The Critical Montessori Model: Supporting the BIPOC Community Through Montessori Research and Practice

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Abstract: Despite an increase in race-related Montessori research over the past decade, the Montessori community lacks a unified framework to examine the Montessori Method and its philosophy through a critical racial lens. Without explicit discussions or universal training about race and whiteness, the Montessori Method can be interpreted through a color-blind lens unless scholars and practitioners explicitly use a critical racial perspective. This paper proposes the Critical Montessori Model (CMM), which centers high-fidelity Montessori practice—including the Montessori materials, child development, respect for and relationships with children, and observation as a learning tool—encompassed by critical race theory, as a way for researchers and practitioners to interpret the Montessori Method. This theoretical model critiques systems of whiteness and instead proposes centering the lived experiences and knowledge of the BIPOC community, drawing from theories such as culturally relevant/sustaining pedagogy and community cultural wealth (CCW). The hope is that this model will be the start of calibration among critical Montessori research to unify Montessori practitioners in their interpretations of Montessori education and the possibilities it provides for anti-racist education that centers Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). The paper ends with recommendations for future research using the CMM as a framework and calls for more BIPOC voices to be highlighted in the Montessori research community.

The Montessori Method, a progressive, child-centered model of education, has been practiced since the early 1900s, when Maria Montessori opened her first school in Rome. Montessori was a physician who was asked to work with a group of poor children in San Lorenzo, Rome. Montessori was a supporter of peace education, developing her method through observation of the children she was tasked to support. Her method spread quickly as educators and communities learned about its focus on supporting and teaching children to be independent and self-sufficient while following their natural trajectory of growth and development. Roughly 16,000 Montessori schools operate worldwide in more than 140 countries (Debs et al., 2022), with more than 3,000 Montessori schools in the United States, 570 of those U.S. schools being public (National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, 2022). Despite the popularity of the method, it is not trademarked, which therefore leads to a variety of ways in which Montessori education is practiced and interpreted (Debs et al., 2022). Although Montessori education has a reputation in the United States of being aimed at White, wealthy families, various Montessori leaders have recently created more opportunities and pathways to equity through sponsorship and support of the Association Montessori Internationale and the American Montessori Society. Such pathways include ongoing research; development of anti-bias, anti-racist courses for students; and professional development centering justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

In the Montessori research community, studies have attempted to establish what it means to practice high-fidelity Montessori education, ascertain which materials are essential, and define specifically what makes a classroom Montessori-based (Lillard & Heise, 2016; Murray et al., 2019). In a census study about Montessori schools, many schools' policies agreed on the following core principles of Montessori implementation: supporting Montessori philosophy, mixed-age groups, Montessori-trained teachers, Montessori materials, students' freedom of choice, and uninterrupted work time (Debs et al., 2022). Montessori research has also addressed topics such as racial diversity in public schools; anti-bias, anti-racist teaching in schools; and racial disproportionality in disciplinary actions (Brown & Steele, 2015; Canzoneri-Golden & King, 2020; Debs, 2019).

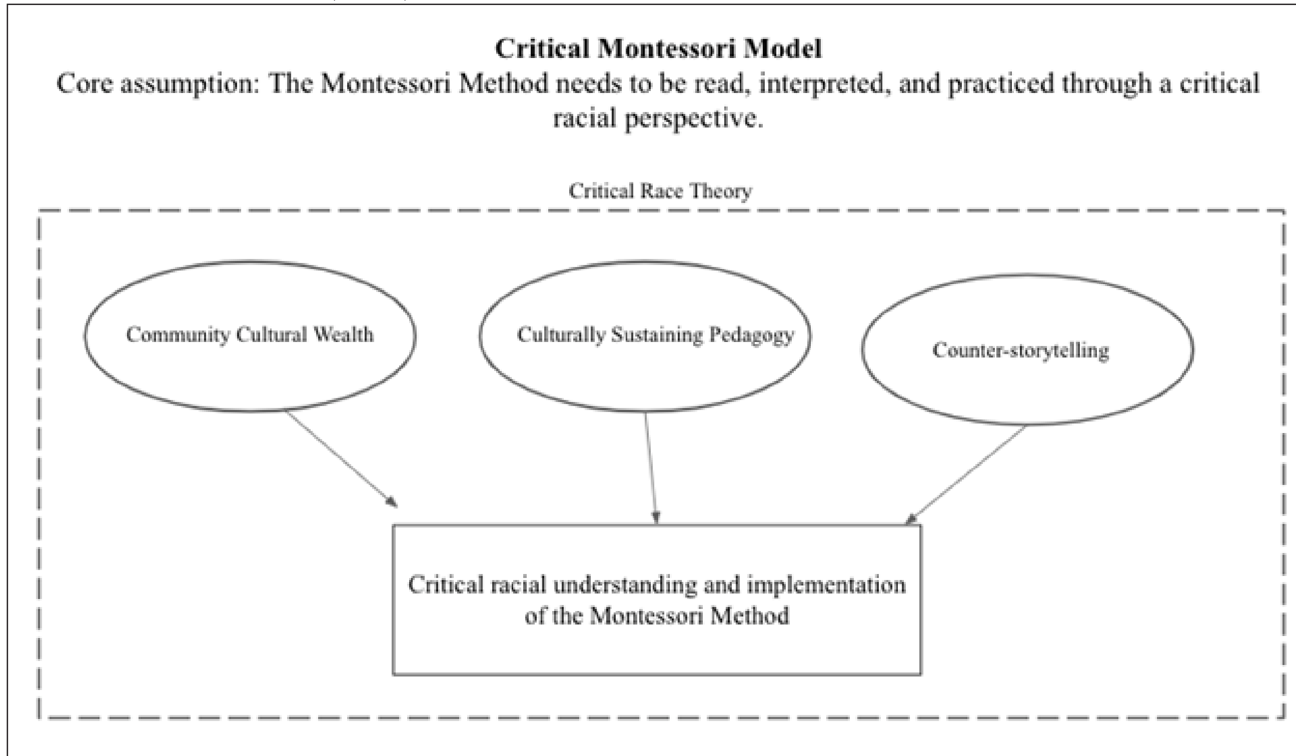
While the Montessori research community continues to expand its scope of research, a limited number of studies focus on BIPOC Montessori educators. With an estimate of more than 257,000 BIPOC Montessori educators currently in the field in the United States, there is a wealth of experiences from which to learn (Zippia, 2024). BIPOC Montessori educators historically have used the method to support their communities of color, including communities whose members are less wealthy (Debs, 2019). We know BIPOC Montessori educators have successfully used Montessori principles to support their communities and sustain their cultures (Debs, 2019), but existing Montessori research lacks a focus on BIPOC Montessori educators' strengths and teaching approaches. With an increase in public Montessori schools in the United States, some research showing that BIPOC Montessori educators have lasting impacts on BIPOC students (Lillard et al., 2023), and 55% of public Montessori school students being BIPOC (Debs, 2016), more studies are required to better understand BIPOC Montessori educators' experiences, specifically in public Montessori schools. Such research requires a focus on educators' successful practices and strengths, as well as a critical racial lens through which to view Montessori education to ensure it is implemented critically, and reflects and builds on the experiences of BIPOC educators and students.

I propose a framework, the Critical Montessori Model (CMM), which I've created for Montessori research and practice. The CMM centers BIPOC students and educators, values their perspectives, views their experiences as strengths, and describes how to implement Montessori practice in a critical racial way. The CMM is a model for interpreting and practicing Montessori methods. Framed by critical race theory (Bell, 1993) and critiques of White epistemologies (Leonardo, 2009), the CMM[1] is a way for the Montessori community to view BIPOC students and educators in such a way that values their strengths, assets, and lived experiences. The model explicitly centers race and the racialized experiences of BIPOC students, educators, and their communities, and thus disrupts the White epistemological assumptions of color blindness and individualism (Leonardo, 2009) within current Montessori methods. My background as an Asian American Montessori educator has led me to the work of introducing critical theory as a lens through which to interpret the Montessori Method's philosophy and practice.

This paper is an introduction to the CMM, its elements, and how to use those elements with Montessori

[1] Appendix 1 gives an overview of the acronyms and theories used in this paper.

Figure 1
The Critical Montessori Model (CMM)



education as the focus. I present an overview of whiteness in U.S. education and contextualize this discussion around the assumptions of White epistemologies in the Montessori Method. I discuss critical race theory and how it forefronts the experiential knowledge of BIPOC community members. I then discuss how other critical theories (community cultural wealth, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and counter-storytelling) extend critical race theory into classroom practice. These theories applied in the classroom could help educators and teacher trainers interpret and practice the Montessori Method in critical and identity-affirming ways, de-centering whiteness as the norm and centering the BIPOC experience. I conclude with recommendations for how the Montessori community can use the CMM to interpret the Montessori Method.

What Is the Critical Montessori Model?

I examine and confront the ideological structures that provide a strong foundation for the method but also constrain it in certain aspects. The CMM (see Figure 1) includes important Montessori principles, such as the materials, shared language and understanding of child development; the use and purpose of observation; and the relationships between adults and children. The shared language and understanding of child development is, ideologically, what distinguishes the Montessori Method from other alternative or holistic methods. Montessori educators use a distinctly Montessori lens to view child and student development.

The CMM brings together a variety of theories and strategies to uplift BIPOC students' and educators' identities. None of these theories individually encompasses the entire Montessori experience. Because the Montessori Method is comprised of a combination of tangible materials and lessons plus philosophy and perspective, and exists in white supremacist structures in the United States, the CMM is necessary to address teaching methods, guide educator perspectives and interpretations of their students' experiences, and uplift BIPOC identities. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) has the following key features: valuing community languages and ways of being; schools being accountable to the community; curricula that connect to cultural and linguistic histories; and sustaining cultural and linguistic practices while providing access to the dominant culture (Paris & Alim, 2017). Whereas CSP encourages educators to value students' ways of being and experiences, the community cultural wealth (CCW) framework through its lens offers educators guidance on precisely *how* to identify their own and their students' strengths. Additionally, both aforementioned theories support, yet do not explicitly address, counter-

storytelling. Counter-storytelling is a powerful and necessary tool to combat dominant (White) narratives, and must be emphasized as significant so as not to get lost in the teaching strategies and lenses of CSP and CCW. As critical race theory assumes whiteness as the standard, or norm, CSP and CCW frameworks help provide ways to resist centering whiteness by centering BIPOC community members. Counter-storytelling also gives a groundwork from which to examine how racism pervades education (Canzoneri-Golden & King, 2023).

Although the aforementioned frameworks could be used individually to interpret Montessori education, they do not fully encompass all aspects of Montessori principles. Research shows that even with culturally relevant and anti-bias, anti-racist practices intentionally focused on equity training, non-Black teachers still hold deficit perspectives about their BIPOC students (Canzoneri-Golden & King, 2020). Canzoneri-Golden and King (2023) offered two approaches (culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-bias/anti-racist practices) to support BIPOC students in the Montessori classroom. The CMM uses various theories, including culturally relevant pedagogy, to establish a new framework altogether. Again, an emphasis on child development and a shared understanding of philosophy are what distinguish Montessori education—and thus the CMM—from current emergent educational frameworks and theories. I propose a theoretical model to change the way Montessori educators look at the Montessori Method in such a way that centers the voices and experiences of BIPOC community members while acknowledging Montessori philosophy. The core assumption of the CMM is that the Montessori Method needs to be read, interpreted, and practiced through a critical racial perspective. Such implementation considers the racial power structures and white supremacy BIPOC community members face (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

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

Leonardo (2009) described racial privilege as the idea that White individuals are advantaged simply by being racially constructed as White. White individuals, or individuals who possess aspects of whiteness—through culture, language, hair texture, and more—benefit from racial privilege whether or not they are aware of it and despite any attempts to distance themselves from whiteness (Leonardo, 2009). The perpetuation of White racial privilege and systems of white supremacy appears in multiple ways, one being color blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2009). Color blindness appears in the Montessori community through the curriculum taught during Montessori teacher training, the lack of representation of BIPOC Montessori educators' and students' voices, and demographics of the public Montessori community dictating whose voices are represented. Because critical race theory assumes whiteness is the dominant standard, a lack of explicit anti-racism means racism is automatically embedded into Montessori training and philosophy as it is interpreted in the United States. Racial inequality is present in American infrastructure, through policies, laws, practices, cultural norms, and narratives (Archer, 2022). For example, my Montessori training taught that a normalized student works quietly and independently. However, this concept results in the othering of students who do not work quietly or independently due to personality or cultural background.

The structural nature of racism in the United States is inescapable for the education system (Leonardo, 2009), pervading Montessori and conventional schools. Current Montessori programs assume White epistemologies that normalize White ways of knowing (racial knowledge). These programs lack consistent anti-racist practices, including honoring the lived experiences and racial knowledge of the BIPOC community (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Framed by White epistemologies, Montessori training, accreditation programs, and schools continue to function in a historically White and racist education system.

Okun (2021) described characteristics of white supremacy, including individualism, the idea that there is only one right way, objectivity, worship of the written word, and more. For example, a characteristic of white supremacy is worship of the written word. As an antidote to this characteristic, training centers could consider storytelling, art, or other forms of demonstrating knowledge instead of written theoretical essays. Rather than focus on one right way to use a material, educators might open up to the idea that a child use a material in a different way from what they were shown. This is a particular challenge teachers face, in attempts to distinguish between purposeful exploration and fantasy play. But were teachers to acknowledge that assuming "one right way" is a characteristic of white supremacy, they might engage in more critical conversations about exploring multiple ways to use a material. Additionally, the emphasis on objective observation in Montessori training assumes there is such a thing as objectivity, and thus, an ultimate truth. To counter this, the Montessori

community could acknowledge that all individuals have different lived experiences and realities, so there is no such thing as objectivity.

If Montessori philosophy centralized race, it could address hierarchical and oppressive systems, at the same time uplifting students' racial identities (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Because of the lack of explicit centering of race in Montessori education, Montessori spaces are not always culturally inclusive of BIPOC community members and require active work to become inclusive spaces.

Critical Race Theory and Montessori Education

To disrupt the pervasiveness of whiteness in education, the CMM is grounded in critical race theory, which is based on the following tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007; Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Omi & Winant, 2014): storytelling and experiential knowledge of oppression to uplift the lived experiences of minoritized groups; racism as normal and permanent, and whiteness as property; a critique of the slow process of civil rights; interest convergence; a strong commitment to social justice; and that minoritized groups are racialized differently in ways that all benefit whiteness.

Bell's (1993) work around the permanent nature of racism asserts that racism is not only endemic to the United States, but is so pervasive and permeates so much of U.S. society that it is permanent. Using critical race theory, I assume racism is built into U.S. society and thus the structures of Montessori education in the United States. This permanence of racism in society presents itself in the Montessori community, through teaching practices and training centers. This means racism appears in teaching practices, classrooms, and training centers around the United States *because* racism is inherent in the ways institutions function. The mere fact that Montessori education is practiced in the United States implies that, as racism permeates U.S. structures and perpetuates racial inequality, it also permeates Montessori structures and practices. Without an explicit commitment to and discussion of anti-racism in the Montessori community, it, as the United States, will remain inherently racist.

Bell (1993) maintains that interest convergence is how and why change occurs for the BIPOC community, meaning the BIPOC community does not progress and has not historically progressed unless the White community also benefited. In the context of the Montessori community, this means the only way progress would occur for BIPOC community members were if White individuals also benefited. The critique of liberalism is a critique of racial progress—a critique which maintains that change in the racial constructs in the United States will happen slowly and over time. By critiquing liberalism as a tenet of critical race theory, critical race theorists push for radical and monumental changes (Ladson-Billings, 1998). I interpret the critique of liberalism as a critique of Montessori classrooms' small, surface-level actions, such as making sure art and books are representative of all students. Although representation is important, it is not enough to stop there. Only explicit anti-racist teaching can benefit BIPOC Montessori educators and students; anything else is insufficient and performative.

Storytelling and counter-storytelling emphasize the importance of lived experiences as knowledge. Counter-storytelling is a method that centers stories of those historically oppressed due to racialization and racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Counter-storytelling and experiential knowledge mean examining the experiences and practices of BIPOC Montessori educators, and considering their experiences to be knowledge.

Finally, Harris's (1993) work describes whiteness as property. Those who "possess" whiteness benefit from the way U.S. society is structured (Harris, 1993). Historically, individuals benefiting from White racial privilege received benefits in intangible property such as status, customs, or respect for their values (Harris, 1993). Whiteness eventually became, and still is today, the norm around which everything else was measured. In a Montessori context, whiteness as property appears through whiteness as the norm, whereas anything non-White (language, customs, art, belief systems) is a "cultural" item, photo, or object. Thus, Montessori training centers whiteness, around which other "cultural" concepts are added.

Forms of systemic racism vary. BIPOC community members experience racism differently based on their various racializations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007). Critical race theory allows me to acknowledge anti-Blackness and how it is woven into U.S. society.[2] Bell

[2] Anti-Blackness is a unique form of racism; the anti-Blackness embedded in U.S. culture, society, and systems functions to protect and amplify whiteness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Beneath whiteness is an anti-Black sentiment that causes rifts not only between the White and BIPOC community, but also serves to divide racial groups within the BIPOC community (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Even when it appears the United States is making racial progress, interests and rights of Black individuals are always subject to destruction (Bell, 1993). Bell (1993) described the anti-Black racism in the United States as a dynamic that will never disappear, asserting that even small events that look

(1993) describes the unique racism Black individuals face in the United States, despite the semblance of racial progress. There are differences in how individuals of color experience racism[3] (Delgado & Stefancic, 2007), but for the purposes of this conversation I examine White and non-White students. Additionally, critical race theory allows me to prioritize the BIPOC experience and acknowledge that whiteness is considered the standard, or norm, of practice in the education community.

Normalization Through the Lens of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory provides a foundation to examine the aspects of race and power included—or excluded—in the Montessori Method. It affects the way I view and interpret Montessori theory and the Method. For example, "normalization" is a term used in the Montessori community to refer to a child who is peaceful and balanced. Normalization occurs once a child is able to work uninterrupted, forms habits such as concentration and focus, and understands how to function in the classroom and with peers (understanding the norms and ways of being in class). Normalization makes no mention of race or societal structures. As I consider normalization through a critical racial lens, I am left with questions: *How do whiteness and racism present in the classroom and in children's relationships? Can children normalize if their classroom or school mimics racist structures? What does normalization look like if we consider oppressive systems that inevitably show up in the classroom?* For example, when examining discipline disproportionality, Montessori schools still encounter racially disproportionate discipline outcomes (Brown & Steele, 2015). Canzoneri-Golden and King (2020) observed that the adultification of Black children is one of the ways educators contribute to bias and discipline disparities. Rather than question what children are doing wrong, a critical racial lens pushes us to question what systems and structures are in place that affect the children. For example, if Black students are frequently being corrected in the classroom, they are getting the same message that what they are doing, their way of being, *they* are wrong outside the classroom. If educators interpret normalization through a dominant (White) lens, they might expect a student to act, talk, or think in a particular way. Rather than giving the student an opportunity to embody themselves, this instead creates an archetype for the child to live up to. If we question normalization and interpret it through a CMM lens, we might define it as a child who is interested in working, enjoys time at school, and feels *safe* in the community. No mention of safety appears in Montessori's definition of normalization, but we cannot expect children to find joy in work and in their schools if they do not feel physically or psychologically safe (Heidelburg et al., 2022). Canzoneri-Golden and King (2020) gave multiple examples of Black students in particular who were reprimanded or responded to differently than were their White peers. This often led to confusion on the part of students, and inequities in the ways teachers responded to and interpreted behavior. We cannot expect children to feel physically or psychologically safe when they are reprimanded and treated differently than their peers are due to race. Heidelburg et al. (2022) found that racial discipline disproportionality is a common experience for Black students, and that schools must analyze their systems, policies, and practices to ensure psychologically safe environments and avoid perpetuating the oppression of BIPOC, specifically Black, students. Because U.S. systems of whiteness create an inequitable environment for BIPOC community members, a critical Montessori educator must actively pay attention to how they interact with, interpret the behavior of, and respond to behaviors from students. These considerations surely affect the children's ability to normalize, as racism will affect the way they function in the classroom, at school in general, or outside of school. Additionally, with the interpretation of normalization including a feeling of safety, the path toward normalization is not only about the child's relationship with work, but also about the climate in the

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like progress will function to maintain white dominance. BlackCrit is a theoretical framework that was born out of critical race theory to center anti-Blackness (Dumas & Ross, 2016). Bell's (1993) work addressed the ongoing oppression specifically directed toward Black individuals. He writes, "Modern discrimination is…not practiced indiscriminately…Black people, then, are caught in a double bind…even when nonracist practices might bring a benefit, whites may rely on discrimination against blacks as a unifying factor" (Bell, 1993).

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

classroom and school. Banks and Maixner (2016) found that a broader, institutional approach is necessary when integrating social justice into Montessori schools, and the same approach applies when examining normalization.

The above example demonstrates how to ask critical racial questions about Montessori education. Someone not using critical race theory does not consider racial structures and how they appear in classrooms and schools. Additionally, the Montessori Method was developed internationally. Maria Montessori did not explicitly consider American racist structures or how racist structures affect BIPOC community members. Without a critical racial lens, Montessori theory is left to be, and often is, interpreted through a lens of whiteness, which serves as the "standard" in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). The Montessori Method does not center race, thus making color blindness the norm. Additionally, with a strong emphasis on individualized lessons and individual development, Montessori practice does not frequently examine systems and structures, whereas a critical racial lens does.

Montessori educators are doing critical racial work in the United States, and the Montessori Method takes a stance akin to the liberalism critiqued by critical race theory. Many Montessori teachers include art and books that represent their students. This is helpful to the students in the classroom, but it does not explicitly teach anti-racism. The example of normalization demonstrates how significantly a critical racial lens affects the interpretation of Montessori theory. Emphasizing counter-storytelling means the CMM must center the voices of BIPOC educators and students to counter dominant White narratives about how BIPOC students and educators experience and embody Montessori philosophy.

Redefining Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The core assumption of CMM is that the Montessori Method must be practiced with a critical racial understanding and implementation of the Montessori Method, with an overarching framework of critical race theory, and employs the following theoretical elements: community cultural wealth (CCW) to support BIPOC Montessori students' and educators' racial identities, culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) to value student knowledge and their racial identities, and a specific emphasis on counter-storytelling.

When considering critical race theory in education, Ladson-Billings (1998) describes the relationship between the two by using five different examples: curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. The CMM addresses curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Critical race theory views curriculum as an artifact maintained to preserve white supremacy, maintaining that current instructional practices are race-neutral and assume Black students are deficient (Ladson-Billings, 1998). By using the CMM, educators can redefine what the curriculum is and looks like.

A Critical Racial Understanding and Implementation of the Montessori Method

A thorough understanding and implementation of the Montessori Method is crucial to the CMM. Lillard (2019) stresses the importance of examining authentic Montessori practices to ensure measurable standards are used to compare schools and practices. Maria Montessori conceptualized the method as an interconnected system between the environment, the adult, and the child (Lillard, 2019). Below, I describe four elements I identify as essential for authentic Montessori practice: (a) Montessori materials, (b) an understanding of child development, (c) observation as a learning tool, and (d) respect for and relationships with children. These four elements reflect this interconnected system between environment, adult, and child. Montessori materials reflect the environment, understanding of child development reflects what the adult must consider and know, and observation as a learning tool reflects how adults identify children's interests and abilities. Respect for and relationships with children are both woven in through the care taken to create a child-centered environment, the effort adults make to understand and follow child development, and how adults use their observations to follow children's interests and abilities.

Montessori Materials

The Montessori materials serve as the curriculum. Lillard's (2011) study described the various materials in Montessori classrooms that were most impactful for children's development and academic growth when used appropriately. Among the many Montessori training organizations around the world, a few stand out as major authorities on Montessori education. One such organization is the Association Montessori International (AMI), whose training includes the list of materials from Lillard's (2011) previous research.

Acquiring and maintaining a complete set of Montessori materials depends on a school's budget and resources. The materials are as essential to the curriculum

as textbooks, worksheets, and paper are in a conventional school. There are so few Montessori material-making companies that they have monopolies on the Montessori materials, as only some companies are approved by organizations such as AMI. If a school wants AMI-approved materials, they must purchase them from the required company or build the materials themselves, an unrealistic task for public school teachers often left to their own devices to prepare and plan for classrooms (Walker, 2019). Additionally, materials such as three-part cards, cultural lessons, and historical timelines often center European perspectives. To use a CMM lens to prepare the classroom environment, educators could make their own materials or order from companies that center non-European perspectives, material-making companies could use alternate perspectives when making the materials, and Montessori trainers could encourage teachers in training to consider the biases that Eurocentric materials bring into the classroom.

Historically, BIPOC students have been denied access to wealth and are more subjected to inequity in education (Ladson-Billings, 2006). As such, even students in Montessori schools are subjected to this inequity, or, as Ladson-Billings calls it, "education debt" (2006). Education debt is comprised of historical debt (historical inequities in BIPOC access to public education), economic debt (funding disparities between schools serving predominantly White students and BIPOC students), sociopolitical debt (exclusion of BIPOC community members from the legislative process), and moral debt (the identification of BIPOC community members as threats to society) (Ladson-Billings, 2006). There is yet to be any research demonstrating that public Montessori schools are subject to less education debt than public conventional schools.

Understanding Child Development

The Montessori Method requires the adult to have a thorough knowledge of child development, to create spaces (tangible and intangible) for children to develop naturally. Montessori teachers use their knowledge of child development to determine where children are in their development (academic, physical, social, etc.) and which content they are ready for.

Child development is strongly connected to Montessori materials. Montessori teachers use their knowledge of child development to create individualized learning plans for students. Educators consider children's developmental readiness to know how and when to introduce particular lessons. Interpreting child development through the CMM means expanding the view of a child's life experience and asking questions directly related to their racialized experience in society: *How does the world view and racialize that child? How does racism affect that child's family? How does that then affect that child's pace of development?* In addition to academic, physical, and social development, children are developing personalities and identities. *How does a child's racial identity affect the development of their personality and identity?* These are a few examples of questions to ask when using the CMM.

Structurally, whiteness also plays a role in how public Montessori educators interpret their child development training. Whiteness is used to set educational goals and objectives (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). Assessments set by school districts prioritize particular aspects of child development, such as social and emotional learning (SEL). Many SEL objectives center whiteness and hold a deficit narrative of BIPOC youth (Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). When districts and states set SEL objectives, educators must then interpret their training through the funnel of predetermined goals that do not include a critical awareness of BIPOC students' experiences and identities. Psychologists have found strong ethnic and racial identity are related to emotional well-being, so whiteness and structural racism negate the benefits of a strong ethnic and racial identity for BIPOC students (Jagers et al., 2018; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). Current research about SEL calls for an awareness of whiteness, and an integration of culturally responsive teaching in setting and assessing SEL standards (Jagers et al., 2018; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020). The data on SEL can be extended to child development. Critical race theory demands an awareness of whiteness and structural racism, and how they impact the ways Montessori educators interpret and assess child development.

Observation as a Learning Tool

The third aspect, observation as a learning tool, can be used in any setting. Montessori educators must observe children, in an attempt to understand their personalities, interests, and to see what they can and will do when given an appropriate amount of freedom. Montessori training touts observation as an objective tool. However, lived experiences affect one's ontology, or perceptions on reality or being. Researchers found that what teachers notice is shaped by racist systems in the United States (Louie et al., 2021). A math teacher who organizes work around the racial achievement gap

in the effort to close it frames Black, Indigenous, and Latino students as lacking, and sets White students' achievements as the standard (Louie et al., 2021). National and local standards and assessments have structural impacts on what teachers notice (Louie et al., 2021). Because lived experiences shape how people understand and view the world, objective observation is impossible (Crenshaw, 2011). The observer must also be aware of how their lived experiences affect what they observe and how they interpret their observations. What one educator sees as a problem or challenge, another educator might see as a strength or an adaptive behavior. Montessori teachers should always incorporate critical self-reflection into their observation practices to help reveal and address racial or other forms of biases in their observations.

Respect for and Relationships with Children

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

Using Community Cultural Wealth to Support BIPOC Educators' and Students' Lived Experiences

Another element of the CMM is use of CCW to support BIPOC Montessori students' and educators' racialized real-life experiences. In Montessori philosophy, the term "the prepared adult" refers to the professional, scientific, and spiritual preparation required of the adult before working with children (Bettmann, 2013). Professional preparation refers to characteristics generally required of teachers, such as communication, attendance and punctuality, and flexibility (Bettmann, 2013). Scientific preparation refers to knowledge of child development, setup of an appropriate Montessori space, and how to practice observation (Bettmann, 2013). Spiritual preparation refers to personality characteristics such as empathy and sensitivity, but also includes understanding that children have something to teach adults (Bettmann, 2013). The role of the adult is to support children and respond to mistakes with humility and flexibility, and refrain from giving unnecessary help (Bettmann, 2013). Being a prepared adult includes having an understanding of one's personal identity and strengths, and being able to notice children's strengths and abilities that are not acknowledged by dominant White culture (Louie et al., 2021; Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) CCW framework emphasizes how and why valuing lived experiences is a crucial element of the CMM, and how to use CCW to center BIPOC students. CCW brings to light BIPOC communities' cultural wealth and resists dominant White narratives of what is considered valuable knowledge (Yosso, 2005). It is an active way to resist power dynamics that disempower BIPOC communities.

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework counteracts deficit thinking in U.S. schools and interrupts the concept of the White middle class being the standard against which other individuals and communities are judged. Yosso (2005) highlights race and its role in schooling, as school policies often view racial differences as "cultural differences'' and interpret culture in various ways. Yosso (2005) builds off of Bourdieu's work to describe a term called "cultural wealth." Cultural wealth, or capital, "refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society...The dominant groups within society are able to maintain power [by using] these forms of capital for social mobility" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). By limiting what is considered valuable, such as particular knowledge or skills, dominant (White) groups limit BIPOC community members' access to specific forms of knowledge or capital (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Thus, using a CCW lens not only empowers BIPOC community members but also disrupts conventional ways of interpreting knowledge. By using a critical racial framework, thus acknowledging that cultural wealth exists, BIPOC communities' cultures, strengths, and skills are empowered rather than discouraged or devalued. Below, I describe how critical Montessori educators can use the six forms of CCW to support BIPOC students and educators. I conclude

with a seventh form of capital: spiritual capital, which is specifically related to Black families' cultural wealth (Iruka et al., 2024).

Aspirational Capital

Students and educators with aspirational capital maintain a sense of hope and possibility despite the systems that oppress them (Yosso, 2005). Being aware of aspirational capital means being aware also of systemic barriers and one's place in them. A BIPOC educator who is aware of their aspirational capital might face hostile racial climates in the school but still maintain hope for their work with the students. For example, although the Chicana/o community has low educational outcomes as compared to other groups in the United States, its community members maintain a sense of high aspirations and possibility for their children (Yosso, 2005).

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital refers not only to the skills of speaking another language entirely, but also to speaking in more than one style (Yosso, 2005). BIPOC students who possess linguistic capital have multiple communication and language skills, and use these skills in their daily lives, such as multilingual youth who often translate for their parents (Yosso, 2005). Acknowledging linguistic capital means encouraging BIPOC Montessori educators possessing linguistic capital to use it in varying ways, using sources other than books or readings to teach content. Linguistic capital also means having intangible social skills such as cross-cultural awareness (Yosso, 2005). An educator could use this cross-cultural awareness and social skills to inform how they assess and teach social skills (Grace and Courtesy lessons in the Montessori community). For example, a student's culture may give them a host of skills, such as how to tell stories with attention to detail or specific focus on volume and rhythm, or prepared them to use various language styles to communicate with various audiences (Yosso, 2005). To address social skills, a teacher could give a Grace and Courtesy lesson about different ways people in various cultures greet one another—some with handshakes, others with a nod, and still others with a wave or other form of communication. In the Montessori Elementary classroom, students often write plays, so a Montessori educator valuing linguistic capital might encourage BIPOC students to incorporate their linguistic abilities and differences into a class play. By using CCW to inform how to interpret and practice Montessori education, educators can both value and actively support BIPOC educators' and students' forms of linguistic knowledge.

Familial Capital

Familial capital encompasses the cultural knowledge nurtured among families and communities (Yosso, 2005). An educator who knows about or possesses familial capital understands a student's home life affects how that student connects with others. Rather than face a challenge alone, a student with familial capital might be more likely to engage others to take on problems with them and collaborate to find solutions. Valuing familial capital also means extending one's understanding of family to a wider community. Delgado Bernal (2001) writes about pedagogies of the home, an example of familial capital in which students do specific kinds of learning in their homes and communities. In a primary Montessori classroom environment, where students ages 3 through 6 engage primarily in individual work, possessing or being aware of familial capital can help educators understand why some children may be drawn to others and spend less time working independently. They can support partner or group work while also offering independent lessons and work time, rather than trying to disrupt the student's tendencies or desires. Many Montessori schools do student home visits, especially for younger grades. A critical Montessori educator could interpret what they see and learn during a home visit as a set of assets a student and their family possess, using the home visit to acknowledge the student's lived experience and understand that they are bringing from home into the classroom their personal values, such as strong dedication to community (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Social Capital

Social capital expands on familial capital, referring to social networks and community resources. Social capital reflects the BIPOC educator's lived experience more so than the BIPOC student's lived experience. An educator familiar with social capital knows students have communities and networks outside the school and can encourage students to utilize these networks. For example, community-based networks can support individuals in attaining legal support, health care, and even further education (Yosso, 2005). A school utilizing the CMM as a lens for practice might invite such community-based networks to speak at or host events, or provide outreach to families. BIPOC Montessori educators with social capital can also use their networks

to create opportunities for students, simultaneously modeling the benefits of social capital.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital is the set of skills acquired while navigating through systems and social institutions that do not center BIPOC community members (Yosso, 2005). Educators with navigational capital can identify it in their students as knowledge, and even build on it to help students navigate schools and other systems such as the job market. An educator could support navigational capital by making students aware of the skills necessary to maneuver unsupportive or hostile social institutions. In the Montessori primary grades, this could be through a Grace and Courtesy (social skills) lesson about how to stand up for oneself or one another. In the Montessori Elementary and Middle grades, raising awareness around navigational capital could take place through true stories and critical conversations. I have seen BIPOC Montessori educators use their navigational capital in their jobs at school. A BIPOC Montessori educator possessing navigational capital is empowered to participate in the Montessori community while acknowledging how whiteness perpetuates hostile racial climates in schools. A Montessori school using the CMM could have programs or connections to community resources, or family information sessions that empower BIPOC students and families to navigate racist systems that serve to exclude them from certain opportunities. Resilience is recognized as a set of resources and cultural strategies to support individuals, and schools can support resilience in their communities with stable, supportive systems and networks, such as community-based organizations (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is students' or teachers' knowledge and skills that others often interpret as oppositional behavior. An educator might demonstrate resistant capital by upholding various forms of cultural wealth or supporting BIPOC students' self-reliance and self-value in the racist, patriarchal structures they face (Yosso, 2005). In an elementary Montessori setting, where teachers share stories to help children know how to function in the world, an educator could create lessons around children's resistant capital, teaching to consciously talk about, identify, or defend one's cultural capital. A critical Montessori educator could share true stories about how different communities throughout history have rebelled against oppression, or study current events and how to use resistant capital to persist under adversity. A school that uses the CMM could support educators to integrate into their teaching critical racial conversations about identity and how to navigate this racist society, rather than teach anti-racist work as an "add-on" to the Montessori curriculum. This could mean giving educators specific planning time to research ways to resist oppression and how to share that in classrooms. A school that uses the CMM acknowledges that student behaviors deemed disruptive may not be problem behaviors but, instead, responses to inequality they are experiencing in and outside of the classroom; resistance can include different forms of intentional, oppositional behavior (Yosso, 2005).

Spiritual Capital

Spiritual capital refers to spirituality and religion, and the potential support they provide for BIPOC students and families (Iruka et al., 2024; Park et al., 2020); although not all BIPOC communities are religious or spiritual, Black adults in particular reported religion as an important part of their lives (Pew Research Center, 2016). Spirituality is a broad enough term to encompass both structured religious practices and institutions and less structured connections to a higher power (Iruka et al., 2024). Churches and religious communities have historically played a role in community resource-sharing as well as activism (Iruka et al., 2024). Spiritual capital, thus, includes the connections, skills, and resources that BIPOC community members have access to through their spiritual communities (Park et al., 2020). Spiritual capital intersects with most, if not all, of the above forms of capital, through supporting social and linguistic skills in spiritual practices to leaning on spiritual communities to use resistant capital (Park et al., 2020). Spiritual communities often support students' education through afterschool programs and tutoring, as well as providing additional education (language or religious instruction) (Park et al., 2020). Recognizing spiritual capital does not require Montessori educators to include spiritual or religious practices in their classrooms, but the awareness that students and families may have access to a strong spiritual community only adds to the assets-based perspective the CCW framework provides.

Being a prepared adult ready to work with children means understanding one's lived experience as a strength. An educator who can understand their own strengths and lived experiences can more easily observe those

strengths in children. Once a Montessori educator internalizes cultural competence and relevance, their role as a facilitator of learning strengthens in the student-centered Montessori environment (Brunold-Conesa, 2019). Educators must be aware of the multiple facets of their identities and experiences to support their students' varying capitals (Brown & Steele, 2015; Durden et al., 2015). Learning about cultural patterns of learning and behavior can help educators disrupt their constructions of racial discourse and introduce them to a different lens for framing student (and their own) strengths and abilities in the form of CCW (Nash & Miller, 2015). The forms of capital above often remain unacknowledged by dominant White culture, and even frowned upon. Educators who are cognizant of CCW can build on their own strengths and recognize the knowledge students and their families already possess, disrupting dominant White ideas of knowledge, centering their own lived experiences, and continuing the Montessori tradition of a strengths-based pedagogy.

Using Culturally Sustaining and Relevant Pedagogy to Value Educators' and Students' Community Cultural Wealth

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

CRP in Montessori Education

CRP emphasizes representation of student identities in curriculum and teaching methods that center students' experiences. It explicitly combats deficit thinking, instead acknowledging institutional racism, racialization, language discrimination, and skin color privilege (Hammond, 2015). The cost of not using CRP is high: students who are unable to connect with course content will not learn it, and perhaps experience a sense of frustration and inability to fully process content (Hammond, 2015). Hammond's work details the implications of considering culturally responsive teaching and its effects on the brain and learning (2015). Hammond describes five principles, or "brain rules," to understand the role of culture in learning (2015). The first is that the brain seeks to minimize threats and maximize opportunities to connect with others (Hammond, 2015). Students need to feel safe and happy to learn (Hammond, 2015). When students face microaggressions, their amygdala stays on alert, trying to detect other microaggressions and leading to "the unconscious safety-threat detection system" to engage, detracting from a focus on school content (Hammond, 2015, p. 47). The second principle is that positive relationships help the amygdala stay calm so other parts of the brain (the prefrontal cortex) can focus on higher order learning and thinking (Hammond, 2015). Third, culture guides how one processes information (Hammond, 2015). Learning is most effective if processed using common cultural learning aids specific to a student (Hammond, 2015). Fourth, attention drives learning. Culturally relevant methods (oral traditions, music, call and response) grab the learner's attention and actively engage them in the learning process (Hammond, 2015).

Another key principle is that new information must be paired with students' existing knowledge to make sense of new content (Hammond, 2015). Finally, the brain physically grows through challenges (Hammond, 2015). Creating independent learners while challenging students involves introducing them to relevant work involving problem-solving (Hammond, 2015). Without incorporating students' cultures and experiences into teaching, students' cognitive processing is inhibited (Hammond, 2015), thus limiting efficacy of the Montessori Method.

Montessori literature shows that public Montessori schools may be limited by the lack of diversity of teaching staff as well as cultural responsiveness of teacher education (D'Cruz, 2022; Debs & Brown, 2017). The Montessori Method naturally lends itself well to elements of CRP, such as culturally relevant art and true cultural stories, and the nature of a student-centered environment.

Despite the potential to smoothly combine Montessori education and CRP, there are no explicit teachings that all Montessori teachers learn to do so (D'Cruz, 2022). One way to support student identity development is through schools that move toward CRP and CSP (D'Cruz, 2022). Montessori training should also support and explicitly include CRP and CSP. Realistically implementing CSP might be challenging, so research is in process on how to do so (Doucet, 2019). Fostering cultural competency, supporting teachers' inner reflection and work, and identifying ways to sustain students' cultures and knowledge is an essential part of student-centered Montessori education (D'Cruz, 2022). Doucet (2019) outlines six ways to implement CSP in schools, including: increasing diversity knowledge; addressing diversity in its full capacity; promoting global perspectives; combating prejudice and discrimination; building classrooms as a community of trust; and involving families and communities in education.

As the term "diversity" implies a White-centered perspective in which non-White individuals are considered the "other," Doucet (2019) uses it to refer to a lack of knowledge of institutional racism and how it affects BIPOC students. The open-endedness of materials such as geography folders and cultural stories lends to increasing diversity knowledge through the curriculum in addition to acknowledging the role of intersectionality, thus addressing diversity in its full capacity and promoting global perspectives. It is the work of Montessori educators and teacher trainers to use such open-ended materials to intentionally address racism in their work with students.

Whereas the first three of Doucet's (2019) six concepts relate to increasing knowledge for and supporting BIPOC students, the final three pertain to the community an educator builds. Doucet's (2019) commitment for culturally sustaining practices expands the idea of representation. Students must be exposed not only to representation of themselves in books and art, but also must know how prejudice and discrimination operate, and how to recognize and discuss these issues. Doucet (2019) gives a nod to observation, by which the observer writes a description of what they see, as helpful practice for educators to familiarize themselves with their classroom dynamic. However, Doucet (2019) does not acknowledge the impossibility of objectivity in standard observation. A critical Montessori educator could review their observation notes and identify any biased or discriminatory comments, or use their notes to address harmful classroom dynamics and to actively support students' racial and ethnic identities. Building a classroom community of trust mimics social cohesion and relationship-building in Montessori philosophy (Doucet, 2019). Doucet suggests self-reflection as a way to build a warm classroom climate; a critical Montessori educator needs time to self-reflect and note what changes or learning might be necessary to support anti-racist teaching and a critical Montessori classroom that explicitly uplifts BIPOC students. Connecting with families also contributes to a strong, culturally sustaining classroom. Utilizing families' skills and knowledge to involve them in the school contributes to a culturally sustaining approach to schooling (Doucet, 2019). In a Montessori setting, educators might ask family members to help in repairing broken materials, connecting educators to community resources and knowledge, or giving their input as to which Grace and Courtesy lessons they deem necessary for their children.

The six commitments serve as examples of CSP and how the Montessori curriculum *must* make way for CSP in schools to counteract dominant, White-centered, deficit lenses and instead promote anti-racist teaching and school environments that support development of students' racial and ethnic identities. The role of CSP in the Critical Montessori Model (CMM) is to invite educators to prioritize culturally sustaining ways of interpreting and practicing the Montessori Method.

Using Counter-storytelling to Support BIPOCs' Lived Experiences

The final theory is counter-storytelling to support BIPOC students' and educators' lived experiences. Doucet suggests storytelling to help build trusting classroom communities (2019). Critical race theory takes storytelling a step further, emphasizing counter-stories, "stories of those people whose experiences are not often told…[tools] for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the…stories of racial privilege. Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) proposed gathering various forms of counter-stories: personal stories describing individual experiences with forms of racism in relation to larger systems (such as the education system), other people's stories revealing racism in larger systems, and composite stories drawing from various sources to convey racialized experiences of BIPOC community members.

Counter-stories can build community among BIPOC community members, challenge established dominant (White) systems accepted as the norm, show that there are a multitude of lived experiences, and illuminate reality by combining elements of existing and new stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). A critical Montessori school that emphasizes counter-storytelling can value experiences and stories of its BIPOC educators to reveal how racism exists and perpetuates itself in a school, striving to disrupt such racist practices and systems. Counter-stories build community among those most marginalized in society, challenge dominant narratives, show the realities of marginalized individuals, and demonstrate that these are not isolated incidents or experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Self-reflection is a part of implementing CSP. By providing time and space for self-reflection, a school could invite BIPOC educators to write or narrate their counter-stories. If, for example, a school were to invite BIPOC educators to share counter-stories, those stories might illuminate their commonalities, such as hostile racial climates or the additional, unpaid emotional labor often done by BIPOC educators (Kohli et al., 2019). With this information, a school would be better equipped to understand how to address such challenges that arise and are perpetuated by racist practices and systems. By providing a platform for such stories, schools can open up dialogue and begin to confront racist structures in their communities. The Montessori community would do well to create space for BIPOC Montessori educators' counter-stories, noting how and where racism appears in and disrupts schools and the wider community.

Counter-storytelling offers opportunities to center and understand BIPOC experiences in education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using counter-stories places importance on voices that historically have been silenced and oppressed—in this case, BIPOC educators and students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Gathering and sharing counter-stories that resist dominant (White) narratives thus reveal systems of whiteness and racism that plague the education system (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Future Directions for the Critical Montessori Model

The CMM has strong implications for scholars, training centers, and Montessori practitioners. Centering the BIPOC community's lived experiences redefines what is considered knowledge as well as which knowledge is considered valuable. The CMM's foundation of critical race theory requires schools, training centers, and other institutions to confront their roles in perpetuating white supremacy through racist systems and examine how they might disrupt those systems. The CMM does not provide explicit answers but instead offers a lens through which to view and understand Montessori education in a way that specifically supports BIPOC community members and questions white supremacy, rather than giving into whiteness as the norm. The CMM's focus on community cultural wealth (CCW) encourages Montessori scholars and educators to broaden the already assets-based Method to include the various ways BIPOC students and families show their strengths and knowledge. This will not only open up the idea of what knowledge is but also challenge the dominant (White) narrative on knowledge and who defines it. Highlighting the strengths, knowledge, and lived experiences of BIPOC members of the Montessori community while simultaneously acknowledging the racist systems in which Montessori education is practiced in the United States will challenge schools and educators to examine how they practice the Method, and posit researchers to examine the philosophy and their research through a critical lens.

One limitation of the CMM lies in its newness. As it is implemented in various settings, it may well evolve and grow, as other theoretical models have. Another limitation is that, due to state and district requirements, public schools may struggle to fully use the CMM to guide their communities, as they often must follow specific guidance around assessment, professional development, curricula, and family engagement.

Further papers and research could use CMM as the lens through which to interrogate various features and concepts in the Montessori philosophy and Method (for example, the concepts of normalization and deviation, the lack of classroom management training that leads to racial discipline disproportionality, and the challenges of bias appearing in such an individualized method). I recommend the research community use the CMM to guide their research, and to calibrate critical Montessori research that aims to center the BIPOC community. Further studies could use the CMM to examine how Montessori training centers prepare and train future teachers. Future research could also examine how a school might use the CMM to analyze school policies, or guide school practices and decision-making processes. Any individual or organization can use the CMM to interpret the Montessori Method and philosophy by

uplifting the BIPOC community's lived experiences, and examining how racist structures and systems affect how Montessori education is interpreted in the United States.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight the inequity in the Montessori research community, as the overwhelming majority of Montessori research studies are conducted by White scholars. Although their work is crucial and provides a strong foundation for future Montessori research, I call for more BIPOC Montessori researchers' voices to be heard. The CMM explicitly centers the BIPOC experience. It highlights practices of already-successful BIPOC educators using their strengths to embody Montessori education. Without these voices, Montessori educators do a great disservice to their communities, but by highlighting BIPOC scholars' works, they can embody the belief that BIPOC's voices, lived experiences, and knowledge are crucial parts of the Montessori research community.

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Appendix 1
Commonly Used Acronyms and Theories

Acronym	Meaning and definition
BIPOC	**Black, Indigenous, and other people of color**: although referring to all people of color, this acronym purposefully leads with Black and Indigenous individuals to highlight the specific discrimination that Black and Indigenous people in the United States have historically faced and continue to face.
CMM	**Critical Montessori Model**: a theoretical model that provides a critical racial lens through which to view and interpret Montessori philosophy and practice
CRT	**Critical race theory**: a theoretical framework that centers BIPOC individuals and posits that racism is a normal and pervasive part of U.S. society
CRP/CSP	**Culturally responsive pedagogy/culturally sustaining pedagogy**: pedagogical methods that recognize students' cultural identities, reflect them in the classroom, and actively work to sustain and support their identities through the curriculum and classroom environment
CCW	**Community cultural wealth**: an assets-based framework for identifying BIPOC student and family strengths and the various cultural knowledge they possess