

## ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND MONTESSORI

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This master's thesis research consists of a study in which the theoretical and practical congruencies between Equity Pedagogy, an essential component of multicultural education, and the pedagogical elements of Montessori Education are examined. The goals of this study are multi-tiered, existing on both a practical and an intellectual plane. On a practical level, the goals relate to Montessori classroom practice and Montessori teacher education programs. In considering the praxis of a small set of public school teachers, the practical relationship between Montessori and Equity Pedagogy begins to emerge. Praxis was explored using non-intrusive observational techniques with no videotaping. The researcher observed the teacher's manner of addressing the students in a variety of classroom contexts. Student's actions were recorded only as they are pertinent to the teacher's praxis, and identifiable student characteristics were not recorded. At no time during classroom observations will the researcher interrupt or attempt to intervene in teacher-student interactions. Interviews will follow observations in order to examine any discrepancies between teacher praxis and teacher ideology. This research will present an ethnographic case study of the public Montessori program in a suburban county bordering on a large city.

# CULTURAL RELEVANCE AND MONTESSORI

by

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Since the *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* ruling overturned the fallacy of “separate but equal” schools, many Americans have lost sight of the issue of equity in schooling. It has been assumed that because schools have been legally integrated, equality of educational opportunity has necessarily ensued. The vast body of research on the “achievement gap,” under its various designations, shows otherwise. In fact, schools today are not only characterized by significant discrepancies in the achievement of African American and Hispanic students as opposed to White and Asian American students, but they are also increasingly segregated. Although this segregation is *de facto* as opposed to *de jure*, (Kozol, 2005) it is nonetheless a growing problem, characterized not only by the “achievement gap,” but also by immense discrepancies in funding, teacher quality, and curricular integrity between predominantly white and predominantly minority schools (Kozol, 2005, Darling-Hammond, 2004). However, even when socio-economic status is accounted for, the performance gap persists. The average black student, at 18 years old, performs similarly to the average white student of 14 years old on standardized measures (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Some theorists argue that race identification accounts for this discrepancy (Steele, 2004), while others argue that minority students do not want to be seen as “acting white” (Ogbu, 1992; Osborne, 2001). Still others refute these theories, pointing to a large body of research indicating that minority students value achievement, want to succeed, and experience success in appropriate educational settings (Lee, 2005). Assuming that this is the case, the responsibility then falls on teachers to enable success within all student populations. It is

the intent of this research paper to examine such possibilities for change at the classroom level through the implementation of pedagogy that is transformational and social action oriented (Banks, 2004).

This research project will examine the theoretical and practical congruencies between the pedagogical facets of Multicultural Education and those of Montessori education. Both James Banks and Christine Sleeter (Banks, 2004; Sleeter, 2001) refer to pedagogy that is multicultural in nature as Equity Pedagogy. In particular, this paper will examine the element of Equity Pedagogy put forth by Gloria Ladson-Billings and referred to as Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. This type of praxis aims to improve teaching and learning for minority students. Additionally, it will attempt to unfold the core principles and underlying theoretical tenets of Montessori pedagogy. In examining those ideas, it will then move towards a comparison between the two educational methods, with the purport of illuminating the elements of these two bodies of thought that are congruent to one another. Lastly, the literature review will conclude with a proposed theoretical framework, merging the major facets of the two ideologies under examination into a “Culturally Relevant Montessori.” The research component will have as its starting point the nexus revealed by the examination of the extant literature on these two pedagogies, and will then attempt to explore the ways in which this nexus appears in classroom practice as well as in the perception of classroom teachers. In moving from this theoretical base into an intersectional examination of pedagogy in action, this research will enter new territory as it attempts to uncover the convergence and divergence of practice from this constructed nexus through the use of observation and semi-structured interviews. The results of this study will then be used to revise the theoretical framework,

based on the data collected in the field, integrating theory and praxis into a proposal for a transformed Montessori pedagogy that is social action oriented.

A growing population of researchers is looking to teachers and teacher educators to move towards improving educational opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds. Within the broad framework of Multicultural Education, this particular body of research falls under the heading of “Equity Pedagogy,” one that exists “when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups (Banks, 2004). Among the most influential researchers attempting to define and refine this notion of Equity Pedagogy as one that is “Culturally Relevant” or “Culturally Responsive” are Geneva Gaye, Gloria Ladson-Billings, and Jackie Jordan-Irvine. These researchers concur in their strongly held belief that it is not the student's culture that needs to change to fit the schools, but rather the school culture that needs to change to fit the students. As the population of the United States becomes increasingly diverse, and increasingly connected to a global society, meeting the needs of a diverse body of students is becoming a requirement for the maintenance of a diverse work force integral to upholding the social and economic structures of this nation. This urgency is symbolized by the recent elevation of Gloria Ladson-Billings to the position of president of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), one of the nation’s most influential educational research bodies. In her research, she defines the essential tenets of a pedagogy that is culturally relevant as one that provides all children with the means necessary for academic success, upholds a pedagogical praxis that is “culturally competent,” and links thought processes to relevant social reform through civic action (Ladson-Billings, 1994; 2001).



Within this framework for culturally relevant teaching there exist many similarities to the framework for Montessori based pedagogy. This congruency has been touched upon at the theoretical level by a handful of scholars including Asa Hilliard, Nel Noddings, and Frances Lowden (Hilliard, 1998; Noddings, 1992; Lowden, 2001). The American Montessori Society is actively calling for more research on multicultural education and practices that serve more diverse bodies of students. However, this call for research has yet to become an explicit reality, and the theoretical similarities that exist between these two separate schools of thought have yet to be explored in praxis. The theoretical bases of Montessori which require the teacher to look to each child's individual needs and to build upon the extensive body of knowledge that they already possess upon entering school, to practice education as a process of drawing out what is already within the child rather than inserting knowledge into an empty vessel, and to consider the education of children as a means of achieving world peace are clearly congruent with the theoretical foundations of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. It is not improbable, then, that the Montessori classroom may provide a pedagogical cadre for a practice that is culturally relevant and it is the intention of this research to explore this possibility and to open up further pathways for research-based exploration. As the Montessori school movement in the United States continues to grow, it is increasingly urgent that these schools find the means necessary for directly addressing the promises and challenges implicit to serving a diverse community of students.

## **Context**

While this movement towards cultural competence in Montessori Schools is important to all Montessori schools as they serve children in an increasingly global and diverse society, it takes on a particular urgency in public Montessori Schools, which, like all public schools, have the fundamental responsibility to educate every child. Since the first Public Montessori Program opened in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1975, more than 360 public and public charter Montessori schools have opened across the United States. This growing body of schools occupies a unique position in the current educational climate, a space in which the ideological stance of Montessori teachers necessarily encounters that of the public school system. The teachers in these schools are often both trained as Montessori teachers and certified as professional educators by their various states. Although this duality presents many possibilities for empirical and phenomenological exploration, the goal of this research project is to explore the extent to which a small sample of these Montessori trained teachers exhibit multicultural awareness and competence in their pedagogical practice, as well as the degree to which they embody the theoretical foundations of the Montessori system. The use of a small sample will allow for more meaningful and probing inquiry and will open up possibilities for larger scale research projects.

This exploration will be preceded by an extensive examination of the available literature on Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, their inherent meanings, their shared ideals, and their divergences. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy will serve as a framework in which to situate a diverse body of research on specific practices that are culturally relevant or responsive. This examination will be limited to the philosophical

and practical tenets of the implicit pedagogies of these two ways of thinking, and will not broach content, curriculum, or school reform, except as they relate directly to pedagogy, although these are clearly important elements of education that is multicultural. This review of the literature will serve as the theoretical lens through which four Montessori teachers in a public school will be examined in their praxis. Eventually, this examination of theory and praxis will serve to open up multiple possibilities, not only for the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in Montessori classrooms and teacher education programs, but perhaps also for some crossover between traditional teacher education programs and Montessori teacher education programs as their interrelatedness, strengths, and challenges are brought into consideration.

### **Goals**

The goals of this study, then, are multi-tiered, existing on both a practical and an intellectual plane. On the broadest level, the goal of this study is to work towards opening pathways for communication between members of the Montessori community and University-based teacher education communities in an effort to create possibilities for knowledge exchange between these two groups. On a practical level, the goals relate to Montessori classroom practice and Montessori teacher education programs. In considering the praxis of a small set of public school teachers, the practical relationship between Montessori and Culturally Relevant pedagogy will begin to emerge. This emergence will serve to highlight the degree to which Montessori teachers are prepared to serve diverse communities of children. Furthermore, the use of interviews preceding and following observations will examine teachers own levels of self-awareness and

perceived competence in contrast to actual competence in culturally relevant and Montessori practices. This difference in perception of the teacher and perception of the observer may illuminate some of the ways in which practices that are alluded to in Montessori teacher education programs need to be taught more explicitly, so as to merge awareness of the ideas that predominate in the field of Montessori and those that predominate elsewhere in the educational field. The intellectual goals of this study, while closely related to the practical goals, are more focused on the theoretical congruency of Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, with the intent of proposing a merged framework for a practice that is a “Culturally Relevant Montessori.” Therefore, this study will not only serve to examine the practice of four teachers, but to open up possibilities for the further examination of classroom practice and teacher education programs with the ultimate goal of creating ideological bridges between culturally relevant pedagogues and Montessori practitioners.

This study, which will attempt to answer the question “How do Montessori teachers in public school systems reflect the theoretical components of Montessori practice as well as those of culturally relevant practice, especially in their nexus, and in what ways are they aware of this nexus in theory and in practice?,” will be an ethnographic case study of the public Montessori program in a culturally diverse suburban county bordering on a large city. It will be a case study in that it is a study of a bounded system, comprised of four classrooms in one pre-k-5 public Montessori school. It will be ethnographic in the sense that it will draw on participant observation of classrooms within these schools as well as semi-structured interviews of teacher participants for the collection of data.

## **Rationale**

An exploration of possibilities for culturally relevant practice within Montessori settings provides a unique opportunity to examine structural change in schools that is oriented towards personal and cultural identity development with a socially conscious agenda. Each of these pedagogical stances has been correlated with increased academic and social success in urban schools. Several empirical studies exist that purport to show academic advantages related to Montessori as opposed to traditional education (Dohrmann, 2003; Moore, 1991; Clifford & Takacs, 1991; Rothman, 1997; Duax, 1989). The benefits of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy are detailed by Ladson-Billings (1994). In spite of the apparent benefits, both pedagogies present possibilities for change in one area while leaving other areas unexplored. More specifically, Montessori provides a concrete pathway towards structural and curricular change at the classroom level that is oriented towards personal identity development. CRP, on the other hand, focuses much more specifically on student to teacher interactions conjoint with curricular changes that are oriented towards cultural identity development. Banks (2004) discusses four levels of multicultural curriculum reform. The first level, “The Contributions Approach,” attempts to reform curriculum through celebrating the holidays, clothing and other discrete elements of a diversity of cultures. It is sometimes referred to as the “foods and festivals” approach. The second level is referred to as “The Additive Approach,” adding content, concepts and themes from various cultures to the curriculum without changing its structure. The third level, the “Transformations Approach” changes the structure of the curriculum to enable students to view concepts and ideologies through diverse

perspectives. The final level, “The Social Action Approach,” provides students in transformative settings with the ability to make decisions about social issues and take actions to help solve them. The fusion of a Montessori ideology, which offers structural reform at the classroom level, and a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, which has a strong emphasis on social action, may offer new possibilities for developing a pedagogy with specific implication for both personal and cultural identity development through the implementation of change at the curricular, pedagogical, and structural level. In other words, Montessori provides a transformative structure in which a social action oriented approach may be implemented.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This literature review has as its locus the intersection of Montessori education and Culturally Relevant pedagogy. First, it will seek to define the nature of the Montessori educational philosophy. Next, it will identify and examine the essential theoretical tenets of a Montessori pedagogy as well as the principles that support the enactment of those tenets. It will also situate Montessori within related scholarly paradigms. From there, it will similarly define, delineate, and explore Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in theory and in practice. This examination will have as its starting point the situation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy within Equity Pedagogy, one of the basic areas of research in Multicultural education (Banks, 2005; Bennett, 2001) and a brief historical exploration of the roots and evolution of Multicultural education. After having laid out the meanings and purposes of these two paradigms, it will seek to identify the convergent, congruent and divergent elements of their philosophical cores, something that has not yet been adequately explored by scholarly research. Finally, it will use this comparative analysis to build a theoretical framework defining a “Culturally Relevant Montessori.” This philosophical comparison will serve as the foundation for the ethnographic research to be undertaken, namely the exploration of Montessori pedagogy in practice, and what, if any role Culturally Relevant Pedagogy plays in this practice. In other words, how do the theoretically congruent elements of these two methods emerge in practice? Having examined the available extant literature, it will be apparent that this intersection has not been sufficiently examined in previous scholarship, neither in theory nor in practice.

## **Montessori Education**

To describe the Montessori system of education is a difficult task, not only in its complexity and distinctness from a “traditional” American pedagogy, but also in that the name of the system is derived from the name of its founder, thus rendering the lines between “thinker” and “thought system” imprecise. It is necessary, then, to consider this system in several fragments, first considering the origins, then the historical evolution, and finally the state of Montessori in present day America. Additionally, as a tradition of education, Montessori incorporates philosophical underpinnings, curricular content, and pedagogical systems. Because of the extensive nature of these three elements, this review will limit itself to an examination of pedagogy and philosophy, and will not broach content matter, an appropriate exploration of which would require a separate literature review, and which is not pertinent to the research questions at hand. Furthermore, for the purposes of this review, in order to clarify the individual parts of this multi-faceted system, it will be necessary to consider each segment as a separate entity before considering the interaction of the theoretical tenets as they occur in practice. This interaction will be the focus of the ethnographic research, whereas the literature review will segregate the minutia of praxis in an attempt to more clearly define the theoretical underpinnings of the system under review.

### *Influences on Montessori Education*

Before considering what entails a pedagogy that is Montessori, it is useful to consider the origins of this pedagogy through an examination of the identity of Dr. Montessori including her situation in time and space. Maria Montessori was born in Italy



in 1870, at a time that preceded women's suffrage, and in an era of intense educational change in the United States. By the time that she graduated from medical school as the first Italian woman to do so, the one-room schoolhouses in America had largely been consolidated, at least in urban centers, into more "efficient" schools based on the factory model of production and geared towards assimilating immigrant children into the American populous through a process of "subtractive schooling" (Valenzuela, 1999; Tyack, 1972). In Europe, a movement towards universal education at the early elementary level had similarly influenced educational thought over the course of the 19th century. Montessori, in particular, had been influenced early in her career by two strains of educational thought, one pertaining to early childhood education, and the other pertaining to the education of children with special needs (Kramer, 1976).

As a newly graduated doctor, however, Montessori's interest in education began with clinical psychology. During her early career as a clinical psychologist, she worked with mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed children in Rome (Kramer, 1976). It was her attempts to educate these children, using sensory-integration, which eventually turned her interests to the education of "normal" children. Out of her work with these children labeled as "deficient," and "delinquent," proceeded her belief, radical at the time, that "delinquency" is not innate, but is brought about by inadequate education and other socially disruptive factors. She was particularly influenced in her research by the work of two French clinicians, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard and Edouard Seguin. Their work had stemmed from the education of one boy, known at the time as the "Wild boy of Aveyron," who had been found in the outskirts of that French city and seemed to possess neither formal training nor informal contact with humanity. Itard subsequently developed

a series of manipulative materials that succeeded to some degree in teaching the boy the alphabet and some primitive spellings. His work was carried on by Seguin, who innovated the field of special education through his focus on respect for the needs of the individual learner, the stratification of intellectual growth into stages ranging from physical movement to intellect, and always beginning with a focus on activity centered education (Kramer 1976).

A second strain of influential thought for Dr. Montessori stemmed from the ideas emanating from the field of early childhood and elementary education at the time, especially the notion of universal education. Beginning with the work of Jacob Rodriguez Pereira, who, as a contemporary of Seguin, relied heavily on the use of the senses to educate deaf-mute children, thought in this field was quickly dominated by Rousseau, who believed that the application of sensorial education to all children would aid in the development of the innate intelligence of man. Rousseau's work, however, was largely based on philosophical conjecture and lacked scientific grounding. His ideas were brought into the schoolroom by Pestalozzi in Italy and Froebel in Germany. Both men also focused on sensorial education, and coupled this belief with a strong idealism that built on the notion that the quality of life of impoverished peoples could be greatly improved by education. In addition to a reliance on sensorial stimulation, Pestalozzi also incorporated movement, field trips, and differentiated instruction into his pedagogy. In his method can also be found a movement from concrete stimulation to abstract comprehension, a notion of primary importance in Montessori's pedagogy. Froebel, as a disciple of Pestalozzi, applied his ideas to the education of even younger children and began the international movement towards universal kindergarten, which continues

today. Although the kindergarten classrooms that resulted integrated many of the concepts of sensorial stimulation that Froebel laid out, they neglected to place the child at the pedagogical epicenter and remained in the tradition of teacher-centered education (Kramer 1976).

### *Evolution of Montessori Education*

The Montessori method originated in Rome, Italy in 1907, with the first opening of a *Casa dei Bambini*, or “Children’s House” in a tenement building in the San Lorenzo district. This first school served only primary children, between the ages of 3 and 6. Although she based her ideas on the work that she had done previously with special needs children and on her research on early childhood education theory, she did not have a fixed set of ideas when she opened the school. Rather, she would use this school as a center for observation of children, and meticulously record their reactions to various materials, as well as their intellectual and physical development using a variety of quantitative and qualitative data instruments that were considered scientifically appropriate at her time. A full discussion of her findings can be read in The Advanced Montessori Method (Montessori, 1991), in which she outlines her observations made over the course of the first several years at the children’s house. What is important to note is that she based her subsequent pedagogical method on her observations of the children in this and subsequent children’s houses, encompassing education for elementary aged children (Kramer, 1976). These findings are more thoroughly discussed below.

The first appearance of Montessori in an American publication was in 1909, in the New York based *The Kindergarten-Primary Magazine*. This and subsequent articles were

descriptive but not prescriptive, and did not provide any critique of the method although they did compare Montessori to the then popular Froebelian kindergarten method, especially in terms of the difference between Montessori's accelerated reading program and Froebel's recommendation that reading be put off until later in childhood. Between 1909, and 1913, when Montessori first visited America to discuss her educational ideas, her method was often discussed in both professional and lay journals as well as at state teacher's meetings and meetings of the National Education Association. Many American educators went to Rome to visit her schools, including representatives from Columbia Teacher's College and Harvard School of Education. By the time of Montessori's visit, schools following her method had already opened in New York and Boston and several public school systems were considering adopting her method. The opening of a school by Alexander Graham Bell in Washington, DC, the publication by the Harvard School of Education of *The Montessori Method*, and the whole sale manufacturing of her materials by a New York firm all contributed to Montessori's rising popularity in the United States at this time and her decision to make the then time-consuming trans-Atlantic journey to visit the United States (Kramer, 1976, pp. 153-171).

Despite early enthusiasm for Montessori and her method, by the post-World War I period traces of this enthusiasm had all but vanished in the United States, not to resurface until after the second world war. In part, this loss of interest was due to the publication of an influential essay by William Kilpatrick, a student of Dewey and professor at the Columbia School of Education. In this essay, *The Montessori System Examined*, Kilpatrick criticized Montessori for failing to present ideas that were new, giving credit to John Dewey for the ideas of liberty and practical life skill development

that Kilpatrick found to be most meaningful to the Montessori method (Stoll-Lillard, 2005). Speculatively, the temporary demise of her system in the American public and the long-term exclusion of her ideology from academia may also have been related to her lack of flexibility, her desire for control over all aspects of her system, and the discovery by the still puritanical American public of her illegitimate son, Mario, whom she brought with her to the Panama-Pacific International Exhibition, where she had a demonstration school, in 1915 San Francisco (Kramer, 1976).

Today in the United States, the Montessori movement is again growing in both the public and private sectors of education. Of the more than 4,600 schools, at least 360, or close to 8%, are public Montessori schools ([www.montessoriconnections.com](http://www.montessoriconnections.com)). The Montessori movement is represented not only in schools, but also in two scholarly publications, NAMTA and Montessori Life. Additionally, two professional organizations, which differ somewhat in their interpretations of Montessori's work, oversee teacher education and accreditation of Montessori schools. Of these associations, the American Montessori Society and the Association Montessori Internationale, the former is characterized by a more flexible and culturally interpretive view of Montessori's work, whereas the latter adheres more closely to her original writings. Because of the lack of flexibility in the AMI ideology, this paper relies on the interpretation of Montessori according to AMS philosophy. Montessori education has also been incorporated into some University level teacher education programs, including Xavier University in Cincinnati and New York University's Steinhart School of Education ([www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org)). In spite of these evolutions, Montessori has not been given the same academic attention

by teacher education programs as her contemporaries, Piaget and Dewey, have merited in recent years.

The ideological underpinnings of the American Montessori Society closely follow and build upon the work of Nancy Rambusch, who was instrumental in re-igniting the Montessori movement in the United States during the 1960s, a part of which movement was the adaptation of certain aspects of Montessori's work to fit more closely with the demands of contemporary culture (Cossentino & Whitescarver, 2005). Rambusch framed the re-introduction of Montessori into American culture as a “transmutation” of historical ideas that would adapt to contemporary American society. This transmutation enabled Montessori teachers in the AMS tradition to more liberally interpret Montessori’s theories to suit the needs of their school and student cultures. This idea of divergence from the traditional set of practices sanctioned by Dr. Montessori was a radical departure from the philosophy of AMI and produced a rift in the Montessori movement that still characterizes schools and teacher education programs today. Cossentino and Whitescarver argue, however, that it is the tensions created by this rift that keep the central tenets of Montessori at the locus of the movement, as the arguments produced by the divergent camps produce discussions that focus on child-centered pedagogy, freedom with responsibility, and education for peace.

The AMS philosophy statement for the 100-year anniversary of Montessori education states the following:

Because of its global approach, Montessori is uniquely suited to public schools, where children of many backgrounds are grouped together.... Montessori students learn to develop critical thinking,

conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity and collaborative problem-solving skills that are ideal for modern workplace environments.

Additionally, they define their “mission [as] to promote the principles and practices of Dr. Maria Montessori within the context of the American culture.” ([www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org)) These two statements combined present a progressive and flexible view of Montessori education in the context of contemporary American society. One facet of this study is the examination of the validity of those statements in order to push members of the Montessori community to listen to the broader currents of educational thought, especially education that is multicultural, in an effort to cultivate authentic and productive dialogue in the educational community. The term dialogue is used purposefully in opposition to the concept of debate, with the intent of producing collaborative ideas based on inter-group cooperation.

### *Montessori in the Public Domain*

Since the first Public Montessori Program opened in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1975, more than 360 public and public charter Montessori schools have opened across the United States. This growing body of schools occupies a unique position in the current educational climate, a space that is neither fully “public” nor fully “Montessori.” Literature that pertains to Montessori in private school settings does not necessarily pertain to Montessori in the public school domain. Although most Montessori teacher education programs do not distinguish between preparation for the public and private school settings, most teachers who enter the public schools are required to undergo extensive supplemental training to prepare themselves not only for Montessori

certification, but also for state certification. In some instances, including in the large Suburban County, teachers may apply some of the credits earned during their Montessori training program to their state certification program. This difference of teacher preparation requirements indicates a difference in not only what is required to be a "highly qualified" Montessori teacher in the public versus the private domain, but also what the meaning and experience of teaching in each setting entails. The rapidly growing body of public Montessori schools in this country indicates a demand for further research in this area (<http://www.montessoriconnections.com/schoolsdirectory.shtml>). An initial study on a public Montessori program in Milwaukee suggests that students from public Montessori schools outperform peer control groups on math and science measures and perform similarly on reading and overall GPA measures during high school years, long after students have left Montessori (Dohrmann, 2003). This suggests a possible long-term positive impact of Montessori. This paper will draw on research that sheds light on the practice of Montessori and pertains to the experience of Montessori teachers and students in diverse settings to lay a foundation for direct inquiry into the experience of teachers in a public Montessori setting.

### *Philosophical Underpinnings and Pedagogical Systems*

In order to define the Montessori paradigm, it is essential to include both the paradigm according to Montessori's original work, and the ways in which that paradigm has been transfigured to fit into contemporary American society. Montessori believed that the purpose of education was to prepare the child to be a global citizen, both concerned with the development of world peace and prepared to be an instrument of this



development. Essential to her educational beliefs are the ideas that education must follow the developmental needs of the child, foster independence, and promote the development of a “world peace” (Montessori, 1978, p. 16; 1985, p. 7; 1992, pp.56, 103; 1994, p. 5). Of the teacher she said: "Instead of giving out what she has in herself, the teacher must bring out the full possibilities of the children (Montessori, 1916, p.30)." This idea is echoed in current scholarly research on culturally relevant pedagogy, which refers to teaching as pulling knowledge from within children through a process of listening (Schultz, 2003; Meier, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). The American Montessori Society (AMS) builds upon these core Montessori beliefs and expands upon them in order to bridge Montessori and contemporary American society. AMS describes the essential elements of Montessori both in terms of the quality of the teacher and of the environment (See table 2.1 adapted from [www.ams-hq.org](http://www.ams-hq.org)).

*Table 2.1*

<b>The Montessori Teacher is characterized by:</b>	<b>The Montessori Classroom is characterized by:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of human growth/development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The direction of a well prepared teacher.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observational skills needed to help students create an individualized learning plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaningful partnerships with the classroom families.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An understanding of the appropriate development and application of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A diversity of didactic materials, activities, and experiences,</li> </ul>

didactic materials in every core subject area.	Montessori and otherwise, that support student learning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An array of teaching strategies that support child-centered education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A multi-aged, multi-graded, heterogeneous student group.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to manage the classroom in a nurturing, supportive, challenging and disciplined manner.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uninterrupted work time in a supportive and encouraging environment.</li> </ul>

A full discussion of the pedagogical system developed by Montessori would include an emphasis on praxis as well as an emphasis on curriculum. As a system, Montessori provides guidelines not only for pedagogy, but also for content knowledge. Because the focus of this research is on pedagogy, however, manner of delivery will be prioritized over curricular content, the latter of which will be included only as it fits into the overall schema, and not as a specific set of lesson plans. It is important, however, to be aware that each Montessori teacher receives an extensive set of specific lesson plans that are meant to guide his or her content delivery. In this respect, an important distinction is made between the two polarized accrediting agencies, AMS and AMI, in that the former uses the work of Montessori as a curricular and pedagogical starting point, and then allows for creativity and curricular reform as needed from the classroom teacher, whereas the latter requires a much stricter adherence to the works of Dr. Montessori. However, these curricular differences aside, the pedagogical guidelines

remain similar and closely relate to Montessori's original ideas with some modifications, which will be noted as necessary.

*Tenet I: Education should serve as a process of drawing out what is already within each individual child.*

At the most fundamental level, Montessori education corresponds to the notion of “child-centered” education. In the development and refinement of her beliefs about educating children, Montessori relied primarily on direct observation of children in schools that followed her method. In a sense, Montessori can be thought of as a grounded theory, in that the method itself evolved over time as research was conducted. As this process of observing and collecting data progressed, Montessori developed a belief in developmental periods, which she referred to as “planes of development.” “Montessori believed that schooling should correspond to the child's developmental periods” (Lillard, 1996). With the developmental needs serving as the underlying base for the pedagogical and curricular structure of the classroom, Montessori found that the incorporation of a child's culture into the school environment served as a point of entry into the classroom for the child. “For the child to progress rapidly, his practical and social lives must be intimately blended with his cultural environment” (Montessori, 1994, p.13). Therefore, to teach each child according to individual needs not only means to understand and build on personal attributes, but also to respect and incorporate a child's cultural background. Montessori schools are purported to accomplish this “drawing out” through the implementation of pedagogical strategies and structures designed to allow children to

develop concentration, build on their own their own interests, and to rely on intrinsic rewards as opposed to external motivation in the pursuit of education.

Stoll-Lillard (2005), in an extensive review of the core principles of Montessori education, examined each of the ideas that contribute to this process of “drawing out.” She found that, when situated in current psychological research, the enactment of these principles strongly correlated with increased success in experimental settings. While many of these principles support all of the basic tenets of Montessori education, it is appropriate to discuss them here as they all relate to structuring education in a way that is child centered. The eight principles as discussed by Stoll-Lillard are as follows:

- That movement and cognition are closely entwined, and movement can enhance thinking and learning;
- That learning and well-being are improved when people have a sense of control over their lives;
- That people learn better when they are interested in what they are learning;
- That tying extrinsic rewards to an activity, like money for reading or high grades for tests, negatively impacts motivation to engage in that activity when the reward is withdrawn;
- That collaborative arrangements can be very conducive to learning;
- That learning situated in meaningful contexts is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract contexts;
- That particular forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes; and
- That order in the environment is beneficial to children. (Stoll-Lillard, 2005, p.29)

### *The Role of the Teacher in “Drawing Out”*

Montessori believed that “instead of giving out what she has in herself, the teacher must bring out the full possibilities of the children” (Montessori, 1916, p. 30). In order to do this the teacher in a Montessori classroom needs to develop the ability to observe the children through both a commitment to the process of observation and through the development of self-awareness that enables teachers to filter out their own inclinations and prejudices (Stoll-Lillard, 2005, p. 265). Montessori believed that by watching the children without passing prior judgment or imposing prejudicial beliefs, the teacher would learn to discover their needs. Today, this observation entails a broad variety of assessments, depending on the particular school or classroom, and corresponds to the notion of “diagnostic assessment” that has risen to importance in educational circles during in recent years. Observation and assessment for a Montessori teacher, however, is not limited to academic subject matter, but entails careful monitoring of the social, physical, and psychological progress of the child to the extent that the teacher is capable. As in many schools, Montessori schools rely as needed on support services from tutors, special educators, occupational therapists and others to fully meet the needs of each child. Observation in a Montessori classroom also guides the teacher in the preparation of lessons, which should be tailored to individual or small groups of children and provide instruction at the precise level for which these children are prepared. This type of constant observation allows for curricular adjustments and individualized educational plans for each child, enabling competent teachers in well-designed

Montessori classrooms to act according to Montessori's belief that "teaching must only answer the mental needs of the child, never dictate them (Montessori, 1985, p. 7)."

*Tenet II: Education should foster independence and encourage freedom with responsibility.*

A common misconception surrounding Montessori education involves the belief that children are free to do as they like in the classroom. The reality of what Montessori intended her schools to be is rather different. Montessori's notion of freedom was not analogous to anarchy. Rather, Montessori believed in providing strict guidelines for children to act freely within. She also felt that children who crossed these appropriate boundaries should be given what amounts to a "time out" of the group (Kramer, 1976). This freedom with responsibility, although commonly misconceived, is essential to the successful enactment of a Montessori based pedagogy. The provision in Montessori classrooms for limited, developmentally appropriate choices is not only integral to the concept of drawing upon a child's own interest and prior knowledge but also lays a foundation for responsible citizenship, which Montessori felt to be the ultimate goal of education. Montessori (1991) felt that "there is, undoubtedly, a fundamental difference between understanding and learning the reasoning of others, and being able 'to reason'" (p.166). The latter, she believed, cannot be learned through lecture or observation, but only through experience. This experience of choice allows for personal error and correction, preparing the child for "real-life" situations and developing within the child a sense of competence. This development depends both on the skill of the teacher and on the quality of the environment in which education occurs. This environment should

provide a structural framework of books, materials, technology, and practical implements necessary for the pursuit of knowledge. This framework is often referred to as the *prepared environment*, and includes separate, ordered centers of activity for every curricular area.

Asa Hilliard (1996) refers to “the human metaphor of Montessori,” a term he used to describe the “view of the human being implicit in the Montessori method” (p.123). This view of the child centers around respecting the needs of development, including a need to use the five senses in gathering information, manipulating one’s environment, and initiating tasks. Hilliard believes that children are born with the innate ability to initiate tasks, and that they lose this ability only when it is repeatedly thwarted by their surroundings. Montessori, he argues, through the process of enabling children to make decisions, fosters this ability to initiate tasks and sustain attention. This not only enables children to develop naturally, but also allows the adults around them to see them for who they are. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (2005) connect this ability to initiate tasks to increased levels on intrinsic motivation fostered by the school environment and experienced by students. They argue that the emphasis in Montessori classrooms on self-direction in a supportive and highly disciplined environment are closely linked with current motivation theories, including goal theory and optimal experience theory, or flow. Goal theory refers to the differentiation between performance oriented goals and task oriented goals, finding that task-oriented goals raise levels of intrinsic motivation. “Flow” theory studies the relationship between intrinsic motivation, task-focus, and concentration. They find that, when compared to demographically matched students in traditional middle school programs, students in Montessori middle schools report feeling

more energetic, more interested in their work, and experience greater feelings of intrinsic motivation.

### *The Role of the Teacher in Fostering Responsibility*

Montessori (1999) described the role of the teacher as "...support[ing] as much as possible the child's desires for activity; not wait[ing] on him, but educat[ing] him to be independent" (p. 57). She saw the development of this independence as depending on two basic variables, the adults that guide the child and the environment in which the child lives. The teacher, as the adult responsible for the child's education, has several roles to play in fostering independence. First, the teacher provides the guidelines within which the child can make choices. This type of teaching is referred to by Stoll-Lillard (2005) as authoritative teaching as opposed to permissive or authoritarian teaching. Authoritative teaching sets firm guidelines within which children can make choices, insists that these guidelines be followed, and encourages children to act responsibly and independently within the set guidelines. Second, the teacher gives instruction in every curricular area. This instruction not only helps the child to make sense of the world that he lives in, but should also open up possibilities for exploration and expansion on the part of the child. This curriculum is both developmentally and culturally appropriate, and progresses in difficulty from concrete to abstract and in content from "big picture" to detail. Third, the teacher maintains the prepared environment, which is in itself structured in an organized manner so as to encourage limited, responsible choices. Finally, the teacher relies upon the child's family for support in the development of an individualized curriculum and



encourages parents to reinforce developmentally appropriate behaviors at home (Montessori, 1989).

*Tenet III: Education should prepare the child for a life of service to humanity and stewardship of the global environment.*

Beyond the essential goals of delivering content and developing character, Montessori saw a broader, more global purpose within the education of children. She believed that education was a tool for the development of world peace. This broadly stated belief rested on two basic components. The first of these was the development of intercultural understanding among students. She believed that the child's "adaptation [to one's own time, place, and culture] involves the capacity to meet new situations and to have the intelligence and courage to transform them when change is needed" (Lillard, 1996). The second of these lofty goals was the nurturing within children of a love of, and desire to care for, the natural environment. Her goal was for children educated in her method to grow up to become "stewards" of this environment. At the locus of these goals was a notion that by educating children to be independent, nurturing, and compassionate, the future citizens of the world would be better prepared to meet the demands of an increasingly international society. Montessori students were "accustomed to the free exercise of will and judgment, illuminated by imagination and enthusiasm. Only such pupils can exercise rightly the duties of citizens in a civilized commonwealth" (Montessori, 1985, p.1).

The structure of the classroom supports these goals through the consistent reliance on cooperative learning and learning in context as primary bases for delivering

instruction (Stoll-Lillard, 2006). The multi-age grouping and looping practices essential to Montessori support cooperative learning, while the individualized curriculum and reliance on teacher observation and child-centered initiation to set the pace of the curriculum support the implementation of learning in context. Learning in context and learning about issues of real social import was further supported by the concept of “going out,” which refers to a specific field trip that is planned and implemented by the children in response to an educational need that arises during their work. Montessori developed the concept of going out as a result of the belief that “a child enclosed within limits however vast remains incapable of realizing his full value and will not succeed in adapting himself to the outer world” (Montessori, 1994, p.13). “Going Out” may also represent an opportunity to invite parents into the classroom, or to visit parents in their places of work. Many Montessori schools seek to involve parents in a plethora of activities, and some private Montessori schools are run as cooperatives and require parent participation as a condition for enrollment.

Cossentino (2005) supports the notion that Montessori contains structures that inherently support a pedagogy that trends toward stewardship of the global environment. However, her research represents a linguistic shift from a pedagogy of peace, as described by Montessori, to a pedagogy of love that is reminiscent of Paulo Freire. She argues that underlying the classroom practice of Montessori is a deeper layer of meaning that she refers to as “ritualizing love (p. 231).” Cossentino describes this pedagogy of love as being enacted by the teacher through the enactment of the virtues of respect for children, belief in the importance of developing internal motivation, and child-centered pedagogy. Through practicing a pedagogy that includes these structural elements, the

teacher develops a pedagogical system that is transformational, with the ethic of love at its center. She describes this love as “the driving force in the progress toward human harmony (p.234).” Noddings (1992) describes the ethic of care in the Montessori classroom in a similar light, in her discussion of teaching children to care for themselves, one another, and for their environment. Noddings stresses the importance of implementing a pedagogy that is specifically aimed at teaching children how to care. In the Montessori classroom, she describes the physical order produced and maintained by cooperative efforts of children and teacher as “designed to induce the serenity of the soul, or what Montessori called grace” (p.140). Noddings alludes to the underlying principle of teaching care in the Montessori classroom, the instruction of grace and courtesy towards self, others, and the environment.

### *The Role of the Teacher in Educating for Peace*

Montessori believed that “preventing conflicts is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education” (Montessori, 1992, p.24). She saw the education of children as the only path towards a stable and lasting global peace, as opposed to the short, intermittent, and location specific periods of peace that characterized the 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to characterize the world today. The possibilities for fostering social awareness and providing opportunities for social justice are extensive. James Banks (2004) describes four levels of curriculum reform (p.15). The least effective of these, the “Contributions Approach,” often referred to by teachers as the “foods and festivals” approach, has a tendency to predominate in many Montessori Schools. Montessori schools, for example, may celebrate International Children’s Day through dressing up in

costumes, singing songs, and trying foods from different countries (Duckworth, 2006). Within the classroom, teachers are inclined to provide opportunities for exploring other cultures through research projects that represent Banks' level two, or "Additive Approach" to curriculum reform. However, Montessori's vision for peace education was much more embedded than this. She describes teachers as providing structural changes that correspond more closely to Banks' level three curriculum reform, the transformational approach. Duckworth (2006) describes this as a "positive" approach to peace education in which students and teachers work together to create peace. This is opposed to a "negative" approach to peace education that is characterized only by the absence of violence. While teachers participate in this type of structural reform through the student-centered, community oriented structures such as cooperative learning and student choice that Duckworth describes, possibilities still exist for taking the peace education curriculum further. Banks' fourth and penultimate level of curriculum reform, the "Social Action Approach," provides students with direct experiences in identifying problems, brainstorming solutions, and enacting campaigns for change. This type of reform fits into the ideology of structural change reflected by Montessori and studied by Duckworth, but involves a conscious commitment on the part of the teacher to bring peace education out of the realm of ideology and into an action oriented curriculum. Duckworth cites an instance of this type of commitment at the City Montessori School in Thailand, where students' work is focused on service and participation in such projects as rural education, local government initiatives, and forestry programs. Such active engagement in civic life represents a commitment to teaching social action on the part of the teacher.

## **Multicultural Education**

### *Historical Roots of Multicultural Education*

Multicultural Education today can be traced back to at least two early movements in the field of education (Banks, 2004). These historical movements, ethnic studies and Intergroup education, have both significantly influenced the evolution of multicultural education, yet they are entirely distinct from one another. They hold in common their focus on diversifying school curricula, but they differ radically in motivation and ultimate purpose. In spite of these differences, both movements still have visible legacies in multicultural education, and a discussion of their historical roots is appropriate. These resulting legacies lie at the center of the tensions experienced by multicultural theorists and practitioners, with some scholars arguing in favor of embracing diversity without recognizing and examining differences in group identity and their causative historical and socio-economic factors. Many others, however, advocate for a critical approach to multicultural education that is predicated upon understanding and recognizing difference in individuals and groups, and the role that group difference plays in structuring schools and society.

The Intergroup Education movement sought to build racial harmony without first recognizing the injustices experienced by racial and cultural minorities (Banks, 2004). Significantly, the leaders the Intergroup studies movement were majority White academics. This movement grew out of a need to address growing racial tensions in the increasingly diverse society of the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It focused on content knowledge related to learning about different racial and ethnic groups with a bent towards including social action in the classroom curriculum. In spite of the predominance

of ideas that were similar to those that guided the early ethnic studies movement in terms of social action and content knowledge reform, the Intergroup education movement included neither a focus on empowerment of minority groups nor a vision of ethnic pride and solidarity. Rather, these educators were working to create a singular culture that provided opportunities for sharing of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The Ethnic Studies movement is based on the idea that the propagation of knowledge among African American people should be centered in African and African American culture and the enhancement of the African American community (Banks, 2004). The leaders of this movement were mainly African American, originating from diverse sectors of the economy. Early roots of this movement can be seen in the work of W.E.B. DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. DuBois and Wilson spearheaded what is now referred to as the Early Ethnic Studies movement, contending that for an African American to be educated in the true sense of the term, he needed to be educated in a new tradition, one that is not dominated by European thought but rather controlled by the African American community (Woodson, 1933). Scholars such as DuBois and Woodson created transferable knowledge in the form of articles and texts to be used in centers of African American learning both in schools and in colleges (Banks, 2004). As a part of this movement, Woodson founded Negro History Week in 1926, the tradition that has now evolved into Black History Month and continues to be celebrated in schools across the United States today. The Black Studies movement that began in the 1960s was born out of this Early Ethnic Studies movement.

As schools and society continued to evolve, diversify and integrate, the field of Multicultural Education remained nascent and experienced a prolonged period of

emergence throughout the 1970s. During this time, Intergroup Studies disappeared in the wake of the Civil Rights movement only to resurface later in a Liberal approach to multicultural education. Concurrently, the Ethnic Studies movement was radically changing. While desegregation efforts posed challenges to many communities, many in the African American community grew impatient and called for an enhanced sense of racial pride. This included, but was not limited to, a demand for community control of schools, a Black history curriculum, and increased representation of African Americans in school staff (Banks, 2004). As Multicultural Education became a recognizable field, made salient by the efforts of such scholars as Geneva Gaye, James Banks, and Carl Grant, it still struggled to define itself. Tensions arose between those who would take a more diplomatic approach and those who favored radicalism and proffered revolutionary thoughts and ideas. Additionally, Banks has identified a gap between theory and practice that continues to challenge multicultural educators. Today, these tensions remain visible and create a necessity for examining both theory and praxis in order to understand the discrepancies.

### *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy*

In two diverse conceptual frameworks for multicultural education, Christine Bennett and George Banks both describe Equity Pedagogy as one of the four major tenets of Multicultural Education (Banks, 2004; Bennett, 2001). Banks and Bennett both include Equity Pedagogy as an integral dimension of multicultural education. Banks' description focuses on a paradigmatic understanding of ways to teach minority children, ranging historically from a cultural deficit model to the current struggle between the more

empowering cultural difference model and the “at-risk” model that has reintroduced cultural deprivation theory using new terminology. He touches upon both learning styles and teaching styles, and includes a special emphasis on language within the domain of second language acquisition and application (Banks, 2004). The foci of Bennett’s Equity Pedagogy cluster are broader, including School and Classroom Climate, Student Achievement, and Cultural Styles in Teaching and Learning. The emphasis of the first genre in this cluster is on the exploration of positive school and classroom climates in terms of the axiological orientation of teachers and administrators using student achievement and inter-group relations as corollaries. The second genre offers a discussion of Student Achievement focusing on effective teaching of historically underserved children. The third genre, Cultural Styles in Teaching and Learning, further emphasizes the role of culture in effective pedagogy and specifically the role of the teacher in understanding student culture and implementing relevant pedagogy.

As a primary example of a researcher focused on Equity Pedagogy, Christine Bennett offers Ladson-Billings. Although Bennett places Ladson-Billings and other culturally relevant theorists in the genre of cultural styles in teaching and learning, it is possible to draw links between the tenets of CRP as defined by Ladson-Billings and the other two genres falling under Bennett’s Equity Pedagogy. In considering the elements of effective teaching as put forth by Ladson-Billings and others within the construct of Bennett’s framework, the central position of pedagogy in the emergent conceptual framework becomes evident. A synthesis of Banks’, Bennett’s, and Ladson-Billings’ conceptions of pedagogy reveals a conception of equity pedagogy in which the emphasis is on social action as the ultimate pedagogical tool. In addition, a synthesized framework



for understanding Equity Pedagogy reveals an increased focus on the intersectional nature of identity within the development of cultural competence in the classroom. This component includes the self-examination and examination of others by both teachers and students who will consider race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, or religion, among other factors in the formation of identity. This central component of the framework being developed draws from Banks' discussion of the role of difference theorists in disempowering racism and related "cultural deprivation" paradigms. It stands in opposition to the use of terms such as "at-risk" that serve to revive deficit theories of understanding cultural difference. Furthermore, it makes central Ladson-Billings' discussion of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and takes the tenets of this pedagogy as its own core and as its means of integrating the three surrounding components, reform at the personal, curricular, and societal strata.

This review will begin with a discussion of Ladson-Billings and then use this discussion as a framework within which to situate with other major scholars and bodies of scholarly thought within in this field. Bennett describes the characteristics of an effective teacher as including pride in teaching, awareness of societal conditions of discrimination and injustice and non-assimilationist pedagogical stances. Their teaching, the defining elements of which are high levels of academic success across all areas, student cultural competence, and the "drawing out" of the child's valuable, and valued, home culture, clearly reflects their axiological orientation. This definition fits closely with the three tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as put forth by Ladson-Billings in *Crossing Over to Canaan*. She asserts that culturally relevant pedagogy

...is based on three propositions about what contributes to success for all students, especially African American students. These propositions are:

- Successful teachers focus on student's academic achievement
- Successful teachers develop student's cultural competence
- Successful teachers foster student's sense of sociopolitical consciousness

(Ladson Billings, 2001, p.144)

The exploration of current trends in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy will explore research on these three tenets, followed by a discussion of alterations or additions to this framework suggested by contemporary multicultural theorists, and culminating in the synthesis of these ideas into a new framework that, when integrated with the framework for understanding child centered pedagogy as defined by Montessori, will serve as the overarching conceptual map for the research presented by this paper.

### *Philosophical Underpinnings and Pedagogical Systems*

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), as Gloria Ladson-Billings names it, can be understood as the intersection of practice and theory related to the education of African American and other historically underserved students. CRP is also referred to in research as pedagogy that is “‘culturally appropriate’ (Au & Jordan, 1981), ‘culturally congruent’ (Mohatt & Erickson, 1981), ‘culturally responsive’ (Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and ‘culturally compatible’ (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987)” (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Although Ladson-Billings (1994) conceptualizes of these pedagogical stances as “models for improving practice and developing grounded theory,

(p. x)” she stresses that her conception of CRP is not prescriptive and does not provide “lists of things to do to achieve effective teaching for African American students” (p. xi). Gaye (2000), whose concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is congruent in many ways to Ladson-Billings ideas, differs in that she does put forth the belief that specific pedagogical practices have been shown to be effective with African American children. Gay point out that “ethnically specific learning styles...[are] tools [for] improving the school achievement of Latino, native, Asian, and African-American students by creating more *cultural congruity* in teaching-learning processes” (p.147). These learning styles differ across cultural groups and within cultural groups according to what Gay refers to as “mitigating variables” of culture, such as gender, age, and social class (p. 11). Howard (2001) concurs with Gaye and mentions the importance of continuity of linguistic discourse between school and home and an emphasis on oral language or storytelling to reinforce written concepts in addition to more general culturally congruent practices. The notion of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy includes three basic tenets that have implications on at least two distinct levels. These tenets, as defined above, are primarily based on the beliefs held in common by successful teachers of African American and other historically underserved children, which have been found to hold to a central core across multiple research contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1994; McIntyre, Rosebery, & González, 2001; Hollins & Oliver, 1999; Gaye, 2000). Through the implementation of these beliefs a second strata of this pedagogy is located in the practices that have arisen out of these theoretical stances and have been shown to be effective when implemented across a variety of social milieu.

*Tenet 1: Successful teachers focus on student's academic achievement*

*What do teachers believe?*

Ladson-Billings (2001) bases the above statement on a variety of observed classroom practices and related conversations with teachers. In *The Dreamkeepers*, (Ladson-Billings, 1994), she describes the culturally relevant teacher as holding a variety of beliefs related to student achievement. This “teacher sees teaching as “pulling out knowledge”-“like mining” (p. 34). She contrasts this with the traditional, factory-based model of education as a process of assimilation, through which the teacher deposits knowledge into the child. As an adjunct to this belief is the notion of knowledge itself as something that is not fixed or static. Rather, the culturally relevant practitioner believes that “Knowledge is continuously recreated...and shared by teachers and students;...[it] is viewed critically” (p. 81). Many researchers and theorists in the social sciences, who see knowledge as constructed and contextually based, share this notion (King, 2004). This view of knowledge is critical to a multicultural perspective because it helps to reveal to dominant role of Euro-centric knowledge in the curriculum and a corresponding lack of Afro-centric knowledge. Understanding knowledge construction as a process that involves both teachers and students then becomes essential to an equitable focus on academic achievement. This understanding directly correlates, and even enables the teacher to believe that all students can succeed (p.34, p.44). A final belief held in common by successful practitioners is a personal belief that teaching is a profession and that they have chosen this profession as a career path to which they are dedicating their lives as opposed to a job to which they simply report. Irvine (2004) describes African

American teachers in Atlanta as holding this same belief in teaching as a calling. These teachers, although steeped in an understanding of the scientific principles of learning, view teaching as an art rather than a science (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 34, p. 35).

*How do they enact their beliefs?*

The teachers in Ladson-Billings' study not only held beliefs about the possibility of academic success for all students, but also enacted classroom practices based on these beliefs. She found that a central component of their praxis was an interaction with their students based on respect and cooperation, in which students are treated as competent and correspondingly demonstrate competence (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 123). In particular, Ladson-Billings (1994) notes that several of the teachers she observed made use of inter-group cooperation in the classroom, encouraging students to support and sustain one another's academic and personal efforts. Additionally, teachers themselves modeled such verbal encouragements, explicitly telling students that they had the ability to succeed at whatever activity they attempted. She quotes one mathematics teacher as coaching students by saying "Don't let it [pre-algebra] scare you" (p.120). In conjunction with this inculcation of self-efficacy into students' personal academic concept, these teachers help all students develop the skills needed to develop the level of excellence they are taught to expect from themselves. This means meeting the children where they are academically as opposed to expecting them to have already learned a certain concept or set of concepts. In order to accomplish this, teachers must treat academic instruction as paramount, as opposed to cultural assimilation or what is commonly referred to as classroom management. Within this instruction, it is essential that students, teachers, and parents

have the ability to practice “educational self-determination” (p.137), a concept that includes student pacing, localized curricular control, and a framework of listening amongst all persons involved in the educational process. Finally, Ladson-Billings describes the penultimate characteristic of these teachers as the innate passion with which they approach their practice.

A wealth of literature in the field of multicultural education supports these pedagogical enactments of contextual instruction, fostering independence through student pacing, and expressing a belief in all children as essential to a practice that is culturally relevant or responsive. McIntyre, et. al. (2001) assert that teachers can bring about academic success for all by seeing every child as an individual with a wealth of cultural knowledge and by believing that students can learn and that contextualizing instruction is one way of engaging them (p.10). They go on to describe the manner in which successful teachers structure curriculum to answer the needs of the child through incorporating the children’s home cultures into instructional practices. They sum up the principles of fostering academic achievement for all students as including the necessity to think deeply about the children from both personal and cultural perspectives, to see children as whole people as opposed to partially formed adults, to engage in continuous learning and to participate in learning communities outside of school and to contextualize instruction in real and pertinent situations. Hollins and Oliver (1999) also emphasize the importance of contextual instruction in a collection of essays describing lessons that are based in both content and culture. Howard (2001) elaborates on the importance of educating the whole child through the use of holistic instructional strategies that reinforce academic skills while also sustaining the social, emotional, and moral growth of the child. Schultz (2003)

emphasizes the importance of listening to students as individuals, as collective groups of learners, and as members of community through both informal observation and more formal inter-group dialogue as a means of enabling successful practice among teachers and correspondent success among diverse learners. Finally, Greene (1995) builds upon these ideas and adds the notion of fostering independence among children through pedagogical praxis. She believes that “to teach, at least in one dimension, is to provide persons with the knacks and know-how they need in order to teach themselves” (p.14). Jordan-Irvine (2004) echoes the ethic displayed by the teachers in *The Dreamkeepers* through a description of culturally responsive practitioners who not only hold high standards and express belief in their students, but reinforce this expressed belief through a form of caring she refers to as “other-mothering.”

*Successful teachers develop student’s cultural competence*

### **Conflicting Views of Culture**

The question of developing student’s cultural competence is a complex one due to the conflicting definitions of culture within the field of multicultural education. These definitions range from a symbolic systems analysis understanding of culture as representational, constructivist, and changing, to a socio-cultural systems analysis understanding of culture as a fixed set of shared beliefs and practices passed down from generation to generation. Within literature relating to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in particular, McIntyre et. al. (2001) take a definitively symbolic stance with regards to culture, stating that “...lists (of cultural traits) are based on false assumptions about culture and its transmission and that no list can be flexible and dynamic enough to

describe an individual's point of view, let alone the points of view of a group of individuals" (p.7). A different point of view can be found in the Ladson-Billings (2004), who draws upon the work of Foucault (1991) and Bennett (1992) in her assertion that "culture is created through the processes of social management, and that it is both the object and the instrument of government." This definition views culture as material, changeable and interactive, but also as a political entity with direct relationships to the power hierarchy of a given society. Ladson-Billings goes on to assert that measures towards standardization of curriculum and assessment reinforce the mythology of the dominant culture as superior, and underline the reliance of dominance on subjugation. As such the hierarchical nature of culture can be understood as a necessity for the maintenance of power and privilege. Gaye (2000) uses culture to refer to "a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others" (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991 in Gay, 2000). This definition also views culture as one element of an inter-subjective reality that evolves over time and place. What is important is to understand that each individual author means something slightly different, and sometimes radically different, when they refer to culture and cultural competence. This section will attempt to shed light on these constructs in their specific contextual realms.

#### *What do teachers believe?*

A culturally relevant practitioner holds a specific set of beliefs regarding both their own cultural identity and that of their student. Primarily, this teacher believes that identity, in its multiple visible and invisible layers, is important to instruction. They are



careful not to ignore the visible traits of identity but rather to take conscious note of these physical characteristics and to build their understanding of the student upon them. In particular, they take care not to ignore color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ignoring color, asserts Ladson-Billings, masks “dysconscious racism” and limits the teacher’s ability to see and meet the needs of a diverse student body. In addition to these external characteristics, however, are a wide range of internal traits that teachers work to discover and value within their student populations. Ladson-Billings describes the use of rewards structured to validate a wide range of student activity and work that helps students to foster a belief in the inherent importance of diversity of identity and action. In addition to believing in the value of diversity among students, however, there is an inherent belief in the value of acknowledging and exploring one’s own cultural composition. Ladson-Billings more fully explores this notion in *Crossing over to Canaan*, an exploration of a teacher education program designed to inculcate the principles of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in new teachers. Other researchers in this field also report on the importance of valuing student diversity through a variety of teacher beliefs. Successful teachers of historically underserved students in Kentucky share a common vision of every child as an individual with a wealth of cultural knowledge, a vision that underlies their belief that all of their students can learn (McIntyre et. al. (eds.), p.10).

#### *How do they enact their beliefs?*

Practitioners of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy possess a wide range of pedagogical skills that directly reinforce their belief in the importance of developing students’ cultural competence. The teachers in Ladson-Billings (1994) study enacted this

belief in at least three essential ways. First, the teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Teachers accomplish this by bringing the student's cultural backgrounds to the center of the classroom curriculum and pedagogical practice. One of the teachers described by Ladson-Billings studies current events with her students and then helps them connect current events to their own lives and circumstances. An example of this type of practice is having the children bring in articles about the war in the Persian Gulf and then discussing the relationship between that war and local resources, including the many soldiers drafted from their local community (p. 49). Related to this concept of connecting curriculum to student's lives is the notion, essential to CRP, of building on what students know through the use of scaffolding. Scaffolding entails allowing the students to build upon the knowledge that they bring to school with them in order to develop more advanced concepts. A third essential principle in the development of CRP is the need for the teacher to honor and respect students home culture through such practices as incorporating student's home language into instruction, enabling the practice of code switching among students, and valuing the students written ideas before critiquing their grammatical constructs when evaluating written work.

Ladson-Billings (2001) discusses a second critical component of fostering cultural competence. She asserts that before teachers can recognize and affirm student's cultural heritage, they need to be comfortable with their own cultural selves. This competence can be developed through an initial, pre-service home-stay with a family in the community where the teachers will be placed. She envisions this home stay as a six week time period during which prospective teachers act as family members, not as researchers or

professionals. Additionally, cultural competence among teachers should be furthered throughout the teaching year through a service learning partnership with a local non-profit agencies, churches, and community centers. A third component of developing personal cultural competence involves interacting with students in their home and community settings. This notion of developing personal cultural competence through a variety of community-based activities is echoed by Moll & Gonzalez (2004). They describe an approach called “Funds of Knowledge,” a concept that requires teachers to enter students’ homes in order to examine the forms of capital that a specific family possesses and to then use this information to structure the curriculum. They believe that both teachers and students will benefit from building the curriculum up from a deep understanding of the familial knowledge that enables families to function as economic and social units on a daily basis. McIntyre et. al. (2001) also encourage teachers to build curricula around students’ lives and to learn about students through getting to know their families and communities. They sum up this approach to cultural competence with a call for “using minority and working-class student’s fund of knowledge as the centerpiece of instruction” (McIntyre, et. al., eds., 2001, p.8). Finally, Zeichner and Liston (1996) also focus on the importance of developing personal cultural competence for prospective teachers. They focus on the notion of critical reflection in conjunction with developing a critical lens through which to view the conditions of schooling as a means for this development. Critical reflection entails writing journal entries about daily classroom experiences. It differs from a more traditional notion of reflection in that it entails the use of multiple and diverse lenses to examine one’s own praxis. Zeichner (1999) also emphasizes the role of action research in helping teachers to understand and incorporate

their student's identities into their pedagogical practices in their efforts to move towards learner-centered practices.

*Successful teachers foster students' sense of sociopolitical consciousness*

This third tenet of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is arguably the most important, and helps to situate Ladson-Billings' work within the construct of "critical multiculturalism" (Ladson-Billings, 2004). She argues that various groups of scholars, educators, and politicians have attempted to appropriate the term "multicultural education" for their own purposes and in so doing have denuded it of meaning as a term standing on its own. However, through the incorporation of a social justice agenda into the field and the use of story in research based narratives, multicultural scholars can re-appropriate the term for their own agenda of civic action and societal change. She cites McLaren (1994) as putting forth the idea that "multiculturalism without a transformative political agenda can be just another form of accommodation to the larger social order" (p.53). Gay (2000) echoes these arguments in pointing out that "intention without action is insufficient" (p.13). She, like Ladson-Billings, believes that thinking about and being aware of injustices, while necessary to incite change, are in and of themselves useless acts. Gay goes on to argue that without developing the competencies necessary to support good intentions, philanthropists and other do-gooders often end up creating more harm than good. An essential element of an education that is culturally responsive, then, is that of "developing socio-civic skills for effective membership in multicultural communities" (p.20). Jordan-Irvine (2004) cites an African-American teacher as summing up the

importance of teaching beyond the curriculum in her own assessment that she does not teach mere academics and her subsequent assertion that “I teach life.”

*What do teachers believe?*

Ladson-Billings (1994) finds that “teachers with culturally relevant practices see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same” (p.38). The teachers in her study chose to teach in less affluent, predominantly African American communities for a wide variety of reasons, but all of them chose freely and purposefully to work with this population of students. Perhaps because of that choice, these teachers see themselves as giving back to the community in a positive way, and feel grateful for this opportunity. As contributing members of the community, teachers are also cognizant of themselves as political beings. Ladson-Billings asserts that teacher education programs have a responsibility to “provide teacher candidates with opportunities to critique the system in ways that will help them choose a role as either agent of change or defender of the status quo” (p.133). The teachers in her study have all been exposed to such opportunities through informal settings, and have chosen to be agents of change. They feel that enacting this agency in the classroom means passing on the opportunity to make such a choice by “helping African American students better understand the world as it is and equip them to change it for the better” (p. 139). Similarly, Jordan-Irvine (2004) identifies a need for teacher education programs to train teachers to be culturally responsive and suggests that researchers look to members of the community in question, in her case African Americans teachers, as role models for cultural outsiders.

*How do they enact their beliefs?*

The most basic element of a change-oriented pedagogy is the creation of communities within classrooms. Ladson-Billings refers to these communities as families, and identifies factors that are essential to their creation (p. 54). Fundamental to these factors is the concept of “humanely equitable” relationships. Teachers are responsible for fostering this type of relationship between themselves and their students, among the individual students, and with classroom families. Teachers encourage and invite parent participation in classrooms, participate in their students’ lives outside of class through attending church events, leading girl-scout troops and maintaining other types of quotidian presence in students’ community lives. An integral part of this community building is encouraging cooperative learning and a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of all. Another integral component of fostering socio-political consciousness is helping students make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Ladson-Billings (2004) explores this notion in depth as she describes the process of creating change-oriented curricula on the part of student teachers. One of these novices helped design and instruct a unit on AIDS, a subject with which some of the students had personal experience. “Despite the children’s young age, the unit dealt openly and honestly with this difficult subject area at an appropriate instructional level” (p.66). Through her interaction with one particular student whose grandmother had died of AIDS, this student teacher learned “that students’ academic achievement is intimately tied to the things they care about; they learn what they love” (p.66). Through community building and directed socially relevant activities, teachers and students engage in a

collective struggle against the status quo which helps students to understand the difference between societal expectations and their own innate possibilities and to overcome negative stereotypes and assumptions through academic and civic achievement.

Ladson-Billings (1994) also describes a culturally relevant conception of knowledge as one that views knowledge as “continuously recreated, recycled and shared by teachers and students. It is not static or unchanging” (p.81). Teachers in her study help students arrive at this conception of knowledge by enabling them to understand the power of their own abilities to create knowledge through such activities as writing, editing and informally publishing written works within the classroom. They also incorporate books and music from the students’ own cultures into their classrooms in order to demonstrate the wide variety of publicly validated knowledge that is available to students and reflects upon their cultural as well as their personal selves. Other researchers call for teachers to help students understand the nature of knowledge as constructed, contestable, and culturally centered. Banks et. al. (2001) describe the third principle for teaching and learning in a multicultural society as the need to “help students understand that knowledge is socially constructed” (p.3), through the analysis of texts, perspectives, and voice. Banks (2004) further defines this area of inquiry as “Knowledge Construction” which has a specific focus on the decoding of texts, media, and materials to understand the implicit biases they carry. Bennett (2001) discusses a similar genre of multicultural education that she refers to as “Detecting Bias in Texts and Instructional Materials.” While both Bennett and Banks segregate the deconstruction of knowledge from the concept of equity pedagogy, extending this concept into classroom practice forms an

integral part of educating children for socio-civic awareness and an activist stance towards change.

### *Theoretical Nexus of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Montessori*

As Gay (2004) asserts, “Principles of child-centered education and the basic tenets of multicultural education are very similar (p. 38).” Ladson-Billings (1995) similarly examines the concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as “good teaching.” She discusses the need for all good teachers to draw upon student interest and ability levels in fostering academic success, to use culture as a vehicle for learning, and to develop in students a sense of “critical consciousness,” through which students learn about civic responsibilities and engage in civic activities. Given that Montessori is a child-centered pedagogy, it is logical then, that many of the essential tenets of Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy are congruent, if not convergent. Lowden (2000) asserts that western educators such as Montessori drew their concept of child-centered education directly from the African concept of Kindezi, a culturally centered approach to rearing the young. What remains to be seen is the extent to which specific Montessori schools and teacher education programs are preparing their teachers to engage in “good teaching” that is both based in Montessori theory and extends beyond this body of work when necessary. For the purposes of this comparative exploration, the term “congruent” will be used to describe principles that fit into a similar category of theory or praxis, although they are not explicitly the same. The term “convergent,” on the other hand will be reserved for those principles of theory or praxis that are a precise match. The few terms that are discordant will be described as “divergent” and explored briefly, although these are not



the explicit focus of this research paper. Table 2.2 provides a comprehensive comparison of Montessori Culturally Relevant Pedagogy based on the research examined in this chapter. A discussion of the convergences, congruencies, and divergences discovered at the theoretical and pedagogical levels can be found in chapter five. The discussion, like the table, examines the theoretical bases of each of three tenets and then explores the pedagogical principles implicit to the implementation of these core tenets in the classroom.

*Table 2.2*

	Montessori	Equity Pedagogy
Comparison I:	<i>Education should serve as a process of drawing out what is already within each individual child.</i>	<i>Successful teachers focus on student's academic achievement.</i>
Theory	Education is child-centered and focused on drawing out of personal and cultural selves.	Teacher sees teaching as “pulling out knowledge”-“like mining”
Pedagogy	Teachers are set firm guidelines for children to act freely within.	Teachers interact with students based on respect and cooperation.
	Teachers practice a pedagogy that is caring.	Teachers practice caring or “other-mothering.”
	Teachers foster opportunities for cooperative learning across age and ability levels.	Teachers foster opportunities for inter-group cooperation across ability levels.
	Teachers tailor lessons to meet the needs of the individual child.	Teachers practice differentiated instruction so as to meet individual academic needs.
	Teachers situate learning in relevant, “real-life” contexts.	Teachers situate learning in relevant, “real-life” contexts.
	Teachers observe children in a manner that is open-minded in order to gain insight.	Teachers listen to students as individuals, as groups, and as members of community.
	Monitor the social, physical, and psychological progress of the child	Teachers consider the “whole child” in their instruction.
	Teachers foster intrinsic motivation and avoid extrinsic rewards	Teachers use rewards to validate student activity
Comparison II	<i>Education should foster independence and encourage freedom with responsibility.</i>	<i>Successful teachers develop student's cultural competence.</i>
Theory	Education should respect the developmental needs of the child. Student's personal interest is at the center of the curriculum and	Education should recognize and respect the multiple layers of identity, including color, ethnicity and culture. Student's cultural background is at the center

	pedagogical practice.	of the classroom curriculum and pedagogical practice.
Pedagogy	Helps students make cross-curricular connections within the prepared environment of books, materials, and technology.	Teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.
	Teacher draw upon a child's own interest and prior knowledge	Teachers build on what students know through the use of scaffolding.
	Teachers enable children to choose and initiate educational tasks and to learn through personal error and correction.	Teachers enable educational self-determination through student pacing and localized curricular control.
	Teachers encourage parents to follow the developmental needs of the child.	Teachers honor and respect students home culture.
	Teachers learn about the child through observation.	Teachers learn about students through listening and getting to know their families and communities.
	Teachers learn to filter out their own prejudices in the classroom.	Teachers are comfortable with their own cultural selves.
Comparison III:	<i>Education should prepare the child for a life of service to humanity and stewardship of the global environment.</i>	<i>Successful teachers foster student's sense of sociopolitical consciousness.</i>
Theory	Education as a tool for the development of world peace and a foundation for responsible citizenship.	Education as a tool for the justice oriented social change and a foundation for responsible citizenship.
Pedagogy	Teachers encourage engagement in civic life through "going out."	Teachers provide opportunities for social awareness and action.
	Teachers build classroom communities through reliance on cooperative learning and multi-age grouping and looping.	Teachers build classroom communities through cooperative learning and shared responsibility for the well-being of all.
	Teachers invite parent participation in the classroom and in "going out."	Teachers invite parent participation in classroom and participate in their students' extracurricular lives.
	Teachers foster development of intercultural understanding among students.	Teachers foster socio-political consciousness by helping students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.
	Teach children to care for the natural environment.	No provision exists
	No provision exists.	Teachers help students understand the nature of knowledge as constructed, contestable, and culturally centered.
	No provision exists.	Prospective teachers have opportunities to critique the system.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### *Research Questions*

The research questions to be answered are:

- In what ways are the Montessori paradigm and the Culturally Relevant Pedagogical paradigms congruent?
- In what ways does the ensemble of teacher preparatory experience influence the role of cultural relevance in a Montessori teacher's praxis?
- In what ways do Montessori teachers in Public Schools perceive their practice as being compatible with the components of a "Culturally Relevant Montessori?"
- In what ways do teachers exhibit a praxis that is compatible with the components of a "Culturally Relevant Montessori"?

This research draws on the large body of historical research and original theoretical writings as well as the small body of scholarly research in regards to Montessori and build on that research to develop an understanding of what it means to practice Montessori. Additionally, this research draws upon the extensive body of research on Equity Pedagogy, one of the basic tenets of Multicultural Education (Banks, 2004, Bennett, 2001). Equity Pedagogy serves as a broader framework in which to situate Gloria Ladson-Billings concept of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as well as related research that uses analogous terms, such as Geneva Gaye's concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Finally, it builds upon any existing literature that pertains to both

of these paradigms as a starting point for a more complex and multi-layered theoretical and practical comparison.

### *Methods*

This study is an ethnographic case study of the public Montessori program in a culturally diverse suburban county bordering on a large city. It is a case study in that it is a study of a bounded system, comprised of the lower elementary Montessori team in one public elementary school spanning pre-kindergarten through fifth grade (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, 55). It is ethnographic in the sense that it will draw on participant observation of classrooms within these schools as well as semi-structured interviews of teacher participants for the collection of data. This study is semi-structured in the sense that it begins with a tentative plan for research and then evolves in response to the phenomena being studied, the lower elementary Montessori teachers in this public elementary school (Maxwell, 2005, 82). The interviews are semi-structured in the same sense, building from a pre-conceived list of questions for guidance and then evolving in response to the participants. A case study is appropriate to the nature of the phenomenon as a bounded system. An ethnographic methodology is integral to this particular case study because the nature of the questions in exploring both process and meaning calls for both participant observation and semi-structured interviews. As an ethnographic case study, this study presents in-depth findings in regard to specific classrooms in one public school setting. This research presents the possibility for further studies to determine the generalizability of the findings (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003, 33). This research is carefully

aligned with the IRB regulations of the University of Maryland and was conducted after receipt of IRB approval.

This study was modeled, in part, on the research conducted by Ladson-Billings (1994) for *The Dreamkeepers*. Although the intent of the study differed, because it was predicated upon the concept of culturally relevant practice as developed in this book, it followed several of the established conventions. Like Ladson-Billings exploration, this research sought not to be objective, but rather to provide an authentic view of teachers pedagogical stances and practices. Additionally, the model of using interviews as a means of accomplishing “good conversation with each” teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 149), was used, as well as the practice of sharing transcripts with teachers to invite collaboration. However, the study was limited by time considerations and by the limited availability of Montessori teachers in this public school setting, preventing the researcher from engaging in active participant selection or from conducting the quantity of observations conducted by Ladson-Billings.

#### *Site and participant selection*

I conducted my research in one public Montessori school in a suburban/urban county. This county is located on the border of a large city and is geographically small but dense in population, with a population density of almost 8,000 people per square mile. Both its citizenry and its school children reflect a broad diversity, with about 43% of the population being Hispanic, Asian, African American or Multi-Racial. This county is also one of the most highly educated in the nation, with 30% of the citizens holding graduate or professional degrees. The site I have chosen is a large Montessori school that

is characterized both by proximity to a major urban center and by a student body that is culturally diverse. These two characteristics make it similar in some respects to the types of settings in which Gloria Ladson-Billings performed her research on culturally relevant pedagogy. The demographics of the student population in Pinewood Community, where Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted her research, differed significantly from this setting in that the Pinewood School district had significantly higher numbers of children living near or below the federal poverty line, as well as a larger percentage of African American students. While the two districts are similar in terms of cultural diversity and proximity to an urban center, they differ in terms of supervisory structure. Notably, the county I have chosen has retained the same superintendent over the course of 8 years.

The Montessori program in this county is housed in five schools. Founded in the early 1970's, this program rose from a belief that providing preschool services to families in lower income areas of the country would help to eliminate the achievement gap. The elementary program was not added until 1995. Because of the late arrival of elementary in the history of this system's Montessori program, four of the schools maintain only preschool classrooms, while only one school houses an elementary program. Because this study pertains specifically to Montessori at the elementary level, this school was chosen as the research site. The school itself is located in a majority African American neighborhood and receives some Title I funding. With a total student enrollment of 460, the makeup of the school is 10.5% Asian, 47.5% African American, 23.9% Hispanic, and 16.9% Caucasian. The diversity of this school and the receipt of Title I funding, coupled with its geographic location, give this school similar characteristics to the schools examined by Ladson-Billings in *The Dreamkeepers*. These same elements provide this

school with characteristics that are similar to the demographic elements of the first Children's House founded by Dr. Montessori.

The Montessori program at this site is housed in a building with another, more traditional, graded program. The two programs share administration, specialist teachers, and a parent teacher organization. However, although the school itself is very diverse, and housed in a community that is largely African American and Hispanic, the Montessori program does not reflect the surrounding community to the same degree that the graded program does. This discrepancy arises due to the difference in entry criteria for the two programs. The graded program is a community school and draws from the surrounding community. The Montessori program, on the other hand, is the only elementary level Montessori school in the county and therefore draws from the entire system. Parents in the county must fill out an application to attend this program, and in the case of applications exceeding the capacity of the program, entry is based on a lottery. Children generally start at three, and parents of three and four year olds pay tuition based on a sliding scale that correlates to income. For this reason, the Montessori classrooms are more likely to include students from other, more affluent parts of the county than are the graded classrooms. I intend to note the racial balance in each classroom during observations.

I worked with four teachers at the lower elementary level (grades 1-3). These teachers were selected because they are the only four lower elementary Montessori teachers other than the researcher herself that work at this particular site.

## **Data Collection**

### *Semi-structured Interviews*

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the teacher participants both on-site and off-site. Two extensive interviews were conducted with teachers before beginning classroom observations. These interviews served to situate the teachers theoretically according to self-perception of practice. Because of the quantity of data collected, the interview process was broken into two interviews so as not to overextend the study participants and so as to allow time for researcher reflection between the first and second interview. The first of these interviews gathered data for a brief biographical sketch that details teacher preparatory and prior teaching experiences, teachers' background in multicultural education, and the decision to become a teacher. The second interview honed in on pedagogy, using a series of questions about classroom praxis to explore teachers' pedagogical stances.

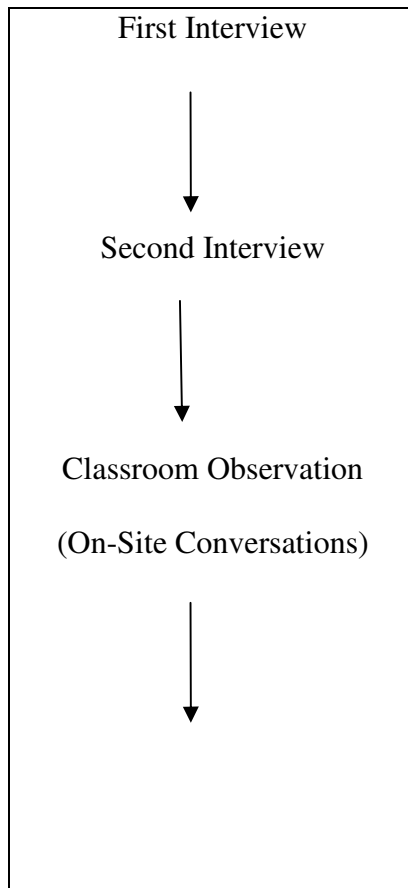
Prior to these interviews, the researcher prepared a list of questions that specifically address the ways in which teachers feel that they reflect the intersection of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Montessori Pedagogy. These questions, found in Appendix A, served as a starting point from which more probing, impromptu questions were added as necessary to elicit the necessary information from teachers. Teacher's responses to these questions in turn served as a point of departure from which to delve further into teacher's conceptions of practice in the public Montessori setting. The use of semi-structured interviews, in which the interviewer planned ahead and yet remained

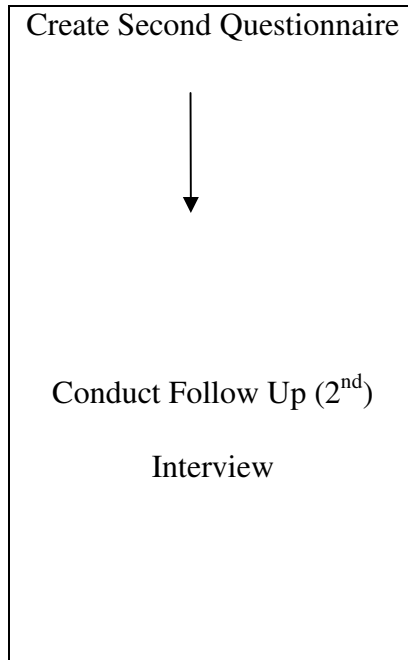


flexible in order to fully incorporate the participants ideology, allowed for an increased presence of authentic voice in this portion of the research.

A third, less structured interview occurred after all data had been collected. This interview was very brief in many instances and simply allowed for the discussion of any misunderstandings of classroom practices, discrepancies between teacher perception and observer perception, and other necessary clarification. Questions that were prepared prior to this interview were based on interview transcripts and teacher specific observations and varied depending on need. In some instances, no follow-up conversation was needed.

Impromptu on-site conversations and other informal interview data were also used to supplement these semi-structured interviews. See table 3.1 for a flow chart depicting the interview and observation process.





*Table 3.1*

Interviews have been selected as the primary method of data gathering in order to shed light on the teachers' own perceptions of their practice. Furthermore, the selection of interviews as a mode of data collection allows the researcher to work around school scheduling conflicts.

After interviews were conducted, the tape-recorded data was transcribed verbatim, with the exception of irrelevant information or language. The transcripts were then submitted to the study participants for member checking and the revised transcripts were used in the data analysis process.

### *Observation*

Two one-hour observations of each classroom were conducted. Observation was chosen as a means of data collection in order to gain insight into the ways in which teachers put into practice the theoretical bases of the two paradigms being compared. These observations were necessarily somewhat brief and small in number due to the full

time teaching status of the researcher, who had to use a combination of professional leave and personal leave time to observe. Therefore, the observations were supplementary to extensive interviews. The use of these two methods of data collection also enabled the comparison of the praxis and ideological frameworks of the teachers in this study.

Observations were scheduled ahead of time and reflected different time periods of the day so that data could be collected on each teacher for a variety of different time periods. This is important because of the structure of a Montessori classroom. Although subject areas are not segregated into time periods, as in traditional classes, each part of the day represents a different instructional setting. For example, in many Montessori classrooms, the first three hour period of the day represents what is referred to as uninterrupted work time. During this time, teachers are giving small group lessons while students are working independently on their classroom assignments. The afternoon block, on the other hand, may include a period dedicated to teacher led read-aloud, another for silent reading, and a whole class instructional period for history, geography, or science. While every Montessori classroom is structured differently, the vast majority of them possess a predictable structure to the day that more or less resembles the structure described above and depicted in table 3.2. Because of this structure, observations were not generally reflective of one curricular area or one specific lesson. This is due to the nature of the Montessori classroom, in which many subjects are being simultaneously pursued. Rather, observations reflected the general activity of the classroom as well as any specific instructional practices recorded during the given time period. Instructional practices included direct instruction, guided practice, and coaching of students who are working independently. Because the focus of this research is on manner of pedagogical

delivery, and not on content knowledge, this did not adversely affect the research. In many ways, it provided more opportunities to observe the teacher in a broad variety of instructional activity, lending a rich quality to the data collected.

*Table 3.2: General Schedule Adhered to by Most Teachers in This Study*

	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<b>9:00-12:00</b>	Uninterrupted Work Time	Uninterrupted Work Time	Uninterrupted Work Time	Uninterrupted Work Time	Uninterrupted Work Time
<b>12:00-1:45</b>	Lunch/Recess/ Specialist Classes	Lunch/Recess/ Specialist Classes	Lunch/ Specialist Classes/ Early Dismissal	Lunch/Recess/ Specialist Classes	Lunch/Recess/ Specialist Classes
<b>1:45-3:15</b>	Various Afternoon Activities	Various Afternoon Activities	Teacher Work Time	Various Afternoon Activities	Various Afternoon Activities
<b>3:15-3:30</b>	Dismissal Procedures	Dismissal Procedures		Dismissal Procedures	Dismissal Procedures

Observation data was collected through the use of copious note taking. This researcher did not request access to the teacher's lesson plans, because the focus of this research is not on the planned activities but on the actual praxis. This type of data collection is the least intrusive to classroom practice. Data was collected primarily through the use of narrative style notes, which were then organized into a grid. These notes focused on the teacher's interactions with the children, and captured dialogue, movements, and tone of voice. Because it is also the most subject to human error, observation data was collected, reviewed, and organized into a matrix and then returned

to the teacher for review. This participant review or member check served as a check on researcher error and also provided valuable insights into teacher's perceptions of their own teaching.

### *Analysis*

Once teachers have reviewed the observational data and provided feedback, it was returned to the researcher for coding. The key principles identified in table 2.2 were used in the coding process. The researcher hand coded the data using the lists of codes found in Appendix B. Hand coding was useful in that certain observations or interview answers were coded as being reflective of the many elements of an emergent framework for a "Culturally Responsive Montessori" as recorded in table 2.2. Data collected from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed both according to individual teacher and to determine instructional patterns across the set of participants. For the analysis on individual practices, data from each teacher were coded according to key terms and ideas that indicate an association with the specific practices that exist at the nexus of the Culturally Relevant and Montessori paradigms. These coded data exist in two subsets, interview data that reflects teachers perceptions of their own practices and observation data, which reflects that which teachers actually do. Once this data was gathered according to individual teachers, it was sorted into a narrative matrix, comparing and contrasting teachers according to their perceptions and their practices. The narrative data was then used to construct a new theoretical framework based on the intersection of the literature review, teachers' ideologies, and teachers' praxes.

## **Validity**

As a Montessori teacher myself, the researcher had the benefit of insider status, which included extensive knowledge of Montessori stemming from certification courses, several years of teaching in both private and public settings, and conference attendance, over the course of my research. However, this may also become a threat to validity in that a bias towards seeing Montessori as a desirable form of practice as opposed to more teacher-centered practices may emerge. Also, as a classroom teacher, teaching in the same school as the subjects, the researcher may tend to sympathize with teacher's challenges and this may inhibit the objective deconstruction of their practices in the data analysis of observation step. The research will be protected from this by the use of member checks, technological coding, and the use of multiple methods discussed below.

In order to compensate for these possible validity threats, multiple methods, including observation and interviews were used to triangulate the data. Additionally, member checks were used periodically by having teachers review observation notes and interview transcripts for misunderstandings and clarification prior to the coding and researcher review process.

## **Implications**

The information gathered over the course of this study will be valuable on several different levels. Primarily, understanding the ways in which Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Montessori intersect and diverge will open up new realms of research for both Montessori teacher education programs and traditional teacher education programs wishing to diversify their content knowledge and praxis-based courses. Furthermore, this

understanding will help administrators in schools serving minority students as well as Montessori teacher education programs to better prepare and support teachers to practice a Multicultural pedagogy, regardless of their underlying theoretical paradigm.

Additionally, the results of this study may be useful to develop studies on a larger scale in order to understand the relationship between these two paradigms and the possibility for collaboration and mutual exploration within their respective teacher education communities. Finally, development of a more clear understanding of the ways in which these theoretical congruencies reveal themselves in practice will lay a foundation for the further comparison of the Montessori paradigm to the Multicultural paradigm, especially as it pertains to pedagogy. This foundation will be useful to the development of a multicultural component of both staff development and teacher education programs for both public and private Montessori schools.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will present the findings for research questions 2, 3, and 4. The literature review ends in a summative exploration of research question 1. First, it will give an overview of the study's participants, including biographical data, reasons for becoming Montessori teachers, teacher preparation and professional experience. From there, this chapter will enter into a thematic examination of teacher's perceptions of their praxis and the corresponding researcher's observations of this praxis. The research questions that this chapter will examine are:

- In what ways does the ensemble of teacher preparatory experience influence the role of cultural relevance in a Montessori teacher's praxis?
- In what ways do Montessori teachers in Public Schools perceive their practice as being compatible with the components of a "Culturally Relevant Montessori?"
- In what ways do teachers exhibit a praxis that is compatible with the components of a "Culturally Relevant Montessori"?

The data presented in this chapter was conducted using two interviews and two observations of each teacher. The initial interview gathered biographical data, while the second interview probed teacher's for their perceptual understanding of their own praxis. The two observations provided snapshots of the classroom, with an emphasis on the teacher's manner of interacting with the children both in and out of lessons. Finally, the researcher, in sharing the same work site as the other teachers, was able to ask them clarifying questions throughout the process. Telephone conversations and e-mail were



also a mode of communication in setting up appointments and requesting clarification of observed behaviors. In order to protect the identity of teachers, pseudonyms are used.

### *Biographical Sketches*

Each of the teachers studied brings to the classroom a unique perspective derived from a combination of life experiences, personal, cultural, and educational. In conducting these conversations, the definition of teacher preparation expanded from the narrow concept of formal training courses and professional development to include a wide variety of life experiences, thought processes, and educational background. While all four teachers have come to the same location, work with similarly diverse student populations in small classrooms of 15-20 students, and have chosen the same teaching philosophy to guide their praxis, each teacher's praxis presents itself as unique. In an effort to understand the development of each, specific pedagogy, the following section undertakes an explanation of the individual, cultural, and pedagogical identities of each teacher studied. This section pertains to research question 2: In what ways does teacher preparation influence the possibilities for practicing components of a Culturally Relevant Montessori in a public school classroom?

### *Manjit Bakshi*

Manjit is a veteran teacher of almost 25 years. She is married and is the mother of two girls, one a sophomore in college, the other a sophomore in high school. She grew up in southern India, in a large family. She shared her childhood home with 45 relatives, including immediate and extended family. As a child, she attended a Montessori school,

directed by a woman who was trained by Dr. Maria Montessori herself. After finishing her secondary studies, Manjit was encouraged by one of her uncles to take a Montessori teacher preparation course, which had come to a nearby village. She did so, and completed this coursework during her late teenage years. Upon completion, she attended a University in India, and received a bachelor's degree in political science and English as well as a master's degree in English. Manjit does not hold a diploma in the field of education.

Manjit has taught in a variety of settings in her lengthy teaching career. While still in India, she worked as a Montessori trainer assistant for three years. When she came to the United States to join her husband, she worked in a private, Montessori school in McLean, continuing to work at the primary Montessori level with children between the ages of three and six. When this school closed she moved to another private school in Neighboring County, where she worked for 14 years. She described both of these private school settings as serving predominantly white middle and upper class students during those early years in the states. However, over the course of her fourteen years at the Neighboring County based school, she reports a drastic change in the population which first diversified and then became predominantly African American by the time that she left.

Manjit first moved from private to public school in the late 1990's, motivated by the higher salary scale. By this time, she had completed her lower elementary Montessori coursework and had been teaching at this level for three years. She describes this transition as

...a nice experience actually. I took a class from Jenny Lind. I had 25 children I think. It was a very nice class. It was a mixed class. It was diverse. It was a public school system so there was a graded program and the Montessori program. We had to deal with the administration because it

was a graded program too. Then of course we did what we could in our Montessori classrooms but we could not have bulletin boards, and other things as they expected. Manjit reports that although they were asked to do things that she did not find congruent with the Montessori teaching philosophy, such as using sticker charts to track behavior and putting up special bulletin boards, the principal was very understanding and did not force them to do things they did not want to do.

Again motivated by a higher salary scale and a closer proximity to her Northern Virginia home, Manjit moved to the school in which she currently teaches almost five years ago. Of her current position she says:

I like working here, even though half the school is a graded program. The principal that was here the last four years did not bother us, did not come to our class and expect us to do something that we wouldn't want to do. She would give us that freedom I would say. Of course there were a few things that we had to cater to, like the testing, which I thought, here in a public school you just have to do it.... [The new principal] doesn't come to the class and say anything.... She's made some changes, but I think they are working.

Although Manjit does not possess a diploma in the field of education, she has taken a wide variety of educational coursework to receive her dual level Montessori certification as well as her Virginia State teaching license. Because she is trained at two different levels, Manjit recollects two distinct experiences at her separate teacher preparation centers. In discussing her first preparatory course, she often finds it difficult to recollect details as this particular course was so long ago. She does recall the significance of being trained by a personal representative of Dr. Montessori, and the high degree of care she was required to take in making her classroom materials. She describes this experience as being

...excellent I would say. It was a lot of work, but very good training. They did expect a lot of us, especially when we wrote our albums and we made the geometry and biology nomenclature cards. They were very, very particular about how we made those cards. The trainer was a very lively teacher.

She took her lower elementary training more recently, at a training center in Washington, DC. This was also an AMI training center, and she completed the

coursework over three summers rather than take a one-year leave of absence from teaching. In recollecting her experiences there, she recalls the intensity of the coursework, particularly the written component and the material making requirements. She also recollects the value of the practicum component of this preparatory course, which takes place over the course of five weeks in three different sessions of observing for one week and then working for four weeks in the classroom. She divided her practicum between a private and a public Montessori school, and had two distinct experiences. In the private school, she remembers enjoying her teaching experience and observing the teacher redirect children to their work if they were misbehaving. In the public school, on the other hand, she describes observing the teacher

...use public school materials. The Montessori materials were there, but they were full of dust. They were hardly being used except for the fraction material which was being used, at least while I was there. The rest of the material was just sitting there collecting dust.

There she also observed the teacher handling discipline problems by using punishments, such as sending the child to the principal's office. She speculates that this practice may have resulted from the public school culture, or from the nature of the population that she reports was mainly African American. In evaluating her experiences, she recollects feeling inspired by the math materials and prepared to teach math content. She feels, on the other hand, that the preparation for teaching language was minimal and could stand to be improved upon.

Alternately, she describes her state certification coursework as being a mix of valuable courses and meaningless courses. Because she did not hold a degree in teaching, she had to take multiple classes in science, math, history, geography, and social foundations of education. This last in particular she reports feeling was not connected to what she does in the classroom. Although she enjoyed the reading, she can no longer

recollect its specific content. She found that some of the courses, particularly one in great literature, were valuable both in content and in structure, in that Montessori teachers and graded classroom teachers took the courses together and could share in one another's different perspectives. She also reported finding meaning in a special course called TESA, which reminded her to give equitable attention to and take responsibility for each student in her classroom

After 25 years of teaching, Manjit still feels that she would benefit from additional coursework, particularly in the area of reading. She also believes that while she is comfortable with classroom management, having someone come in to work with the whole school on this issue could be helpful. She feels strongly that while teachers deserve autonomy in their classrooms, “In the common spaces and I think there should be some common discipline.”

### *Jenny Lind*

Jenny is a classroom teacher of more than 27 years. She is the mother of two teenaged children, both of whom attended Montessori schools as children. She grew up in Sri Lanka, where she lived into her early twenties. There she took her primary teacher training, inspired by a brief stint as a volunteer in a home for children with special needs. Seeing these children learning through the implementation of the Montessori method showed Jenny how much children were capable of doing, helping her to see outside of the traditional Sri Lankan idea that children are to be cared for extensively into their early teenage years. Like Manjit, Jenny took her primary teacher education course before attending college, which she did not do until after moving to the United States. Also like

Manjit, she completed her undergraduate degree in general studies, although she then went on to receive a master's degree in Montessori Education as part of her elementary training.

Jenny has taught at two different age groupings and in three different countries over the course of her 27-year teaching career. She began teaching at the primary level, ages three to six, while still living in Sri Lanka. After moving to the United States, she first taught for one year at an affluent, predominantly Caucasian school in Southern California. She then moved to a more diverse, less affluent private school in Chicago, where she worked full time and went to college. She did not decide to take her lower elementary training course until after moving to Sweden, where she lived after she got married. She remembers that

In Sweden, the situation was very different, because all the private schools were subsidized by the government. Anybody can afford to have their children there so it was a very mixed group, when it comes to socio-economics. But when it comes to ethnicity there wasn't very much diversity at all.

When her older child started in a lower elementary classroom, she became interested in this age group and flew back and forth to Washington, DC for four summers to earn her master's degree from an AMI affiliated program in conjunction with her lower elementary certification.

After ten years in Sweden, Jenny moved to the Washington, DC area, where she first worked in a public school setting. This was her introductory experience teaching lower elementary students. She describes this first class as being a diverse mix of African American and Caucasian, with some Hispanic, Philipino, and Vietnamese students. While she found the students to be similar in nature to other classes she has taught, she was shocked by the teaching practices of other adults. She recalls that

Coming straight from Sweden it was terrible. It was terrifying, even as an adult, it was terrifying to see the ways the teachers treated the children. The loud voices and the language [they used]. I was totally unprepared. Not the Montessori teachers, but the graded teachers.

After two years there, she moved to her current teaching position, where she is now teaching her seventh year.

Unlike teaching in Neighboring County, her first experience at the new school was marked by intense behavior problems with one child in particular. She remembers that “One child was constantly being picked up by the police...outside, for setting fires. He was in second grade.” Although she recollected that in the classroom,

He was very much part of the group. His academics were a little bit lower but he was in trouble outside the school all the time so he was pulled out for counseling and things like that. His mother was a single parent and she would very rarely come if called and so he was more or less alone most of the time. The social worker was involved, the counselor was involved, and the county was involved in this child's case. To be honest I didn't have much experience with a child with such severe needs. Everybody, I just followed their lead. I don't think he was very much supervised at home.

Despite this challenge, she felt very supported by the school community in coping with these issues.

Jenny has had a variety of preparatory and professional development experiences that have contributed to her development of a coherent praxis in myriad ways. She places value on her primary Montessori training in Sri Lanka, which took place over the course of two years and included an extensive practicum experience. Like Manjit, she expresses high regard for her teacher educators who studied with Dr. Montessori while she was an intern in India. She feels that this course emphasized the Montessori philosophy and particularly the importance of humility in the presence of children. She also stresses that teaching was

seen not as a profession but as a...vocation...and that after the two years I was ready to go into the classroom and totally knew what I was doing because of the one year of teacher training, of actually being in the classroom for one year.

She also feels that both the evening lectures and the practicum experience were of equal importance. From the practicum experience, which took place under the direction of three

different teachers, she recalls the importance of practical life activities, such as table washing and sorting, and movement. She also feels that she learned the importance of

...speaking individually to the children, never punishing them as a group. The intrinsic motivation was what I saw very much, trying to appeal to the child's sense of right and wrong and never condemning or humiliating children in front of others. Those kinds of things. Respect I think was a huge part of it.

She speaks of her elementary preparation in a similarly positive light, although the lessons she values from this stage of her learning are somewhat different. She recalls that on "The first day I just fell in love. It was just so fantastic. When she talked about cosmic education and presenting the Universe to the child I was hooked." She also remembers feeling fascinated by the math materials and the idea "...that the children could get these more advanced concepts at such a young age," as well as the emphasis on fostering independence and going out into the real world as part of the elementary curriculum. Finally, she recollects learning about the difference between the younger children and the older children and

Just totally embracing the idea of following the child. In the primary it is so much more concrete. It is mostly showing by example how to do the practical life, the sensorial. You don't get that much into the abstract. But here [in the elementary] it is so much in the abstract. Actually seeing that in the classroom, seeing that if they really find an interest and get hooked on that how their behavior changes. So that was the elementary classroom.

Jenny feels that her Montessori preparation was very complete, but could have been improved by additional coursework in art and music education to facilitate cross-curricular connections. She also feels that there could stand to be more time spent on reading and writing in the elementary classroom.

Unlike her feelings in regard to her Montessori training, Jenny does not place a great deal of value on the coursework she was required to do to receive her Virginia state certification. When asked if she found value in any of these, she responds simply, "No." She has difficulty remembering the titles of the courses in math, science and history, but does recall that



one of them was really, really bad...through Holy Cross. I mean I felt that we had much better methods and materials to present the same ideas and the same concepts. I think I took one in geometry....

She has found value in some of her professional development opportunities, although she feels that most of them have built upon concepts that are already in use in a Montessori classroom. However, she continues to take coursework and feels open to learning more, particularly in art and music.

### *Pamela Stone*

Pam is a young, Caucasian woman in her fourth year as a Montessori teacher. Pam grew up in Rhode Island with two younger sisters. Her father was gone for much of her childhood, living and working in another state, and she feels that this time at home with her mother and sisters was greatly influential in her development of a passion for helping others. Pam's parents were both of French Canadian origin, as were the majority of the citizens of her hometown. Pam was driven by a love of learning about new cultures to move to Maryland, where her father lived, when it was time for her to attend college. She recalls that "I never really appreciated that culture until I move down here and now I'm getting a greater appreciation for it. I never thought it was a culture because that's what I grew up with." A series of frustrating experiences with chemistry classes, a close relationship with a young cousin, and a friendship with an elementary education major all led Pam to switch direction during her sophomore year of college from Marine Biology to Elementary Education. It was not until she returned from the Peace Corps and needed a job, however, that she decided to become a Montessori teacher.

Although Pam has only been a full time contract teacher for four years, a variety of experiences in educational settings add to her practice. Throughout college, she worked first as an assistant and then as a lead teacher in an inclusive childcare center where she "...worked with kids with autism, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, down's syndrome, and kids that did not have any known disabilities." As a junior in college she spent three weeks in Costa Rica studying farming and ecosystems, inspiring her to go into the Peace Corps directly after college. She recalls learning that she had been accepted into this program, remembering

When I got the letter saying that I was going to Lesotho, I didn't even know that that was a country. I [thought] "oh my gosh" I don't know how to plant, I don't know how to farm, I don't know how to grow my own food...I went into it not knowing really what I was getting into except that I was going to learn about another culture.... On the day that we got on the plane, [I was] thinking "what was I doing?" I was so sure that I needed to be doing this.

Pam spent two years in Lesotho, living with a family and working with elementary students and teachers in a small village. She recollects that the teachers in her village were not prepared to receive professional development from the Peace Corps, but rather expected that the volunteers would be teaching. Pam remembers that

I was doing model lessons, which I think was a challenge and I learned from that experience that you cannot...motivate people to do something that they don't want to do, that they have no interest in doing.

Another great challenge for Pam in this experience was working to find common ground on disciplinary issues. While the teachers in her village practiced corporal punishment, Pam felt very uncomfortable. She recalls that

I tried to teach them other ways of dealing with it and at that time I didn't know about the Montessori way or the "Positive Discipline" way and I was just doing a lot of rewards. I [said] "Everybody bring in a can that you find on the street and every time we catch you being good lets put a rock in it." They [the teachers] needed some kind of immediate reaction, something that would make an impact on the kids at the time. So beating them was an immediate reaction.

When the beating didn't stop, Pam talked with the teachers about it, and they agreed to ask her to leave the room before implementing this type of punishment. Again, she remembers

I would sit outside and hear the kids screaming. That was really hard for me, being forced to work in an environment that did things that I disapproved of. It was a cultural thing. I was friends with the teachers. As much as I sat down with them to talk about my beliefs, it was also a cultural thing. They were back in the 1950's. Where we are now, its like...stuff that they were doing now was happening in our culture in the 1950's.

The disconnect between Pam's concept of her responsibilities and what the teachers believed Pam was there to do led to a great deal of frustration. She began to skip days of work and to focus on other projects, such as building a collection of books from donations from home and painting local and global maps on the school walls. Pam also involved herself in HIV prevention education.

After two years in Lesotho, Pam returned home and was faced with the economic realities of re-entering life in the United States. As she searched for a substitute teaching position, someone mentioned a small Montessori school in McLean, Virginia. She recalls doing some internet research in regards to Montessori and feeling that the ideas fit with her philosophy of education. She took an assistantship there, and when they offered to pay for her to work towards her Montessori certification, she accepted. The next year she started teaching full time. Nicole describes the environment at her school as being predominantly Caucasian, and very wealthy. She refers to feeling that

...the parents were not allowing their children to be children and they wanted them to be Einsteins. They were not giving them...what kids need and they were putting the pressure, lots of pressure on the teachers. The administrator at that school was not very nice. It just wasn't working for me or anybody else that was there. I needed to get out.

The spring of her first year there, she began an aggressive job hunt that led her to the position in which she currently teaches. She recalls feeling of this public, Montessori environment that "Ahhh...this is where I belong." In this school Pam serves a population that is both culturally and economically diverse. She feels supported by the staff as a whole, and feels that, in spite of the challenges she faces, everyone in the school is collectively engaged in looking out for the kids.

The ensemble of Pam's preparatory experiences is broad. Unlike Manjit and Jenny, she holds a diploma in elementary education from a nationally ranked University. Additionally, she has had training from the Peace Corps, holds a lower elementary Montessori certification from an AMS accredited program, and has taken a wide variety of professional development courses to maintain her Virginia state certification. At different times in her career, different coursework has stood out for her as valuable. During her time in the Peace Corps, for example, she felt lucky to have had her elementary education background and experience. While she felt culturally well prepared to live in a different society, she did not feel that they fully prepared her for the didactic part of her responsibilities. At other times however, she has felt critical of her teacher preparation program, with the most severe criticism being that a wide gap existed between the theory she learned at school and the practices she observed in the field.

...the stuff that I got in my elementary ed. program was all about the current research, you know constructive learning, and all of these great things and group work and all of this stuff but when I went to student teaching hardly any of it happened. [The theory] just made sense to me but I didn't see it and I didn't see how you could do it in a traditional classroom.

These feelings of frustration over the disconnect between what she learned at school and what she saw in practice returned to her years later when she first saw a Montessori classroom. She felt that this type of classroom offered structural possibilities for implementing the practices that she embraced during her undergraduate preparation. In spite of these misgivings, overall she now asserts that

I feel like my education training was valuable. I think it sparked a passion in me that still exists today for working with kids and for finding the best ways to help children learn. I think just [learning] the structure of giving a lesson [was valuable]. The observation part of it I think really helped me.... Math, I look at my math methods courses, science courses, all of it left little seeds in me. Not big ones, but just little seeds that kept me growing.

Pam also had her first exposure to the concept of positive discipline during her field experiences, and she feels that this set her on the path towards her current disciplinary stance.

Of her Peace Corps training she reports valuing the instruction of cultural norms, the language instruction, and the gradual transition from a large group of Americans into an interim family and finally into a more permanent residence. During her interim residence in particular, Pam recalls a balance between learning basic survival skills in her courses during the day and learning cultural lessons from her host family.

I went outside without ironing one day and I got in trouble from the family. I was so annoyed. I was almost going to be late for class and they made me come back and iron my skirt. But it's a symbol. I represent the family and so that was a learning experience. She reports feeling well supported and confident in her own abilities as a result of this support. She did not, however, feel that they prepared the teachers in her village to receive her, leading to the frustrations that she ultimately felt.

Pam felt similarly that her Montessori preparatory course was valuable in many ways but left some holes in her pedagogy. Notably, in spite of the compression of information into a nine-week course, she felt prepared to teach lessons. However, she did not feel that she had a firm grasp on the philosophy, and like in her University based program, she felt that the reading instruction left much to be desired. In her professional development work, she has attempted to fill this gap through courses in reading instruction. She has also worked with the reading specialist. In addition to attempting to mediate her lack of preparation for teaching reading, she has also focused on arts integration through courses in world music and cultures and a special program with the Kennedy center. Finally, she has taken the opportunity to build on her concept of peace education, which she feels that her children need.

*Judy Borchelt*

Judy is a Caucasian teacher who possesses a wide array of teaching experiences accounting for 16 years of teaching, of which she is in her fifth year as a full time Montessori teacher. She grew up in a rural area of the United States as the middle child in a family of five, attending a small college in Ohio for her teacher preparation program. From there, she taught for two years before going back to school full time to get her master's degree. Although this degree in Public Administration was meant to lead to an educational policy job, Judy became interested in international development and went into the Peace Corps after school. As a result of this work in the Peace Corps, her life went in a different direction for an extended period of time, taking her to Cameroon for five years and then to Indiana, where she worked on a research project for two more years. The birth of her children ultimately led to her exposure to Montessori, which she became enthralled by, but she was unable to take the necessary coursework until after her children grew older. As she prepared to do so over a ten-year period of time, she spent time working as a substitute and assistant in Charlotte, North Carolina and lived for another year abroad in Nigeria. Judy finally returned to the states with her family in 2001, took the Montessori teacher preparatory course, and began teaching full time. After two years in a private school, she was drawn to the free tuition offered by public school and the chance to serve a socio-economically diverse body of students. She reports that "I was curious because I had started...as a public school teacher so I just wanted to see...whether...truly the kids would be transformed like I had seen in private school." She reports after three years in her current post that she had seen evidence of such transformations.

Judy's wide variety of teaching experience is a large part of what led her into Montessori. Because her undergraduate degree was in elementary education and special education and included an extensive practicum component, Judy reports that she felt prepared to enter her first classroom near Gary, Indiana, in an inner city school for high school students with special needs. While she felt prepared to teach content, however, she reports that she did not feel prepared to deal with what she refers to as "inner-city" discipline. She felt frustrated by the policy of suspending students, feeling that it would merely send them back into the same types of behavior on the street that they had already gotten into trouble with. It was this frustration and concern that led her back into school, thinking that she could make a difference at a policy level.

Upon receiving her graduate degree, however, Judy decided to go into the Peace Corps, where she had a very different experience in an educational setting. There, she was engaged in

...a field work type of teaching. I was teaching women that belonged to a food cooperative and they were selling beans and... buying palm oil. I was going out to different villages and teaching accounting and how to keep track of the coming in and going out of different goods. I had a motorcycle and I would go to different villages and talk with the women and teach them there. I [also] worked at the main cooperative in the village that I lived in helping them to work with the data that they had from bringing in palm oil from down south.

From there, she went on to work as an associate director of the Peace Corps, living for three more years in Cameroon. This worked also involved some instruction, but it was more oriented towards training new Peace Corps volunteers, for which she relied extensively on the body of knowledge she had accrued during her own time as a volunteer.

In the early 1990's, she returned to the classroom in an international school with an immersion focus in Charlotte, NC. Here, she was struck by the disciplinary system, which affected her own teaching and the learning of her children. This was a system of

receiving a green, yellow, or black card depending on your behavior. She was shocked that, in an integrated school with a large percentage of African American students, they would use the color black to represent the worst behavior. She felt concern about the message this sent about color. The experience of her own children with this system also concerned her. She remembers that

I would say [to my daughter], “Tell me about your day,” at the end of the day. She would say “I stayed on green all day” or she’d say “I was on yellow and I felt so bad.” [If I replied], “Tell me about some of the things that you learned,” [she would not remember].

She contrasts this memory with what she had observed while her son was in a Montessori school, and recalls feeling that she needed a change. This feeling was compounded by her research on how people self govern around natural resources and her husband’s research on how people learn to organize and self govern.

Everything that I had read about Montessori was about teaching children to be centered within themselves and to be able to self-guide and be self-governing. So all of the theory that I had been reading about what are the natural outcomes of this [led me to be] just really fascinated that Maria Montessori had a theoretical framework and...a philosophical framework that guided everything that she espoused.

After many years of contemplating a career change, Judy finally took a job with a private Montessori school in Northern Virginia upon her return from Nigeria. She describes this school as culturally diverse and mainly middle class, and remembers feeling a great deal of excitement about her position there. After two years, however, she felt driven by a desire to serve a more socio-economically diverse population in a setting closer to her home, and took her current teaching position, in which has remained for three years.

In addition to her many life experiences, she holds several teaching credentials and has done a great deal of additional coursework for professional reasons including maintaining her Virginia state certification. She places value on her undergraduate teacher preparation coursework, which included a wide variety of student teaching. She remembers her decision to enter the teaching profession:



I always just really was attracted to working with children. My mother had a great influence on my life. She taught handicapped children in swimming. My University allowed a lot of hands on work in the classroom. It was a requirement. I had a wonderful mentor as a professor at that time. He held debate classes and we learned how to do public debates on education. We had a fantastic reading professor, a professor that was the director of the highlight magazine at that time. A lot of professors [were] connected to the community, the greater community. So those are just some of the things that inspired me.

She also recalls an emphasis on videotaping and reviewing emergent classroom practices, which she now feels is remarkable for the time frame in which she attended school.

While she felt very positively about all of these elements, she did not feel prepared following graduate for the disciplinary component of teaching in an inner city environment.

She also values the training component of the time she spent in the Peace Corps.

I felt grateful for all the people who had gone ahead of me who had done this work. A lot of the people who trained us were former Peace Corps volunteers or Cameroonians who had invested their lives in training cross-culturally. There is such a beauty about the passing on of knowledge. We were just put out in the middle of a brand new culture and there was a safety and a comfort to knowing that many had gone ahead and had made it and had done it beautifully.

She recollects her first entry into the country, into the French speaking part of Cameroon, and the great sensitivity with which the teachers at her school brought the new volunteers through the immersion experience. In addition to the skill of the training staff, she also values the hands-on nature of the experiences, including the opportunity to visit different cooperatives and see how they were run before she began her own work. Finally, she felt that she benefited from the specific cross-cultural components.

...There were a lot of cross-cultural things that we built into the training about how one could approach a villager. For example you...never shake hands with your left hand, you never serve food with your left hand. We were taught many, many things like that.

Although she felt well prepared for the work that she did there, she did feel that an additional emphasis on safety and health training would have been beneficial, and she later incorporated these ideas into her own training programs.

Many years later, Judy took her Montessori training, an experience which she also valued in many ways. She again felt impressed by the dedication of the training staff and

the longevity of their commitment to teacher education. She also recollects valuing “The way in which we were taught [and] the way in which Montessori becomes a part of a person.” Like her training in Cameroon and during her undergraduate career, she again benefited from the hands on nature of the work.

I thought that was very valuable, the fact that we were physically required to make materials even though it added to the intensity of the training. It was really valuable just to see the methodology, do the methodology and have materials ready when we started teaching.

Additionally, she felt that the philosophy course brought together many of the elements of things she had learned in the past and helped her to build a cohesive framework to guide her teaching. Now, in her present teaching position, she feels that the process of learning through assembling albums, or collections of lessons, really has helped her to understand the integrated nature of the curriculum. However, she feels that her summer training was missing a “big picture” framework, what Montessori teachers call the “Great Lessons” in history and geography, which helps children tie together the pieces of what they are learning in other areas. She also feels that the program needs to place greater emphasis on the elements of teaching, such as parent education, that occur outside of the classroom.

The final piece of Judy’s coursework includes classes that she took for personal and professional growth. Following her time in the Peace Corps, she spent about a month in France taking an intensive French course to increase her linguistic ability. She has also taken several courses towards recertification in Virginia. Of these, the upper elementary Montessori training was particularly important to her. She also felt that the child abuse training, which gives teachers specific parameters for handling instances of abuse and neglect in Virginia, was useful. Finally, she found that several “gifted” courses, in

spelling and poetry in particular, have added to her ability to integrate the state curriculum and the Montessori curriculum.

She feels that the collection of these diverse teaching experiences, which drew from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds in myriad places, have led her to "...a humbling and emptying out of preconceived ideas so that new ones can come in." She also recalls the importance of cross-cultural training and language training in foreign countries. She also values the acquired knowledge "...that people learn in different ways. I have learned a lot about how to get information across to people from different backgrounds. I worked really hard on [this]." Finally, she feels that "...it is just really critical to realize that every child is a gift."

### **Research Question 3**

#### **How do teachers perceive their practice as being compatible with the components of a Culturally Relevant Montessori?**

Interviews with all four teachers in the study yielded a large body of evidence indicating that they believe that knowledge is a process of drawing out what is within each individual child. The vast majority of this data resulted from the second interview, which was praxis-oriented in nature. Teachers were asked to share the practices that they perceived as being successful, as well as those that were challenging, and to define the goal of education and the respective roles of teacher and child in this praxis. They were also asked to discuss their own conception of what it means to be a Montessori teacher, along with the successes and challenges they meet with in the task of living up to this

standard. Finally they were asked to talk about previous exposure to multicultural education and to define the ways in which they incorporate diverse identities into their classroom praxis. What arose from these conversations was then coded and categorized according to the essential components of Multicultural Montessori praxis. The resultant themes were categorized into the three major components of this praxis.

*Teachers who teach in a Culturally Relevant Montessori tradition believe that education is a process of drawing out knowledge.*

The teachers in this study were not asked directly about drawing out, and yet all four of them express agreement with elements of a pedagogy of drawing out, although there is some difference in the weight they afford their responses and the manner in which these are expressed. Because the most controversial component of the fused framework lies in this section, the teachers are asked to talk about the use of internal versus and motivators directly. Certain teachers talk more about providing the guidelines necessary for drawing out to occur, while others focus more on the ways in which the environment and the children within it foster this process of drawing out. Only one teacher, Judy, directly states a guiding philosophy of drawing out, a belief that

We are all unique and different with incredible talents and...my role as an educator is to unlock, to help children unlock and to see through many different ways in which we bring out knowledge in the classroom what maybe some of their hidden talents are. I think there are some people who go through life and they don't discover [these talents] and I think that's really sad.

All of the teachers, however, express ideas about their praxis that are in agreement with Judy implicitly, if explicitly diverse. The components of a drawing out pedagogy that were identified in the teachers' beliefs are laid out below.

*Firm Guidelines*

Jenny and Manjit, the two most experienced teachers, both talk about the importance of providing firm guidelines in the classroom for children to act within. Jenny talks about the importance she places each fall on bringing her new students, the incoming first graders into the classroom culture “so they become familiar with the classroom expectations. I believe a lot in being a good model myself, [in] modeling the behavior that I want from them, [in] the other kids being good role models too.” Manjit returned to this concept of firm guidelines repeatedly during her interview, providing examples of what she does in order to reinforce the acceptance of these guidelines.

Well, sometimes, if a child is very distracting and I'm in a lesson I invite the child to sit next to me and he or she has to sit very quietly and just be there. Either they listen to what's going on or they are in their own little worlds, I don't know. That's one strategy I use. Another strategy is I move them from the group they are in and try to isolate them... so hopefully they would focus on their work. That's another one. In the past I have tried sending them to another classroom also, which sometimes works.

She also iterates that the child's own responsibility, “first and foremost” is to follow directions. Finally, she discusses the notion that some forms of behavior are totally unacceptable and need to be addressed with strict consequences, such as being sent to the office. “Hitting is unacceptable and they need to know that.” Neither Pam nor Judy explicitly mention firm guidelines in their interview, although they speak about other components of discipline.

Pam also describes the evolution of her grasp on firm guidelines, which she involves the students in creating.

...The first year it was rules. Classroom constitution, which I think is very extrinsically driven. Then we made expectations, which are kind of a lighter way of saying rules, but they are also extrinsically imposed even though they came up with them. But this year we called them classroom responsibilities and I feel like that is a more intrinsic way of the kids looking at their responsibilities and how it affects that environment.... Whenever the class has gotten out of hand we just sit and we review the responsibilities and talk about why we have them and it really becomes ingrained, it really does. They talk about it... with each other.

### *Respect for Students*

Only Jenny explicitly mentions the importance of respecting students in the classroom. She talks about the teachers she observed during her student teaching, saying that what impressed her and stayed with her was their manner of "...speaking individually to the children, never punishing them as a group and the intrinsic motivation [that resulted]." She also recollects their "trying to appeal to the child's sense of right and wrong and never condemning or humiliating children in front of others. Respect I think was a huge part of [what made their classrooms work]."

### *Cooperative Learning*

Judy, Jenny, and Pam all mention the importance of cooperative learning to their successful praxes. Judy talks about the implementation of Montessori at the lower elementary level as a process of observing and guiding the children as they are "working together in different groups," and observing the "rotation of those groups [and] the energy that comes from those groups and the flow of that and redirecting the flow or directing the flow." She also identifies this group work as one of the essential elements of a Montessori framework. Jenny also talks about the importance of groups and capitalizes on this by using it as the defining element of the children's role in the classroom. She feels that their work is to learn "how to support each other and work on their own learning." She finds that the current scheduling at the school, which divides the children into groups by grade level for their specialist classes, is problematic because

The children are divided by grades. I think...learning happens vertically and horizontally, not just horizontally. I think they have a lot to learn from each other. Some of the first graders are very advanced and I think if it was a multi-age group, I think it would be better. This whole idea of community building that we work on, children helping each other, working together, I think its much more difficult when its a group of children that are the same age that only get to see each other during specials. That is a problem.

Here, Jenny articulates her perception of the importance of multi-age grouping in the Montessori classroom, in which cooperative learning is an essential part of the process.

Pam talks about cooperative learning more specifically, giving an example of how it helps her students to integrate their own cultures into the classroom and share with others. “I have this little boy who has wanted to teach Spanish and I made this Spanish animals work and he taught it.... The kids who wanted the lesson were the Spanish speaking kids.” Pam goes on to talk about the relationship between this second language development and vocabulary acquisition. She also discusses how the continuum of materials provides opportunities for the younger children to ask the older, more experienced children for support. Overall, Pam reiterates what Judy and Jenny stated about the importance of cooperative learning, and also provides insight into how this is enacted in the classroom.

### *Differentiated Instruction*

Jenny, Manjit, and Pam all discuss the importance of differentiated instruction in the multi-age Montessori classroom. While in some ways it is evident that this differentiation is necessary with three different age groups, their thoughts provide insight into why it is an integral part of a pedagogy of drawing out. Jenny starts out saying that giving individual lessons helps the students to build upon their own identity as an individual, elaborating on this notion by explaining that teachers guide children to grow intellectually

...By showing them the concepts and showing them where the material is and letting them work [with] the research work for example. In the beginning I'll take the newcomers and we'll work together on how to write a report...beginning with the very basics of identifying what they are interested in and then finding a book. Distinguishing between fact and fiction and finding the information they want in the book. Coming up with the questions. So...mostly by showing them.

Here, Jenny illustrates her belief that the work done by the children guides their development. Manjit expresses that this part of being a Montessori teacher comes most easily for her, saying “I feel very successful at doing all the lessons...after ten years of elementary.” Pam, as the youngest teacher in the study, also feels that she has

...Really started to figure out how to meet children’s needs, and how to try to be more patient with them. To try to accommodate what messages they are trying to send to me through behavior, through work, through avoidance of work and so on.

She goes on to explain that she does this through preparation of the environment and the materials as well as professional development that is tailored to her students needs. She talks about having a child with sensory integration needs, explaining that she

...Went to conferences and read so much about SI and went to a workshop about it and learned how to meet the needs of children who have either kinesthetic needs or sensory input [needs] in any way, [and that] now this little boy in my class [this year] may be more successful in my room because of that [time invested previously].

Pam’s enthusiasm for learning about every student in order to properly differentiate instruction demonstrates the importance of this instruction to her practice. She goes on to define this differentiation in public school terminology. “Somebody once said that [teaching in] ‘the Montessori way’ is like having an IEP for every kid in your class.”

### *Contextual Learning and Real World Experiences*

Judy, Manjit, and Pam all touch upon the importance of providing children with a framework in which to situate their learning, and a reason to reach for new knowledge.

Judy believes in

...Inspiring kids to believe that not all knowledge has been discovered and that they truly are in the process of discovering. They could name a very high number that has never been named. They could be the scientist that is going to find out that this Universe is expanding and we are going to see new and different things. They could be the ones to find it. They could find a fossil that is unnamed. Inspiring them to believe that they are exploring....

Manjit also talks about the importance of motivating children with purposeful

exploration. She talks about the lessons in history, geography, and science as tools with



which "...we can help children see where things were, where they are, and where they could be in the future [and to understand] that they are the ones that would make a difference in the future." Pam also talks about the importance of real and hands-on exploratory experiences in contextual learning. She describes the lack of enthusiasm she was met with when she tried to have the children study ancient cultures through literacy integration. "...The kids were just... not so enthused about it. They don't take it to where they want to take it when it's just through a book." These examples demonstrate an understanding of the importance of materials, field experiences, and scientific exploration in the classroom for children of this age.

### *Observation and Listening*

Judy, Jenny, and Pam, all touch briefly on the role of observation and listening in their instructional settings. Judy describes her current classroom situation, in which some students have yet to settle into learning, by placing the impetus on the teacher to continue "observing and trying to figure out what is their best motivator," rather than on the child to shape up and fit into the existing structure. Jenny talks about withholding consequences until she has repeatedly observed the same behavior and provided chances for reform, implying the importance of observation in building a respectful interaction between teacher and student and in preempting obvious behaviors before they occur. "I think it's a logical consequence because of what has gone on before. I mean very often this is a child I would have observed over a period of time doing something inappropriate and being given several chances to correct their behavior and still choosing not to do it."

Pam feels grateful for the observational strategies she learned as part of her undergraduate degree in education. “I feel like there were still some strategies. The observation part of it I think really helped me.” She explains how this has guided her in meeting the needs of her students, as she is

...Always looking for... a gap in instruction or in the materials [when the children don’t understand a concept]. So I think that that for me is also just being a good observer and I think my observation skills [have] become much stronger over time.

Pam goes on to explain that, in addition to uncovering academic needs, she is also able to discover the motivations of children

...Through interviewing and through finding out what they do out of school and watching them on the playground [and]... in the classroom. Just observing their behaviors. [One] little girl was so all the time and...I think that a lot of her reading development came from doing dramas and things like that in the classroom.

Pam explains how observation helps her to meet the needs of each individual child and to understand the components that need attention.

### *Rewards, Punishments, and Intrinsic Motivators*

Unlike the other components of the framework, teachers were asked explicitly about their feelings in regards to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. It was explained to them that this conflict presented the most glaring difference between Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Montessori Education, with the former explicitly condoning the use of rewards in the classroom and the latter explicitly condemning and use of external motivators or punishments. What follows is an exploration of the themes that arose during this portion of the interview.

Each of the teachers explicitly states a firm belief in the value of intrinsic motivation. Judy explains how for her, this belief stems from her background in international development. She worked on a project that examined the nature of self-governance and group organization, and then felt drawn to Montessori because

“everything that I had read about Montessori was about teaching children to be centered within themselves and to be able to self-guide and be self-governing.” Judy also believes that part of her work as a teacher is to inspire children towards productive self-governance. Jenny also expresses a belief in

...The Montessori philosophy of freedom and responsibility. I think that a child comes into a Montessori classroom and their interests are respected and they're a lot of time given the freedom to explore those interests. I think Montessori's whole idea of when a child is acting on their interests and that interest is satisfied, that content that comes from that... results in peace within a child, and it affects the whole classroom. I think freedom and responsibility is the most important thing. Giving the children choice to explore their own interests. I think in the public school we can...do that when we manage to teach the required curriculum but still give them time to do things that they want. Long periods of time, sometimes over days. The resulting satisfaction the child gets I think translates into good behavior.

Here, Jenny explains a belief that developing intrinsic motivation precludes a need for rewards and punishment. Manjit also believes in the penultimate importance of fostering intrinsic motivation.

Well, the foremost thing is to provide to help the children become free with discipline...not just freedom where they can do anything they want to. It comes from inner discipline I would say.... They can move around with a purpose. They are not just moving around aimlessly....

Manjit also recognizes the difficulty of developing this intrinsic motivation for a child, expressing a belief that it is hard work to understand all of the components of purposeful activity in the classroom. Pam also iterates the importance of intrinsic motivation, which derives from her time in the Peace Corps, where she realized that “...its really hard to motivate people to do something that they don't want to do, that they have no interest in doing.” She believes deeply not only in the power of intrinsic motivation but also in the absence of “ extrinsic rewards in the classroom, [which] really helps them focus on the importance of learning and on work.” She goes on to express a firm belief in children’s desire to “...fit in and take care of their environment.... I think most kids are passionate and empathetic.”

These teachers also place limits on self-governance, however. Judy explains that

“Not working is not a choice,” going on to explain that she does not permit random acts of destruction in the classroom because the children have chosen to destroy. “Randomly knocking stuff off the wall or taking rulers and slashing the curtains, that's not acceptable.

The teachers believe in enforcing their limits through the use of logical or natural consequences. Judy firmly states that “Yes, there are consequences. The work is removed. My first year I had a little boy who slashed people with rulers that had a little metal strip on them so I put the rulers away. I worked on...helping him...[through] physical spacing of furniture,” which provided him with boundaries. Manjit expresses some frustration with the sole reliance on a philosophy of believing in internal motivation and redirecting the children to work when they misbehave. “...Following the Montessori philosophy you try to direct them back to work, but at times they are just not motivated. You know I look at myself and question myself [but] some children do lack that internal discipline.”

Because of such frustration, teachers sometimes feel obligated to be creative and rely on other disciplinary systems. Some teachers also extend consequences one step further, using language to provide a link between the action and the consequence that may not otherwise be apparent. Judy is reluctant to take away children's recess.

I believe in recess. I believe in large motor [development] and so ...what I have said is that if you then cannot choose and you're really using your recess time [in class] then you need to think about that because we have our hands are our guides and we need to be using our hands constructively. Jenny describes a process of isolating a child from the group when they are not compliant with classroom guidelines.

Occasionally I have asked one or two children... to leave the room, just step outside for a few minutes. They take their work outside...[only as a result of] either or physically or verbally attacking another child. At times, after several reminders to work quietly, she also resorts to asking the children to separate within the classroom. Pam feels that consequences can be as simple as the child

being rejected by other children, excluded from the group for poor behavior. She also believes that for children of this age, “the disappointment that you [the teacher] have in a child’s behavior is enough punishment for them.”

At other times, teachers rely on positive, work related incentives to bring children to where they need to be in the classroom. Pam believes that providing the opportunity for children to contribute to the classroom through making materials helps to motivate them positively.

I had a little boy last year who made a parts of the volcano work and its on the shelf. He left last year to go to the fourth grade and this year the kids are using it. The kids saw him in the hallway and they said, "We're using his work! We're using his work! We used your volcano work and we're learning about the parts of the volcano."

She also believes that the process of watching other children become excited by work helps to motivate children. Jenny also recalls a process of motivating a child to work through providing him with time to pursue his interests once he had completed his required assignments. “He would have to finish...his assignments, and then he could draw, or even... make an illustration that went with the lesson.... I don't know if it was so much time to do it or showing him the opportunities when he could use his artwork.”

Pam has also relied on work as a motivator in a “sticks and carrots” sense of the word.

However, she has struggled internally with this system, and is trying to back off of it. She talks about a student who

...Really wants to make mud bricks. I said you're not making any mud bricks until you can get the work done that I'm asking you to do. I don't know if he's working towards it or not. I read in The Science behind the Genius that if you give kids that incentive to do what they really want, the work that they do before that is going to be so much more minimal. If you say ‘Okay, you can work on the art project after you do this word study. That word study is going to be completely rushed not their best work, and then they're not going to have a lot of time to focus on that art. So both works are going to be minimal.

Many of the teachers have developed their beliefs about rewards and punishments through experience. Judy describes the disciplinary system used by a school that she worked in when her children were still in elementary school.

I started teaching at that school and their discipline system was set up such that they had a board.... If you were good all day there was a green slip that was put in a pocket and if you were sort of good then it was yellow and if you were not so good then it was red but if you were really bad it was black This really bothered me because this was an integrated school and there were a lot of African American kids there. [We were sending them] the message that [the] really bad...color was black.

She goes on to describe her daughter's preoccupation with this system, to the point where all she could remember at the end of the day was the color of her behavioral slip. Judy also spent time in a school where students were suspended for their "bad" behavior, a system which she felt sent struggling, inner-city high school kids back out onto the street, denying them educational opportunities and reinforcing their opportunities to get arrested. Jenny also comes from a place of having had a negative experience with consequences. She describes

Coming straight from Sweden [to Neighboring County]. It was terrible. It was terrifying, even as an adult, ...to see the ways the [graded program's] teachers treated the children. The loud voices and the language. I was totally unprepared [for] punishments.

Such experiences, in part, have led her to believe that this type of discipline system

causes "...the children [to] become dependent on somebody else for their moral

judgments." Manjit also describes being required to use external rewards for the children

in another public school setting. But, she says, "I didn't do it for too long. I just didn't

want to do it, I guess." Pam has much stronger feelings about her exposure to a strong

form of consequence. She explains that in Lesotho,

I did not feel completely prepared for...corporal punishment. That was something I had to deal with on my own and I told them that I didn't like it. I tried to teach them other ways of dealing with it.

She drew upon her student teaching experience in a public school that had used a reward

system, which she described at length in her autobiographical sketch. Pam has also had

negative personal experiences, as an adult, with extrinsic rewards, which have led her to

feel that they are insulting to children. She describes being in a class in which "...they

asked me to do a task and if I got the task done first I would get a piece of candy. I was so

insulted...because they weren't respecting my pace. They weren't respecting my way of learning.”

However, in spite of their strong feelings, Judy, Pam and Manjit express some doubts about the preeminence of a plan that relies solely on intrinsic motivation and logical consequences. Judy describes how

...Pam and I have gone on this journey of the whole issue of intrinsic motivations and where that all starts. [We have asked ourselves] where is Skinnerian vs. Intrinsic motivation? ...Are kids naturally born understanding how to work within an intrinsic motivational setting? I just think that there is a body of knowledge on both sides that needs to be tapped and explored and I will admit that I am, even after having two children and teaching, still working on the whole issue of incentives and motivations...Some of our kids really respond immediately to what I call a graduated sanction which means they are waiting...for the loud voice, because they hear that... in other places. [However] I feel very comfortable working with intrinsic motivators in my classroom. I have never been the type of person who gave M & Ms for potty training...but I know lots of people who do. I am really curious about what is the end product of that.... No one is paying our kids to go and take things off the shelf or...[saying] if you do that math work you get four pieces of candy. We know from what Maria Montessori said that the hands are the great healer. Work is the great healer.

Manjit explains that she is not adverse to praise, which is considered by many to be an extrinsic motivator. She feels that although “In my practice I have not done the external rewards... I don't mind saying ‘yes, you did a good job.’ Not all the time but some children...will be a little more motivated to go on.”

Manjit and Pam both address the issue of coexisting in a space with a program that uses a system of external rewards. Manjit feels that

As a school I would say if everyone is walking in the hall and the graded teachers expect their children to walk quietly in a line but some of us [Montessori teachers], we don't care about that...its kind of chaotic [and] the children get mixed messages.... In the common spaces and I think there should be some common discipline.

Pam expresses frustration with the disciplinary tactics suggested by the resource teachers. The first thing they say for a behavior problem is come up with a behavior chart. I don't agree with having a bucket of candy, I don't agree with having toys and I don't agree with having a lot of the things that they suggest that I see other teachers doing. So I've come up with my own tool for observing positive and negative attention getting behaviors and I don't know if that works yet really. I've seen this little boy start to self-monitor though, to look at his behaviors as positive and negative.

At other times, though, Pam feels that behavior charts and extrinsic motivators may serve as a bridge to intrinsic motivation for children who have never experienced it before. She

recounts two instances in which such a system was effective in her perception. An example of this describes a “little boy who was depressed [for whom external rewards] got him to the point where he was loving work again.” However, she encountered problems in trying to remove the reward system once the desired behavior was achieved.

*Teachers who teach in a culturally relevant Montessori tradition believe that the development of individual students is central to classroom practice.*

The teachers in this study were asked about the ways in which they incorporate children’s cultural identities into their classroom practice. While all of them responded to this question with some strategies for honoring and incorporating culture, their level of thoughtfulness and awareness in regard to this issue varied. At other times during the interviews, this issue surfaced in multiple ways, with teachers expressing a perception of their practice that fit closely with elements of developing individual and cultural identities. The components of a pedagogy that incorporates student’s individual and cultural identities into the classroom and builds curriculum and classroom structure around those identities, as were identified in the teachers’ stated beliefs, are laid out below.

#### *Incorporating Cultural Identities into the Classroom*

All four teachers were asked directly about this issue, and all four responded with varying depth. Judy, in particular, broaches the issue before she was asked about it, and her opinions on this subject are thematic to her overall responses. Judy speaks about the



value of her experiences living abroad in two different African cultures for more than six years. One of the lessons she took from that time was the idea that

...People learn in different ways. I have learned a lot about how to get information across to people from different backgrounds. I worked really hard on trying to learn better ways.... I'm learning about discipline techniques in different cultures and some of them I guess I don't want to know about.

This indicates a culturally responsive manner of pedagogical delivery, while other components of her interview focus on adding to and sometimes altering the curriculum. She speaks specifically about inviting Hispanic, North African, and Asian families to share elements of their culture. Interestingly, she does not identify African American families as a separate culture.

We mainly wove...the bridges [between school and home] within the classroom and the class work that we have been doing. We've had holiday celebrations where they've brought different foods or we've tried different recipes for different countries.

Interestingly, she expresses a belief that these practices not only fit closely with a Montessori pedagogy but also were condoned by Montessori as she built her theoretical framework. She talks about the importance of studying world cultures through history and geography, beginning with ancient civilizations and moving through modern cultures. She feels that as a result of these studies, "...kids start to see that they are connected to the oneness of human kind."

Pam also focuses in on this issue of incorporating and building upon cultural identity throughout her interview. Pam touches briefly upon the notion of altering pedagogy to better serve culturally diverse students.

As far as [teaching the second language learners]...in the classroom I'm learning that I have to really speak slowly. Very few will tell me slow down. So I've come up with little hand signals...because the behaviors start when they don't understand what is being said.... I've been trying to do a lot more vocabulary development in the classroom and it's interesting.

As part of this vocabulary development, she invited a Spanish-speaking student to help her developing flashcards and then asked him to teach lessons to other children. She also feels that as a teacher, she needs to be conscious of the materials in the classroom and

types of texts she is making available. She discusses the importance, emphasized in her University preparation, of “Making sure that what you are using with children is culturally diverse. So that they see that there are not only white characters in every book.” In Lesotho, she enacted this practice by painting a wall-sized map of the country in the schoolhouse, giving children the opportunity to learn about their own geographical surroundings. However, the majority of Pam’s responses that fit into this category correspond to Judy’s notion of adding to the curriculum. At several points during her interview, she spoke of “celebrating” cultures, a large part of which revolved around having celebration in the classroom around holidays and sharing foods.

We do a holiday celebration every year. This is by the kids choosing that we do this.... We all pick a holiday. Last year I had two Muslim children in my class and so we looked at Ramadan... [as well as] Hanukah... Christmas...Kwanza...[and] a Mexican thing, Los Posados.... Parents have come in to talk and they share they stories with the kids and so we have a big celebration and everybody shares what they did. Every group has some kind of food or some kind of cultural experience even if they're not from that culture, to celebrate it.

Jenny and Manjit both respond to this question more briefly, and correlated ideas

do not resurface throughout their interviews as they do with Pam and Judy.

Jenny talks both about being aware of the materials in classroom and about celebrating cultures through a holiday celebration similar to the one discussed by Pam. Manjit discusses an approach that is more transformative of the curriculum, in which children study different cultures throughout the year, write about them, and then share their knowledge and some representative food with their classmates.

### *Incorporating Individual Identities into the Classroom*

Because one of the basic premises of Montessori is that the teacher should follow the lead of the child, it is not surprising that all four teachers talk extensively about building upon the children’s individual identities in the classroom. Judy speaks about

this issue as both a success and a challenge. While she saw one of her greatest challenges as figuring out the "...key personality quirks in children," she also feels that this is one of the things she puts the most effort into.

I really feel like I work hard at helping each child become who he or she is going to be on their journey the time that I have them.... Its one of the key things that I really love about Montessori because there are many ways in which we can guide children and many ways in which they can heal themselves in the room. I think that's one of the key ones.

Furthermore, she feels that this exploration of self is one of the key elements of a Montessori pedagogy, and is the key to helping children discover where they are going in life. When children leave her room, she hopes that they will take with them, among other things, the knowledge "that every child has something to offer to the world. We are all unique and different with incredible talents." Like Judy, Jenny feels that meeting the child's individual needs is a point of great success for her. She, too, feels that this success is essential to a Montessori practice, of which she feels that all of the essential elements are subcategories of "...following the child. Within that falls... meeting the child's needs, giving them the freedom with responsibility, being aware of their developmental stages, all the nuts and bolts...fall into that."

Manjit and Pam talk about this issue from a different perspective. Manjit discusses how a course offered by the county made her more aware of the need to accomplish this identity development with all children. This course "...made me more aware of the fact that I should be asking questions to all the children not just focusing on a few." Pam continues to seek coursework to help her meet the needs of every child, including those with exceptionalities. She finds that although a class may seem specific to only one child, it later helps her in her praxis with other children. She also talks about learning to incorporate identity development through a source external to Montessori, her University teacher preparation program, which "...was valuable and I think it sparked a

passion in me that still exists today for working with kids and for finding the best ways to help children learn..." Like Judy and Jenny, Pam feels that this recognition of individual needs is one of her greatest successes, although for her she feels that it is still emergent.

I think I've really started to figure out how to meet children's needs, and how to try to be more patient with them. To try to accommodate what messages they are trying to send to me through behavior, through work, through avoidance of work and so on.

Pam gives an example of how she draws out knowledge through the observation and development of individual interests.

I try and focus on their passions.... [One student] didn't really care about China but I [suggested that we] do a timeline of fashion. I bought a coloring book about the Chinese costumes or their clothing and she made a timeline out of it. That really got her excited about the Chinese culture and was excited to participate more in it.

In this way, Pam was able to draw a student into the required curriculum through the foundation of her own observed interests.

### *Fostering Independence and Developing Freedom with Responsibility*

While all four teachers discuss this issue, their responses represent a variety of conceptions about what it means to build a responsible independence in the classroom.

Judy talks about a continuum of approaches that the children take to the environment, and the way in which she attempts to meet them where they are.

I am starting to think that there is a continuum of a way in which a child approaches the Montessori environment...[on] my report cards... I write about this continuum of self-guidance. As we know some kids can just come right into the room and really just be very curious about everything on the shelf and other children need guidance about how to select and how to make choice. There are all sorts of lessons about how to make choices, [and about what to do] if you are overwhelmed with this room.

She feels committed to working with children on this continuum, though, because she sees that "The children's role is explorer and discoverer on their journey." She also feels that not only do children need to practice freedom with responsibility, but that the practice of this freedom is responsibility for each child. While Judy is hesitant to encroach too much on the child's decision-making ability, she does express that "not

working is not a choice,” and that children are not permitted to behave in ways that are destructive to the classroom.

Jenny also places great importance on the concept of developing a responsible independence within each child in the classroom. She alleges herself to this idea as one of the foundational concepts that brought her to Montessori. She feels that this notion is the one that truly makes the classroom function.

...I think it all goes back to the Montessori philosophy of freedom and responsibility. I think that a child comes into a Montessori classroom and their interests are respected and they're a lot of time given the freedom to explore those interests. I think Montessori's whole idea of when a child is acting on their interests and that interest is satisfied, that content that comes from that, it, you know, it results in peace within a child, and it affects the whole classroom. I think freedom and responsibility is the most important thing.

As the teacher, she feels that her role in this is to show the children how to work by introducing them to new materials and concepts on a consistent and necessary basis.

Finally, Jenny couches this belief in terms of an underlying faith in children. “Yes. I think it’s...that belief that it is the child who creates herself and believing...in the end that everybody wants to be good person.... If you give them the right tools, the environment to fulfill themselves and to fulfill their potential.”

Manjit also places her belief in this tenet of a Montessori philosophy at the forefront of her work in the classroom. She feels that “...the foremost thing is to provide to help the children become free with discipline....” She talks about observing other teachers enacting this in the classroom during her practicum experience, describing the difference between a private and a public Montessori school

Well at ...private school... it was a little different I would think. The teacher goes by as Montessori says that you direct the child to work and when the child is wandering away or is misbehaving [you do this]. [At public school], the child misbehaved and the teacher couldn't handle him he was sent to the principles office...I did see that.

She does not pass judgment on these two different teachers though, but states that she, too, has experienced difficulty in enabling freedom with responsibility at times. Although

she speaks of a variety of strategies to help them, she feels at times that children are not motivated to seek out independence. Yet, even with the most difficult child, she has found that engaging them in work is the saving grace, implying that with responsibility comes an inner calm that cannot be found in disruptive or destructive behavior.

Pam also talks about the importance of this issue in developing children's self-respect.

Kids having choice of the work...gives them all sorts of good feelings of just having that control of their environment. I think that leads to the self-respect and self-confidence in themselves to be able to make those choices and the fact that I can trust them with that.

Like Judy, and Manjit, however, she does not always find that this process is an easy one. She discusses her work with a school counselor, an African American woman.

She's really helped me learn to refocus [and] to look at how I talk to children and just observing the behavior and giving them the power to make the choice. It works with every kid. I feel that it makes them think.... The more you point things out that the kids are doing wrong, even as simple as "your shoe is untied," ...they can have the slightest amount of control in their lives. It makes a difference.

Pam goes on to express a belief that is similar to Jenny's that helping children to develop this independence is a question of having a strong faith in their innate ability to learn and behave in a pro-social way.

### *Making Cross-Curricular Connections in the Classroom*

Judy, Jenny, and Pam all talked about the importance of making cross-curricular connections in the classroom. Judy focused in on how she sees the students making these connections naturally, referring to them as gifts of the children's discovery.

The one thing that really stands out are just the gifts the kids discover. The discoveries are always made. Today we were talking about early humans and how some mammals do have tools and how they use tools to get termites out of the ground. One of my little girls found a book, just in the middle of the day and found a chimpanzee eating termites off of a stick and just immediately shared that with a couple of kids and she shared it with me. It was somewhere in the room. I didn't

even have the book out and she discovered it.... We were studying ancient Mali last year and one of my little guys went out to recess and he all the sudden started swinging three hula hoops and he said "oh, those are the colors of the Mali flag." Just those connections are really nice. I see them in this population too."

Judy's emphasis on cross-curricular discovery is based in her understanding of the curriculum as a inter-woven fabric. Although she feels that the weaving together of the different curricular strands is a challenge, she feels that is foundational to children's' process of discovery. This is an issue that she feels deeply about, identify curricular integration as one of the core tenets of a Montessori practice. "I think that just the way [the classroom] is set up...teaches comparative analysis. It teaches inter-disciplinary [learning], comparisons, similarities, and differences, and kids start to see connections all over the place." Manjit talks about how the historical and scientific backdrop provided by the history and geography lessons help the children to understand their place and the possibilities for their futures. Pam again discusses the valuable contribution made to her curricular approach by sources external to Montessori. She explains that she is part of an arts integration study-group that works with the Kennedy Center.

I really feel like arts integration really helps kids from every walk of life. Just being part of the experience, truly being part of it and having to think about the content through the art and the arts at the same time. I'm really loving that. I've taken only two classes on it now, and then every month we go to another class and we meet every month to discuss what we're doing and support each other.

### *Personal Error and Self-Correction*

Judy and Jenny talk briefly about the empowerment experienced by students when they are given the time and the tools to correct their own errors rather than being corrected by an adult. Judy feels that this process is integral to a functional classroom practice. Jenny feels that it extends beyond the curriculum and into behavioral issues. She talks about giving the children multiple opportunities to correct their own behavior before intervening. When she finally does intervene, she feels that "...It's a logical consequence

because of what has gone on before.... Very often this is a child [has been] observed over a period of time doing something inappropriate... given several chances to correct their behavior and still choosing not to do it.

### *Student Pacing in the Curriculum*

Jenny is the only teacher to talk explicitly about the importance of student pacing in the curriculum, although it is tied into other areas of identity development. She feels that giving students the power to learn at their own pace is integrally tied to the pro-social behavior she sees in her students as opposed to students who are not allowed this freedom. When “all the children are not being forced to do something at the same time... I think they are more satisfied and at peace with themselves.” She also relates this student pacing to the concept of following the child, not only in terms of differentiated instruction but also in terms of differentiated pacing.

### *Teacher’s Relationship with Parents*

All four of the teachers in this study express some frustration with parents, with some of the teachers zoning in on single parents, parents of low socio-economic status, and African American parents. Because of the sensitive nature of this data, teacher’s pseudonyms will not be tied to their ideas. Some of the teachers talk about trying to understand who the kids are culturally, specifically through an examination of at-home disciplinary practices. For two of the teachers, however, this examination comes with frustration at the use of corporal punishment in some homes. One of the teachers in



particular struggles with the boundaries between school and home, recounting a speaker who last year asked the teachers to

...Stop thinking about the home connection. We need to spend our time thinking about what we are doing here [at school]. I struggle with that. I think that there are home and school connections. Not that I would stop working really hard and doing everything I could in the classroom to help children because something is not going right at home...but I think that there have to be bridges, backward and forward linkages, home and school, school and home.

Three of the teachers directly express frustration with certain parents. One talks about a second grade child who "...was constantly being picked up by the police" She iterates that "...His mother was a single parent and she would very rarely come if called and so he was more or less alone most of the time." Another teacher talks about parents in a private school setting as pushing their children too hard "...the parents were not allowing their children to be children and they wanted them to be Einsteins...I felt like I probably could have continued with the children if they didn't have their parents."

Several of the teachers mention attempting to educate parents about Montessori, but much less emphasis is placed on learning from the parents in a positive sense. One teacher is in constant contact with a specific parent whose child is struggling. She has that child call home during the day when he is not being cooperative. Two of the teachers talk about sending newsletters on a regular basis, and the school requires biannual parent conferences as well. For one teacher, school to home communication is seen as a strength, from which she derives a lot of support. This same teacher discusses the importance of "being aware of the fact that we have so many cultures and making sure that all those children's cultures were respected and honored."

### *Teacher's Concept of Culture*

Two of the teachers, Judy and Pam, talk extensively about their own cross-cultural training. It is important to note, however, that while Manjit and Jenny do not discuss this, they too have a background that is cross-cultural. For a more extensive discussion of teacher's concept of their own cultural selves, see the autobiographical sketches.

*Teachers who teach in a culturally relevant Montessori tradition believe that the goals of education extend beyond content knowledge.*

The teachers in this study were asked directly about what they felt to be the ultimate goal of education. All of them responded with very similar notions, more or less well developed. Many of the components of a pedagogy that is social-action oriented also surfaced as themes in their interviews. Many of the teachers echo the sentiments of Judy, as she explains that the goal of education, in her view, is to

...Figure out our place.... We have all kinds of data we say about how the universe started but why is a question that no one has really answered and I believe that is our quest. We are all looking and seeking the why. Finding our place in relationship to others in our family, our community and the greater world.

Pam added to that the notion that children need to build a love of learning, so that they can

...Be successful in the world and... be happy...and be doing what they want to be doing. The [idea is] to prepare them so they can follow through on what they were meant to be doing. I think that the classroom environment needs to provide a safe place for that to happen.

Overall, teachers' responses to the question of the goal of education fell into two main categories, the development of a responsible citizenship and the development of world peace.

Jenny, Manjit and Pam focused specifically on the development of a responsible citizenry as a major goal of education. Jenny feels that the development of "responsibility

towards each other and themselves should be the ultimate goal.” She feels that this development hinges upon a strong feeling of faith in the child on the part of the teacher. Manjit begins by talking about the development of basic skills, but then quickly transfers her thoughts to larger ideas. She feels that education of children has the task of “preparing them for life,” and like Jenny she feels that

[The goal is] to help them be good citizens, ...usually people are interdependent. They come to realize that we are all interdependent on each other in some way or the other. It may not be directly but indirectly. Then in order to be a good citizen they need to participate in the community or wherever they are. If it's a school community or a home community they also have a role to play there. Their role as a child may be in aiding the other children; they may help adults, etc....

Pam also expresses the development of elements of responsible citizenry, although she does not mention it directly as Manjit and Jenny do. She feels that an educational process that leads to the development of responsible citizenship should show children how “...To be compassionate and to think about how their actions affect the world around them and how they can create a better future for those that follow. Not just for them but for the whole world.” Pam’s statements here come close to linking responsible citizenship to social justice oriented education, which culturally relevant practitioners espouse.

Although Judy does not talk directly about citizenship, she does discuss education for the development of world peace extensively. She thinks about world peace in a broad context, feeling that talking about world peace is synonymous with

...Talking about the universe. We are talking about taking care of the environment, this beautiful planet that we have.... We're talking about [the notion that] we all have...the same needs and we have empathy for people in Iraq that are being murdered and children who can't live freely on the street. It's about the Universe.

In spite of her deep commitment to this type of education in the classroom, Judy feels that Montessori teachers have a tendency to get caught up in semantics, using language to define their practices that do not translate easily into compatible ideas with other sectors of the educational field. She talks about how the graded program teachers at her school become frustrated by this

...Whole idea of peace, for example, the language we use is so abstract that they would prefer character education. [They think] that this would help clarify what we are talking about. So reflecting as Montessorians we need to think about when we say peace what do we mean.... For some people, people have really fought hard to get where they are and they haven't been able to [achieve this] in a peaceful way. So there is this whole [dilemma of wondering] 'Does it take friction to get us where we need to be?' 'Does it take revolution?' 'Where does peace fit?'

Judy revisits this dilemma again in her interview, espousing a strong allegiance to the

notion that peace does involve friction, and that even in the classroom some discomfort is necessary in order to achieve real community. Of this notion she determines that

We don't get to Peace without hard work. I don't think Mother Theresa would have said that people who are hungry should sit there and think about peace. They need to think about 'what can we do to help ourselves so that we can get something to eat.'

Jenny and Pam do not dig as deeply into the definition of peace as Judy.

However, they do discuss the ways in which Peace Education is implemented in a

Montessori classroom. Jenny sees this implementation as being integral to the foundation of a Montessori pedagogy. She feels that the respect for children, student initiated pacing and incorporation of the individual's identity into the classroom lead to a more peaceful environment. When asked about the meaning of Peace Education, she describes the basic daily interactions of the classroom, feeling that "...in the classroom I think its the way we treat each other...the way we talk to each other, the way we interact with each other."

Pam takes a different approach, again focusing on drawing in added curricular components to the basic Montessori design. She talks about a Peace Curriculum, written by Sonny McFarland, and explains how it addresses the need her children have "...for them to look at the love that's inside everybody [and to] focus on the positive."

### *Building Classroom Communities*

Jenny, Manjit, and Pam all discuss the importance of building community to the healthy functioning of a Montessori classroom. Jenny identifies this as one of her pedagogical strengths, asserting that she is "...very good at facilitating a classroom

community so the kids feel safe, they enjoy coming to school and learning.” She describes this process as being an investment of time and energy in the incoming students each fall, explaining that she feels lucky to be able to keep the students for three years so that each year she has only a small group to focus on. She also feels that the children’s responsibility, in addition to their own learning, is to support one another’s learning. Finally, she discusses the benefits of multi-age grouping in this process of building community. “This whole idea of community building that we work on, children helping each other, working together, I think its much more difficult when its a group of children that are the same age....” Manjit and Pam agree with elements of Jenny’s beliefs, with Manjit reinforcing the importance of learning to be a community member while in elementary school so that later in life one can fulfill the duties of citizenship. Pam agrees with the notion that community building is made easier and more meaningful be the presence of three age levels in which children model for other children.

[The goal is] to help them be good citizens, I would say.... A good citizen...again where they...usually people are interdependent. They come to realize that we are all interdependent on each other in some way or the other. It may not be directly but indirectly. Then in order to be a good citizen they need to participate in the community or wherever they are. If it’s a school community or a home community they also have a role to play there. Their role as a child may be in aiding the other children, they may help adults, etc...

Pam also identifies community building as one of the essential elements of Montessori.

### *Fostering School to Home Connections and Participating in Student’s Lives*

Jenny, more than any of the other teachers, emphasizes the importance of bringing parents into the classroom and being a part of her students’ lives. Of her parents, she explains that

... I tell them in the very beginning that [in] my classroom I have an open door policy. They are welcome anytime. Even if they just come in the morning and... stay for a bit, [it’s] fine.... I write

a newsletter on a regular basis, ...weekly I would say. I see a lot of them. They come up to the classroom.... I call them. It's something I've built up. Like if I organize something I make sure I contact them personally. I want to make sure that everybody comes. Usually everybody does.... I call them; I email them, even two or three times.

Jenny not only invests time and energy to draw her parents into the classroom, but also invests time being a part of her students' lives by eating lunch with them in the classroom every day. She talks about the value of "...making sure I try to interact with the child every day.... I think our lunchtimes are a huge help to me that way. It is amazing, you know, interacting socially with children. That situation really gives me an insight into who they are and what they are thinking.... We talk about their interests and what happened over the weekend...."

### *Fostering Inter-Cultural Understanding in the Classroom*

Judy and Pam touch briefly upon the notion of fostering inter-cultural understanding in the classroom. Judy talks about how she is preparing herself to build cultural bridges by learning more about other cultures.

I've studied a lot about Vietnamese culture and have Vietnamese friends so there is a bridge there about knowing some of the cultural differences that might come up. I'm learning about Hispanic culture and how there are allegiances to one's country [in this culture].

Pam also talks about learning about cultural sensitivity through her work in the Peace Corps. She goes on to describe how her Montessori training taught her to celebrate cultures and how her teacher preparatory program at the University showed her how to look at her prepared environment with a critical eye. She also talks about the application of this knowledge to her classroom practice.

We do a celebration of a culture. We celebrate Egypt [for example]. Everybody that wants to join the study studies Egypt and we try to look at the fundamental needs and we study all the aspects of the fundamental needs through Egypt. I choose a month and we do a [cultural] focus in each month. I'm not sure if that works best and not everyone agrees with me the way that I am doing it. The kids really get so involved into it and it becomes a whole class celebration of culture.

Interestingly, neither Judy nor Pam mentions African American culture as being a culture that they are investigating or studying with the students.

### *Knowledge Construction*

Pam is the only teacher talk about an awareness of the way that children construct cultural knowledge in the classroom, and she does not talk explicitly about teaching knowledge construction. Rather, she explains that her University teacher education program focused on “Making sure that what you are using with children is culturally diverse. So that they see that there are not only white characters in every book. Making sure that your classroom reflects cultural diversity and celebrates it too.”

### *Critique of the System*

All of the teachers had critical reflections on the internal workings of the school as a system. While some of the teacher’s focused on previous places of employment, other talked about the school by which they are now employed. Because of the sensitive nature of this information, teacher’s pseudonyms will not be attached to their statements.

One of the recurrent themes of teachers’ critique has to do with disciplinary tactics endorsed by public schools. One teacher talks about a previous place of work, describing the use of a behavior chart that she felt preoccupied the students to the point of not being able to effectively learn. “ I felt that the discipline should be carried out a different way and maybe incentives should be a little bit different.” The same teacher felt similarly frustrated by another school that constantly suspended students for their

behavior, pushing them back out onto the streets. Another teacher talks about the issue of discipline at the location of this study. She explains that all of the teachers "... have the same problems, but we deal with them differently, and... sometimes I think more successfully. We don't have the same level of need or behavior problems that they [the graded program teachers] do." She goes on to explain what she dislikes about the disciplinary approach taken by teachers outside of the Montessori program at the school. She feels that

...The way that some of the adults interact with the children is not what I would call ideal. In the lunchroom or recess, even the specials. [They tell the children] just...do what I tell you to do, don't ask [questions]. I encourage my children to...ask questions...I make it a point to tell them way before I ask them to do something. [They are] not respecting them as individuals.

Another theme relates to the lack of communication between two different programs housed in the same school. One teacher feels that "Its all of our responsibility...to try so hard to hear each other...." She continues with a description of how this responsibility is not being met, because teachers

...Are stuck in a circle at this school where we are almost like children.... There is this constant process of trying to make things equal and I have a chapter from a book that is called "Equal is Not Better." Equity is a good idea but if everybody is reaching for being totally equal then we are going to look totally alike and we will wipe out diversity.

Another teacher talks about specific concerns that result from this lack of communication. She is frustrated that the children are divided by grades for specialist classes, explaining her feeling that "...learning happens vertically and horizontally, not just horizontally." She feels that this difficult situation results from a lack of deep listening on the part of administrators at the school. Of the principal she says that



...I feel that she hasn't listened at all. She really doesn't listen.... I just feel very strongly that we have an administrator who is not interested in learning anything about Montessori and who just uses information, bits and pieces of information, to suit her own agenda.... I really, really strongly feel that she doesn't listen.

A third theme revolves around the mandated curriculum, elements of which are felt to be trite and unnecessary, even counter-productive, by some teachers. One teacher discusses the challenge presented by "...integrating the required curriculum. Some of [the standards]...I don't think are developmentally appropriate. The concepts are harder for the kids and there's not relevance. Things are taken out of context...." Another teacher agrees with this assertion, explaining her struggle with the content and the mandated memorization of concepts.

I think that the curriculum and the pressures from the county definitely affect...the flow of life in the classroom. [It] is hard to [follow the child] sometimes when you have to make sure that they know whom Betsy Ross is and what she did. To make sure that they memorize that by first or second grade doesn't seem to add to the flow of life in the classroom.

These teachers seem to feel frustrated not by the integration of standards they perceive as valuable, but by having to teach concepts by a certain date and being required to teach content they view as arbitrary.

Some of the teachers go to great lengths to attempt to explain the origins of these misunderstandings. One teacher feels that it is a question of semantics.

Never before have I worked in a situation where it really has come to me that we are speaking a different language. We have really come up against it here.... [It is like living in another culture] and you're trying to get your ideas out but... not [succeeding at] it so you ask yourself, 'what am I not doing or saying, what can I do to make myself better understood' We've done a lot of that here.

Another teacher believes that

The whole environment of working in a school that has two programs [is hard] ...Having to constantly explain what the program is about and then being misunderstood. I think there are a lot of misunderstandings. Some are really [about]...being on the defensive all the time and not having administrators who are Montessori trained. I think [the misunderstandings are] because [what we are doing] is so different... from what they're doing.... I don't know if they feel threatened....

A third teacher presents a very different view of sharing a school with a graded program, saying that she feels that there is a lot to learn from teachers who teach in a different discipline. "I like working at [this school], even though half the school is a graded

program.... Of course there were a few things that we had to cater to, like the testing et cetera, which I thought, here in a public school you just have to do it. You can't just say no.”

#### **Research Question 4**

**In what ways do teachers exhibit a praxis that is compatible with the components of a “Culturally Relevant Montessori”?**

Each teacher was observed twice over the course of two weeks in late October and early November. The data collected was organized into grids, showing behaviors corresponding to a culturally relevant Montessori praxis. The tables cross-categorized the data according to the three major categories discussed in table 3.2? , Along with the origin of the evidence in the teacher, the environment, or the students. Tables 4.1-4.4 present a combination of data gathered during both teacher observations. For a discussion of the data collected in these observation tables, refer to chapter five.

*Table 4.1 Judy Leventhal*

Evidence ...	...of drawing out knowledge from the students personal and cultural identities.	...of fostering independence and encouraging freedom with responsibility.	...of fostering the development of world peace and responsible citizenship.
...in the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The room is segmented into curricular areas, providing for differentiated instruction.</li> <li>* There are many areas available for cooperative learning work, both on the floor and on tables.</li> <li>* Evidence of children's work decorates the room, indicating a pedagogy that is caring and respectful.</li> <li>* Many non-fiction books are available, providing possibilities for "real world" exploration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Choice is evident in the materials located throughout the room, providing possibilities for cross-curricular connections and fostering independence.</li> <li>* Evidence of children's work hung throughout the room indicates the incorporation of children's individual identities into the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Music and artwork from a variety of cultures are evident in the classroom, providing possibilities for the beginning of inter-cultural understanding.</li> </ul>
...in the teacher's praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Differentiated instruction is evident in lessons in writing, sense observation, art, and drama.</li> <li>* The teacher circulates the room, asks questions, and stands back to observe, indicating a practice of observation and listening.</li> <li>* At times, firm guidelines are expressed, through asking children to work quietly, and insisting that children follow directions and choose work.</li> <li>* Respect for students is evident in the teacher's tone.</li> <li>* A caring pedagogy is evident in the provision of snack, and the sharing of joys and concerns with the children.</li> <li>* The teacher sometimes exhibits external rewards in the form of praise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Freedom with responsibility is fostered through observing responsible behavior out loud to the children.</li> <li>* Independence is fostered through allowing the children to go to the cafeteria by themselves to get their lunches.</li> <li>* The teacher uses s questioning methodology to pull out prior knowledge.</li> <li>* The teacher leaves students to work alone during the independent practice phase of each lesson, which guides them towards independence.</li> <li>* Children's individual identities are incorporated into the classroom through the sharing of joys in circle time and appreciations at lunch time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher introduces a material for the sharing of joys and concerns, providing for community building.</li> </ul>
...in the students' behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Children are working independently on a variety of projects, both together and separately, displaying internal motivation as well as cooperative learning techniques.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Children are engaged in and comfortably switching between a variety of meaningful activities, indicating a degree of freedom with responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Children care for the classroom environment at clean up time.</li> <li>* Children practice grace and courtesy thorough the use of problem solving materials.</li> </ul>

*Table 4.2 Manjit Bakshi*

Evidence...	...of drawing out knowledge from the students personal and cultural identities.	...of fostering independence and encouraging freedom with responsibility.	...of fostering the development of world peace and responsible citizenship.
...in the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The organization of the materials into curricular areas allows for differentiated instruction and hands-on work.</li> <li>* The numerous four person tables provide space for cooperative learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The extensive body of materials available for choice in each organized area provides for fostering independence and making cross-curricular connections.</li> </ul>	
...in the teacher's praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teaching of small group lessons shows cooperative learning and differentiated instruction.</li> <li>* The teacher displays observation and listening skills by using questioning methodology and visual monitoring both while in small group lessons and while standing aside or over a child's work.</li> <li>* The teacher's calm tone of voice is respectful.</li> <li>* The teacher fosters intrinsic motivation by directing the children back to their work.</li> <li>* The teacher provides firm guidelines by directing the children to follow social norms, initiate and complete work, and to accomplish specific tasks following lessons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The implementation of one on one lessons, observed several times, allows for individual identity development.</li> <li>* The teacher draws upon prior knowledge through the use of questioning in all lessons observed.</li> <li>* The teacher verbally restricts the students from misusing the materials, and guides children who are not working back to work, fostering independence and freedom with responsibility.</li> <li>* The teacher redirects a confused child to ask his classmate rather than asking the teacher, fostering independence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher shows the children how to carry materials, encouraging care of the environment.</li> <li>* If the teacher sees a child misusing a material, she reminds him of the appropriate handling or asks him to put it away.</li> <li>* The teacher is observed giving a lesson about the fundamental needs of humans, demonstrating the value of good citizenship.</li> </ul>
...in the students' behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* While the teacher is giving lessons, the majority of the children are engaged in their own work, showing evidence of intrinsic motivation.</li> <li>* Children work in small groups and help one another at times, showing cooperative learning skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The children are engaged in a variety of activity from multiple curricular areas at most times during the observations, displaying independence and freedom with responsibility.</li> <li>* Children's planet work displays a cross-curricular connection between science and writing.</li> <li>* Children choose work independently, exhibiting task initiation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students help each other with their work, demonstrating a sense of community.</li> </ul>

*Table 4.3 Jenny Lind*

Evidence...	...of drawing out knowledge from personal and cultural identities.	...of fostering independence and encouraging freedom with responsibility.	...of fostering the development of world peace and responsible citizenship.
...in the Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The division of the materials into curricular areas provides for differentiated instruction.</li> <li>* A job chart shows firm guidelines.</li> <li>* A cozy red chair suggests a caring pedagogy.</li> <li>* Materials for building Indian villages, provide for “real world” learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The materials available provide for fostering independence and cross-curricular connections.</li> <li>* The display of children’s work, flags of the world, and a child’s personal timeline show incorporating individual and cultural identities and honoring the home culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The flags of the world show possibilities for creating inter-cultural understanding.</li> <li>* The display of the child’s personal timeline shows the inclusion of parents in the classroom culture.</li> <li>* The job chart is an indicator of requisite care for the environment.</li> </ul>
...in the teacher’s praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher provides firm guidelines through clear direction followed by consistent reminders, setting parameters for student activity, redirecting children to their work, giving the children leadership responsibilities, and checking student work.</li> <li>* The teacher shows respect for students by preparing them for activities and using calm, polite language.</li> <li>* The teacher practices a pedagogy of caring by reading with the children.</li> <li>* The teacher groups students, providing opportunities for cooperative learning and differentiated instruction.</li> <li>* The teacher shows skill in observation and listening by using questioning and circulating the room.</li> <li>* The teacher fosters intrinsic motivation by redirecting children to work, at times giving praise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher calls upon prior knowledge through her use of a questioning methodology.</li> <li>* The teacher fosters independence and freedom with responsibility by asking older students to guide younger students, directing children to do what needs to be done, redirecting children to their work, asking leading questions, asking that the children verbalize their choices, scaffolding choices by breaking them into steps and providing students with jobs in multiple contexts.</li> <li>* The teacher incorporates individual identities into the classroom by displaying work, giving individual lessons and allowing them to choose jobs.</li> <li>* The teacher respects student pacing by listening for readiness to move on and giving lessons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher provides opportunities for multiple groupings through the completion of projects and readings, and pairing students during work time to help one another, giving students the chance to build community.</li> <li>* The teacher encourages students to care for their environment and the materials in it, and invites students to help prepare the environment.</li> </ul>
...in the students’ behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students learn in realistic contexts as they build models of native American villages.</li> <li>* Students make appropriate learning choices, exhibiting intrinsic motivation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The children prepare themselves for lessons and work, indicating independence and freedom with responsibility.</li> <li>* Children take out work, initiating tasks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The students initiate care of the environment, indicating internalization of this process.</li> </ul>

*Table 4.4 Pamela Stone*

Evidence ...	...of drawing out knowledge from the students personal and cultural identities.	...of fostering independence and encouraging freedom with responsibility.	...of fostering the development of world peace and responsible citizenship.
...in the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The room is divided into curricular areas displaying a wide variety of materials providing for differentiated instruction and hands on work.</li> <li>* A job chart displaying pictures of the children and evidence of children's work around the room are evidence of a pedagogy of caring.</li> <li>* The job chart is also evidence of firm guidelines.</li> <li>* The rocking chair and cozy reading corner suggest a caring pedagogy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The extensive body of materials available for choice in each organized area provides for fostering independence and making cross-curricular connections.</li> <li>* The display of children's work, a sorting material that depicts each child's personal and cultural interests, and the pictorial job chart are evidence of the incorporation of student's individual and cultural identities into the classroom.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* A peace area includes the peace book and several activities, showing evidence of community building and education for peace.</li> <li>* The job chart is evidence of a requisite care of the environment.</li> </ul>
...in the teacher's praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* A consistent use of questioning, circulating the room during independent work, and answering the children's questions are evidence of observation and listening.</li> <li>* The request that disruptive children separate, the requirement that children choose challenging work and keep their work tidy, and the occasional direction of children back to work are evidence of firm guidelines.</li> <li>* The teacher displays respect for the students through her quiet tone and calm demeanor.</li> <li>* At times the teacher evidences external rewards through the use of praise.</li> <li>* Differentiated instruction is evident in the giving of small group lessons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The teacher incorporates children's personal identities into the classroom through the use of interpretive questioning.</li> <li>* She fosters independence and freedom with responsibility by holding the children accountable for their work verbally and with work plans, and by giving them scaffolded and guided choices.</li> <li>* Twice, she fosters independence without responsibility. Once when a child chooses not to come to a lesson and that choice is verbally validated, and once when she voices the choice of not following directions as a legitimate choice.</li> <li>* She allows for student pacing by listing lesson requests from children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* The use of language regarding "love-lights" is evidence of her community building efforts.</li> <li>* The calm way in which she addresses the children and fully includes them in choice is also evidence community building.</li> <li>* She encourages children to keep their workspaces neat, fostering care of the environment.</li> </ul>
...in the students' behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Some children work diligently and make choices, evidencing the development of intrinsic motivation.</li> <li>* At times children work together in groups, displaying an aptitude for cooperative learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Some children choose work that appears challenging and engaging, providing evidence of freedom with responsibility and task initiation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Children are seen cleaning up after themselves, showing care of the environment.</li> </ul>

*Observation provides evidence of a pedagogy of “drawing out” knowledge*

- *In the environment*

The four teachers in this study demonstrate the ability to create an environment that fosters the drawing out of knowledge in very similar ways. Their classrooms were all segmented into major curricular areas, with each area containing several shelves stocked with hands-on materials for learning about the area. Examples of this include large puzzle maps of the seven continents for tracing and labeling, base ten bead bars, manipulative alphabets, and scientific classification charts depicting animals from each of the five kingdoms. Although the materials vary somewhat from room to room, the basic materials are the same. Each room evidenced many areas available for cooperative learning work, both on the floor and on tables. Many non-fiction books are available, providing possibilities for “real world” exploration.

There were some differences in the environmental design as well. Judy, Jenny, and Pam all display evidence of children’s work, decorating the walls of the room, indicating a pedagogy that is caring and respectful. Jenny and Pam each displayed job charts, indicating firm guidelines, and Pam’s job chart, which displayed pictures of the children, was also evidence of a caring pedagogy. Jenny and Pam both had cozy reading areas, with a large red chair in Jenny’s room and big cushions in the library corner of Pam’s room, suggesting a caring pedagogy. Jenny’s room contained materials for building Indian villages, relating to a field trip she had taken the day of the first observation, evidence of a “real world” context for learning.

- *In the teacher’s praxis*

The elements of praxis observed also contained many similarities. The teaching of small group lessons by each teacher shows evidence of fostering cooperative learning and differentiating instruction. All of the teachers display observation and listening skills by using questioning methodology and visual monitoring both while in small group lessons and while standing aside or over a child's work. Similarly, they all used unfailingly calm tones of voice, indicating a pedagogy of respect.

There were some differences here as well. Jenny and Manjit were observed fostering intrinsic motivation by consistently directing the children back to their work when they were idle or disruptive. Jenny and Manjit also showed evidence of providing firm guidelines by directing the children to follow social norms, initiate and complete work, and to accomplish specific tasks following lessons. Pam and Manjit both separated children who were disrupting the work of others. Pam also required that children choose challenging work and keep their work tidy, and sometimes directed children back to their work, evidencing some firm guidelines. Like Pam, Judy sometimes redirected children to their work and asked for quieter voices. Pam, Jenny, and Judy were all heard using praise to reinforce positive behaviors. Jenny provided very clear direction at all times and through followed up with consistent reminders, and setting parameters for student activity. She also provided the children with leadership responsibilities, and consistently checked student work. Jenny and Pam were observed practicing a pedagogy of caring by reading with the children. Judy practiced a caring pedagogy by sharing snack with the children and talking with them about their joys and concerns.

- *In the students behavior*



In all four teacher's classrooms, children work in small groups and help one another at times, showing cooperative learning skills. However, only in Jenny and Manjit classrooms were the majority of the children are engaged in their own work during the teachers small group lessons with other children, showing evidence of intrinsic motivation. In Pam and Judy's classrooms, some children were working diligently and making choices, evidencing the development of intrinsic motivation. Finally, in both Judy and Jenny's classrooms students were engaged in realistic work such as corn shucking and building native American villages, providing for learning in realistic contexts.

*Observation provides evidence of fostering identity development in students*

- *In the environment*

Each of the teachers studied displayed the ability to foster identity development through the extensive body of materials available for choice in each organized area, providing for fostering independence and making cross-curricular connections. Pam, Jenny, and Judy all displayed children's work, evidence of the incorporation of children's identities into the environment. Pam also had several materials available for choice that were either child-made or related to the children's interests. Jenny displayed a child's personal timeline, showing honor and respect for the child's home culture.

- *In the teacher's praxis*

All of the teachers' praxes showed evidence of fostering identity development in multiple ways. They each incorporated children's personal identities into the classroom through the use of interpretive questioning. They were also observed fostering

independence and freedom with responsibility in different ways. Pam holds the children accountable for their work verbally and with work plans, and by giving them scaffolded and guided choices. She also allows for student pacing by creating a list of lesson requests from children to guide her teaching. Jenny fosters independence and freedom with responsibility by asking older students to guide younger students, directing children to do what needs to be done, redirecting children to their work, asking leading questions, asking that the children verbalize their choices, scaffolding choices by breaking them into steps and providing students with jobs in multiple contexts. She respects student pacing by listening for readiness to move on to more difficult concepts and giving individual lessons. Judy fosters freedom with responsibility through observing responsible behavior out loud to the children. In her classroom, the children move towards independence by going to the cafeteria by themselves to get their lunches. Judy also incorporates children's individual identities into the classroom through the sharing of joys in circle time and appreciations at lunchtime.

Not everything that was observed fit into the framework. Pam was observed fostering freedom without responsibility. This occurs twice, once when a child chooses not to come to a lesson and that choice is verbally validated, and once when she voices the choice of not following directions as a legitimate choice.

- *In the students behavior*

The children evidence identity development in a variety of ways. In all of the classrooms, the children are engaged in initiating and sustaining a variety of activity from

multiple curricular areas at most times, displaying independence and freedom with responsibility. In Manjit and Jenny's classrooms this was more often the case.

In Manjit's class, children's work on planets displays a cross-curricular connection between science and writing.

*Observation provides evidence of fostering responsible citizenship*

- *In the environment*

There is less evidence in the teacher's environments of this indicator, although some exists in each classroom. All of the teachers' students help each other with their work, demonstrating a sense of community. In Pam's classroom, a peace area includes the peace book and several activities, showing evidence of community building and education for peace. Both Pam and Jenny display job charts, evidence of a requisite care of the environment. Jenny also displays flags of the world, indicative of possibilities for creating inter-cultural understanding, and a child's personal timeline showing the inclusion of parents in the classroom culture. Judy and Pam in particular have music and artwork from a variety of cultures, providing possibilities for the beginning of inter-cultural understanding.

- *In the teacher's praxis*

The teachers evidence this indicator in very different ways. Manjit shows the children how to carry materials and reminds them of the appropriate handling when they are misusing them, encouraging care of the environment. She is also observed giving a lesson about the fundamental needs of humans, demonstrating the value of good

citizenship. Pam talks about the children's "love lights" being dim bright. This language from the Peace Education program she is using indicates community-building efforts. She is also observed to fully include the children in choice, further evidence community building. Finally, she encourages children to keep their workspaces neat, fostering care of the environment. Jenny provides opportunities for multiple groupings through the completion of projects and readings, and pairing students during work time to help one another, giving students the chance to build community. She also encourages students to care for their environment and the materials in it, and invites students to help prepare the environment. Judy introduces a material for the sharing of joys and concerns, providing for community building.

- *In the students behavior*

In all classrooms, the students are observed helping one another, with their work, demonstrating a sense of community. They are also observed cleaning up after themselves, showing care of the environment. Judy's students are also seen practicing grace and courtesy, an element of community building, through the use of problem solving materials.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter will present the conclusions of this research project. First, it will examine each research question in a separate section. Then, it will suggest the implications of this examination through the presentation of a theoretical framework and a discussion of possibilities for enacting the tenets of this theoretical framework in the Montessori community. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a call for future research.

### Part I: Findings

*Research Question I: In what ways are the Montessori paradigm and the Culturally Relevant Pedagogical paradigms congruent in theory?*

An examination of the literature reveals that Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy are theoretically similar in at least three ways. Both Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) are essentially child-centered methods of practicing pedagogy that emphasize identity development and foster social awareness through engaging students in socio-civic activism. Overall, these two pedagogical stances converge on these three major theoretical points, with very few differences existing at the pedagogical level.

At the academic level, these two methods are theoretically convergent, with both focusing on a concept of praxis that is aimed at drawing knowledge out of children as opposed to a more traditional, Lockean, blank-slate model of depositing knowledge into empty vessels as though banking. Additionally a number of convergences exist at the

pedagogical level. Primarily, expressed teacher attitudes towards children are similarly expected to be respectful, firm, and caring. Both Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy encourage teachers to foster opportunities for cooperative learning across ability levels, with Montessori emphasizing cross-age cooperation. Similarly, both methods call for differentiated instruction to enable teachers to meet the needs of individuals and groups of children regardless of their level of prior knowledge. Finally, both methods of instruction purport to be based in relevant, real-life contexts that address the “whole” child through holistic methods of education. These seven principles of instruction remain consistent across both methods as the primary means for ensuring academic success for all.

While a comparison of means of achieving academic success for all students reveals multiple convergences between Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, an examination of personal and cultural competencies reveals congruency at best. While Montessori focuses on developing self-awareness and sense of personal agency, CRP examines the possibilities for development on a broader, culturally centered level. However, the focus on intrapersonal identity development within the Montessori curriculum provides opportunities for further development that is more globally centered. Furthermore, Montessori does allude to the need for intercultural identity development, which suggests that had she conducted her research at a different time and place there may have been more discussion of cultural competence. At the theoretical level, both methods focus on the necessity for intrapersonal identity development, in which teachers and school environments foster growth at extra-curricular levels. For Montessori, however, this growth is limited to the development of personal awareness, independence

and decision making. For CRP, this growth pertains to the multiple layers of identity, including color, ethnicity, and culture.

At the level of praxis, there are several additional possibilities for congruence and a few possibilities for convergence between Montessori and CRP. Both methods continue to refer to a pedagogy that is child centered, but Montessori looks to the developmental needs of the child while CRP expands the definition of needs to include needs that are centered in color, culture, and ethnicity. As child-centered pedagogies, both methods demand that the student's interests be placed at the center of the curriculum. However, Montessori does not thoroughly define the origins and scope of student interest while CRP clearly states that these interests should be based in the student's cultural background and should provide opportunities for cultural enrichment for all students. In terms of cross-curricular connections, which are integral to learning, Montessori does not clearly define the scope of these connections, although it is evident that connections should be made at least within the classroom environment and between the classroom environment and the surrounding community. CRP more explicitly defines these connections as being made between students' community, national, and global identities. Montessori and CRP more overtly converge in terms of the methods used to develop students' intrapersonal identities. Both philosophies agree that scaffolding, or building on students' prior knowledge, is essential. Additionally, teachers should enable what CRP refers to as "educational self-determination," the practice of involving students in their own curricular pacing and localizing curricular control so that students and teachers may focus on content knowledge that is pertinent to their local communities and specific classroom contexts. A third convergence relates to learning about children through

sustained visual and auditory observation. Finally, both methods mention a need for teachers to develop a sense of comfort with their cultural identities and to refrain from passing judgment on children based on observations made through unfiltered cultural lenses.

An examination of the theoretical underpinnings of both Montessori and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy reveals a core value of preparing children to be responsible and proactive citizens. These two methods, developed in very different times and places, both call for education to foster a sense of “sociopolitical consciousness” in students. Whether this consciousness relates to students’ communities, their countries, or the global environment, a strong convergence of belief is clear, with differences mainly pertaining to the language used to express this need. Both methods encourage teachers to provide students with ample opportunities to engage in social action that is meaningful to them. Teachers are encouraged to focus on community building through cooperative learning, although Montessori teachers rely on looping and multi-age grouping to reinforce diverse, long-standing, dynamic communities. CRP, on the other hand, explicitly mentions the necessity for encouraging a sense of shared responsibility for all students’ academic and personal success. CRP is also clearer in its call for parent participation in classroom communities, which although a common practice in Montessori schools is not explicitly mentioned in her research. A final point of congruence is the fostering of intercultural understanding among students, which is more pointedly referred to in CRP as the need for teachers to help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.



Although no clear divergences emerge in this area of praxis, there are several points that are uniquely mentioned either by Montessori or by CRP. Montessori, for its part, clearly indicates a need for students to learn to care for their classroom and outdoor environments as preparation for what Montessori referred to as “stewardship” of the global environment. No such mention is made in CRP although this type of responsibility is congruent to other needs expressed by culturally relevant theorists. CRP does, however, mention two important principles which are not discussed by Montessori and which are indispensable to CRP. Teachers in this tradition should provide students with opportunities to critique knowledge in its various forms, to deconstruct knowledge as presented in school, and to understand the nature of knowledge as dynamic, created by all types of people, and arguable. Furthermore, in preparation for instructing students in knowledge deconstruction, teachers themselves should have ample opportunities in their preparatory courses to critique the system and to understand its faults. Although Montessori does not examine these needs, it is possible to imagine that in an environment where independence of thought and movement are integral to learning, teachers may find room to help children decode the knowledge in which they are immersed.

Overall, two major points of distinct divergence can be found between the two methods. While Montessori insists that teachers foster intrinsic motivation and avoid external rewards, Ladson-Billings refers to successful practitioners as using rewards to promote academic achievement. Stoll-Lillard (2005) cites extensive research that suggests that giving rewards de-motivates children and results in lowered levels of performance on future, unrewarded tasks (Chap. 5). Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde (2005) similarly suggest that Montessori’s practice of emphasizing internal as opposed to

external rewards results in comparatively high levels of experienced affect, potency, internal motivation, and interest among middle school students. An additional divergence appears in the area of identity development. While CRP plainly asserts that teachers and schools should respect students' home cultures and draw on familial knowledge bases in the development of the curriculum and implementation of pedagogy, Montessori is somewhat less clear in the treatment of this topic. An examination of Montessori's written work regarding the family suggests that she placed an emphasis on teaching the family developmentally sound practices as opposed to listening to the family and learning from their wisdom. This is directly oppositional to the notion that schools stand to learn from families. Extensive research on the value of familial knowledge suggests that there is room for updating the views held by Montessori at the time of her research in favor of a more culturally sensitive praxis.

Overall an examination of these two pedagogical stances, developed in different cultures and at different times in history, reveals many similar notions. Ultimately, the two ideologies both claim to place the child at the center of learning; to respect the developmental, personal, and cultural needs of the growing child, and to prepare the child for responsible and proactive citizenship. An examination of these ideas as they are revealed in classroom level practice stands to illuminate the possibilities for dialogue between two previously segregated ideologies.

*Research Question 2: In what ways does the ensemble of teacher preparatory experience influence the role of cultural relevance in a Montessori teacher's praxis?*

Interviews with the teachers in this study reveals the inadequacy of examining teacher preparation programs alone in considering the impact of the preparatory experience on classroom teaching. Rather, the data collected suggests that four major themes define the impact of teacher preparatory programs on preparing teachers to practice a “Culturally Relevant Montessori.” These themes, cross-cultural experience, teaching experience, teacher preparation, and prior exposure to multicultural education create an ensemble of preparatory experience. Based on the four teachers in this study, it appears that living for a prolonged period of time in another culture, significant experience with teaching in diverse settings, perceived rigor in teacher preparation programs, and a reflective exposure to ideas in multicultural education beyond what was experienced by these teachers are the essential components in the preparation of culturally relevant Montessori teachers.

Each of the teachers involved in this study has lived for a prolonged period of time in at least two cultures. While two of the teachers were born and raised abroad, two others grew up in the United States, later moving abroad for work. Each of the teachers talked about their cross-cultural experiences during their interview. For Manjit and Jenny, their experience in American culture was their first experience abroad, their primary cultures being Asian. Both teachers took their first training course in their primary culture, then moving to the United States in their early twenties. While Manjit came to the greater metropolitan area in which she currently lives and stayed to raise her family and work, Jenny went from California to Chicago and then married a Swedish man and lived in Sweden for 11 years before coming to her current location. For Judy and Pam, on the other hand, a drive to learn about other cultures and to make a contribution led them

to live abroad. Both started out as Peace Corps volunteers in Africa. Pam then returned to the United States to continue her teaching career after two years abroad. Judy, on the other hand, returned to Cameroon and then later to Nigeria for a total of 6 years of living outside of the United States.

In *Crossing over to Canaan*, Ladson-Billings (2000) suggests that inter-cultural experience is integral to the development of a culturally responsive pedagogy. The experiences of these teachers in multiple cultural contexts would suggest that they are at least in an emergent phase of developing personal cultural competence. It is unclear from the data, however, the degree to which each of them has internalized this awareness. Judy speaks about an “emptying out” of preconceptions, which has then allowed her to open up to new ideas. Judy, Pam and Jenny, however, all expressed some conscious discomfort with ideas from other cultures. For Judy and Pam, the idea of corporal punishment as practiced in certain cultures creates an intense discomfort. Jenny, for her part, rejects the idea of incorporating pop culture into her classroom when she disagrees with the ideas expressed in pop culture, specifically in certain rap music. Manjit also expresses some cultural stereotypes in her interview, suggesting that her concept of culture and personal cultural competence is also incomplete.

Each of the teachers in this study is characterized by multiple teaching experiences and a length of teaching that exceeds five years. While Pam is the youngest and least experienced teacher, she holds three years of experience in an early childhood center for children with special needs, two years of resource teaching in Lesotho, and is in her fourth year of full time contract teaching. She has also worked in four settings that differed greatly from one another and from the cultural context in which she grew up.

Judy has the second least amount of experience, as she is now in her fifth year of full time contract teaching as a Montessori teacher. However, she also has taught in a wide variety of settings, including an inner-city environment in Illinois, Charlotte, North Carolina, Cameroon, and two very different Montessori schools. Like Pam, Judy has taught uniquely in situations that differ from the rural farming cultural context in which she grew up. Both Manjit and Jenny have been teaching for more than twenty years. In Manjit's 25 years of teaching she has taught at the primary (3-6 year old) level and the elementary (6-9 year old) level for more than ten years each. She has also taught in a wide variety of settings, from her first years of teaching in India to an affluent school in McLean, VA, followed by 16 years in Maryland at both private and public schools and then finally returning to Virginia to work in a public Montessori school. Jenny has a similar teaching record, having begun her 27 years of teaching in Sri Lanka, followed by California and Chicago, then moving to Sweden, and returning to the United States to teach in Maryland and now Virginia. She too has taught in a wide variety of settings at both the primary and lower elementary levels, both in private schools and in public.

An examination of the preparatory and professional development coursework of the teachers in this study reveals two emergent themes. First, each of the teachers studied has completed more than one credential in the field of education. While these credentials are diverse, it is important to note that each set of credentials includes both a Montessori-specific component and additional coursework taken for initial certification or recertification. Second, the teachers similarly found value in two components of this credentialing process, the Montessori training and the recertification coursework. All of the teachers reported in some way feeling that the Montessori coursework was intense.

When asked to describe their elementary coursework, the first responses of Pam, Manjit, and Judy were “A lot,” “Very intense. Very, very intense,” and “Very intense,” respectively. However, they all found enormous value in it, most notably in terms of the math content and the philosophy for most of them. Several of the teachers also referred to recertification coursework as valuable. Pam and Manjit found that courses in reading in particular added value to their classroom practice because they had not felt particularly well prepared by any previous experiences for the teaching of reading. Two courses, Words Their Way and Poetry Alive, a spelling and a dramatic poetry course offered by the county in which they work, seem to be of particular value. As Jenny expressed, she appreciated this course because it built upon what she already tries to do in her classroom.

All of the teachers also discussed a common exposure to ideas in multicultural education, although they had differing opinions of its value. They spoke about a lecture by Dr. Kunjufu, who spoke to them about the African American culture. Judy felt that he was encouraging them to stop blaming parents for children’s problems in school. She seemed to agree with this, but felt unsure of the ways in which Multicultural Education gives credence to incorporating the home culture into the classroom. Jenny felt that Dr. Kunjufu was a very controversial speaker. She was uncertain about some of his ideas.

His idea for example that black children should be taught by black teachers, I don't think that's necessarily true.... [His idea] that we have to incorporate...rap.... I really don't know if that is necessary. I can understand using rhythmic music or...I don't think its necessary to bring the language [associated with rap]....

She went on to say that she disagrees with the values expressed by some rap music and does not want that in her classroom. Manjit felt that the speaker was attacking teachers who were not African American. Pam, who had exposure to other ideas in multicultural

education as part of her undergraduate teacher preparation, agreed with many of his statements and was especially affected by his culture specific commentary on Latino female students. She has incorporated some of his ideas into her classroom.

It is apparent from this examination of the four teachers concepts of multicultural education that none of them has had enough exposure to fully understand and incorporate the elements of this type of pedagogy into their classroom practice.

*Research Question 3: In what ways do Montessori teachers in Public Schools perceive their practice as being compatible with the components of a “Culturally Relevant Montessori?”*

Overall, teachers perceived compatibility with elements from each of the three categories of the guidelines for a “Culturally Relevant Montessori” practice. Their perceptions fit into three categories, a philosophy and practice of building upon the base of understanding students already possess through drawing out their prior knowledge, a philosophy and practice of incorporating the various layers of students identities into the classroom and working to develop the multiple elements of identity through fostering independence and freedom with responsibility, and a philosophy and practice of educating for world peace, responsible citizenship and social change. The elements of each of these three categories that were expressed by teachers as being integral to their practice and understanding of Montessori are delineated in three categories below.

All of the teachers express ideas about their praxis that are in agreement with the components of a drawing out pedagogy. However, not all of the components of this type

of pedagogy surface in teachers' perceptions of their practice, and some surface only superficially or only in one or two teachers interviews. The only elements that are identified as being essential to all teachers' perceptions of their practice have to do with rewards and punishments, and the importance of fostering as opposed to hindering the development of intrinsic motivation. Most teachers spoke about setting firm guidelines, implementing cooperative learning and differentiated instruction, teaching and learning in relevant, realistic contexts, and observing and listening to children. Only Jenny talked explicitly about the integral role of respect for students in classroom practice. Teachers did not talk directly about practicing a pedagogy of caring or incorporating the whole child into instruction, although some of their responses alluded to these elements.

Teachers' discussions of rewards and punishments as opposed to intrinsic motivators are of particular importance. Unlike the other components of the framework, teachers were asked explicitly about their feelings in regards to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. It was explained to them that this conflict presented the most glaring difference between Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Montessori Education, with the former explicitly condoning the use of rewards in the classroom and the latter explicitly condemning and use of external motivators or punishments. All of the teachers agree that intrinsic motivation is highly valuable and should be fostered in the classroom. However, there is a recognition of the challenge of fostering intrinsic motivation that takes place, with some teachers expressing a feeling that certain children have not yet experienced this and that it is harder for them to demonstrate signs of internal motivation than for other students for whom it comes more naturally. The teachers face this challenge in different ways, with some of them enforcing limits through the use of logical or natural



consequences. Other teachers redirect children to work when they are misbehaving, and resort to secondary tactics only when this does not work. These may include limiting free playtime when children are irresponsible in the classroom and isolating the children or regrouping them to work with others. Teachers may also use incentives that are work-related, such as allowing a child to do a favorite activity after a less preferred activity is completed.

In spite of their commitment to intrinsic motivation, teachers are not convinced that this system is perfect. There is some concern, for example, that holding up an activity as a reward may diminish the quality of work done in both activities, with the student rushing through the first to get to the second, and then having limited time to do the second. Judy, Pam and Manjit express some doubts about the preeminence of a plan that relies solely on intrinsic motivation and logical consequences. Pam in particular feels that behavior charts and extrinsic motivators may serve as a bridge to intrinsic motivation for children who have never experienced it before.

The data collected in regard to the incorporation of students' identities into the classroom reveals that all of the teachers possess some strategies for honoring and incorporating culture into their praxis. Their level of thoughtfulness and awareness in regard to this issue varied, however. There are four components of a pedagogy that incorporates student's individual and cultural identities into the classroom and builds curriculum and classroom structure around those identities that were most important to all teachers, as per their own expression of their beliefs. These are the incorporation of cultural identities into the classroom through content and pedagogy, the incorporation of individual identities into the classroom through identifying children's interests and needs

and guiding them to achieve them, fostering independence in the classroom through scaffolding choices, asking questions, and listening for students ability levels. Most of the teachers also emphasize the importance of creating opportunities for cross-curricular connections in the classroom. Only some of the teachers discuss the importance of student error and self-correction, and the value of experiences in a diversity of cultural settings to their classroom practice. Only Jenny directly emphasizes the importance of the students' role in pacing their individualized curricula. The elements of this sub-category that did not emerge in discussion were the importance of pulling out prior knowledge to build upon and the role of task initiation in developing student's identities.

A particularly controversial topic under this sub-heading is in regards to the role of parents in the classroom and the relationship between teachers, parents, and students. All four of the teachers in this study express some frustration with parents, giving the impression at times that this is one of the elements of their pedagogy that they felt least prepared to handle appropriately. Some, but not all, of the teachers directly admit to feeling that the children of single parents, parents of low socio-economic status, and African American parents are more challenging to work with. Others seek to understand the children's culture through an understanding of their parents, regardless of their level of frustration. One teacher in particular, however, thinks of school to home communication as a strength of her pedagogy as opposed to a challenge, and spends extensive time and energy on strengthening her relationship to parents, something that she feels benefits her practice greatly. Overall, the teachers seemed to feel torn between divergences between their own and parents' ideas about discipline and a belief in the theoretical importance of honoring the child's home culture.

Many of the components of a pedagogy that is social-action oriented surfaced in teachers' interviews, both as a result of direct questions and indirectly as elements of their other responses. Overall, teachers' responses to the question of the goal of education fell into two main categories, the development of a responsible citizenship and the development of world peace, with all of the teachers responding that one or both of these are essential to the goals of a Montessori pedagogy. However, while their responses indicated a belief in a broader goal for education, they did not show a conscious connection between these lofty goals and a social action oriented curriculum as a means of achieving these goals. Rather, the responses remained largely abstract and teachers' ideas about how to achieve world peace in particular through education appeared under-developed. In addition to expressing their beliefs about the goals, several other elements of this third component of "Culturally Relevant Montessori" practice also emerged. Most of the teachers also talked about the importance of building classroom communities. Some of the teachers talk briefly about fostering inter-cultural understanding in the classroom, although the notion of how to do this seem limited to "The Contributions Approach" level of understanding curriculum reform. Only Jenny emphasizes the importance of bringing parents into the classroom and being a part of her students' lives, not only investing time and energy to draw her parents into the classroom, but also investing time being a part of her students' lives by eating lunch with them in the classroom every day. Pam skirts the idea of knowledge construction but does not talk about teaching children to deconstruct forms of information delivery.

The last essential element of developing a social action oriented pedagogy is the personal critique of the system by teachers. All of the teachers in this study had critical

reflections on the internal workings of the school as a system. In particular, teachers had qualms about the manner of disciplining children using rewards and punishments as they observed in the more traditional, graded-classrooms. They also felt exasperated by a perceived lack of understanding between themselves and their counterparts in the graded program, and a feeling on the part of some teachers of not being listened to or understood by the administrator in the building. A final area of critique is in regard to the state mandated curriculum, elements of which are felt to be trite and unnecessary, even counter-productive, by some teachers.

*Research Question 4: In what ways do teachers exhibit a praxis that is compatible with the components of a “Culturally Relevant Montessori”?*

The four teachers in this study demonstrated at least some ability to create an environment that fosters the three tenets of a Culturally Relevant Montessori pedagogy in at least some ways. Through their interactions with children and their environmental design, teachers demonstrated a pedagogy that was consistent with their perceptions although different in some of its manifestations. Some of these abilities were consistent from classroom to classroom, suggesting consistency in school culture and teacher preparatory programs. These included the organization of spacious environments with many curricular choices and the giving of small group lessons to foster the drawing out of knowledge. Additionally, all of the teachers used questioning in their praxis in order to draw out knowledge.

There were some differences in teacher's praxis as well. All of the teachers created comfortable environments, but not all incorporated the students into that environment through a display of their work or cultural artifacts. Teachers also demonstrated caring in inconsistent ways. While all teachers used quiet voices, only some of the teachers shared snack or lunch with their children. Additionally, while all of the teachers expressed a belief in firm guidelines, only the two most experienced teachers consistently directed the children back to their work when they were disruptive. This additional direction had the effect of creating an atmosphere that felt both calm and purposeful. Additionally, these two teachers' students displayed the most consistent self-directed behavior, suggesting an inherent value in this type of redirection. Teachers often were observed limiting choices and guiding students to make decisions, but this was accomplished in different ways. In the classrooms where children appeared to be quieter and more directed, older students were asked to help the teacher to guide younger students, and choices were given in small pieces. In these classrooms, the teachers had many mechanisms in place for creating a truly "responsible" freedom. These teachers also expressed a distinction between freedom and freedom with responsibility. In the classrooms where freedom without responsibility was allowed, student behavior demonstrated a lower degree of self-regulation.

The area of "Culturally Relevant Montessori" praxis that was the least demonstrated was the third tenet, that of guiding students towards a responsible and socially active citizenship. While all of the teachers spent time building community, their methods were inconsistent from one classroom to the next. In all classrooms, however, the students were observed to be helping one another, cleaning up after themselves, and

showing care of the environment. This indicates that on some level teachers efforts to foster community are successful. It is possible that observations were not lengthy enough to reveal social activism among students, however, the lack of focus on this aspect in teachers interviews as well suggests that this is an area for professional growth among this group of teachers.

## **Part II: Implications**

The synthesis of the results of this study and its literature review provide the foundational elements for a theoretical framework to guide the implementation of a “Culturally Relevant Montessori” practice. An examination of this conceptual framework provides implications of this study for teacher education and for classroom practice.

*Teachers who teach in a Culturally Relevant Montessori tradition believe that education is a process of drawing out knowledge.*

- Teachers set firm guidelines and use natural incentives and logical consequences to reinforce them.
- They differentiate instruction and provide opportunities for cooperative learning in realistic contexts.
- They practice a pedagogy that is caring and respectful, based on listening, observation and critical self-reflection.

*Teachers believe that the individual and cultural identity development of individual students is central to classroom practice.*

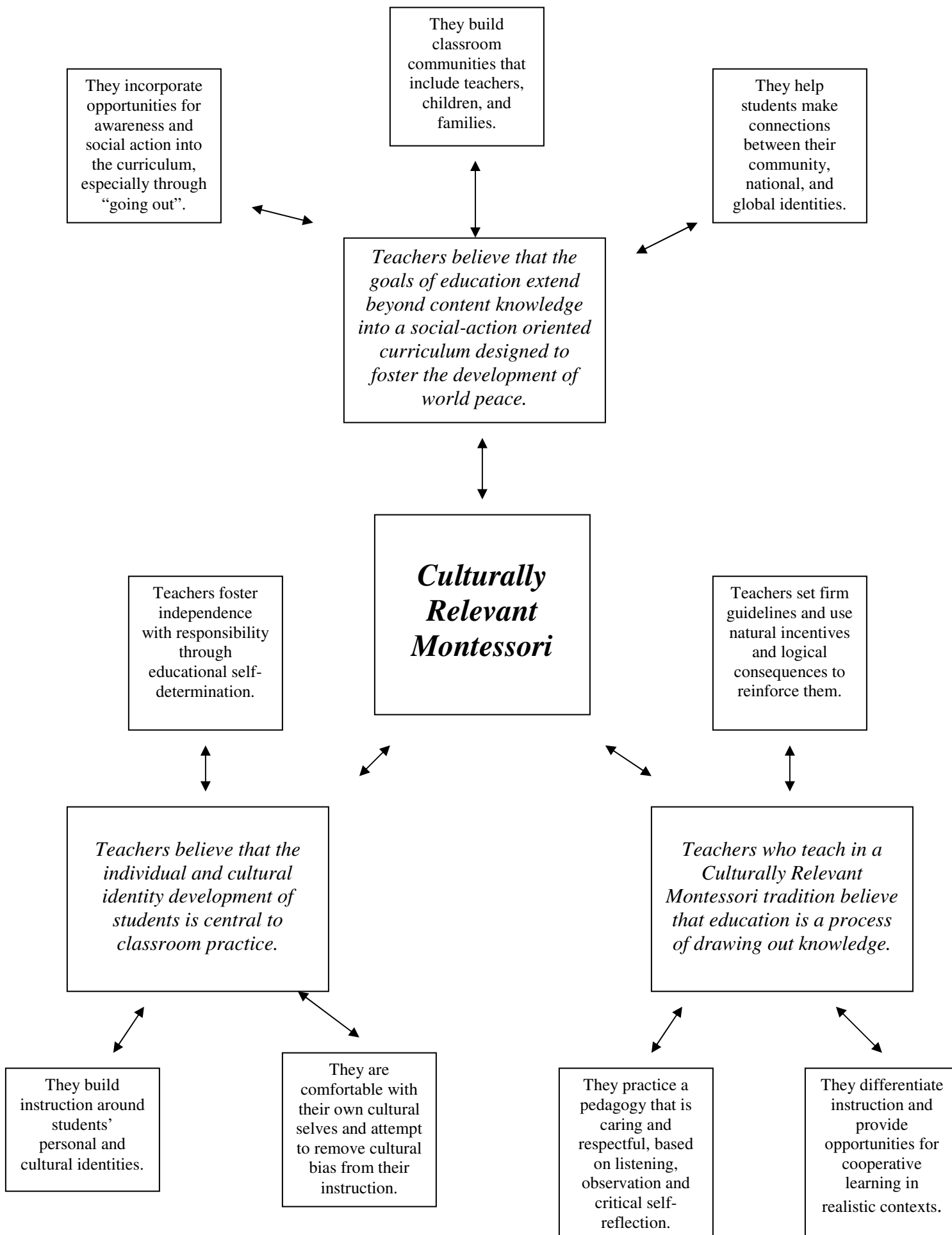
- They are comfortable with their own cultural selves and attempt to remove cultural bias from their instruction.
- They build instruction around students' personal and cultural identities.
- Teachers foster independence with responsibility through educational self-determination.

*Teachers believe that the goals of education extend beyond content knowledge into a social-action oriented curriculum designed to foster the development of world peace.*

- They incorporate opportunities for awareness and social action into the curriculum, especially through “going out”.
- They build classroom communities that include teachers, children, and families.
- They help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.

## **Implications**

Teachers in this study were found to be proficient in several of the proposed tenets. First, they consistently differentiated instruction and provided opportunities for cooperative learning in realistic contexts. They also practiced a pedagogy that is caring and respectful, based on listening and observation. All of the teachers worked to build





classroom communities that included teachers and children, and built instruction around students' personal identities. In almost all instances, teachers clearly fostered independence with responsibility through educational self-determination. Finally, all of the teachers incorporated field experiences, or "Going Out," into their students learning.

However, some areas of need indicate possibilities for professional development and for growth in Montessori teacher preparatory programs and professional development activities. Teachers did not all set clear, firm guidelines. In some cases, there seemed to be some lack of clarity in terms of the appropriate use of natural incentives and logical consequences to reinforce what guidelines existed. Teachers did not all engage in a critical self-reflection (Zeichner, 1999), nor did they appear entirely comfortable with or aware of the role of their own cultural selves and cultural biases in their instruction. Although they did include field experiences in their curriculum, they did not appear to explicitly focus on social action in these or in classroom experiences. Aside from one of the teachers, none of them seemed to fully incorporate families into their classroom communities, nor did they seem to help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities. Finally, although students' individual identities were central to the classroom, their cultural identities did not seem to be as essential to the teachers' praxes.

This study suggests that improvements in several areas would increase the ability of teachers to act collaboratively with students as agents of change. For acting teachers, cohesive, carefully structured professional development opportunities built around classroom discipline, complex identity development, critical self-reflection and social

action would provide the most logical course of action towards a Culturally Relevant Montessori pedagogy. For pre-service teachers, making preemptive changes to both University teacher preparation programs and Montessori teacher preparation programs around the same themes would be a more coherent venue. Based on the observed “missing pieces” described above, the multiple possibilities that exist for improvement in teachers’ praxes toward a Culturally Relevant Montessori can be grouped into two major categories, teachers’ self-perception, and teachers’ classroom practices.

Perception underlies practice, so working towards a more cohesive concept of identity is a meaningful starting point in the development of Culturally Relevant Montessori teachers. The concept of identity is highly complex, particularly in the case of professional adults who need to grapple not only with their own personal, professional, and cultural identities, but also with those of the children and parents in their classrooms, which are often diverse and differ from the teachers themselves. A professional development unit around identity development would need to start with an exploration of these three different facets of identity and how they interact and change within each individual. This exploration would need to examine the concept of culture, and to help teachers not only to develop personal awareness but also to see how identity acts as a lens through which they see their students. From here, teachers would be introduced to the concept of critical self-reflection (Zeichner, 1999), and provided with opportunities to practice this type of deliberative evaluation independently and with colleagues.

Critical self-reflection provides a logical bridge into the second phase of professional or pre-service development, the role of culture and cultural concept in classroom practice. Some of the teachers in this study evidenced a need for a more clear

vision of disciplinary practice in the classroom, a foundation for successful practice. The collaborative development of a cohesive disciplinary plan between teachers with the help of multicultural and Montessori specialists would serve as a way to begin to build this foundation. This plan, according to the framework for a culturally relevant Montessori practice, would include the implementation of firm guidelines and the reinforcement of these guidelines with natural incentives and logical consequences. Both critical self-reflection and peer observation could be used in its implementation. From there, teachers would benefit from an understanding of how home culture and classroom culture are integrally related, and a framework for drawing families into the school and drawing from the wisdom of families. Finally, teachers in this study showed a need for tools to help them to build upon their ideals of social action and to incorporate opportunities for student agency and social progress into the classroom.

### **Future Research**

Due both to time limitations and a limited availability of public Montessori teachers to study, this study presents significant possibilities for future research. First, larger scale studies undertaking various public Montessori programs for study would clearly provide more opportunity to uncover and confirm the emergent trends in this study. The inclusion of a quantitative component of this study, gathering data about the practice of the tenets identified above using surveys, would further support the relevance of these findings. Second, the creation of teacher study groups based on classroom observations and interviews, as per Ladson-Billings (1994) would provide opportunities

for teachers to share their own insights into the process of developing a Culturally Relevant Montessori.

## **APPENDIX A: Interview Question Overview**

### **Interview 1: Biographical Data**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. Where have you taught? Describe these places.
3. Tell me about your decision to become a Montessori teacher. When did you make this decision? What factors in your personal life influenced your choice? What factors in your professional life?
4. What, if any, experience did you have within the field of education prior to becoming a Montessori teacher?
5. What experiences did you have outside of the field of education that you feel are pertinent to your decision to become a Montessori teacher?
6. What was your pre-service teacher preparation program like? This includes any preparatory courses taken prior to entering the classroom. Please talk about any University based preparation first.
7. What things were most valuable to you at this stage of your preparation? What things have you found valuable in the field?
8. Now lets discuss your Montessori training. Where did you do your coursework? How would you describe this experience?
9. What things were most valuable to you during your training? What things that you learned at this time do you now find to be of the most value?
10. What, if any, additional courses have you taken to receive/maintain your state certification?

11. Which of these courses has been most meaningful to you?
12. What, if any, areas of weakness do you see in your preparatory coursework. What do you feel would have benefited you but was not offered or not fully covered?

#### Interview 2: Praxis-Oriented Data

13. I'd like to gather a little more biographical data. Can you briefly talk about your own background including your upbringing and your family?
14. What, if anything, drew you to public school in particular?
15. In what ways do you see yourself as a successful teacher?
16. What are your major challenges as an educator?
17. How do you define your role in the education of children? The children's role?
18. What do you see as the ultimate goal of education?
19. What do you see as the central tenets of Montessori?
20. In what ways are you able to adhere to these tenets in your practice?
21. What, if any, obstacles do you face as you work to adhere to these tenets in your practice?
22. What do you know about Multicultural Education?
23. In what, if any, ways are you able to integrate these concepts into your practice as a Montessori teacher?
24. In what ways do you meet the culturally diverse needs of your students?
25. How do these practices relate to the Montessori paradigm?
26. How do they relate to your understanding of Multicultural Education?
27. In what ways do you incorporate children's cultural identities into your classroom?

### Interview 3: Follow-Up Interview

This interview will be used to clarify processes observed in classroom praxis. Questions will be prepared on a case-by-case basis.

\*These questions may not all be asked in a given interview.

## APPENDIX B: CODES

### DO-Education as a process of drawing out knowledge

- FG-firm guidelines exist and are reinforced
- RS-respect for students is apparent
- CP-teachers practice a pedagogy of caring
- CL-cooperative learning is implemented
- DI-differentiated instruction is implemented
- RC-learning is situated in real-life contexts
- OL-observation and listening to children are integral to praxis
- WC-whole child is considered in praxis
- IM-intrinsic motivation is fostered/ evidenced
- ER-external rewards are used

### ID-Identity Development is a part of classroom praxis

- CI-cultural identity is valued and integrated into the classroom
- II-individual identity is valued and integrated into the classroom
- FI-Independence is fostered
- FR-Freedom with responsibility is evident
- CC-cross curricular connections are made
- PK-Prior knowledge is called upon
- TI-task initiation is evident
- SP-pacing is student driven
- PE-parent education and advice are implemented
- PH-parents are asked for advice and input, are honored and respected
- TC-teacher exhibits awareness and understanding of own cultural self

### UG-Ultimate goal of education

- RC-responsible citizenship
- WP-world peace
- SC-social change
- CB-community building
- PP-parent participation in classroom/ education of child
- TP-teacher participation in student's life
- IC-intercultural understanding
- CE-care for the environment
- KC-knowledge construction is studied in class
- CS-teacher critique of system

PC-Preparatory coursework

AC-Additional coursework

VC-valuable coursework

UC-useless coursework



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