conversations after reading a book which highlights race and/or racial bias.”

These sorts of conversations were termed teachable moments in the coding.

Books were a primary way of teaching about race and racial bias, with stories that often led to teachable moments. When respondents noted what books they used, they often named books about Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, and other notable historical figures. Respondents also often referenced books that address color, as in the following response, where the participant commented that

we read stories related to race and diversity. We have discussions about the melanin in the skin that causes the differences and also read books on this, the children then choose words to describe their color; I'm peach, I'm chocolate. We study different cultures where the children see pictures of people from different continents which leads to discussions. When children of color or Caucasians cut themselves we might have a discussion that they both have red blood.

These concrete ways of teaching similarities, as in the statement of the “red blood” were termed colorblind or color neutral in coding, and many teachers used some variation of those lessons in their teaching.

Examples of what was termed a “colorblind” or color neutral approach arose in many responses, some of which discussed seeing the ways people are similar rather than focusing on differences. Other teachers mentioned using lessons that teach how people are similar on the inside. One teacher stated that “I teach that we are all the same on the inside regardless of how we appear on the outside. I use the bruised apple lesson at group time.” Another mentioned that the way she teaches explicitly about race is “White egg/brown egg- crack them open and they look the same.” Although a few of the teachers noted that both similarities and differences are important to discussing race, most teachers focused on the similarities.

Theme 3: Talking about race. Most respondents noted that they were comfortable talking about race. Participants were particularly comfortable talking to the children, with one respondent indicating that “I am open & comfortable speaking to the children. It shows acceptance & tolerance. Very important.” Most also answered the question regarding talking about race with children in mind rather than adults, although the question was “How do you feel about discussing race and racial bias?” The three previous questions did specifically ask about children, so the orientation is understandable. A few respondents mentioned that it is either the parent’s responsibility to talk to their children about race or that they were careful with parents when talking about race. One respondent mentioned that “I approach the conversation in an honest way. And I always tell the parents when I do have a sensitive conversation.” Only a few teachers mentioned being uncomfortable talking about race.

Theme 4: Education about race and racial bias is implicit in Montessori training. Most teachers that discussed the issue of training on race and racial bias in their Montessori training agreed that it was not discussed explicitly in their training. As in the classroom teaching

approaches, most teachers felt that Montessori training implicitly addresses race and racial bias through peace education or other tenets of Montessori training. One respondent exemplified the overall responses when she wrote, “There was not much explicit work regarding race and racial bias, but it was touched on. We learned lessons where race was implied, but not explicitly taught. As Montessorians, we learn about peace education, inclusivity, and welcoming each and every child.” Peace education or teaching for peace was a significant subtheme representing the ways respondents felt education about race and racial bias is implicit in Montessori training.

Another major subtheme of how respondents felt education about race and racial bias was implicit in their training is the teaching of respect. One respondent stated that “I think there was implicit preparation in my Montessori training because I think the Montessori approach is inherently about respect, seeing the strength and ability in each child, and nurturing each individual's unique development and growth.” The subthemes of peace and respect frequently emerged regarding training and teaching about race and racial bias.

Some participants indicated that teaching about race and racial bias was not addressed in training because it was unnecessary. Many of these responses were paired with ideas that children in early childhood are too young for these conversations. For example, one respondent wrote that race, and racial bias were not covered in training because “it's not age appropriate for primary children.” Another participant wrote

I feel that the teachings of Montessori are based in the wholeness of the child regardless of background or color. To follow the child is to in a sense see no race or bias. A mindful teacher keeps this at the forefront of all she does.

Overall, the respondents felt the teachings of Montessori implicitly addressed the issues of race and racial bias in young children.

Overall Theme

The central theme from respondents was that Montessori teachings and training implicitly prepared them to discuss race and racial bias if the topics arose in their environments. Most equated teaching or talking about race or racial bias with teaching about diversity, respect, peace, peace education, culture, or similarities between peoples. While a few participants did not agree that diversity, respect, and peace equated to teaching or talking about race, and understood the broader themes and teachings in Montessori as supporting their work in talking or teaching about race and racial bias, they were in a small minority.

The image that represented the group as a whole was the layers of the earth, a fitting model as world culture, geography, and how to live peacefully in the world were mentioned often as critical elements in how Montessori prepared teachers to teach about race or racial bias. In this model, the layers of the earth represented the themes, with race and racial bias at the core of the earth (mainly because these terms appeared often on the survey). This segment was the smallest but deepest and most volatile section of the earth, with the other layers of teaching and talking about race and racial bias radiating out from the core. The shallowest layer on the surface of the earth, or the earth's crust was designated to represent those responses farthest from directly addressing race and racial bias. As such, the crust of the earth represented those coded as teaching from a colorblind or color neutral stance. These respondents taught that people are

all the same on the inside. Most of the respondents in this category noted talking about color in this way, if not all the time, some of the time.

The next layer beneath the top layer of the earth's crust, the upper mantle, represented those participants that reported discussing culture, and related holidays and events. These respondents also noted similarities between people but deliberately marked differences as well. These respondents did not initiate conversations around differences and similarities but engaged if children did bring those topics forward. Many of the participants adhered to those ideas. The third layer, the thicker and less diffused lower mantle, represented respondents that taught and talked about culture and holidays, with the critical difference from the preceding respondents being that these participants *initiated* discussions of differences and similarities with questions and prompts to the children. Fewer respondents were in this category than in the previous two categories.

The next layer of the earth is the outer core, which represented respondents who actually used the words race and bias, and presented bias to the children as being unfair, using stories or conversations. While a few respondents in the previous group represented by the lower mantle did represent bias as being unfair, they characterized it as happening long ago and intimated that it no longer happened, at least in the case of discrimination. The outer core represented participants who actually presented bias as an issue and literally noted it as being unfair, linking bias and discrimination to children's everyday experiences with what is fair or unfair. For example, when discussing Martin Luther King Jr., a respondent noted that "I also make sure to include that while many things have changed and gotten better, there are still times that people aren't treated kindly or fairly and things that are not right, and that we all can be courageous to

work to make things more fair for everyone.” These respondents that used the terms of race and bias, and presented real-life examples were far in the minority (Figure 3). The core of the earth represents race talk using the actual words race and racial bias, noting that children, like all people, were biased and prejudiced. One of the respondents approximated this response.

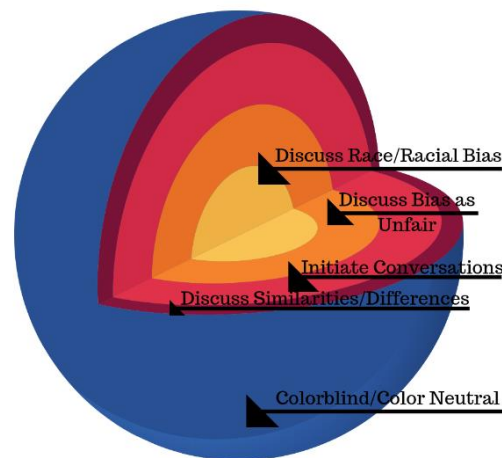


Figure 3. Representation of overall themes on race and bias from survey respondents.

Interview Sample

The interview was designed to both serve as data triangulation for the responses and themes of the survey, and to provide the opportunity for new questions that emerged as a result of the responses and themes from the survey (Appendix E). The interview participants were all female and all identified as White. To protect the identity of the respondents, limited demographic information was shared because of the small sample size. Again, in-depth analysis and comparisons of the demographics and the resultant themes were beyond the scope of this particular study, yet were gathered with the possibility they might illuminate avenues of future

study. Fictitious names were chosen by each interview participant to honor their anonymity, yet acknowledge their humanity. Table 1 represents the demographic and interview information for the interview participants.

Table 1

Interview Respondent Overview

<u>Pseudonyms</u>	<u>Years Teaching</u>	<u>Credential or Diploma</u>	<u>Region</u>
Lisa	10-12 years	Other	South
Kate	4-6 years	AMS	NE
Emma	4-6 years	AMI	South
Olivia	10-12 years	Other	South
Hannah	4-6 years	AMI	South

The interviews were held over a three day period, from Friday evening through Sunday afternoon. The duration of each interview was anywhere from 35-45 minutes. Collaborate Ultra, an online video conferencing tool, was used to conduct the interviews. Participants were e-mailed a link to join the face to face session. One session did not record, and the researcher's notes were compiled, emailed to the interviewee, and approved by the interviewee. The other four interviews were recorded and downloaded. In one of the interview sessions a connectivity issue occurred, but eventually, a stable connection was established. The other interviews had excellent connectivity. An independent transcription service transcribed the downloaded MP4 audio and video within two days of the interviews. The transcriptions were sent to the

interviewees, and all transcriptions were approved within one week. Interviewees then received a \$25.00 gift certificate to Target as a thank-you for participating.

Introduction to Interview Themes

Four major categories emerged from coding the interviews. Because the interview questions were designed to elicit more comprehensive responses to the already coded survey themes, many responses in the interviews corresponded with the survey themes. The infographic that was provided prior to the interview helped activate interviewees' memories of the survey and also prepared them to answer the questions more deeply and thoroughly. One of the interviewees said she did not receive the infographic and the infographic was read to her prior to the interview questions being asked.

As with the surveys, coding was confirmed by an independent coding analyst. The first iteration of the coding did not include the category of "Training within Montessori," which the independent analyst suggested be added. After several discussions with the independent analyst, the code was included as "Implicit Training within Montessori" and the responses re-coded. After including "Implicit Training within Montessori," the coding was concluded with approximately 90% intercoder reliability.

Categories. Under the category of *Talking about Race and Bias*, the main sub-categories consisted of *Race Stories*, and *Difficulties Due to Whiteness*. The category of *Presenting Race and Bias* included the themes *Difficulties with Parents*, and *Positive Approaches to Presenting Race*, with the sub-themes *Culture*, *Books*, *Conflict Resolutions*, *Historical Figures and Diversity*. The category of *Bias* included the main categories of *Children are Not Biased*, with

the sub-themes of *Children Notice Color*, *Children Experiment*, *Children as Pure and Innocent*, and *Children as Color Neutral*. The category of *Training* encompassed the themes of *Education Outside of Montessori Training*, *Implicit Training within Montessori Training*, *No Training*, and *Training Needed* (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Headings and significant categories from the interviews. Squares represent the number of occurrences of the categories and sub-categories. Size reflects frequency.

Talking About Race and Bias. This category consisted of talking about race and bias with adults as well as children.

- *Race Stories*: Even if race or bias talk was not a component of the classroom environment, race stories emerged in the interviews. Notable is that even when

participants remarked that they did not believe children had bias, the interviewees still shared stories in which race was salient in the environment.

- *Whiteness/Difficulty*: These comments portrayed instances in which interviewees felt their Whiteness inhibited their ability to talk about race effectively, or in some way constrained them.

Presenting Race or Bias. This broad category consisted of the ways race and or bias was introduced, and sometimes why.

- *Difficulty in Talking to Parents*: In these instances, participants mentioned parents, administrators, or friends in their discussions around race talk, usually as an impediment to effectively or freely talking to children about race.
- *Positive Ways of Presenting Race*: This code represented teachers who declined from presenting what they saw as "negative" aspects of race or history, notably bias, discrimination, ill-treatment, etc., but instead presented "positive" aspects of race, such as people of color as peacemakers (with conflict resolution as a teaching tool in this area), or historical "heroes." These interviewees preferred to be positive because they believed children in early childhood could not or should not have to handle the negative. Several subcategories included:
 - *Peace*: Peace education as a substitute for directly teaching about race and bias.
 - *Culture*: Cultural subjects as a substitute for directly teaching about race and bias.
 - *Books*: A main tool for teaching about race and bias.
 - *Conflict Resolution*: A way to teach about unfairness or bias.

- *Historical Figures*: Historical figures used to teach about race or bias rather than modern-day figures.
- *Diversity*: Seen as a necessary component that indirectly teaches about race and bias.

Bias. This broad category included how participants perceive bias in children, adults, and society.

- *Children are Not Biased*: Concluded that children are not biased and may be colorblind or color neutral. Several ways that children exhibited a lack of bias as defined by the interviewees were:
 - *Children Experiment*—This response perceived talk about race to be a way in which children experiment with language or social reactions, not as a prejudiced or biased response.
 - *Children Notice Color*—Interviewees indicated that children notice color just as they notice gender or primary colors.
 - *Children as Pure and Innocent*—The belief that children simply do not possess the capacity for outright prejudice in early childhood.
 - *Children as Color Neutral*—That children do not see color.
- *Children are Biased*: Interviewee responses that concluded that children are biased because of society.
- *Systemic Bias*: The expressed belief that systemic bias exists and affects all people.

Training. This broad category was comprised of responses to whether participants believed they had enough training around race and bias, how they pursued training, and what components of training they utilized. All interviewees reported that their training did not address race and bias explicitly, however, most indicated implicit ways race and bias were addressed in their training, and all interviewees mentioned that they looked for information to inform them on teaching about race and bias outside of what they received in training.

- *Education outside of Montessori:* Interviewees mentioned the kind of training or education they pursued outside of Montessori training.
- *Indirect Training within Montessori Training:* The ways the interviewees believed Montessori training addressed race and bias issues implicitly.
- *No Training within Montessori:* Interviewees responded that their training did not directly address race and bias.
- *Training Needed:* Instances that corresponded to responses indicating more training was needed on race and bias within Montessori teacher training.

In each category, codes with the most responses emerged as primary themes. Responses that developed into themes were *Race Stories* and *Difficulty in Talking to Parents* within the category *Talking About Race*. Another primary theme that emerged was *Positively Presenting Race*, within the category of *Presenting Race and/or Bias*. The belief that *Children Are Not Biased* emerged from the category of *Bias*. This theme was consistent with the survey and did not appear in any new way in the interviews; thus it is not discussed substantively in the next section. Under training, the theme of how *Education Outside of Montessori* is obtained emerged.

Theme One: Race Stories. Most interviewees, regardless of whether or not they thought children were biased, had at least one race story or connection to a race story that exhibited some aspect of bias or prejudice. For example, Hannah spoke about a child in her environment who wanted to be “vanilla,” not “chocolate.” Lisa spoke of a mother who accused her and the school director of being prejudiced. Lisa described this accusation as stemming from an incident in which "I had a little black girl in my class, and her mother was a pretty radical African American woman. And one little white girl started calling her [the child] names. And it actually was a staff's child, so it brought a whole new dynamic in." Olivia described a situation in which "I have a worker there who's Native American, and she comes in. And they're [the children] always like, ‘Whoa! Do you live in a teepee?’ And I'm like, ‘Okay, you know like it's 2018, she could live in a teepee if she wanted to, but she lives in a house and Native Americans ...’ So, there's a big gap." Emma mentioned an

assistant who was African-American and she was like a really big woman. I only say that in that the children. . . . They noticed and they were kind of intimidated by her a little bit. That's what the head of my school perceived, which made her [the assistant] very effective. I don't know if it was because she was so big or because she was big and silent or experienced or whatever it was, her aura, there was something about her that made her relationships with the students different than the previous assistant we had and she was fantastic. Just exceptional. But actually, now that I think about it that might be the only undercurrent of racial awareness I actually saw.

Although each interviewee had a race story or an analogy on bias that could pertain to race, most did not perceive the stories as connected to bias or prejudice in the children or at least did not explicitly link the two ideas.

Theme Two: Difficulty in Talking to Parents. All respondents noted difficulties related to talking to parents, and sometimes to administrators and/or friends around race. Some of the concerns were related to parental difficulties that resulted from subjects introduced in class. For example, Olivia said that she focused on Native Americans during Thanksgiving, rather than the pilgrims. She said that

One parent asked me, “Why can't you talk more about the Pilgrims because at Thanksgiving my son said that the Pilgrims just brought disease and rats to the United States.” I was like, “I'm not going to talk more about the Pilgrims, they can get that in first grade or whatever.”

The interviewees noted that they were careful about what they said because of parents' reactions. Hannah mentioned that one of the pitfalls of talking about race and bias with the children is that teachers can sometimes “get in trouble for saying things. So you have to be careful.”

The interviewees also indicated the belief that any of the racial bias the children brought into the class came from the home. Olivia stated that if she brought up race and bias in the environment, her

big concern would be just the political climate right now. And I know that I have parents who don't agree with me politically and I would be very careful that it wasn't

misconstrued as me pushing my political beliefs towards children. So it would have been very well thought out.

Generally, the interviewees had misgivings around parent's reactions to race talk in the classroom. Lisa reiterated this concern when she remarked that "we spend a lot of time dealing with parents and how you talk to parents. Yeah, we've got to keep the parents happy."

Theme Three: Positive Ways of Presenting Race/Bias. The interviewees all discussed methods of presenting race and racial bias that were indirect. Most of these techniques included presenting "positive" information to the children. For example, if stories about someone such as Ruby Bridges or Martin Luther King, Jr. were presented, their actions as peacemakers might be highlighted, as opposed to the discrimination they faced or the inequity that existed in their lifetime. The people or events that teachers highlighted for the children in stories and books about race were often historical figures as opposed to modern-day representations. Cultural presentations were commonly used to illustrate both similarities and differences between people, such as with holidays or celebrations. Often, these celebrations were part of presentations of different countries or continents outside of the United States or the people from those places that now resided in the United States. Interviewees occasionally used the Montessori method of

conflict resolution¹¹ to highlight how certain people were able to be peacemakers or how people can learn to coexist, regardless of differences. Emma said that Montessori implicitly addressed race and:

It [Montessori] included grace and courtesy lessons for offering them [children] tools for just social situations and being civil, courteous people. But then separately from that, the conflict resolution and interventions that you might see where you bring two children together and you're helping them mediate a conversation and giving them practice expressing their feelings and having that kind of dialogue.

Emma said that with these presentations¹² children were being provided tools to avoid bias and learn to interact “courteously” with all people. Grace and courtesy lessons, which are Montessori lessons on social graces, were mentioned frequently by the interviewees as a means to avoid racial bias.

Kindness, niceness, and peacefulness as embodied in the children were often noted as hopeful outcomes of the varied presentations and the conflict resolution techniques. Olivia

¹¹ Conflict resolution was most often defined by the Montessori teachers as bringing children together to discuss a disagreement, in which one child speaks at a time while the other listens and they reach a mutually agreeable resolution.

¹² Presentations in Montessori education are equivalent to lessons.

stated that "I want them to leave to be able to be great members of society and if I can't really let them know how to be kind to anybody, I don't think I'm doing my job." Kate indicated that she presents differences between people, but wants her presentations to "be based on how we treat each other and showing kindness towards each other and how we can promote peace in our classroom, in our friendships." As noted in the results from the surveys, books were also the main means that emerged from the interviews by which presentations on race and/or bias were offered. As also found in the survey results, most presentations concerned historical figures, cultures around the world, and the ways children were similar and different rather than directly addressing race or bias.

Theme Four: Training Outside of Montessori. All of the respondents reported having sought information outside of their Montessori training to enable them to more effectively deliver lessons of race within their environments or to understand race relations, even though they felt the topic was covered implicitly in their training. Hannah found lists online of books she could use during Black History Month or for different events. Other interviewees also confirmed finding book lists or information online. Hannah sought out a group she meets with to talk about issues such as race and bias. Emma joined a group training that gave her insight on race and bias. Lisa and Hannah said their classes in college outside of their Montessori training gave them some insight on race and bias. Kate related doing significant research and reading on her own into the topic. Olivia stated that "our school counselor is really trying to improve our discussions on racism. And she and I discuss things a lot. We throw ideas back and forth, you know, 'Oh, I saw this on Facebook what do you think?'" Lisa also mentioned talking about issues of race and bias with her school director.

Overall Theme

A major theme of the interviews was that although interviewees indicated that Montessori training implicitly prepared them to address race and bias, they still felt the need to do work outside of their Montessori training to adequately prepare to discuss issues of race with children. Also, although most participants did not feel young children needed explicit presentations around race or bias, racial episodes were happening to and around children in the schools. Whether it was an adult admonishing a child not to play with another, or children reacting to a woman of color, racial incidents appeared to be occurring. Even Kate, who is not in the classroom at this time, shared an incident she observed on the playground in which one child told another child he could not wear a skirt because he was a boy. This interaction could have as easily been a comment from a child about race, indicating some need for attention to the subject, according to Kate. Interviewees acknowledged, either implicitly or explicitly, that they needed more information around race and bias to guide them in the classroom environment.

During data analysis and interpretation, Figure 3 representing the layers of the earth began to take on multiple meanings. Initially, the figure illustrated the perceived depth of participants' approaches to teaching and talking about race and racial bias with young children. As the resultant themes from the surveys and interviews were interpreted, other meanings began to emerge. To illustrate those levels of meaning, the initial graphic was lacking the fluidity and complexity the new interview data represented. To accommodate the amorphous condition of the findings, the researcher produced a revised rendering of the original figure. This figure also symbolized the relationships of the categories and sub-categories (or properties) and emerging themes or hypotheses, as is often found in grounded theory qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

The levels represented not only the perceived depth of participants' teaching and talking about race in the environment, but the perceptions of the interviewee's personal comfort and depth in excavating their racial identity (see Figure 5). Further discussion on what these levels represented is enlarged upon in Chapter Five.

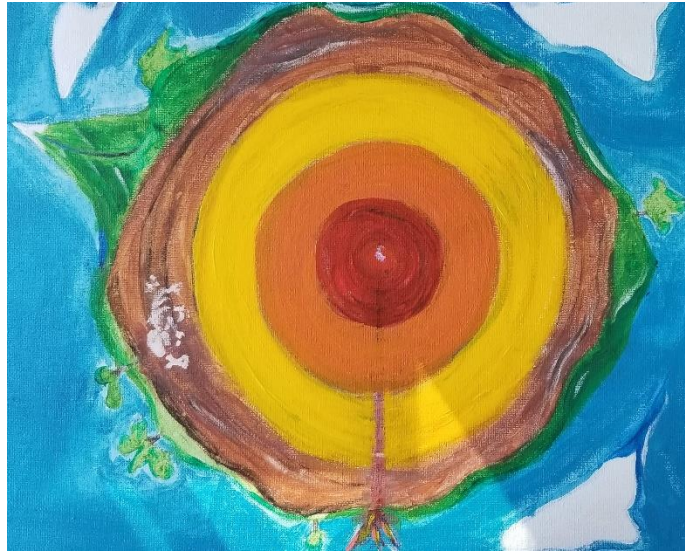


Figure 5. Levels of the earth representing the perceived interview participant's responses. Responses that relate more closely to race and racism are represented by the center, those farther away by the green layer.

Chapter V: Discussion

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Montessori early childhood teachers are approaching the topics of race and racial bias in their classrooms. More specifically, the intent was to identify how Montessori teachers react to and address race talk and/or bias, and what Montessori teachers present or teach to children regarding race and/or racial bias. Alternatively, if Montessori teachers were not approaching race or racial bias directly, this study examined whether an alternative or indirect means of approaching race and racial bias was used in the classroom. In addition, this study explored whether Montessori teachers received instruction in their training regarding how to approach race and racial bias in the classroom.

Twenty-four participants responded to the survey in this study. From their responses, an infographic was created which presented the major themes from the survey. Six interviewees were chosen randomly from the survey pool of 13 and were then provided with the infographic prior to the interviews with the hope of eliciting more profound responses and elucidating survey responses.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the question: how are Montessori early childhood teachers approaching teaching and talking about race and racial bias with children in the classroom? Several questions supported the central question:

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do Montessori ECE teachers talk about race and racial bias with young children?

Research Question 2

RQ2: How do Montessori ECE teachers teach about race and racial bias?

Research Question 3

RQ3: If Montessori ECE teachers do not teach and/or talk directly with children about race and racial bias, what are some ways that race is addressed in the classroom?

Research Question 4:

RQ4: What instruction and guidance from their teacher education program did Montessori ECE teachers receive in discussing and addressing race and racial bias?

Conclusions

Montessori teachers' actions largely coincide with the actions of other mainstream early childhood teachers in that they generally do not explicitly talk or teach about race or bias in the early childhood classroom (Vittrup, 2016b). According to the results of this study, while participants do explore race indirectly through cultural and social teachings, they mainly offer a superficial level approach to race and bias, delivered through lessons with messages of kindness and peacefulness. These findings support the research of Milner (2017b) and Vittrup (2016b) who found teachers are primarily employing a colorblind or color neutral approach with children and avoiding race talk. Lazar and Offenber (2011) portrayed these classrooms as "silent" classrooms and maintained that "within these silent classrooms, the realities and consequences of racism are left unproblematized, contributing to its normalization within society" (p. 276).

Inherent in the participant's approach to race and bias was the belief that young children are not biased, while the research demonstrated that children exhibit race preferences in infancy

and develop significant racial bias around age three (Aboud, 1988; Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2010; Katz, 2003; Kelly, Quinn, Slater, Kang, Gibson, Smith, et al., 2005; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). As children construct their understandings of race and society through the microcosm of the classroom, the participants' mistaken belief leaves children without guidance. Thus, children's understandings may at best be false and at worst harmful to the development of their views on race and contribute to the evolution of bias.

Particularly harmful is ignoring the differences in structural and institutional racism that disadvantage some and advantage others which perpetuates an inequitable system. Systemic racism and Whiteness as a central way of being in society are insidious and somewhat invisible influences (Tatum, 1997). Most participants believed that children would only become biased if parents or others in their lives were prejudiced, not realizing the extreme effect unconscious absorption of societal norms of Whiteness have on children, indeed, perhaps on all people.

A belief in the equality of all children regardless of color largely undergirded participants' assumptions and presentations within the classroom environment. This belief, which equates to the colorblind or color neutral ideology, ignores the cultural capital as well as systemic disadvantages that race represents in the United States. The conviction that all are equal often manifests in the notion of meritocracy, as well. Because belief systems and personality traits acquired in early childhood persist into adulthood (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010), the perpetuation of an inequitable system is a possible unfortunate outcome of race neutrality in the face of obvious bias. Montessori (1998) wrote of "psychic barriers" that children may develop, for example, in relation to a dislike or feeling of inadequacy in math, where the children do not learn to like math. Of those barriers, Montessori wrote that "nothing is more common than for

individuals to carry psychic barriers set up in infancy throughout their lives" (1998, p. 164). Is it possible that teachers who have not been taught to recognize race and racial discrimination as a social construct at a young age might have a "psychic barrier" in addressing and discussing those concepts as an adult? Perhaps the participants' feelings of discomfort around the subject encouraged them to avoid race talk. Teachers and schools have the opportunity, if educated in anti-racist practices, to educate parents and children to engender equity, both in their presentations or lessons in class and their interactions outside of class with parents in the community.

Montessori as Metonymy

As research findings were coded and analyzed, the idea that "doing" Montessori was somehow equivalent to teaching for racial equity emerged. Montessori teachings, for a majority of the participants, were believed to address racism and bias, with some participants indicating the belief that Montessori was a path to equity in the world. A heartfelt conviction expressed by most of the participants was if they enacted Montessori education properly, people would eventually become connected (as Montessori children become adults) and achieve real peace. Thus, to these participants, Montessori is metonymy for anti-racist teaching. Metonymy, the substitution of a word or phrase that is closely associated with the actual word, accurately described the phenomenon. Most of the participants indicated that Montessori teaching was equivalent to teaching for anti-racism. This explanation is contingent on the participants' conviction that the foundations for anti-racism are implicit in the way Montessori is manifested

in the early childhood environment. Montessori as metonymy for teaching and talking about race and bias became the overarching theme of the research.

Many participants in the study indicated that although their training in Montessori did not *explicitly* address race and bias, they felt that their Montessori training *implicitly* addressed those issues. One participant noted that “I think there was implicit preparation in my Montessori training because I think the Montessori approach is inherently about respect, seeing the strength and ability in each child, and nurturing each individual's unique development and growth.” Most participants exhibited the belief that addressing race and bias is inherent in how Montessori education trains teachers to interact with children. As one participant stated, “I believe in a Montessori classroom there is a general awareness and inclusiveness that guides our teaching of racial awareness.” Another interviewee noted with some relief that the participants responded to the survey questions (per the infographic) in ways similar to her. The responses on the infographic illustrated that the participants believed that teaching about race and racial bias was included in the peace curriculum and the cultural teachings of Montessori. The interviewee indicated that she felt "good" that she was aligned with all the other participants.

Another participant mentioned that "I believe that the children accept each other for who are they because of the role models in the building and because of how we teach acceptance, similarities, and differences.” Only a few participants felt that their training did not implicitly prepare them to address race and bias in the classroom, but all acknowledged that the model of Montessori is about, as one survey respondent stated, “honoring, loving and respecting all living beings.” Overall, participants responded that Montessori itself—the approach, the training, and the enactment of—was a method of addressing race, racism, and bias. However, in actual

practice, race, racism, and prejudice were rarely discussed among these participants, and mostly obscured and marginalized by the methods of many of the participants. The words participants were using, or not using, mattered.

The words and ideas of peace, love, and respect were repeated often as a panacea to race and racial bias. Some of the respondents took issue with the word "race" itself. One survey respondent noted that "I prefer not to specifically teach 'race' as I prefer to discuss all cultures instead of focusing on skin color. In my opinion, discussing race (black, white etc.) indirectly teaches racism." Another interviewee provided training information that instructed trainees that the word "race" should not be utilized because it is a social distinction. Although the directive was founded in good intentions, teachers given this idea in training may intuit the mistaken belief that race does not or should not matter. The general attitude that directly addressing race and bias is not "nice" permeated many of the responses.

Niceness, Whiteness and Teacher Education

Niceness in teacher education and teaching is not a new concept. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) made the connection when she titled her article *Just What is Critical Race Theory and What is it Doing in a Nice Field Like Education?* Niceness can also equate to Whiteness (Castagno, 2014). Bissonnette (2016) noted that "often times, teacher education programs subscribe to notions of niceness and see it as a superior form of instruction—an aspirational one, even—and in doing so, fail to recognize the problematic properties of this reductive allegiance" (p. 12).

What is problematic and reductive in niceness? One negative aspect of niceness is that the real difficulties of race and bias can be obscured beneath a veneer of civility. Aleman (2009) explained “liberal ideology and Whiteness privileges niceness, civility, and commonalities, which only serves to maintain the status quo, covers up institutionalized racism, and silences the experiences of marginalized students and communities” (p. 291). Niceness coupled with Whiteness served to suppress direct conversation around race in the Montessori early childhood classroom, where participants preferred to address the concepts with words like respect, kindness, and peace, a reductive manner of presenting race, racism, and bias. As a reminder, the definition of Whiteness provided by Riggs (2014) in Chapter One was

the concept of whiteness, when used in a critical context, more correctly refers to a form of cultural capital that accrues to those individuals who most closely conform to the normative subject position rendered intelligible within societies where “race” is treated as a meaningful marker of difference. In western societies, notions of whiteness center the values and beliefs of white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied men, and those who approximate this subject position (p. 2075).

Because most of the women surveyed and interviewed for this study were White, it is reasonable to ascribe notions of Whiteness to them. More specific to structures in teaching, Castagno (2014) defined Whiteness as

structural arrangements and ideologies of race dominance. Racial power and inequities are at the core of whiteness, but all forms of power and inequity create and perpetuate whiteness. The function of whiteness is to maintain the status quo, and although White people most often benefit from whiteness, some people of color have tapped into the

ideological components of whiteness for their own financial and educational benefits.

(p.5)

The “normative subject position” and the “status quo” are both components of Whiteness and niceness that permeated the responses in this study, and are present in many teacher education programs (Delpit, 2006; Matias, Montoya, and Nishi, 2016; Milner, 2012; Milner, 2015a).

These concepts, as indicated by the participants, also appear to be present in the Montessori model, as most respondents did not desire to actively disrupt Montessori in any way by questioning extensively the absence of attention to race and racial bias, thus maintaining the status quo. The few teachers who did note the lack of attention to race and racial bias in their training turned quickly to the positive aspects of Montessori, and the culture of respect and peace that Montessori education provides for all children.

In the revised figure of the earth (see Figure 5) the level of “nice” teaching regarding race was represented by the flora and fauna, and the surface area of the earth. As more race talk was discussed with the participants, the verbiage and the discourse seemingly became less “nice,” represented by the increasingly hotter and deeper levels in Figure 5. Participants appeared to begin having difficulty articulating their answers clearly or sometimes searched for words. The deeper levels of discourse did not seem to have the natural fluidity and ease that the colorblind approach to racism appeared to for the participants, represented by the surface landscape of the earth. The underlying levels symbolized a possibly less comfortable and familiar terrain to the participants, as represented by the apparent discomfort they encountered in describing their experiences. Participants seemed most comfortable when returning to the Montessori principles

of peace, respect, and cultural teachings. However, by adhering to this culture of commonality, most teachers appeared to embody and enact the principles of Whiteness and niceness.

Early Childhood and Niceness. Some aspects of niceness correspond with the way society views and values early childhood, and have roots in the view of women as caregivers who are kind and gentle. Vintimilla (2014) stated “We find antecedents of this conception in the traditional feminine notion of ‘niceness,’ of the timid female virtue so alive and well in the gender ghetto that remains in early childhood education in many societies, including North America” (pp. 84-85). Because primarily women continue to teach in early childhood, the perception that women are kind, gentle, and nice may be inculcated in the participants as the way women “do” early childhood. Kim and Reifel (2010) found that the subjects of their study on early childhood teacher identity conformed to the public perception of early childhood teachers as calm, patient, tolerant, loving, and nurturing, even as they spoke of the complexities and level of education necessary to be a “good” teacher.

Galman, Pica-Smith, and Rosenberger (2010) wrote of being surprised by their own conduct in their study of anti-racism and pre-service teachers. They found themselves “defusing conflict and maintaining both good manners and the status quo” as “social mothers” (p. 233) when race talk was difficult. While the subject of femininity was not coupled with the responses to race, racism, and bias in this study, the avoidance of discussing fraught topics might have a relationship to unconscious adherence of a feminine version of the early childhood teacher. Montessori’s (1967a) words regarding the teacher is that she “must fashion herself, she must learn how to be calm, patient, and humble, how to restrain her own impulses and how to carry out her eminently practical tasks with the required delicacy” (p. 151). Considering this

description of the Montessori teacher, it is perhaps not surprising that Montessori teachers would choose “nice” ways of enacting Montessori education in regard to race.

Montessori, Niceness, and Whiteness

Most participants appeared to prefer a kind and "nice" way to address any topics that were difficult and professed a belief that this approach is the appropriate way to dismantle race issues for the children, now and as preparation for the future. A majority of the survey respondents indicated that they were comfortable with discussing race. Additionally, several interviewees spoke about desiring to present the "positive" aspects of race, or presenting ways to be kind and nice even through the way participants conducted conflict resolution (which was likened to discrimination). One survey respondent replied that “I find that teaching more about acceptance, kindness and love are more tangible [*sic*] for this age.” Interestingly, kindness and love are possibly just as, if not more so, abstract as race, and racial bias, but these abstractions did not surface as concerns.

These positive presentations, no matter how well intended, are lost opportunities for dialoguing about race issues that are relevant even in the lives of young children. Castagno (2014) found that “most teachers have a genuine curiosity about diversity, but they engage the issues in nice ways that never actually threaten inequity. Dancing between valuing sameness on the one hand and difference on the other hand is a common manifestation of whiteness” (pp 48-49). Valuing sameness and difference at the same time transpired frequently in these participant’s responses. Quotes such as “we also use our Peace Area and Cultural Area to highlight that everyone might be different on the outside but on the inside we all have feelings and are similar” were common.

Participants' considerations of their race. The attachment to niceness permeated even the responses of some of the participants of color. One participant, who identified as a person of color remarked that, "I feel showing love for all people is more important than discussing black white etc." Whether or not this philosophy was acquired during Montessori teacher training or emanated from other socio-cultural experiences was unclear. However, the sentiment did align with the statements of most of the other Montessori participants in response to discussions of race, regardless of color. Although a few participants did discuss with children how bias and discrimination are unfair, and how that "unfairness" worked to privilege some and not others, most did not, preferring instead to present stories of historical figures as heroes or discrimination as something that happened in the past, ignoring the conflict-laden truth.

Whiteness. Participants did talk about their Whiteness, and how their Whiteness prevented them from speaking about race and/or bias, and/or led them to need more information. One interviewee stated, "I feel that as a white woman I'm fairly unprepared in this area. And I think that there's a lot of work that can be done." Another respondent mentioned in her survey that "as a white woman I can only depend on the knowledge of experts and those who have experienced it." Both statements indicate a willingness to engage in race talk but hesitancy about how to enact that talk.

According to the research study findings, enacting a kind and nice approach effectively enabled participants to avoid decentering Whiteness in any substantive way, as this method avoided any talk that was not "positive" or kind, or excused participants from engaging in a conversation if they felt ill-prepared. If conversations of race or bias were attempted with the children, participants utilized verbiage that obscured the truth, as some participants indicated that

people were not “nice,” as opposed to wrong or racist, or that people in the past did not understand they were doing “bad” things, but now they do understand, with the implication that racism is no longer practiced. Neither approach is truthful, and neither approach works against inequity. Castagno (2014) asserted that

Because majoritarian perspectives and knowledge are normalized, particular kinds of niceness are valued (so dialogue and action related to power and race are avoided), social harmony and unity are valued (so anything that might disrupt those goals is avoided), and meritocracy and equality are valued (so oppression is ignored and reproduction ensues). In addition, race, structural arrangements, and inequity are obscured or ignored. This is achieved by centering the individual and by othering groups, perspectives, knowledge, and experiences that fall outside the norm. (pp. 80-81)

Castagno’s (2014) research coincided with Okun’s (2010) in that Whiteness often elevates certain ways of being over others, including valuing politeness and comfort, and avoiding conflict and emotion. Often, because peace was so highly valued by the Montessori teacher participants, they persisted in “positive” interactions, regardless of the circumstances. For example, even when a child demonstrated that she was devaluing her own color by articulating a desire to be lighter-skinned, the statement was not excavated with the child or the other children who were in the environment. Bissonnette (2016) noted that “many teachers cling to niceness, believing that their allegiance to the construct highlights their humanity and improves their pedagogy” (p. 13). This sentiment proved to describe the participants and their approach in this research study.

The layers of the earth (Figure 5) also exemplified the steps involved in coming to terms with Whiteness. The layers in this interpretation represented the levels of White apprehension of racism, as conveyed by Helms (1992), Sue (2015), and DiAngelo (2018). Most participants in this study appeared to be at a surface or shallow level of racial identity. A few participants appeared to have initialized deeper engagement with the concepts of racism and Whiteness, but for these participants, the work appeared to be nascent.

The illustration was also symbolic of the deep work that needed to be done to reach a level of truth and solidarity in ameliorating racism. The idea of “excavating” to reach these deeper levels of understanding resulted in the layer with the dinosaur fossil. The fossil represented that regardless of the difficulties, there are rewards in excavation, such as when the interview inspired a participant to seek out texts that expose racism.

The fossil also exemplified the history that is unearthed in “excavation” for understanding. An example is the historical trauma caused by slavery that is uncovered when researching racism, and the knowledge and understanding crucial to deeper levels in the understanding of racism and the need to work for change. The participants also had their personal history to consider. As such, the participants’ presentations on race appeared to be at a surface level, as they represented heroes and celebrations and other “nice” ways of approaching race rather than helping children understand the true history of the United States and its modern day ramifications.

Teachers and parents. Teachers may also favor “nice” presentations around race and/or bias to avoid upsetting parents and/or administrators. Most interviewees in this research study mentioned needing to keep parents happy or noted events where parents were unhappy. At the

root of this response it appeared that not only are teachers unsure of how to address race and/or bias appropriately, but that parents may not possess accurate information that would support teachers' efforts in honest interactions. Contingent on parental responses are the administrators' issues with teachers (which tangentially relate to parental responses), in the ways they might be presenting race or bias, or even culture, thus upsetting parents. Husband (2012) suggested that teachers first consult with administrators prior to discussions that may occur with children. Aligning administrators and developing a whole school focus on anti-racist practices is possibly a better solution. Crucially, teachers, parents, and administrators' lack of knowledge of early childhood bias constrain efforts to effect change on a larger scale.

Individualism. In this research study, the issues of race and racial bias did not rise to a collective educational response in schools or with the participants and were insufficient to address the prejudicial undercurrents in context of race and race relations on a systemic or institutional level. Ladson-Billings (1995) long ago "defined culturally relevant teaching as a pedagogy of opposition (1992c) not unlike critical pedagogy but specifically committed to collective, not merely individual, empowerment" (p. 160). By individualizing their approach, as opposed to recognizing racism as a collective systematic issue, participants could disregard the exterior factors of racism, believing that if children were simply taught how to get along peacefully, racism would end and peace would be achieved. Absent from that analysis was an understanding of structural and institutional racism, and the understanding that treating all children as individuals who have equal opportunities disregards the societal factors that favor some and limit others.

The evidence that children are socialized in a White-centered society and assimilate White values and bias did not seem to weigh greatly in the participants' choices of presentations to address race and/or bias. Most participants indicated that addressing those specific components at this age was inappropriate, as they identified race and/or bias as not developmentally relevant for early childhood, further, that it was not appropriate or "nice" to talk about race or racial bias. Hayes and Fasching-Varner (2015) challenged this niceness in teachers and teacher education, when they stated

we believe that it is largely irrelevant that teacher educators are most often kind, dedicated, and nice people. Niceness and goodness have little, if anything, to do with the knowledge that guides the interactions and activities in which White teacher educators engage future teachers; many colleagues have little meaningful context or experience working effectively with students of color. (p. 115)

For participants in this study, the experiences of Montessori training, and their teacher educators' dispositions toward including race and racism in the training had an impact.

Montessori Training

An obvious difficulty in enacting race talk that emerged in this study is the lack of training or education in Montessori teacher training. Most participants did not receive education specific to discussing race in the classroom. A few participants said they did receive some instruction, but characterized it as limited in scope. Most participants mentioned that they had no guidance in choosing diverse books. Because the majority of the participants did not realize that children in early childhood were biased simply by being a segment of society (although they

recognized that they may have prejudice because of parents or other outside sources), they did not feel a great need to address race or bias.

Montessori teacher *educators* may also be unaware of the findings on children and bias, given that the answers from participants indicated a lack of training. Because of the insufficient information regarding race, racial identity, and bias in training, participants were left to believe that children are free of bias in their early years. In addition, that information void may lead some teachers to believe that if they present cultural lessons about “different” world communities and celebrations, and teach peace through social interactions and conflict management, children will naturally remain bias free.

Teacher identity. Just as children are constructing their social identities, so are teacher candidates. Introducing race talk in education programs with attention to developing a positive teacher identity outside of Whiteness and niceness may help teachers understand the need for anti-racist education in early childhood and assist them in efficacy around race talk. Lazar and Offenberg (2011) acknowledged that developing an anti-racist teacher identity “can be very challenging for those who maintain a ‘color-blind’ orientation that denies the significance of racism in contemporary society or who resist exploring these issues” (p. 281). Extensive work in racial awareness is often required to dismantle color neutral views. Hayes and Fasching (2015) posited that the

racial power of Whiteness must be considered and addressed explicitly within the context of preparing future PK-12 teachers to realize social justice in the classroom. The sabotaging, silencing, and gagging of social justice and socio-cultural foundations in the

preparation of teachers with the intertwined resistance to race and equity is unlikely to be interrupted without a serious consideration of the role of Whiteness. (p. 115)

Part of the continuing work of building a teacher identity in the United States is genuinely addressing the role race plays in education.

Montessori wrote about the transformation of the teacher into a “new” kind of teacher created “ex novo” that regards children and education in a different, more holistic, and scientific way (Montessori, 1917/1971, pp. 125-141). One aspect of that transformation is developing a teacher identity. Without training and education that help teachers to recognize that widespread systemic racism exists, the extent that it affects children, and the understanding of how to combat it, children are left without adequate guidance to ameliorate their negative racialized views.

At some level, these participants did recognize the need to supplement their training, if not around racism, at least in presenting stories about people of color or recognizing that people are many different colors. As Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, and Powers-Costello (2011) found, teachers’ reluctance to talk about race might not be unwillingness, but a lack of foundational knowledge and resources. The Montessori teacher participants in this study developed their own approaches to utilizing materials, presentations, and ideas. The dilemma is that their individualized approach may or may not be beneficial for children.

Literature as a teaching tool. As with the children who constructed their own social understandings, participants constructed their own approach to teaching lessons around race and bias without significant guidance, mainly using books to present concepts. However, Lazar and Offenbergl (2011) relayed that

Teachers’ ability to talk about this literature in accurate, candid, and thoughtful

ways also depends on teacher education programs that address the intersection of sociology, literature, and pedagogy. Specifically, there is a need to model close readings of literature to identify how the story language and illustrations work together to show structural racism, Black activism, White complicity, and the complicated nature of Whiteness. There needs to be room in the teacher education program to support teachers' construction of lessons around these books from the perspective of critical literacy and to nurture their ways of facilitating discussions with children about these books in practicum settings. They will need many more explicit models of how teachers apply a critical literacy stance to their use of literature. (p. 307)

Unfortunately, these Montessori teacher participants were attempting to broach the concepts of racism and activism, but without the context Lazar and Offenberg (2011) deemed necessary to effectively introduce those concepts to children. The unfortunate outcome is that participants are perhaps introducing erroneous information that could be ineffectual or even perpetuate bias.

In-group bias in teachers. The Montessori teacher participants in this study manifested in-group tendencies. In-groups can be small or large groups that have social and emotional resonance for members (Johnston, 2001). In-group bias occurs when individuals reinforce group beliefs sometimes as a response to an out-group threat. The outgroup threat can be real or perceived (Johnston, 2001). Erlich and Gramzow (2013) found that a group-specific mind-set, as opposed to an individualized mind-set

guides subsequent thoughts, judgments, motivations, and behaviors. A by-product of this mind-set would be an increase in biases that serve to establish, protect, and enhance the worth and integrity of that group. A group-affirmation. . . . increases group-relevant

subjectivity by leading people to recategorize themselves specifically at that group level and, thus, reinforces any biases inherent to that group membership. (p. 1120)

The participants in this study seemed convinced that Montessori training and education provided a means of addressing race and racial bias, even when they themselves presented conflicting evidence. The participants seemed to subscribe to a biased in-group tendency that reinforced their beliefs in the pedagogy, perhaps in response to a perceived out-group threat to the method around the questions of race and racial bias. Social Identity theory provides some further explanation of the phenomenon.

Social Identity theory was developed as a continuation of Allport's (1954) research on prejudice. Social identity theory was posited by researchers as one way people define themselves as individuals and group members of society (Social identity theory, 2018). Applied to the participants in this study, in the social groups that are important to personal identity, members tend to downplay any negative attributes of the group, and in fact, seek out positive attributes (Brown & Zagefka, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Social identity theory, 2018). This aspect of social identity theory was present with the participants in their expressed belief in the efficacy of Montessori pedagogy in addressing race.

Participants were attached to the concepts they were presented in training. Repeatedly, in the surveys and in the interviews, participants returned to the cultural lessons or the concept of peace or peace education as antidotes to race and bias, especially with young children. Even those participants who indicated a basic understanding of structural inequity returned to these themes. Inherent in these responses was the suggestion that what Montessori philosophy presented was more than adequate to address the complexity of race relations in the United

States, which was likely an idea retained from Montessori training. Cossentino (2009) explained that

The training lectures [of Maria Montessori] have been transcribed, translated, and disseminated in a collection of books that are treated by Montessorians as sacred texts. As crystallizations of a dynamic oral tradition, these texts serve as the primary sources of Montessori orthodoxy, and Montessorians of all persuasions routinely turn to quotes and passages to validate practice, to check interpretations, or to argue about implementation. (p. 521)

Given how Montessorians return to these texts and their training throughout their careers, a possible explanation for the continued belief that culture and peace solved for racism, within the broader concepts of in-groups and social identity theory, are the theories of evaluative conditioning and processing fluency.

Evaluative conditioning and processing fluency. Evaluative conditioning (EC) is generally “examined using a procedure in which an initially neutral conditioned stimulus (CS) acquires affective valence through repeated pairing with an affectively positive or negative unconditioned stimulus (US)” (Landwehr, Golla, & Reber, 2017, p. 125). Thus, Montessori teacher training consistently pairing culture and peace studies with world-wide amity or conversely with ending racism and other isms could produce an automatic association between the ideas for Montessori teacher participants in this study. Furthermore, the more an idea is repeated, true or not, the more likely it is to be believed (Weaver, Garcia, Schwarz, & Miller, 2007). Processing fluency, the relative ease with which an idea is accessed (Landwehr, Golla, & Reber, 2017, p. 125), combined with evaluative conditioning and repetition may explain the

consistency with which peace and culture were equated to anti-racist teachings in the responses on the surveys and interviews. Understanding the almost religious fervor that Montessorians have for both their approach and training (Cossentino, 2009), as well as the concepts of in-group bias and social identity theory, could explain some of the participant's reluctance to address inadequacies, and the desire to believe Montessori as metonymy for addressing race and racial bias.

Montessori in the United States. Of the 24 teacher participants, only one discussed the difference between race relations in the United States as opposed to the countries where Montessori solidified her model of education, and how that may change the dynamics of Montessori in the United States. Most participants seemed to believe Montessori to be a model that has a world-wide application without needing adaptation. Several participants did believe racism needed to be addressed in a different way in the United States but were unsure how to do that, outside of the peace and cultural presentations. Most participants seemed eager to believe that Montessori education addressed race and bias in a way that dismantled racism. Further, some seemed aggrieved that the issue would even be raised in this study, as many respondents quite adamantly professed that addressing racial bias in early childhood was unnecessary. One respondent noted that "I think by creating a climate of acceptance in the classroom and a culture of kindness, racial bias among young children is not existent." Another replied that they did not present race or bias because "it's not age appropriate for primary children." Nancy Rambusch, who originated the American Montessori Society for the Association Montessori International (AMI), separated from AMI over her belief that in the United States, Montessori education must

be adapted to U.S. culture, while AMI held that Montessori models worked for all cultures (Povell, 2010).

The differentiation of the United States from the rest of the world is intriguing. After William Heard Kilpatrick, head of the Teacher's College wrote negatively about Montessori in the early 1900s (Povell, 2010), Montessori left the United States and never returned. Until Mario Montessori (Montessori's son) sent an emissary to the United States in the 1950s, Montessori education was almost non-existent in the United States (Povell, 2010). Would Maria Montessori have considered a different approach to race relations in the United States had she been more present in the U.S.? The possibility exists, as she added additional concepts around peace and "cosmic education¹³" after and between the World Wars and her internment in India and Sri Lanka.

For many Montessori teachers, content in training is sacrosanct. Most teachers will not deviate from their presentations and approaches without explicit direction from their training centers, an example of the strength of the in-group beliefs. This strict adherence model undoubtedly originates from Montessori herself, as she had the "absolute need for control of her

¹³ Cosmic Education is a Montessori concept that holds everything and everyone in the Universe is interconnected and interrelated, and all have a "cosmic task" that is carried out according to this plan (Grazzini, 2013).

method” (Povell, 2010, p. 108). For Montessorians, following Montessori’s model with fidelity is of the utmost importance. Introducing lessons that help children understand the racialized nature and inequitable treatment of people of color in the United States will not occur without direction from Montessori training programs, as teachers hold trainers, training centers, and programs in the highest regard. Teachers do their best to include materials to enhance instruction in content areas where there is flexibility, but do not always present accurate information, nor acknowledge the very real bias children reveal at a young age.

Montessori Teachers and Paradox

Another theme that was prominent was the paradox presented in how the beliefs and theories of Montessori teacher participants contrasted with their actions, perhaps in relation to their in-group status. Many of the participants surveyed and interviewed expressed profound belief in some aspect of their training, and in the same survey or interview revealed actions or ideas that contradicted their previous statement. Bias and the Absorbent Mind (a Montessori theory that will be defined in the next section), supplemental lessons versus fidelity to training, “simple” language versus nomenclature, and racism beliefs versus race stories were some of the paradoxes that surfaced.

Bias and the Absorbent Mind. The Absorbent Mind is a Montessori theory which posited that children’s minds absorb all impressions of the world around them without discrimination. These impressions create in the mind what in essence becomes the child’s *self*. Montessori (1967) defined the Absorbent Mind, describing the concept as one where

the child undergoes a transformation. Impressions do not merely enter his mind; they form it. They incarnate themselves in him. The child creates his own “mental muscles,” using for this what he finds in the world about him. We have named this type of mentality, The Absorbent Mind. (pp. 25-26)

This theory is crucial and central to Montessori education. When the movement returned to the United States, *The Absorbent Mind* was one of three books approved for Montessori training, along with *The Discovery of the Child* and *The Secret of Childhood* (Povell, 2010, p. 127). What becomes paradoxical here is that most respondents to the survey felt that children were not biased, yet most also acknowledged that society, parents or others have bias or prejudice. If bias and racism is “like smog in the air” that all are breathing, these beliefs and ideas become incarnated in children, as these impressions form the mind (Tatum, 2017, p.86). A strong belief in the Absorbent Mind should acknowledge that bias is embodied in children, if it is manifested in the world around children.

Some participants recognized the societal aspects of bias. One respondent noted that “I think the children in the class are racially biased due to the culture that they are living in.” Another stated that “I think that children in my class are absorbing everything around them - at school and home - in terms of racial bias.” Of the twenty-four survey respondents, six noted that everyone has some sort of bias. The remaining 18 did not believe children were biased, in spite of being trained in the concepts of the Absorbent Mind.

Supplemental Lessons and Fidelity to Training. Another area in which paradox appeared was in the lessons and materials participants used to teach about race. While almost all participants believed that Montessori *implicitly* addressed race and racial bias, almost all

participants also added books, lessons, and materials that were not supplied or taught to them during training. In example, when participants were asked how they presented race, racism or bias, most said they do it through the cultural lessons, peace and peace education, grace and courtesy lessons, and in the case of almost every teacher, books. When the interviewees were asked how they chose the books they used, they invariably replied with answers that were outside of their training. The internet and friends were the sources most consistently provided. When interviewees were asked if their training gave them book lists, or ways to present the books, they responded that it did not. Some were given direction in talking about “different” cultures but not in how to present critical literacy with children and certainly not how to navigate race conversations.

Even though participants in the study were choosing materials and lessons outside of their training, they did not seem to make a connection that they were compensating for a gap in their training. Regardless of these actions, participants still persisted in the belief that culture and peace as implicit in Montessori were adequate to address race and racial bias. Because participants substantially incorporated books to teach children lessons in race or racism, the participant’s lack of expertise in navigating the choice of the books and the subject is significant. Lazar and Offenber (2011) conducted a study in which professors coached teachers in how to talk about race and racism through books, then had these student teachers enact the lessons in a children’s class. Lazar and Offenber (2011) found that when these teachers developed and communicated lessons with books about race and racial injustice, they

avoided issues of racial oppression and White complicity when designing lessons and teaching students. It is important to point out that being exposed to these concepts in the

course did not mean they solidified their understandings of these concepts or that they fully accepted them. There is also the possibility that teachers understood these concepts well but lacked the ability to translate these understandings into instructional conversations with children. (p. 306)

For these participants, even though they were exposed to concepts relating to reading texts around race, racism, and discrimination, and participated in conversations and coaching in how to teach about race and racism prior to entering the children's classroom, they still avoided those conversations. Given the results of Lazar and Offenber (2011), the Montessori teacher participants who added books and materials in what they consider the cultural area, are unlikely to introduce issues of discrimination and Whiteness in conversation with children, at least in any substantial way. That the participants added the books on race at all is surprising, given that they indicated that these concepts were inherent in the Montessori model, and addressing race was not covered, for most, in Montessori training. Perhaps the participants in this study believe in their training consciously, but unconsciously intuit a deficiency.

“Simple language” and nomenclature. Another surprise was the use of the language around race and racial bias. Throughout the Montessori environment, examples of nomenclature exist using precise, scientific language. Montessori (1967) believed that children both absorb the language (correct and incorrect) they hear in the world around them and have a natural tendency

and desire to group and order language. This all occurs during the “sensitive” period¹⁴ for language. Thus, since Montessori believed children are developing the language skills that provide a foundation for life, a need for precise language that follows predictable patterns exists.

One example for the precise use of language would be articulating the word children instead of kids, or supplying the words pistil and stamen when studying the flower. Nonetheless, when participants were talking about race, they surprisingly did not follow this principle. The participants used words like “differences” or “culture” as substitutes for race, and “unfair” instead of using the words racism or discrimination. Some, when they did talk about discrimination, would use words like “mean,” and characterized discrimination as in the past. Participants expressed the belief it was inappropriate to either talk about race, bias, and prejudice or to use those words, although Montessori teachers are directed to teach about the non-fiction realities of life for the child.¹⁵ Often, participants discussed teaching about different cultures, but did not discuss an approach to Whiteness or to White as a race or culture.

¹⁴ Sensitive periods are times when children have a special propensity for acquiring a particular skill. These times are discrete in length and when they fade, do not return (Montessori, 1998).

¹⁵ These statements on training are largely informed by experiences from my own training, anecdotal conversations with others about their training, and from Montessori’s publications. It is possible others may have had different experiences, but because training is prescribed, it is unlikely to vary greatly.

Certainly, participants' own unawareness around Whiteness may prevent them from conceptualizing White as a race with a culture. That these concepts were unexplored is not surprising, but the imprecise use of language is unexpected. Montessori training is explicit in the use of correct words and language with children. In their discussions or responses, however, most participants did not connect their training to their substitution of euphemisms for race, racism, bias, and prejudice. A few did utilize the correct terms, but the majority did not.

Racism and Race Stories. According to the study's findings, most participants did not believe that young children were racially biased or that racism existed in their school communities. However, even though participants indicated the belief that racial bias was not an issue in their environments, many race stories were shared that suggested prejudice or bias, with an exception being a story of friendship between a Black girl and a White girl who said they were "twins." What exactly that meant to the girls was not explored. The other stories seemed to suggest overt signs of bias or prejudice. One respondent noted that a grandma had told a White child not to play with another Black child. Another story surfaced in which a young girl told the teacher participant she did not want to be chocolate (in color), but wanted to be vanilla. Yet a different respondent had a White child who made racist comments toward a Black child, and both families became involved. The children in an additional school asked an assistant, who was Native American, if she lived in a teepee. Muslim children formed a "group" because they all worshipped together, although the respondent noted that was mainly on the playground. Some children avoided talking with other children because of their accents. One race story explored the way children responded with silence and acquiescence to an assistant who was large and Black. These examples are a small sampling of the race stories that were either a result of

the survey responses or the interviews. Even though most participants did not indicate that race was a significant presence in the life of children, the stories suggested that it was a factor in their daily activities.

Many adults want to believe that children are pure, innocent, and naïve (Katz, 2003; Vittrup, 2016). Research demonstrates that they are not. Children are social beings who are absorbing the social world and enacting what they absorb (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 1996). These accounts, in juxtaposition to the professed belief that race was not a significant occurrence in the life of these children, are another representation of the paradoxical perceptions of the teachers.

Theories on Paradox

What did these paradoxical findings mean? Besides perceiving the data through the lens of education and educative critical race theory, psycho-social elements began to emerge as influential. The levels of the earth (Figure 5) were also cogent to this analysis, characterizing the fluidity of qualitative interpretation, and the multitude of layers and levels required to comprehend data from the study. Interpretation and content from the psycho-social perspectives also needed to be “excavated” (as in the dinosaur fossil) and examined. The excavation into those disciplines was an unexpected layer of analysis.

The concept of *motivated reasoning* was uncovered as possibly having relevance in regard to the seemingly incongruous paradoxical ideas. The definition is as follows:

Motivated reasoning is a form of reasoning in which people access, construct, and evaluate arguments in a biased fashion to arrive at or endorse a preferred conclusion. The term *motivated* in *motivated reasoning* refers to the fact that people use reasoning

strategies that allow them to draw the conclusions they want to draw (i.e., are motivated to draw). (Pandelaere, 2007, p.2)

Given the conviction professed by most of the participants that the Montessori model provided implicit training on how to address race and racial bias, participants may have been motivated to explain away, even on a subconscious level, events that did not fit the Montessori heuristic. Because of the fraught issue of race and the lack of information that training provided, Montessori teacher participants may have simply disregarded salient information, even if on some level they deemed it important enough to emerge in conversation or narrative. Are there other reasons this disassociation might appear?

Generally, motivated reasoning occurs when there exists a threat to self (Pandelaere, 2007). Could issues, such as racism and bias, which are unaddressed in Montessori training threaten the identity of the Montessori teacher? Epley and Gilovich (2016) noted that “A person who recognizes that a set of beliefs is strongly held by a group of peers is likely to seek out and welcome information supporting those beliefs while maintaining a much higher level of skepticism about contradictory information (p. 135). If the incidences in which participants held one belief, likely from their training and in accordance with their Montessori principles, was in conflict with their actual practice, it is possible that the in-group pressure of Montessori practices caused motivated reasoning to occur. Pandelaere (2007) explained that there are types of conclusions that elicit motivated reasoning responses, one being “conclusions that are consistent with strongly held beliefs or strong attitudes. For instance, supporters of a politician might downplay the consequences of an undesirable act committed by the politician they support or might attribute the behavior to situational pressures” (p. 2). Montessori teacher participants in

this study may have “downplayed” any actions that might be “non-Montessori” as they believe so strongly in the model.

Implications

Participants in this study were largely without direction from their training regarding addressing race and racial bias. Nash and Miller (2015) maintained that key to early childhood teacher educator’s work is the recognition that uninterrupted Whiteness will continue to cause disproportionalities in education (p. 201). The Montessori community must recognize the saliency of race education and provide direction to Montessori teachers to enable Montessori education to remain relevant in the United States in the 21st century. Contrary to popular notions of innocence, young children do see race and do exhibit prejudice and bias based on race (Aboud, 1988; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Given the inadequacy of education for the Montessori teacher participants in this study on addressing race with young children, and the misinformation participants hold regarding prejudice and young children, Montessori teachers, Montessori teacher training centers and universities, the Montessori community writ large, and other early childhood practitioners and educators may benefit from understanding how Montessori teachers are actually addressing race in their environments.

Implications for Practitioners

Teachers. Teachers may need to educate themselves extensively on children and race, which is primarily within their control. A means of access might be to consider their own identity and their teacher identity within the context of culture and race. Although teachers undergo a transformation during their Montessori teacher education, the work of building a

teacher identity and a racial identity, particularly for White teachers, is continuous. Why White teachers? The answer is primarily because Whiteness is so often uninterrogated and unrecognized as a race and a culture (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2011). Teachers could begin at the micro-level of personal cultural identity, moving next to the meta-level of White culture (Helms, 1992; Sue, 2015). Because of the in-group protectiveness of proponents of the Montessori Method, the most efficacious progression would be to then examine the culture of Whiteness and niceness inherent at the meso-level of the Montessori Model and in most educative settings. After the initial discoveries of personal identity and White cultural identity, Montessori teachers may be willing to critically examine their own role in the perpetuation of Whiteness in education.

As teachers grow in their racial identity and understanding, a commitment to equity must be paired with action. Social justice and racial inequities require concentrated efforts if systems of oppression are to change. Action is a crucial component of the tenets of critical race and critical education theories (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Gay (2010) cautioned that educators “may come to see ‘awareness’ as sufficient preparation for teaching cultural diversity and ethnically diverse students without giving due consideration to *changing* policies, programs, and practices” (p. 149). The challenge for Montessori teachers is to move beyond discourse to action. That path is neither easy nor comfortable.

Both Sue (2015) and Helms (1992) noted a progression of difficult transitions occur in racial identity development. Teachers should be prepared to be uncomfortable as they move toward understanding their role in dismantling racism. Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, and Powers-Costello (2011) advised teachers that

it is wise to expect questions and challenges from not only White educators and parents, but parents of color as well. Yet, educators need to be astute and well-prepared. It is important to reflect on how they plan to proceed with their activities and to get feedback from administrators and parents when feasible. (p. 339)

Teachers might make use of the excellent resources developed by *Teaching Tolerance*, *Teaching for Change*, *Montessori for Social Justice*, *Social Justice Books*, and *Anti-Bias Leaders in Early Childhood Education*, as well as the resources found in Appendix F, as they initiate their research into identity development and anti-racist teaching practices. That recommendation is not to suggest that teachers can do this work alone. They must be assisted by their education programs.

Teacher educators. Before any significant work in race and racial bias, Montessori teacher educators must engage in training with cultural identity work just as they do with the transformative Montessori teacher identity work. Teacher cultural identity is a necessary precursor to understanding racial identity. Teacher identity is important to excavate in all its manifestations, and it is necessary for teacher educators to do similar work on their own identities. Brown, Bloom, Morris, Power-Carter, and Willis (2017) suggested that just as teachers' own racial identities were implicated in the nature of and the extent to which they engaged in classrooms conversations on race, researchers' and teacher educators' identities must be included as an integral component of theorizing about classroom conversations on race. (p. 471)

With supplemental professional development, Montessori teacher educators could provide direct instruction in Montessori training on methods to engage children in race talk. They could

proactively provide teachers with book lists and information that is culturally and racially relevant, if they are not already doing so. In addition, just as in the other areas of Montessori education, specific presentations on issues of race, racism, discrimination, bias, and prejudice could be addressed in training, enabling teachers to act with more confidence in this area. Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, and Powers-Costello (2011) suggested that

conversations and anti-racist activities should be ongoing rather than brief, one-time events which can inadvertently reinforce stereotypes and colorblindness. In order to move beyond superficial coverage, it is best to find ways to integrate discussions about racism into existing curriculum and instruction. (p.338)

In addition, teacher educators could provide direction to teacher candidates for navigating any particularly fraught communication with parents and administrators over these presentations.

National Organizations. National organizations in Montessori may need to provide training to teacher educators on instructing teacher candidates on race and racial bias. These national organizations could develop professional development required of all educators in Montessori training centers. Consensus could be developed on the best way to incorporate direct teaching of race talk into the Montessori sequence. Stevenson (2016) of the American Montessori Society's Board of Directors noted the need for schools and leaders that facilitate productive race talk and for diversifying Montessori teachers and schools. Leaders in national organizations will need to procure experts in the field of race, racism, and critical studies to assist in developing protocols.

Organizations and people exist that have been working on anti-bias and anti-racist approaches in the Montessori field, but they still exist on the fringe of mainstream Montessori

education. *Montessori for Social Justice* (montessoriforsocialjustice.org) is a group that might be of assistance in developing presentations for trainers and educators, as well as University-level social scientists, including educators. Daisy Han of *Wildflower Montessori Schools* (wildflowerschools.org) has developed a Montessori training called “Embracing Equity.” In the program, “small, intentionally racially diverse cohorts of individuals dive into their own racial and ethnic identities, building their own critical consciousness and looking into the mirror to unpack long-held assumptions” (Han, 2018, p.33). *City Garden Montessori School* in St. Louis (citygardenschool.org) is deliberate in their anti-bias anti-racist (ABAR) approach to Montessori. Others may exist as well. National organizations in Montessori may want to utilize these resources as they consider how to equip training centers and universities to guide their Montessori teacher candidates.

Future Research

Recommendations for Academics. Further research is needed on best practices to enact race talk and teaching about racism and discrimination in the early childhood classroom. Research that tests the efficacy of disparate ways of introducing race and race talk with young children and teacher engagement in that process would be of interest. In addition, interrogating the connections between feminine discourse and difficulty with race talk in early childhood settings could be informative to teachers and training centers. Further, study of the Whiteness and niceness of Montessori educators, teacher education programs, and schools could elucidate relevant information. Few studies exist that fully examine the ways Whiteness is enacted in the Montessori model. Persistence in beliefs of Montessori efficacy across cultures has curtailed

serious examination of the niceness and politeness inherent in the model that may be obscuring a centered Whiteness, particularly in the United States. The socio-cultural and psychological components of in-group bias, evaluative conditioning, and motivated reasoning among Montessori practitioners may also yield interesting results.

Limitations

This study was first of all limited in scope. The survey participants were all female early childhood teachers who agreed to be part of the Montessori Research Group of the American Montessori Society. All participants in the interviews were White women. The survey was a concise set of questions that revealed focused information. The interviews were a one-time occurrence of less than an hour each with a small subset of the larger survey pool. More extensive ethnographic studies may yield richer information on teachers, teaching, and children and their approach to race and prejudice.

Second, demographics could have been considered to a greater extent in the study of the representation of anti-racist teaching. Is geographical region in the United States significant in the ways race talk is realized? Is the age of the teacher of consequence? Does the organization that offered the participant Montessori training have importance? How are teachers of color enacting race talk in the early childhood environments? Does their approach differ from White teachers? In this study, those factors did not appear to influence race talk, but a deep analysis was beyond the scope of the study. A broad examination of demographics may yield additional information to guide educators and trainers.

Third, the inclusion of early childhood teachers who are not Montessori-trained may yield more useful broad information. This study was highly specific and the results are not widely generalizable. Research outside of the Montessori context may yield results that could be beneficial to the entire early childhood community. The results of this study may or may not apply to non-Montessori teachers.

Fourth, the survey and interview protocols utilized could be assessed for efficacy and suitability to the research. The data-informed infographic may have enriched the interview or perhaps elicited responses constrained by the presented themes. The interview itself could be conducted in person to ascertain whether that method is superior to an online interview and possibly elicits differing responses.

Concluding Comments

Early childhood education must cultivate teachers who can enact conversations concerning race and racial bias in the classroom. The Montessori teacher participants in this study indicated effectiveness in the areas of peace and cultural education, but remain, along with most early childhood educators, uneducated and uninformed on the social development of race and racial bias in the young child. Montessori education does not escape the persistent manifestation of Whiteness that permeates most education in the United States. Educators have a responsibility to the child to address these inequities. Derman-Sparks and Olsen Edwards (n.d.) cautioned that "Just as we do not wait until a child asks questions about how to read before planning how to provide a range of literacy learning opportunities, anti-bias education is the teacher's responsibility, not the child's, to initiate" (para. 5). The dialogue around race and

racial bias must be commenced in the classroom, in the moment when children are developing the social constructions that will guide them throughout their lives. Without challenging the existing Whiteness endemic in early childhood education, little hope exists that inequities in later education will be ameliorated. The following quotation was invoked in the second chapter as a possible call to investigate race and racial bias but takes on new meaning at this point in the study. Again, Montessori (2007) stated that “An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live” (p. 30). What became clear is that in order to prepare the children for the times in which they live, teachers must first prepare themselves.

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Informed Consent Form

Start of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Welcome to the Montessori Early Childhood Educators and Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Study

I am interested in understanding how Montessori early childhood educators approach race, diversity, and ethnicity in their environments. You will be emailed a survey relevant to race, diversity, and ethnicity and early childhood and asked to answer some questions. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. I will also be interviewing random participants from the survey to better understand the survey results.

The survey should take you around 20-30 minutes to complete, and you will receive a \$10 gift card to Target for your participation. If you consent to the interview and are randomly selected,

you will receive a \$25 Target gift card for your participation. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Teresa Ripple at tmripple@stkate.edu

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable, and only aggregate data will be presented. Select quotations from the surveys and interviews may be shared in the study but interviewees will not be identified. The audio from the interview will be transcribed (written down) for coding purposes. . You will have the opportunity to ascertain that the transcription is correct. All information will be kept on a password-protected computer and this information will be destroyed at the culmination of the study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the American Montessori Society in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans.

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

- I consent to the study and the survey (1)
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate (2)
- I consent to the additional interview (3)
- I do not consent to the additional interview (4)

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Block 2

Montessori Early Childhood Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Study

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 How do you explicitly teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class?

Q2 If you don't explicitly talk or teach about race and racial bias with the children in your class, what are some ways race and racial bias might be indirectly addressed in your classroom?



Q3 To what extent do you think children in your class may be racially biased?



Q4 How do you feel about discussing race and racial bias?



Q5 How did your Montessori training prepare you to teach about race and racial bias with children in early childhood?

Q6 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
 - Female (2)
 - Non-binary/third gender (3)
 - Prefer to self-describe (4)
 - Prefer not to say (5)
-

Q7 What is your age?

- 18-24 years old (1)
- 25-34 years old (2)
- 35-44 years old (3)
- 45-54 years old (4)
- 55-64 years old (5)

65+ years old (6)

Q8 What region did you grow up in?

Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT) (1)

South (AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA,
WV) (2)

Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI) (3)

West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY) (4)

Outside of United States (5)

Q9 What region do you live in currently?

Northeast (CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT) (1)

South (AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA,
WV) (2)

- Midwest (IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, WI) (3)
 - West (AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY) (4)
 - Outside of United States (5)
-

Q10 What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If you're currently enrolled in school, please indicate the highest degree you have *received*.)

- Less than a high school diploma (1)
 - High School degree or equivalent (2)
 - Some college, no degree (3)
 - Bachelor's Degree (4)
 - Master's Degree (5)
 - Professional Degree (MD, DDS, DVM) (6)
 - Doctorate (7)
-

Q11 Number of years teaching

- 1-3 years of teaching experience (1)
 - 4-6 years of teaching experience (2)
 - 7-9 years of teaching experience (3)
 - 10-12 years of teaching experience (4)
 - 12+ years of teaching experience (5)
-

Q12 Training

- AMS (1)
- AMI (2)
- NCME (3)
- MEPI (4)
- SMTC (5)
- Other MACTE (6)

Other (7)

Q13 What race or category describes you?

White (1)

Black or African American (2)

American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

Asian (4)

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

Hispanic, Latinx or Spanish origin (6)

Middle Eastern or North African (7)

Some other race, ethnicity, or origin (8)

Q27 Email Address to receive giftcard _____

Appendix C

Reminder Letter

Hello,

There is still time to complete the Montessori Early Childhood Race, Ethnicity, and Diversity Survey! As a reminder, I am Teresa Ripple and a doctoral student at Bethel University. I am interested in understanding how Montessori early childhood educators approach race, diversity, and ethnicity in their environments.

This project is made possible by the generous support of Montessori educators like yourself who have volunteered to participate in the Montessori Teacher Research Panel. You are making a valuable contribution to research efforts that are critical to the future of Montessori education. If you have any questions about your participation in the Montessori Teacher Research Panel, please contact the AMS Research Coordinator at research@amshq.org. This project is also designed for early childhood guides/teachers who are currently in the prepared environment. If your information has changed since you volunteered for the research panel, please contact research@amshq.org.

The survey should take you around 15-20 minutes to complete, and you will receive a \$10 gift card to Target for your participation.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

Teresa Ripple

Doctoral Candidate

Bethel University

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${1://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

Appendix D

RACE AND RACIAL BIAS IN CHILDREN MONTESSORI

TEACHABLE MOMENTS



A majority of teachers use "teachable moments" to talk about race or bias. These moments might include times where teachers overhear a discussion about race or bias, or when conversations arise from books, stories, and other moments.



A FEW TEACHERS DIRECTLY TALK ABOUT RACE AND BIAS

A few teachers thought it was important to directly engage children in conversation or presentations around race or bias because of the bias in our society.



CULTURE AND BOOKS

Almost every teacher presents cultural lessons, either through the Montessori materials or other means. Every teacher uses books as a primary teaching tool.



IMPLICIT EDUCATION IN TRAINING

No teacher said that their training covered race and racial bias in any significant way. Many said that Montessori training implicitly addresses the topics of race and racial bias through peace or peace education, and Montessori's teachings of respect and love.



CHILDREN ARE NOT BIASED

Most teachers felt that children are not biased or prejudiced based on race unless adults or society introduces bias into their life.

SOURCE:
t-ripple@bethel.edu

Appendix E

Interview Guide or Schedule

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Remember to practice bracketing prior to the interview. Minimize bias through a neutral stance.

Protocol: Introduce researcher. Thank interviewee for agreeing to interview. Remind interviewee that interview will be recorded, transcribed, and that the transcription will be made available for the interviewee to approve prior to use in the study. Remind interviewee that any confidential or personal identifiers will be removed. Let the interviewees know that if at any point in the interview the conversation or questions become too intense that they are free to pass and not answer specific questions, and that they are free to stop or end the interview at any time without affecting the relationship with Bethel University or the American Montessori Society.

Ask them to pick a pseudonym.

Icebreaker Questions:

1. I'd like to tell you a little about me and then hear about you—you, your household, your history and education.
2. What made you decide to become a Montessori teacher?

Interview Questions and prompts

1. Have you had the opportunity to look over the infographic?
2. What were your first impressions of the infographic?
3. What themes resonated or stood out to you?
 - a. Tell me more about. . .
4. What themes prompted questions for you?
 - a. Tell me more about. . .
5. Many teachers responded that they think young children are color blind or color neutral.
How do you feel about that?
 - a. Give me another example of. . .
 - b. Suppose a child said something racially prejudicial in your room. What would you do?
6. Do you find yourself in situations where you talk about race with adults?
7. Some teachers said that Montessori teachers need more training on discussing race and bias with children. What do you think?
 - a. Tell me more about that?
8. If you could design the ideal training for talking about race and bias with children, what would it look like?
9. If you were to give a new teacher one piece of advice on addressing bias with children, what would it be?

10. Relative to all the topics and presentations in your classroom, how important is the topic of race and bias in the grand scheme of things?

11. Are there any topics this interview or the survey raised for you that we haven't addressed that you'd like to discuss?

Thank them for their time. Remind them that you will be sending them the transcript to read and approve approximately one week after the last interview. Remind them that at any point if they have deeper questions about race and their own inter-cultural competence that I have resources available. Remind them that the interview is entirely confidential, all personal identifiers will be removed, and that transcripts and notes will be destroyed at the end of the study. Let them know that you will send them a link to access the final dissertation and that their gift card will be sent as soon as the transcription is reviewed.

Appendix F

A Resource List to Get You Started on Teaching about Race in Early Childhood

Articles and Books

The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism, Debra Van Ausdale and Joe Feagin.

Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong, James Loewen.

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People To Talk about Racism. By Robin DiAngelo.

What if All the Kids are White? Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young children and Families, Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia G. Ramsey.

Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves, Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards.

Rethinking Early Childhood Education, Ann Pelo

Beyond Heroes and Holidays, Enid Lee, Deborah, Menkart, and Margo Okazawa-Rey

Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Classroom, Beverly Daniel Tatum

Other People's Children, Lisa Delpit

Black Ants and Buddhists, Mary Cowhey

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism

Retrieved from <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-in-conversations-about>

The anti-defamation league site has quite a few good articles on race and education under the tab for education.

Creating an Anti-Racist Classroom: Reflections to level the playing field retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/anti-racist-classroom-danielle-moss-lee>

Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls by Jean Mendoza & Debbie Reese retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v3n2/mendoza.html>

Teaching Toward Consciousness by Joshua Block retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-toward-consciousness-joshua-block>

Websites:

Raising Race Conscious Children at <http://www.raceconscious.org/>

This website says it is “a resource to support adults who are trying to talk about race with young children. The goals of these conversations are to dismantle the color-blind framework and prepare young people to work toward racial justice.”

Rethinking Schools at <http://www.rethinkingschools.org/index.shtml>

Readers can find many teacher-friendly, short articles on social justice issues

Teaching Tolerance at <http://www.tolerance.org/>

Teaching Tolerance offers free resources such as DVDs, publications, lesson plans, and activities which will be useful for getting started and sustaining the efforts

We Need Diverse Books at diversebooks.org

National Association for Education of Young Children, NAEYC www.naeyc.org

Teaching for Change at www.teachingforchange.org

National Association for Multicultural Education at <http://nameorg.org>

The Jane Addams Peace Association

Tim Wise resources at <http://www.timwise.org/category/essays/>

Montessori for Social Justice resources at <http://montessoriforsocialjustice.org/resources/>

Racial Equity Resource Guide from PBS retrieved from <http://www.racialequityresourceguide.org/resources/resources>

Films:

Three films are recommended to help educators venture beyond colorblindness

A. *Starting Small*—Available through Teaching Tolerance. Great examples of how teachers all over the U.S. positively and creatively

engaged diversity issues with young children

B. *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*—A film that illuminates how Disney represents & reinforces stereotypical images in “children’s films.”

Available from: <http://www.mediaed.org/cgi-bin/commerce.cgi?preadd=action&key=112>

C. *Consuming Kids*—Developed by the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood. Although this video does not directly address racism, it shows how marketers use psychology, brain imaging/neurological stimuli, and other methods to manipulate children’s thinking. Coupled with *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*, it helps adults and educators to understand how deeply embedded and manipulative media outlets are and how stereotypes can work their way covertly into children’s belief systems and worldviews. These films were retrieved from an essay by Boutte, G.S., Lopez-Robertson, J., & Powers-Costello, E. (2011). Moving beyond colorblindness in early childhood classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 335–342. doi: 10.1007/s10643-011-0457-x

D. *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (3-part series)

E. *Black America since MLK: And Still I Rise*—four part video series from PBS

Children’s Book Lists

#IndigenousReads by Indigenous Writers: A Children’s Reading List. Retrieved from

<https://medium.com/embrace-race/indigenousreads-by-indigenous-writers-a-childrens-reading-list-c3b558d1d94a>

Anti-bias Education: A Selection of Children's Books for Each Topic

<http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/Protect/antiBias.php> These books are a companion to each of the chapters in the book *Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* by Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards .

From the We Need Diverse Books website. Retrieved from

<https://diversebooks.org/resources/where-to-find-diverse-books/>

Reading Lists from *Sarah Park Dahlen* at <https://readingspark.wordpress.com/>

Lee and Low Books Blog: <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2017/04/27/best-multicultural-books-for-preschool/> and <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2017/05/18/best-multicultural-books-for-kindergarten/>