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The underlying motives of school choice emerged as major courses of action to offer parents opportunities for education in the free market enterprise and to limit the racial desegregation of public schools. This policy became known as "freedom of choice." Historically, parental choice of schools was the option of parents who could afford the tuition of private or parochial schools. The first options for public school choice appeared during the 1960's. Today, magnet schools are the most popular form of school choice.

Montessori schools have become a well-liked preference of magnet school options. Fifteen years ago, there were approximately 50 public Montessori schools in the United States. Today, there are between 250 and 300 public Montessori schools.

While research has been accumulating on why parents choose a particular type of school (parochial, private, magnet, charter, or local public school) far less is known about why parents choose a particular curriculum. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how parents navigate school choice decisions and why they choose Montessori schools over other available options. This dissertation further examines if parents' educational choices correspond to their reasons for selecting Montessori schooling and the impact family income and ethnicity have on their preference for Montessori.

The methodology of this study utilized a mixed methods research medium. The mixed methods approach blended two different research strategies, qualitative and quantitative. Recognizing the overlap between qualitative and quantitative research methods, the data from self-report surveys were supplemented with semi-structured interviews. Three hundred surveys were distributed to the parents of the Montessori school and interviews were held with ten parents of the same school. Of the original 300 surveys, 132 were returned and comprised my final sample.

The quantitative findings indicate that parents who choose the Montessori school use a range of strategies to gain relevant information and are astute in choosing a school that is congruent with their particular values and aspirations. The qualitative findings illustrate why the Montessori curriculum has become so popular. Responses are remarkably similar across income and ethnicity.

NAVIGATING THE SOCIAL/CULTURAL POLITICS OF SCHOOL CHOICE:
“WHY DO PARENTS CHOOSE MONTESSORI?” A CASE STUDY

by

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This dissertation is dedicated to those who smile in my life.

To my father, Virtus Evans and my brother Virtus A. Evans, they smile on me from Heaven each day. To my mother, Indiana Evans, my sisters Valarie Wheeler, Bertina Melchor, Iristine Evans-Roddy, and my brother Anthony Evans, their smiles and laughter encourage me. To my special nieces and nephews, their smiles bring joy to me. To my husband,

Jerry Parker, his smiles support me.

To my daughter, Sydney Jervonne Parker, her smiles bring love and happiness within me, and to my God, His smiles sustain me.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

SETTING THE CONTEXT

The Montessori Method is an educational approach to teaching children that developed from the work of Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 1900's. The Montessori classroom is a prepared environment (Lillard, 1972) of carefully crafted manipulative materials that engage children in learning activities. These hands-on materials (i.e. grammar boxes, golden beads, geometry cabinet, sandpaper letters, pink tower, etc.) cover an array of student interest and ability levels. Classrooms are designed for multi-age groupings which promote student collaboration. The trained Montessori teacher serves as a facilitator in the educational process by assisting children in cultivating a love of learning through concentration development, independence, self-discipline, motivation and by making discoveries with the learning materials.

Personal Reflections—Journey to Montessori

I was initially introduced to the Montessori philosophy years ago while working as a principal in the southeastern area of North Carolina. A colleague of mine would frequently discuss in great detail the wonderful Montessori education that her child was receiving. At the time, I did not give much thought to her remarks, chalking them up to be the musings of one of “those” parents with the “brilliant, wonderful, smart, accelerated child”. However, her remarks did compel

me to investigate Montessori schooling and the opportunities it presented for children.

Surprisingly, I discovered some striking similarities in my educational philosophy and those of the teachings of Maria Montessori. For example, using hands-on/manipulative materials to learn the content is a primary practice in a Montessori school. I began my career as a special education teacher and quickly learned that utilizing meaningful, hands-on materials contributes to successfully moving children from the concrete level to abstract understanding. Hands-on learning is certainly no new phenomenon. My students were learning by doing, using manipulative materials (many of which I made) when I first started teaching over 25 years ago. Multiage grouping is a primary element in a Montessori school; my initial principalship was in a multi-graded school and I was impressed with how children responded to and learned from each other.

Another parallel in the Montessori philosophy and my belief is the manner with which children are disciplined. Children that entered Maria Montessori's initial school were classified as "wild and unruly" and many were diagnosed as mentally retarded.

This may sound appalling, but from a personal standpoint, I can think of no better descriptor than "wild and unruly" to identify some of the children that I have worked with in my educational career. My undergraduate degree is in Special Education; my first teaching experiences were with children who were mentally handicapped. My master's degree is also in Special Education, with a

concentration in Behavior Emotionally Handicapped. For many years I taught children who had emotional handicaps coupled with severe behavioral issues. Although, many of these children appeared to behave in a “wild and unruly fashion”, I was very successful with these children because I held high expectations for them. I see similarities in how I responded to children (with the highest degree of dignity and respect) and the manner with which Maria Montessori regarded children.

Maria Montessori’s “wild and unruly” children responded to her teaching methods because she held her students in the highest regard and taught her teachers to do likewise. During that period of our educational history, it was uncommon to regard children with a high level of respect. It was a prevalent belief that children should be seen and not heard. Maria Montessori believed denying children educational opportunities because adults did not think they could learn was illogical but somewhat typical of the way schools had been operated (Kramer, 1976). Her methods completely contradicted the educational theories and practices popular during her day.

My educational philosophy aligns with Montessori’s beliefs regarding children being highly respected and being treated with dignity. My first building level administrative position facilitated this awareness. I began in administration as an assistant principal in a very affluent public elementary school in the southeastern area of North Carolina. The school served predominantly middle to upper middle class children of accountants, judges, lawyers, teachers, etc. To

add a degree of economic and racial diversity, the school district assigned part of a low-income, federally subsidized housing development (described by many as “the projects”) to this school. To further complicate matters, this housing development was located on the opposite side of town. Some may refer to the location as “the other side of the tracks.” The children of this federally subsidized housing development were all African American and impoverished. This community of families cared about their children greatly; however, their social and cultural values were uniquely different from the Eurocentric families. The intersections of race, class and gender could be viewed in multiple and competing paradigms given the positionalities of this school community. Unfortunately, the mix of students was more like oil and water.

The African American students from the federally subsidized housing development were often involved in verbal and physical altercations. When white students were involved in similar issues, the circumstances appeared to be perceived differently. As an African American woman, I was very cognizant of the “gaze” that some of the African American students received especially from some of our white staff members. There were only two African American classroom teachers among the 25 teachers in the school. I was also aware of some of the inequities regarding disciplinary practices. For example, when an African American student was involved in a physical altercation, suspension was most likely the immediate consequence. When a white student was involved in a physical altercation a parent phone call was the usual consequence. This

personal school experience occurred over 10 years ago and interestingly enough, there are some who contend that these types of inequities exist today – in many school districts throughout the United States.

These experiences as an assistant principal informed my thinking regarding the needs of African American children. My belief is that many of these African American children were viewed as “wild and unruly” and possibly hopeless by some staff members because of issues regarding race, class and gender.

I am compelled to believe that Maria Montessori would have viewed these children with dignity and respect. By doing so would contribute to them developing a more positive self image and a sense of fairness, possibly resulting in behaviors that were positive and affirming.

Later while still in the same school district, I became a principal of an elementary school with a high percentage of African American children of low wealth. Non-compliance issues were rampant; therefore, I initiated a conflict resolution program which taught children how to resolve their own conflicts and disputes. Additionally, I implemented training which taught staff members how to de-escalate crisis situations. The conflict resolution approach and the de-escalation strategies parallel with the Grace and Courtesy/Peace Curriculum which is an integral part of Montessori schools.

To help create a more calming atmosphere throughout the school, each morning, classical music was played over the intercom. There is a body of

research which suggests that children who listen to classical music show an increase in math achievement. Additionally, I found that this type of music contributed to student success and a more peaceful environment. Playing classical music is also a practice in many Montessori classrooms. Needless to say, my basic educational framework aligned with many of the tenets of Maria Montessori's methods. Although I kind of stumbled upon Montessori by accident, it was not until years later after having a child of my own that I actually gave Montessori schooling any further thought.

After leaving the southeastern area of North Carolina my husband and I relocated to Park County,¹ one of the largest school districts in North Carolina. We were blessed to have a daughter in 2002. Knowing our daughter would soon be entering the school system, my interest in education elevated to an entirely different level. Everything I had read about, discussed, and even taught was now personal as I began to gather even more information about schools, programs, and options.

As a result of high test scores, my neighborhood school is considered one of the best in Park County. However, the percentage of non-white children is extremely low. Subsequently, my husband and I were not interested in a school that lacked diversity, so we began to talk with other parents and look at magnet school options. After conversations with trusted friends and colleagues about the

¹ All information regarding names of schools, school districts and participants are pseudonyms. To maintain anonymity, all students are referred to as "he" regardless of the actual gender.

kind of school we were seeking for our child, the subject of Montessori (specifically Evans Montessori) resurfaced. Through my work in Park County Schools as a district office employee, I had visited Evans Montessori previously and was rather pleased with my observations.

During this same time frame that I was observing Evans Montessori through a parent's lens, the opportunity arose for me to become the principal. I knew that Evans had a waiting list and I also knew that employees' children were automatically selected. I was thrilled at the thought that our daughter would be able to attend the school.

Therefore, at this venue, I am interested in Montessori schooling from a personal and professional standpoint, and further interested in finding out why other parents are attracted to Montessori schools.

Introduction of the Study

In this dissertation, I uncover the inherent complexities regarding parents choosing Montessori schooling for their children especially as alternatives for school choice increase as viable options to ensure student success. I further examine if parents' educational choices match the reasons for them choosing Montessori schooling and if variables of family income and ethnicity affect their choices.

I begin by presenting a general rationale for doing research on this topic. Secondly, I review relevant literature to develop an analytic framework that can be used to examine the history of parental choice and magnet schools. Following

this, I discuss the specific proposed research questions. I then describe the methodological perspectives for this research study and the subjectivities that surfaced. Finally, I present a mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative data that support this study. I conclude with a discussion of the potential contributions and limitations of this research.

Description of the Problem

Fifteen years ago there were approximately 50 public Montessori schools in the United States. Today, there are 250-300 public Montessori schools nationwide (Matthews, 2007). There are only two public Montessori schools in Park County, a relatively large urban district in the Piedmont area of North Carolina; both schools are magnet schools. One school is located in the southwestern part of the county; the other, Evans Montessori, is located in the eastern section of Park County. Currently, there are approximately 220 students in grades pre-kindergarten and kindergarten alone on a waiting list for Evans Montessori School.

Since their inception, magnet schools have expanded in scope as well as in numbers (Gamoran, 1996). The importance of magnet schools as a tool for providing students with enriched and equitable learning opportunities was solidified with the passage of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program in 1985 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

As a result of school reform ushering in the school choice movement, many parents recognize that there are several successful public school options

from which to decide upon. Presently, in Park County, there are sixteen elementary public magnet schools from which parents can select.

Each of these schools offers a variety of academic programs with various emphases from global studies to science and technology curricula. Among the many options, why then, do parents choose Montessori schooling for their children?

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Why do parents choose public Montessori schools?
2. Do parents' educational choices correspond to their values for choosing a school?
3. What is the impact of family income and ethnicity on school choice?

Description of the Study

To examine these questions, I chose a mixed method research medium.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) emphasize that

mixed method research is formally defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, concepts or language into a single study. (p. 17)

By utilizing mixed methods, I provide a richer portrayal of the issues of school choice and information on Montessori schools with this particular case. Through the quantitative portion of my research, I uncover answers to the what, where and when questions surrounding

1. educational values,

2. school choice,
3. family income, and
4. children's strengths and interests.

The qualitative section of this study provides an overview on how and why parents select Montessori schooling. Hence, the numbers needed for the semi-structured interviews are smaller, more focused samples. The qualitative section of this study is comprised of 10 interviews from Evans Montessori mothers. Eight were birth mothers and two were grandmothers. The two grandmothers had been the primary maternal caregivers since birth. Additionally, using a quantitative approach, I surveyed all parents of the school.

Of the ten mothers, five were African American, five were white, six were middle to high income and four were low income. Approximately, 300 surveys were distributed and one hundred and thirty seven were returned from Evans Montessori families. Of the 137 that were returned, 132 were completed in their entirety and deemed utilizable for this investigation.

Whereas the quantitative portion of my research provided a generalization of findings, the interviews illuminated understanding of school choice and Montessori preference.

Snapshot of Maria Montessori and Her Methodology

Maria Montessori, an only child, was born in 1870 in the province of Ancona, Italy (Standing, 1996). As a young child, her parents moved to Rome to provide better educational opportunities for her. Montessori's parents

encouraged her to become a teacher since that was the only career open to women at the time; however, she was determined to excel beyond the traditional women's role .

Italy was one of the most conservative countries in the world at that time in its attitude toward women. Not only did Montessori pursue a scientific education, but she graduated with highest honors from medical school at the age of twenty-four. As a physician, Montessori specialized in pediatrics and psychiatry. She had one child out of wedlock, Mario Montessori (Standing, 1996).

According to Lillard (1972), Maria was considered a liberationist before her time. After attending a technical school for boys , she was eventually accepted into medical school and in 1896 she became Italy's first female physician. She began working with mentally deficient children; to her amazement, these children learned what seemed nearly impossible. She wrote,

I succeeded in teaching a number of the idiots from the asylums both to read and to write so well that I was able to present them at a public school for an examination together with normal children. And they passed the examination successfully....While everyone was admiring the progress of my idiots, I was searching for the reasons which could keep the happy healthy children of the common schools on so low a plane that they could be equaled in tests of intelligence by my unfortunate pupils. (Lillard, 1972, p. 2)

Montessori gained international acclaim as a pioneer of progressive early childhood education. She was a controversial figure in the field of education during her 81 years of life. Her research and the studies that were conducted based upon that research, helped change the course of education (Seldin, 1981).

Martin (2004) describes Montessori as “one of the few developmental theorists who devoted her life to the actual teaching of young children” (p. 22). In contemporary terms, Montessori’s view of child development is quintessentially holistic. According to her vision of education, the ideal school provides a “home” for nurturing the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual development of the child (Miller, 2004). Montessori’s philosophy of education evolved from her earlier work with developmentally disabled children and poor children from the slums of Rome - whom she deemed to be capable of learning. Employed as both teacher of students and trainer of other teachers, Montessori concluded that, “similar methods applied to normal children would develop or set free their personality in a marvelous and surprising way” (Montessori cited in Brehony, 2000, p. 116). Weissglass (1999) notes that, ironically, Montessori’s teaching methods, originally designed for special needs children, proved so successful that parents would willingly pay, regardless of cost, to have their “bright” children enrolled in Montessori schools.

A hallmark of Montessori’s philosophy is her respect for the child’s natural intelligence (Brehony, 2000; Edwards, 2002; Weissglass, 1999). *Constructivist* and *self-directed teaching methods* are learning terms often applied to Montessori’s pedagogical principles (Cohen, 1990; Edwards, 2002; Martin, 2004; Miller, 2004; Vaughn, 2002). Based on her observations of children, Montessori argues, “education is not something in which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being” (cited in

Weissglass, 1999, p. 45). Miller (2004) emphasizes that Montessori “clearly did not mean to endorse the absolute trust in children’s actions” that some progressive educators support (p. 19). Rather, she meant that the teacher should assume the role of facilitator, attuned to the children’s actions and intervene when needed to ensure students are engaged in constructive activities. In essence, “the goal of education in Montessori schools is not for the teacher to direct, drill, or instruct; rather, it is to give children opportunities for independent mastery” (Martin, 2004, p. 22).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described how my educational background and basic beliefs led me to investigate the teachings of Maria Montessori. I related how my educational convictions of maintaining high expectations and treating children with dignity and respect paralleled those of Maria Montessori. Montessori was considered one of the first women’s liberationists. She saw a history of firsts in her lifetime, beginning with being the first female to enter a technical school for boys at the tender age of thirteen.

Dr. Montessori’s amazing academic progress with mentally deficient children has made her renown throughout the world. By using a combination of sensory-rich environment and manipulative materials, children who were previously identified as wild, unruly, deficient and insane were able to pass standardized public school tests. This success led to many of her techniques being adopted and used with average and bright children. Dr. Montessori’s

innovative practices produced positive learning behaviors in children who were previously disregarded and left behind in traditional schools.

Private Montessori schools have been available for nearly a century, whereas public Montessori schools have escalated over the past 50 years. This investigation outlines reasons for that popularity and examines the larger issues of school choice. Within the framework of school choice, I explore why, with so many popular programs of choice and magnet schools, parents select Montessori. I also investigate if their educational choices correspond to their reasons for selecting Montessori schooling and what impact, if any, does family income and ethnicity have on their preference for Montessori.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This review of literature presents the history of school choice and the inception of magnet schools and how they marked the first experiment with school choice in the American public educational system. Magnet schools remain exceedingly popular, going beyond their original purpose of countering racial isolation, to offer students a wide variety of educational options. The issue of whether magnet schools, or more broadly, school choice plans, actually reduce stratification by race and ethnicity is a point in dispute. By mandate, magnet schools have racial quotas thus they serve their original purpose of reducing racial stratification.

Montessori schools were introduced into the public school system with the inception of magnet school choice. Montessori schools offer a child-centered, developmental curriculum where learning is highly individualized and students progress at their own pace. An optimal Montessori environment achieves a balance between individuality and community; students pursue their personal interests and preferences while interacting with peers in collaborative, multiage learning activities.

Situating the Need for the Study

Fifteen years ago there were approximately 50 public Montessori schools in the United States. Today, there are between 250 and 300 schools (Matthews, 2007). There are only two public Montessori schools in Park County. Each one has a waiting list; however, Evans Montessori, one of the most sought after magnet schools in the district boasts a waiting list that exceeds 200 children. Park County offers over a dozen elementary magnet options including Communications, Global Studies, International Baccalaureate, Math and Science, Science and Technology, Performing Arts, Expressive Arts, A+ Education and Cultural Arts, Traditional Education, Open Education and Performing Arts, Leadership Academy, Montessori and Spanish Immersion.

While research (Bomotti, 1996, Bosetti, 2004) has been accumulating on why parents choose a particular type of school (private, parochial, magnet, charter, or local public school), far less is known about why parents choose a particular curriculum. In this study, the word curriculum is used broadly to infer activities, instruction, and daily interactions within a school environment. The focus of this project is exploring why parents choose Montessori schools over other available options.

During my educational career as a substitute teacher, classroom teacher, Teacher Observer/Evaluator, central office employee, assistant principal and principal, I have continually sought innovative and exceptional methods for educating adults and children. As a parent of a child attending Evans Montessori

as well as the principal of the school, during the process of conducting this research, I have developed a more crystallized understanding why there is such an extensive waiting list for this school.

Historical Overview of the Montessori Movement

Montessori Education

Maria Montessori, Italy's first female physician, gained international acclaim as a pioneer of progressive early childhood education. Born in 1870, she was a controversial figure in education during her 81 years of life. Her research, and the studies that were conducted because of her research, shaped the course of "child centered" curricula (Seldin, 1981). Italy was one of the most conservative countries in the world at that time in its attitude toward women. Montessori pursued a scientific education and graduated with highest honors from medical school at the age of twenty-four. As a physician, Montessori specialized in pediatrics and psychiatry.

Martin (2004) describes Montessori as "one of the few developmental theorists who devoted her life to the actual teaching of young children (p. 22). In contemporary terms, Montessori's view of child development is quintessentially holistic. According to her vision of education, the ideal school provides a "home" for nurturing the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual development of the child (Miller, 2004). Montessori's philosophy evolved from her early work with developmentally disabled children and poor children from the slums of Rome - whom she deemed to be capable of learning. Employed as both teacher of

students and trainer of other teachers, Montessori concluded that, similar methods applied to normal children would develop or set free their personality in a marvelous and surprising way” (Montessori, cited in Brehony, 2000, p. 116).

Weissglass (1999) posits that, ironically, Montessori’s teaching methods, originally designed for special needs children, proved so successful that parents willingly would pay to have their “bright” children enrolled in Montessori schools.

As emphasized previously, a major precept of Montessori’s philosophy is her belief in the child’s natural intelligence (Brehony, 2000; Edwards, 2002; Weissglass, 1999). *Constructivist curricula* and *self-directed instruction* are often applied to Montessori’s pedagogical principles (Cohen, 1990; Edwards, 2002; Martin, 2004; Miller, 2004; Vaughn, 2002). Miller (2004) deciphers the work of Montessori to denote that she “clearly did not mean to endorse the absolute trust in children’s actions” that some progressive educators support (p. 19). Rather, she meant that the teacher should assume the role of facilitator, attuned to the children’s actions and intervening when needed to ensure they are engaged in constructive activities. Essentially, “the goal of education in Montessori schools is not for the teacher to direct, drill, or instruct; rather, it is to give children opportunities for independent mastery” (Martin, 2004, p. 22).

Montessori stressed the importance of the learning environment (Miller, 2004). The “prepared environment” envisioned by Montessori consists of an array of multi-sensory materials laid out in a sequence that allows children to progress fluidly from simple to complex tasks (Cohen, 1990). Children engage in

a variety of hands-on learning experiences designed to help them achieve understanding of complex processes. Teachers assess children's progress by becoming sensitive observers of their learning activities. Lillard (2005) notes that the hands-on nature of Montessori's work encourages learning by observation and imitation. The children are grouped in multiage clusters that reflect their developmental level. This structure allows for interactions and simulations between younger and older children. Modeling by children who are more advanced is often the key to this process. Multiage groupings and individualized learning are the cornerstones of Montessori curriculum. This allows children to appreciate their own progress without feeling that they are "slow" if they fail to keep up with their peers (Aina, 2001). The individualized nature of a Montessori education makes it an excellent option for students with learning disabilities as well as gifted students. Vaughn (2002) uses the term "empowerment" to describe the interaction dynamics of the Montessori classroom.

Edwards (2002) detailed similarities and differences among Montessori education, Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education, and Reggio Emilia, a less structured, but equally progressive early childhood education approach that was developed in post-World War II Italy. Although the curricula differ, they share the same basic philosophy: "All three approaches view children as active authors of their own development, strongly influenced by natural, dynamic, self-righting forces within themselves, opening the way toward growth and learning" (Edwards, 2002, p. 4). Teachers in all three approaches act as "nurturers,

partners, and guides,” who create a careful planned, aesthetic learning environment and promote respect for learning, the self, and other children. In addition, all three approaches favor partnerships between teachers and parents.

Montessori’s approach is distinguished by her belief that children develop in six-year intervals (Edwards, 2002). The period from birth to age three is the time of the “unconscious absorbent mind,” followed by ages three to six, the time of the “conscious absorbent mind” (Montessori, cited in Edwards, 2002, p. 5). During these six critical years, children seek sensory stimuli and engage in active exploration, attempting to derive meaning and order from their activities and the world around them. The curriculum is highly individualized, but it is also carefully structured. Teachers introduce new curriculum through demonstration lessons that take place when the teacher perceives that a child or group of children is ready to advance. As a result of the individualized learning approach, some children master reading and writing before age six. For children aged six to 12, the curriculum emphasizes “rational problem solving, cooperative social relations, imagination and aesthetics, and complex cultural knowledge” (Edwards, 2002, p. 6). Pre-adolescents and adolescents aged 12 to 18 “reconstruct themselves as social beings and are humanistic explorers, real world problem solvers, and rational seekers of justice” (p. 6).

Edwards (2002) refers to the Montessori teacher as an “*unobtrusive* [original emphasis] director in the classroom” (p. 7). While other authors avoid terms like “director,” preferring terms that denote nurturing or encouraging

(Martin, 2004; Miller, 2004), Montessori portrayed the teacher as “the director of the spontaneous work of children” (cited in Ruenzel, 1997, p. 33). Drawing from Montessori’s writings, Montessori teachers use terms like “guides,” “skillful observers,” or “silent caretakers of the environment” to describe their role in the classroom (Ruenzel, p. 33). Montessori described her curriculum as “the method of *observation* and *liberty* [original emphasis]” (cited in Brehony, 2000, p. 117).

In contrast to the Montessori teacher’s foremost role as observer, the Waldorf teacher is more didactic and directive, frequently leading or modeling whole group activities (Edwards, 2002). Although embedded in a unique framework, this role is more consistent with the traditional notion of classroom instruction. Ruenzel (1997) reported feeling some hesitation about what one teacher described as a “detached, analytic posture” (p. 33). In fact, the author and his wife were not satisfied with the effects a Montessori classroom environment had on their two-year old son. They felt that the method placed too much emphasis on the interactions between the child and the materials and too little emphasis on interactions with a caring adult. Some Montessori educators agree with this criticism. However, they attribute excessive detachment to teachers who become “fossilized” in their teaching methods. Ideally, Montessori teachers strive to create a balance between independent learning and classroom community (Brehony, 2000; Vaughn, 2002).

Vaughn (2002) conducted a case study of communication dynamics in three classrooms in a Midwestern Montessori school. The classrooms

represented a Pre-K through kindergarten class, a lower elementary class for children aged six to nine, and an upper elementary class for children aged nine to 12. Similar to Ruenzel (1997), Vaughn (2000) was initially struck by the project orientation of the classes. Unlike Ruenzel (1997), whose original enthusiasm for the child-centered environment dissipated over time, Vaughn (2000) became more impressed by an atmosphere in which “many of the environmental choices were symbolic of the school’s philosophy of empowerment” (p. 189). Vaughn viewed the organization of space, time, rules, and learning activities as less arbitrary and more empowering than the formal organization of the traditional classroom.

Vaughn (2002) perceived “the classroom environment, the classroom policies, and the construction of learning” in the Montessori school as interrelated features of a classroom that fosters a sense of personal empowerment and intrinsic motivation to contribute to the community of learners:

Instead of working to keep the teacher’s space clean and orderly, students are motivated to keep the space that they share with others suitable for learning. Rather than follow the teacher’s rules to satisfy that central authority, students are motivated by community rules, enforced by all, to maintain an optimal learning environment. Students don’t work through the teacher’s random tasks for his/her arbitrary ranking. Rather, they self-select their program of tasks and work through them until they feel a sense of mastery. In this individualized approach to learning, students naturally find a sense of control in their environment. (p. 197)

Vaughn (2002) agrees that Montessori’s classroom philosophy taken literally might seem “a bit sterile” (p. 199). Montessori was originally trained as a

scientist, not a teacher of young children. However, the teachers Vaughn observed transcended the pitfall of “fossilization,” adapting Montessori’s principles to create an optimal learning environment. This is often the case with American Montessori teachers (Martin, 2004). Vaughn (2002) also noted that as a professor of communication studies, she has taught former Montessori students and has been impressed by their desire to take on the challenge of difficult topics and their relatively low concern with grades (which are typically high). While acknowledging that her observations took place in a private school serving an affluent clientele, Vaughn commented on the study of Lillard, who reported that Montessori education enhanced students’ curiosity, independence, self-esteem, and community involvement in an economically disadvantaged urban setting.

Rothman (1997) described the implementation of the Montessori Method in the John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky. The drive toward adopting the curriculum predated the mandate of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), although the reform effort provided the school with the requisite resources, as well as incentive, for successful program implementation. In fact, Rothman (1977) observed that Kennedy was one of the few schools that welcomed the reform act as a powerful boost to their goals rather than as a challenge or threat. However, one aspect of the two-pronged strategy for becoming a Montessori school did represent a challenge. The strategy required an education program for parents and a training program for teachers. Most of

the teachers were reluctant to change their established teaching methods. As a result, the principal had to replace veteran teachers with teachers who were willing to undergo the requisite professional development training (ironically, the school was inundated with applications from teachers from other schools in the district). A major concern for advocates of Montessori education is ensuring the curriculum is taught by specially trained and certified Montessori teachers (Cohen, 1990).

The Kennedy school, a federally subsidized school that qualifies for additional funding and resources (Title I) was under intense pressure to raise student achievement. They augmented the Montessori curriculum with special programs for at-risk students (Rothman, 1997). For example, they replaced Title I classroom tutors with a specialized language arts program entitled "Reading Recovery." However, the academic gains in reading and mathematics experienced by the students after the implementation of the Montessori curriculum far surpassed the school staff's original expectations. The principal credited the focus on individualizing instruction within the context of a structured curriculum, the hallmark of Montessori, with transforming the quality of education in the school. As depicted by Rothman, the principal exemplified Inger's (1991) concept of the committed, charismatic magnet school principal.

Of the three European approaches, Walden, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia, Edwards (2002) views Montessori as the most conducive to empirical research on learning outcomes. Montessori educators favor authentic

assessments such as observations of students' progress and portfolios of students' work over formal, standardized tests. However, many researchers have documented the positive impact of Montessori programs on reading and literacy development, mathematics performance, and intrinsic motivation (Brehony, 2000; Edwards, 2002; Weissglass, 1999).

Using longitudinal data, Dohrmann (2003) compared the academic outcomes of two groups of students who graduated from high schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) during the years 1997 to 2001. One group included students who completed fifth grade in Montessori programs during the 1990 to 1994 school years. The second group comprised a matched sample of students from the same high schools who did not attend Montessori schools. Of particular relevance, the two Montessori schools were created as public magnet schools during the 1970s, and remain dedicated to providing students with an optimal Montessori education. The 201 Montessori school graduates had begun the Montessori program in preschool and remained in the school through the fifth grade.

The MPS data showed that the Montessori school graduates significantly outperformed other students on the Math and Science scales of the WKCE (Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination), a form of the standardized Terra Nova tests. Interpreted by Dohrmann (2003), "In essence, attending a Montessori program from the approximate ages of three to eleven predicts significantly higher mathematics and science standardized test scores in high

school” (p. 3). Dohrmann (2003) noted that both the Montessori and non-Montessori students from the two target high schools exhibited significantly higher performance than MPS high school students in general. Thus the finding that the Montessori students scored higher reinforces the effectiveness of the Montessori curriculum. According to Dohrmann (2003), the study showed that Montessori elementary education has an enduring positive impact, and additionally, that Montessori school graduates perform successfully in traditional schools.

Advocates of Montessori education credit the increasing adoption of Montessori programs by public schools as a “renaissance” that brings the benefits of a Montessori education to a broader, more diverse array of students (Cohen, 1990). Alternately, some Montessori teachers, especially those in private schools, are apprehensive that some public schools may become “Montessori in name” without adhering to the program’s philosophy. Of particular concern is the idea that the demand for Montessori teachers will exceed the supply, resulting in programs taught by teachers without appropriate training. Rothman (1997) noted the principal of the Kennedy School was faced with a difficult decision in replacing veteran teachers with new teachers who were willing to learn the Montessori curriculum. She consistently affirmed her decision as an essential condition for school transformation.

Public school officials have countered the criticism by arguing public schools have no more risk of altering the Montessori curriculum than do private

schools. The American Montessori Society (AMS) encourages parents to “look at a school, its materials, and the training of teachers” prior to enrolling a child in the school (Cohen, 1990, p. 3). The director of the AMS emphasizes that this applies equally to public and private schools. Jean Miller, who implemented the Montessori program at the Greenfield School in Milwaukee claims that many private schools compromise Montessori principles in order to attract or retain tuition-paying students. Miller believes most private schools distort Montessori principles. At the same time, Miller noted that “good Montessori practice has survived . . . the same is possible in public schools” (Cohen, 1990, p. 3). The performance of Miller’s school confirms her assertion. The Greenfield School was one of the two Montessori schools that produced enduring benefits in the study reported by Dohrmann (2004).

From an alternative perspective, some educators observe that while public Montessori programs do not always adhere faithfully to the tenets of Montessori, they produce excellent academic outcomes, the children enjoy the program, and the parents are satisfied with the results (Cohen, 1990). Public educators also contend state and local standards can be effectively integrated with Montessori programs, and the resources available to public schools can enhance the curriculum. The Kennedy Elementary School stands as a successful example of this synthesis (Rothman, 1997).

Interest in Montessori programs experienced a resurgence with the emergence of magnet schools in the 1970s (Cohen, 1990) and the school

reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (Rothman, 1997). Individualized instruction and multiage grouping are keynotes of Montessori schools. Reducing class size for the purpose of individualizing instruction has been a focus of research for several decades. In the context of public education, multiage classrooms are a more recent phenomenon and have received less attention. The following sections address the impact of small class size and multiage groupings on children's academic and social development.

Small Class Size

Since the 1970s, reducing school class size has been proposed as a viable strategy for closing the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic backgrounds (Nye et al., 2000). Although there is no consensus, most studies report a connection between small class size and higher academic achievement. Some discrepancy may be due to differences in class size reduction and the outcome of such reductions. The effects on achievement become more pronounced as the classes get smaller.

Tennessee's Project STAR (Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio) is one of the most extensively researched class size reduction programs in the United States. In an experimental design, kindergarten students were randomly assigned to small classes (13 to 17 students), larger classes (22 to 26 students), or larger classes with a full-time teachers' aide (Nye et al., 2000). The students' progress was monitored through third grade. The project spanned rural and urban communities, as well as a wide socioeconomic range from the wealthiest

to the poorest school districts. Various analyses of the data revealed that smaller class size translated into higher academic achievement. The children's gains in reading and mathematics were both significant and persistent.

In their own analysis of Project STAR, Nye et al. (2000) examined whether small classes conveyed superior benefits for minority and economically disadvantaged students. They found only weak effects for an advantage for minority students (in reading) and negligible effects in favor of low socio-economic status (SES) students. Nonetheless, their findings concur that small class size benefits students.

Academic achievement is one of several perceived advantages of smaller class size. Evaluation of Indiana's Prime Time program included classroom observations and interviews with parents, teachers, and principals, as well as student achievement data (Mueller et al., 1988). Project Prime Time was implemented in 1984, beginning with class size reduction in first grade, followed by second grade, and then third grade (with a district alternative for kindergarten), within the next two years. The initiative was based on a pilot project in which reducing the size of first grade classrooms to an average of 18 students resulted in significant gains in reading and mathematics accompanied by enhanced self-concepts and more positive attitudes towards school. The first formal evaluation was conducted in 1986 on 200 first and second grade classrooms representing 29 school districts. The survey included teachers of

both large and small classes, with no mention that the results would be analyzed according to class size.

Teachers, principals, and parents were very positive toward Prime Time (Mueller et al., 1988). An overwhelming 90% of the teachers reported students received more individual attention and prompt feedback, and approximately 80% credited the program for enhancing the academic performance of students across achievement levels. In addition, 77% of the teachers observed that students spent more time on task. More than 70% of the teachers reported using a broader repertoire of materials since the inception of Project Prime Time, and noted that students progressed at their own pace. Mueller et al. (1988) noted that while teachers of both large and small classes had positive attitudes toward project Prime Time, teachers of small classes had significantly higher perceptions of students' improvement.

The responses of parents paralleled those of the teachers (Mueller et al., 1988). Parents of children in small classes had significantly higher perceptions that their children surpassed their expectations for school performance and reading ability. Small-class parents also found teachers to be more accessible for consultation, and to report that their children received "adequate" or "more than adequate" personal attention. Parents cited class size as "an important factor" in their children's learning (p. 50), a preference shared with parents who send their children to charter schools (Kleitz et al., 2000).

Regardless of class size, 90% of all parents said their child was “very” or “generally” happy with school (Mueller et al., 1988). According to Bussell (1998), this is a key concern for most parents. Although it is speculative, it is possible that project Prime Time had a trickle-down effect, since a majority of all teachers rated it favorably. Mueller et al. (1988) noted all classrooms had teaching aides, which enhanced the amount of individual attention the children received. In small classes, classroom aides enabled the teachers to spend more time working with students in small groups.

Analyses of student achievement data revealed that first grade students’ scores increased 50% in reading after the implementation of Prime Time, and 30% in math (Mueller et al., 1988). For second grade students, the achievement gains were 20% in reading and 10% in math. The impact for younger students is congruent with Montessori’s belief that most critical learning takes place during the first six years (Cohen, 1990). Labeling their results as “a strong case for reducing class size in the primary grades,” Mueller et al. (1988) proposed that, “Minority students, students with learning disabilities, and all categories of at-risk students are likely to receive special benefits from smaller teacher-student ratios” (p. 50). While Nye et al. (2000) are less positive about the differential advantages, there is virtually unanimous agreement that primary grade students flourish in smaller classes with more personal attention and individualized learning opportunities.

Multiage Classrooms

The practice of grouping children into graded classes based on chronological age was introduced to American schools at the turn of the 20th century as a pragmatic solution to the rapid growth of the public school population (Aina, 2001). The premise of graded education is “children who are the same chronological age are relatively similar intellectually” (p. 219). Research on childhood development consistently fails to support this assumption.

Fosco, Schleser, and Andal (2004) present several disadvantages to the traditional elementary school classroom structure. First, children of the same age do not learn at the same rate. Second, traditional classroom instruction does not reflect differences in learning styles. Third, children who do not perform within the expected norms for their age are labeled “failures,” which lowers their self-esteem and may discourage them academically. The implementation of multiage classrooms in the primary grades allows teachers to offer students a wider variety of learning experiences, consistent with their developmental level. Instead of comparing themselves to other students, the children learn to appreciate their own social and academic progress and build on their success.

Interestingly, Fosco et al. (2004) found rather limited effects for multiage grouping. In their study of children in kindergarten through second grade, children in multiage classrooms progressed cognitively at a faster rate than children in conventional grade level classrooms. However, the children in both types of classes reached the concrete cognitive development stage by the end of

second grade. Children in both types of classes also displayed equivalent reading scores, although Fosco et al. (2004) expected students in multiage classes to read at a higher level. Aina (2001) notes that multiage classes are common practice in New Zealand which boasts the world's highest literacy rate.

Aina (2001) conducted a naturalistic study of a single multiage classroom that was implemented as a trial. A K-1 class was dropped due to the introduction of an all day kindergarten, leaving a class combining grades one and two. With the only multiage class in the school, the teacher was left on her own to structure the class. However, although she felt isolated from colleagues, the teacher reported a strong sense of community in the class. The children worked collaboratively and developed socially as well as academically. The teacher observed more advanced students willingly helped their classmates and older children served as positive role models. The teacher noted the second grade students progressed at a faster pace than their peers in traditional classes, speculating, "They are given more freedom to advance at their own pace" (p. 221).

The children were uniformly enthusiastic about their learning environment, which was simultaneously varied and communal (Aina, 2001). While some parents of second graders were apprehensive (or negative) regarding their children being grouped with younger children, they agreed at the end of the year that their children had advanced socially and academically. For example, the father of a boy who was good in math but had reading and other developmental

delays was initially opposed to the multiage class. Although he remained ambivalent about the arrangement, he admitted that his son was “maturing” and “seems to be more successful in school” (p. 222). The boy’s mother commented that being allowed to progress at his own pace boosted the boy’s self-esteem and enthusiasm for reading. In addition, he felt that he could “help set a good example for the first graders. It makes him feel important and he feels good being a helper” (p. 222). The mother of a high-achieving child (initially apprehensive) also noted that her son had become more independent and was proud to be helping others. Thus children at both ends of the performance spectrum benefited from the multiage class.

From Aina’s (2001) perspective, “In simplest terms, the multiage classroom allows children to progress from one concept or skill level to the next as they are ready without regard to their age or grade” (p. 222). Drawing on her own research and that of others, Aina outlined several benefits of multiage classes:

- Optimal learning takes place in a nurturing environment that promotes self-esteem, risk-taking, and decision-making.
- Instruction and activities are designed to accommodate different learning styles and progress rates.
- Learning is holistic, encompassing the child’s social, emotional, and intellectual development.
- Students actively construct their own knowledge.
- Children learn best through interacting with others and with the environment. (p. 222)

It is noteworthy that Aina (2001) invoked Montessori, along with Piaget and Gardner, in support of multiage classes. Equally noteworthy is the fact that the only drawback to this particular class was that it was implemented in isolation. The teacher was forced to rely on her own resources for planning instruction and activities. Although the teacher appeared to be doing admirably well, teachers within a school where multiage classes are the norm have access to collegial support. Montessori teachers have the additional benefit of specialized training for sequencing materials and curriculum (Cohen, 1990; Edwards, 2002).

Maria Montessori—Biography (Brief Overview)

Maria Montessori was born in Italy on August 31, 1870. Much information regarding her early life seems to be uncertain or contradictory. Kramer (1976, p. 22) describes Maria's father, Alessandro Montessori, as being "an old fashioned gentleman of conservative temper and military habits." He was an accountant for the civil service. Maria's mother was very well educated and loved to read books. This was unusual because in the village in which they lived, many people could not even write their name. Maria's mother was considered very patriotic and devoted to the ideals of liberations and union for Italy. Even at an early age, Maria's parents often had troubles seeing eye to eye on what was best for their talented, head strong daughter (Kramer, 1976).

According to Lillard (1972) Maria was considered a liberationist before her time. At the age of thirteen, against the wishes of her father, but with the support

of her mother, she attended a technical school for boys. After that she attended Regio Istituto Tecnico Leonardo da Vinci from 1886 to 1890 (Kramer, 1976). There she studied modern languages and natural sciences.

After several years, Maria Montessori again decided to do something which was nontraditional. She resolved to study medicine. Her parents encouraged her to become a teacher, one of the few occupations open to women at the time, but she was determined to enter medical school and become a doctor. Her father was opposed to this idea since only males were admitted to medical school at that time.

There is not much recorded on how she did it, but Maria persisted until she was accepted into the medical school. Kramer (1976) suggests the possibility that Pope Leo XIII helped her gain admission. So, in 1892, Maria Montessori became the first woman to enter medical school in Italy. Montessori became notable not just because of her gender, but because she excelled as a student. She earned several scholarships in medical school which enabled her to pay for most of her medical education (Centenary Media Briefing, 2006). While in medical school, Montessori faced gender prejudice from her male colleagues and had to work alone on dissections which were not allowed to be done in mixed classes (Centenary Media Briefing, 2006). However, she was a dedicated student and in 1896, Maria became the first woman to graduate from the University of Rome Medical School (Lillard, 1972).

During her medical practice, Dr. Montessori observed insane children and analyzed how they learned. While observing how children learned in their environments, Montessori's interests became challenged again. Subsequently, in 1901, she returned to the University of Rome to study the mind instead of the body (North American Montessori Teachers' Association - NAMTA, 1996-2006). In 1904, she began teaching as the professor of anthropology at the University of Rome. A few years later, she gave up that job to begin working with sixty young, disadvantaged children. This was the genesis of her educational methodologies, which became so successful that even learning disabled children began to pass examinations for normal children. With these sixty children she started a school that was more reminiscent of a home environment. Her first school opened in San Lorenzo Rome and was called Casa dei Bambini or "Children's House" (Standing, 1996). The day her school opened according to the Christian calendar, it was the Feast of the Epiphany. According to Ruenzel (1997), Montessori intoned the Epistle for the day with her remarks,

Arise, shine, for the light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon me. She added, in what she later claimed was an inspired departure from her prepared text, words more prophetic than even she could have realized: Perhaps it may be that this Children's House may become a new Jerusalem, which as it is multiplied among abandoned people, will bring light into education (p 1).

This children's home was an environment that was offered to the child so he may be given an opportunity to develop his activities (Kramer, 1976).

Maria quickly noticed how the children absorbed knowledge almost effortlessly from their surroundings. She felt the children were teaching themselves, which helped inspire her lifelong pursuit of educational reform.

Maria Montessori made her first visit to the United States in 1913 (NAMTA, 1996-2006). Later that same year, Alexander Graham Bell and his wife Mabel founded the Montessori Educational Association at their Washington, DC, home. Montessori also received strong support from Thomas Edison, Helen Keller and Margaret Wilson, daughter of President Woodrow Wilson.

Montessori Curriculum

The Montessori Curriculum is based on the studies and findings of Dr. Maria Montessori. Based on my professional practice, the Montessori Curriculum is by far, not your traditional school curriculum. In traditional elementary school classrooms, the teacher typically teaches everything. Lillard (1996) suggests that Montessori classrooms are quite different.

In Montessori education at every level, it is always through interaction with the environment that the child learns; the teacher is only part of the environment. To meet such a challenge, it follows that the elementary environment cannot be haphazardly designed by an individual teacher's whim. Its structure must be scientifically planned and methodically formed. (p. 78)

During her lifetime Montessori evoked a philosophy of human development that influenced child development approaches. In her book *The Absorbent Mind* (1988), Montessori recounts her discovery.

Education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child. (p. 7)

The philosophy and the overall arrangement of a Montessori classroom is different from a traditional classroom; yet, children are encouraged to move ahead in a challenging curriculum, supported by materials designed by Dr. Maria Montessori (Lillard, 1996). Children are able to work at their own pace and level of interest with materials they have chosen. Lessons may be presented to a whole or small group. According to the Evans Montessori school brochure, group lessons are presented followed by individualized instruction, based on the interests, needs and developmental level of each child.

The core of the Montessori elementary curriculum involves Montessori lessons and hands-on materials. These materials are carefully sequenced so that each activity has an orderly and logical process to follow. This allows children to organize their thinking and problem solving skills in a clear way and to absorb knowledge through their senses (Montessori, 1965).

The five major elementary curriculum areas are Practical Life, Sensorial, Math, Language, and Culture Studies. (Educational Video Publishing, 2002). The classroom space is divided into areas defined by the particular curriculum, Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Math and Cultural Studies. The materials are placed on low open shelves for ease of student accessibility (Montessori, 1965).

Children frequently work on the floor placing their materials on a neutral colored rug.

In most traditional classrooms, each subject is taught independently with a specific time and text book. Lillard (2005) describes Montessori's views. "In contrast, Dr. Montessori believed interest comes in part through integration and interconnection, and the Elementary curriculum was taught with an eye to making connections across disciplines" (p. 130).

Based on my professional training, observations and experiences in Montessori classrooms, The Montessori Curriculum is an integrated thematic approach that ties the separate disciplines together. In this way, one lesson leads to many others.

The five curriculum areas, Practical Life, Sensorial, Math, Language, and Culture Studies, will be discussed below as described in the Nurturing the Love of Learning Video: Montessori for the Early Childhood Years (2002).

1. The Practical Life Curriculum lays the foundation for all other work to be done in the classroom. The activities are everyday type tasks that a child needs to learn for self care and care of the environment. Practical Life Exercises are the foundation of the Montessori environment. These exercises provide a wholesome range of activities which allow the children to develop control and coordination of movement, awareness of their environment, orderly thought patterns, independent work habits, responsibility, and many other characteristics which can

only be attained through spontaneous, purposeful work. Practical life promotes mind and body coordination, control and refinement of basic movements and develops focus and attention. These activities extend to the home and to the larger more conventional learning environment.

2. The goal of the Sensorial Curriculum is to develop a child's attention for details, order and sequence, the essential foundations for acquiring language and math skills. This curriculum contains Montessori-specific materials to refine the child's experiences of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Sensorial materials are specifically designed using scientifically based concepts, such as the metric system.
3. The Math Curriculum places a prime on concrete and meaningful learning of math concepts with the sensorial materials as its foundation. Math is separated into major categories which include; beginning counting, the decimal system, rational numbers/fractions, and the operations of addition, multiplication, subtraction and division.
4. The Language Curriculum is an integrated disciplinary approach that combines both phonetics and whole language. A full range of direct and indirect experiences are offered through vocabulary enrichment, language training, letter sound and alphabet association, word building, word composition, comprehension, expressive writing and reading. Once language skills are developed, the child reads for research purposes and report writing.

5. The Culture Studies Curriculum focuses on different areas of the world and integrates the geography, history, music and art of different countries. Children learn about the world through relevant examples of the dress, food, artwork, language and cultural readings.

Another important part of the Montessori Curriculum is the Great Lessons.

Dr. Montessori saw the world of humans based in five critically important developments (Lillard, 2005):

1. the creation of the universe
2. the beginning of life
3. the coming of human beings
4. the development of language
5. the development of numbers (p. 130)

Montessori described these five critical developments as the Great Lessons.

Cosmic Education is presented through The Great Lessons (Lillard, 2005). These are lessons, stories or fables, which allow the child to explore and understand a global vision of cosmic events. The stories are designed to provoke thought and leave children with more questions than answers.

The first lesson, describes the birth of the universe and is entitled God Has No Hands. The story does not contain any particular theory of creation, but rather opens the door to geography, physics, astronomy, geology (Lillard, 1996). The second lesson, entitled The Coming of Life on Earth, tells how life emerged and opens the door to biology. The third story, entitled, The Coming of Human Beings introduces the story of history and the progress of human civilization and

our capacity to love (Lillard, 2005). The fourth story, Communication in Signs, involves children understanding the earliest ways of communicating. (Lillard, 1996) asserts that this Great Lesson is:

an introductory experience for the youngest children, who are just developing their understanding of reading and writing. The older children go into more depth, studying different alphabets and kinds of writing such as Egyptian hieroglyphics and American Indian picture writing. (p. 65)

The fifth Great Lesson, The Story of Numbers, explains how people needed a way to convey things they counted. They needed a language for their inventions (time, calendar, measurements, etc.).

Historical Analysis of School Choice

The origin of the school choice movement can trace its roots to the work of Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman (Fuller & Elmore, 1996) and the momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. According to Fuller and Elmore (1996),

Choice first arose as a major strategy in the effort by conservatives to limit the racial desegregation of public schools. The Supreme Court's 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declared unconstitutional the school systems of 17 states and the District of Columbia, which had mandated separate schools for blacks and whites. In response, southern segregationists interpreted the Supreme Court decision as requiring nothing more than a choice for black students to transfer between two racially separate systems of schooling. This policy, euphemistically known as "freedom of choice," was the dominant southern position. A number of northern cities instituted "open enrollment." A form of choice permitting transfers to schools that had space but in many cases did not provide transportation. Typically a very small proportion of students made such transfers. (Fuller & Elmore, 1996 p. 5)

“School choice covers a wide variety of options, including open enrollment plans, magnet schools, tuition tax credits, public vouchers for private schools and home instruction” (Jones-Wilson, Arnez, & Asbury, 1992, p. 127).

Choice is everywhere in American education. It is manifested in the residential choices made by families with school-age children; it is capitalized in the housing prices found in neighborhoods. Choice also occurs when parents decide how to care for their preschool-age child and in the consequences of those choices for their youngster's readiness for elementary school. It occurs when parents use their knowledge, skill, and social connections to get their children assigned to one teacher or another, to one program or another within a given school, or to one school or another within a given district. Choice is present when families, sometimes at great financial sacrifice, decide to send their children to private schools instead of public schools. And choice occurs when parents jockey for places in selective public high schools or when students are chosen by lottery for magnet schools with specialized academic programs. In these and many other ways parents and students make choices that influence their educational futures. And in all instances, these choices--and the options from which to choose--are strongly shaped by the wealth, ethnicity, and social status of parents and their neighborhoods. (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, p. 187)

Historically, parental choice of schools was the province of parents who could afford the tuition of private or parochial schools (Waldrup, 2005). Some of the first options for public school choice appeared during the 1960s, when street academies such as Harlem Preparatory emerged as part of the protest against racially segregated schools. Forced school desegregation resulted in parents moving from urban school districts to avoid mandated busing, or alternately, enrolling their children in private schools. This phenomenon threatened to stratify schools even further by socioeconomic status (SES) and race. The first schools created to reduce racial isolation opened in Tacoma, Washington and Boston,

Massachusetts in 1968 and 1969, respectively. Labeled “alternatives,” these schools offered all students continuous advancement with individualized instruction which allowed them to learn at their own pace.

Other schools followed, boasting innovations designed to appeal to families from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Officials of the Performing and Visual Arts School in Houston, Texas, claimed it attracted students like a “magnet” (Waldrip, 2005). The catchphrase “magnet school” worked to publicize the underlying concept of a school that attracts students by offering a high quality education and unique features outside the scope of traditional public schools. Organized around a specialized curriculum or theme, magnet schools provided a safe, supportive learning environment, encourage parental involvement, and conveyed high expectations for student success (Douzenis, 1994; Inger, 1991; Klauke, 1988). Magnet schools remain the most popular form of school choice (Hausman & Goldring, 2000).

The proliferation of magnet schools during the 1970s led to the introduction of the Montessori curriculum into the public school system (Cohen, 1990). In 1973, Cincinnati, Ohio opened the first Montessori school in the nation (Waldrip, 2005). Based on Maria Montessori’s philosophy of childhood development, the number of Montessori schools in the United States continues to expand in both public and private school sectors. In the public sector, Montessori schools are usually magnet schools (Cohen, 1990; Waldrip, 2005) or charter schools (Martin, 2004). Teachers typically belong to either the International

Montessori Society (IMS) or the American Montessori Society (AMS). Teachers in the IMS tend to adhere more closely to Montessori's instructional methods, while those in the AMS are more likely to modify them (Martin, 2004). Under the mandates of education reform, Montessori principles may be integrated with state and local performance standards (Cohen, 1990).

The emergence of choice can also be traced to more specific attempts by urban school systems, since the 1960s, to preserve the participation of the white middle class in public schools and to provide a positive vision of what public schooling can become in the face of increasingly strident criticism (Fuller & Elmore, 1996).

The move toward school choice gained momentum in the 1990s as an integral part of education reform. Critics of the public school system maintained that free market competition shifts the balance of power from government agencies to parents and schools (Harrison, 2005). Parents who lack the tuition for private schools should have more options for sending their children to "good" schools; in fact, low-income students stand to benefit most from school choice. Competition for students increases incentives for schools "to perform, improve, and change" (Harrison, 2005 p. 203). At the core of the market-based approach is the idea that parents choose schools by seeking out information and weighing available options to decide what school will be best for the child. Parents self-reported their priorities for choosing a school have cited the child's happiness and security (Bussell, 1998), evidence of high academic achievement

(Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roth, 1998a; Schneider, Teske, Marschall, & Roch, 1998b); high quality education, small school or class size, and safety (Kleitz, Weiher, Tedin, & Matland, 2000).

The attributes most favored by parents essentially fall into the categories of high quality instruction and safe learning environment. Magnet schools were created to offer these attributes and have thrived as a result (Inger, 1991; Klauke, 1988). While research has been accumulating (Bosetti, 2004; Patterson, 2001, Wells, 1990) on why parents choose a particular type of school (private, parochial, magnet, charter, or local public school), far less is known about why they choose a particular curriculum. The focus of this project is to explore why parents choose Montessori schools over other available options. The question is framed within the broader issue of school choice, which will be discussed in the next section.

School Choice and Parent Perspectives

In the past 15 years there has been an increase in racial, ethnic, and economic isolation of students in American public schools (Fuller & Clarke, 1994; Hanushek, 1994; Orfield, 1993). If children's performance in school is greatly impacted by parents' social class and educational background, then it seems conceivable, other things being equal that increasing parental choice will accelerate the social stratification of schools. The gap in student performance between schools enrolling high concentrations of poor and working-class

students versus those with predominantly white, middle-class students will unlikely be reduced.

Advocates of school choice maintain that ultimately all students will benefit when traditional public schools are forced to compete for students with high quality magnet and charter schools (Edwards & Whitty, 1992; Harrison, 2005; Hoxby, 1998; Patterson, 2001). Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2003) reveal that the number of parents who favor school choice increased substantially over the 1990s, a phenomenon paralleled with parents' increasing dissatisfaction with the public schools (Patterson, 2001). To meet the demand, the number of magnet schools nearly doubled from the early 1980s to 2000 (NCES, 2003). In 1992, there were two authorized public charter schools; by 1999, there were more than 1,400.

Wells (1990) compiled a list of the most prominent arguments in favor of school choice:

- School choice offers low-income and minority families' viable alternatives to low-performing and overcrowded urban schools.
- It infuses free market competition into a stagnant public education system.
- The decision-making power from bureaucratic school systems is transferred to individual families.
- School choice offers a cost-efficient solution to "enormous" problems in public education.
- A greater potential to match student needs with educational offerings is available.
- Parent involvement with the schools is potentially increased. (p. 2)

The main counter argument to school choice is choice programs favor parents who are better informed about the educational system and have the time and the resources to research various options (Hsieh & Shen, 2001; Wells, 1990). Instead of helping the families who are most in need of good schools, choice programs may lead to greater stratification. Critics see choice in American education as serving the interests of the privileged. Moore & Davenport (1990) argue school choice increases the gaps between those who are successful at manipulating the system and those who are not. Opponents contend choice drives the privileged and less privileged further apart, exacerbating school inequalities. Critics argue people are automatically denied choices when they lack information, money, or accessible options.

According to NCES (2003) data, the trend away from assigned local schools toward enrollment in voluntarily chosen public school is most pronounced for low-income families. NCES (2003) also reports that across demographic classifications, parents who chose the child's school (public or private) were more satisfied with the school than those who enrolled their children in assigned public schools, thus inferring parents' satisfaction and involvement with schools were interrelated.

Several studies report high satisfaction with schools among parents who exercise choice (Bomotti, 1996; Bosetti, 2004; Hausman & Goldring, 2000). Bomotti (1996) reports that among parents who enrolled their children in alternative schools, even parents who had an unfavorable experience with an

alternative school frequently went out of their way to inform interviewers that they remained staunch supporters of school choice. These parents self-reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the school.

Hoxby (1998) compared a number of datasets to explore the interrelationship between school choice and education reform. Hoxby's (1998) research supports the assertion that public schools do respond to competition by improving the quality of instruction. These improvements are not contingent on losing students per se, but reflect financial incentives and penalties attached to attracting or losing students. Hoxby's (1998) findings supported the notion that parents who have options for choice are more involved in their children's education. Based on my professional practice, parents who choose schools are more likely to exert their influence in areas such as curriculum or school discipline. With respect to criticism regarding school choice increasing segregation, Hoxby (1998) observed that American schools and school districts are already heavily segregated. Magnet schools were created to address this issue and remain the most viable alternative to racially segregated urban schools (Waldrip, 2005).

Many educational researchers draw on Coleman's (1990) concept of social capital. Coleman (1990) perceived social capital in terms of human social networks. Specifically, this term refers to the informal social relations, primordial institutions (families, religious groups), and other informal institutions that exist in the environments of children in a school, insofar as they can serve to augment

the education of the children. Social capital is also used to refer to “social relations and norms that arise spontaneously within a constructed organization, when these augment the organization’s goals” (Coleman, 1993, p. 538).

Gamoran (1996) views magnet schools as a valuable resource for urban inner city communities that have historically been deprived of social networks that promote responsibility and achievement. A learning environment with high expectations for accomplishment is an intrinsic source of social capital. Additionally, students within the environment interact with peers who model positive values and pro-social behavior. Coleman (1993) contends few American schools create this type of learning environment. He criticized the culture of most middle and high schools “across the socioeconomic spectrum and among all racial and ethnic groups” for reflecting informal norms that “scorn effort and reward scholastic achievement only when it appears to be done without effort” (p. 534).

Hoxby’s (1998) study suggests pragmatically that school choice is a mechanism for improving school culture, because schools have incentives for attracting students, and the learning environment and academic performance are key factors in school choice. Coleman’s (1993) recommendations for improving public school quality reflect this perspective. Coleman advocates replacing the “administratively-driven organization” (or traditional bureaucracy) with an “output-driven organization” (p. 532). As outlined by Coleman, the recipients or consumers of the “products” have the right to monitor the quality of the products,

and are the ones who determine “rewards” and “punishments” (p. 538).

According to Hoxby (1998), parents who choose the child’s schools are most likely to take on this role, monitoring the school’s performance and providing input for school improvement (or withdrawing the child from the school).

Reasons for Choosing a School

Parents and teachers are often thought to hold different beliefs about the qualities of an ideal school. The Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup national survey addressed this issue by examining teachers’ attitudes toward public schools (Langdon & Vesper, 2000). There was substantial agreement between teachers and the general public on the most important attributes in choosing a school. Both groups unanimously gave top priority to the quality of the teaching staff. Teachers and the public were almost unanimous (99% of each group) in citing the importance of curriculum and 100% of the teachers and 99% of the public rated school discipline as very or fairly important. Of the highest ranking attributes, the only disparity (albeit small) was for class size, which was awarded more importance by teachers (99%) than parents (94%) as reported by Langdon and Vesper (2000, p. 610). This last result is probably not surprising given that class size reduction has a long history in education reform (Mueller, Chase, & Walden, 1988; Nye, Hedges, & Konstantopoulos, 2000).

Using National Center for Educational Statistics data (2003) examining school choice trends, Hsieh and Shen (2000) investigated the reasons underlying parents’ enrollment decisions. The survey included parents who enrolled their

children in an assigned public school, parents who chose schools within the public school system, parents who sent their children to a private religious school, and parents who sent their children to a non-religious private school.

Not surprisingly, parents with high income and education levels were most likely to choose private religious or secular schools (Hsieh & Shen, 2000). Most parents in this group were white; however, one leading indicator of the data revealed, a very high proportion of African American parents exercised choice within the public school system.

According to Evans Everett (2000) African American parents place a high value on educating their children.

African American parents' goals and aspirations for their children all include their children receiving a quality education. The trend in education now is the concept of "school choice" and "neighborhood schools". Since education is a major priority for Black parents, I examine how school choice may or may not affect the quality of education African American children will receive. There is burgeoning research on school choice and neighborhood schools. (p. 34)

Based on the Hsieh and Shen (2000) study, all three groups of parents who opted for school choice cited academic improvement as a key reason, although the percentage was highest for parents of children in secular private schools. Of the parents who chose public schools, 40% based their decisions on social factors such as convenient location, a safe school area, and specialized activities. Hsieh and Shen (2000) suggest that public school parents who based the choice of a school on social reasons may be neglecting the academic quality

of the school, thereby undermining a major rationale for school choice. Hausman and Goldring (2000), who reported similar findings, dispute this interpretation. While admitting low-income parents are constrained in their educational choices, they suggest the choice is grounded in what best serves their needs.

In studying parents in Alberta, Canada, Bosetti (2004) found minimal evidence of school choice among low income parents. To an extent, Bosetti's findings were consistent with those of Hsieh and Shen (2000), who found, parents who chose secular private schools were motivated by smaller class size, shared values and beliefs, teaching style, and strong academic reputation. Interestingly, more individualized attention was a less significant variable, despite the correlation with small class size. Parents who chose private parochial schools had two overriding reasons: shared values and beliefs and strong academic reputation. For parents who chose alternative schools, the top three reasons were strong academic reputation, teaching style, and special programs. In contrast to these somewhat overlapping reasons, 50% of the parents who enrolled their children in public schools cited proximity to the home as the dominant reason for their choice. Bosetti (2004) asserts a significant number of the public school parents sent their children to the assigned schools without seeking out information on alternatives. Consistent with other studies, parents who exercised choice were most satisfied with the schools.

Reflecting on the social capital theory, Coleman (1990), Bosetti (2004) observed that social networks were a prominent source of information about the

schools. “The social network of more highly educated parents is more likely to include professionals with knowledge of the educational system” (p. 395). Bosetti (2004) raised the issue of whether parents with less education have access to accurate and detailed information. Other researchers have found parents with higher education and income tend to be more attuned to educational issues, have a greater understanding of the educational system, and are more aware of school quality (Bomotti, 1996; Bussell, 1998).

While the social network tends to favor parents with higher education and incomes, the current structure does not empower all parents and students to compete for highly competitive schools. Regarding parents, Fuller and Elmore, (1996) assert some parents,

. . . choose not to participate in this competition as they resist the dominant culture it symbolizes or they perceive their chances of winning to be slim. Others may choose to participate eagerly in a school choice plan, seeking upward mobility through access to higher-status schools. (p. 28)

Contributing to the body of research addressing issues pertaining to less dominant ethnicities, Fuller and Elmore (1996) interviewed African American families who lived in St. Louis and had both urban and suburban school options. They interviewed three groups of African American high school students and their parents for the study. The *city* group consisted of those who chose to remain in all-black city high schools. The *transfer* group included those who transferred to suburban schools and stayed in these schools; the *return* group was comprised of students who had transferred to a county school but had

returned to an all-black school or had dropped out of school. The final sample consisted of 17 boys, 20 girls and 34 parents or grandparents if they were the primary care givers. All of the children lived within one block of an all-black school and within the group there were middle-income, working-class, and low-income students. Though the primary purpose of this study was to navigate around simplistic generalizations and make sense of the inherent complexities involving school choice perspectives, Fuller and Elmore (1996) affirm that three overlapping and intertwined factors strongly emerged which impacted the students' decisions.

1. the degree of parental involvement in the initial school choice
2. students' acceptance or rejection of the achievement ideology, and their perception of what it takes to get ahead in the world
3. students' and parents' racial attitudes—their fear or distrust of whites and the degree to which they accept the dominant view of white supremacy. (p. 31)

“All three factors were heavily influenced by both students' and parents' habitus as it related to their understanding of the kind of cultural capital needed to succeed in a predominantly white suburban school” (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, p. 31). Habitus is described as “how one's view of the world is influenced by the traditional distribution of power and status in society” (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, p. 27).

Bomotti (1996) focused on three popular alternative schools within a Colorado school district. The schools were created in response to the recognition that many local parents were quite well informed about educational issues and

were demanding a greater variety of educational offerings as well as a “voice” in their children’s learning. The location is relatively affluent and predominately white, although it has a growing Hispanic population. The Harris Bilingual Immersion School was created to accommodate diversity through the development of a school offering strong bilingual language skills and cross-cultural knowledge. The school enrollment is comprised of predominately English-speaking and predominately Spanish-speaking children. The largest alternative school is the Core Knowledge School, which offers a back-to-basics curriculum and emphasizes character education and discipline. In contrast, the Lab School is a nontraditional progressive school that offers a small student-teacher ratio and a child-centered developmental curriculum (Bomotti, 1996).

Parents were quite articulate about their choices. Their choices of school reflected their personal values and philosophy of education and child development. Bomotti (1996) observed a common phenomenon: parents who chose the alternative schools were well versed in educational issues and were involved in their child’s education prior to enrolling the child at the alternative school. With the exception of parents who sent their children to the Bilingual Immersion School, which is multicultural by definition, they were more homogenous than the community as a whole. Consistent with other studies, parents who chose the alternative schools tended to be more educated and have higher incomes than those with children enrolled in assigned local schools. In fact, some parents stated explicitly that they chose an alternative school because

they did not want their children to associate with children from lower economic backgrounds.

Education and income consistently emerge as factors underlying school choice. In their study of parents in five communities in San Antonio, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee, Martinez, Thomas, and Kemerer (1994) report, “the general lack of awareness regarding school choice programs appears to be a formidable obstacle to participation among some low-income minority families” (p. 681). Parents in low-income communities who exercised choice were more likely to be better educated, have higher incomes, and less often underemployed than those who sent their children to the assigned public schools without weighing their options. For parents who exercised choice, academic quality was the overarching concern.

Schneider et al. (1998a) contend while parents of different social classes and ethnicity may award different priorities to school attributes, they represent sound decisions based on situational realities. For low-income parents of color, school quality means providing their children with a safe learning environment that will provide them with a good basic education that can serve as a bridge to economic advancement. Schneider et al. (1998a) found that low-income parents were concerned with high scores on standardized tests and classroom discipline while more affluent parents preferred a more progressive educational setting. To a degree this may explain the stronger preferences of white and high-income parents for magnet schools (Goldring & Hausman, 1999). Schneider et al.

(1998a) maintain all parents want their children to have a good education. Their choices are based on their personal values, which differ across socio-demographic cultural and political paradigms.

In a second study, Schneider et al. (1998b) investigated school choice from a consumer perspective. Their sample consisted of parents in two New York City school districts, one with a long history of alternative schools and school choice and the other a fairly new entrant to public school choice. Both school districts were ethnically diverse with relatively low-income populations. Within this setting, Schneider et al. (1998b) identified a group of parents they labeled “marginal consumers.” Marginal consumers were parents with superior knowledge of school quality. In fact, these parents were remarkably astute in matching their preferences for certain school qualities with objective ratings. For example, parents whose primary concern was high reading scores closely estimated the school’s actual scores on standardized tests. Parents in this group exerted considerable influence on school improvement efforts and on the decisions of other parents. Demographically, marginal consumers were more likely to be white and have higher educational levels.

Buckley and Schneider (2003) explored the behavior of marginal consumers versus “typical” consumers of school choice by means of an Internet survey. Their data analysis indicated that marginal consumers of education make decisions differently than average consumers. Marginal consumers were more likely to engage in in-depth decision-making processes, carefully processing

information and weighing their options. Their decisional processes could explain their accuracy in assessing school performance indicators (Schneider et al., 1998b).

Kleitz et al. (2000) used data derived from the evaluation of open enrollment charter schools in Texas to investigate the educational preferences of parents who enrolled their children in charter schools. Across socio-demographic lines, virtually all parents cited providing their children with a better education as their foremost reason for choosing a charter school. Small class size and school safety were also prominent reasons for the choice of the school. Safety was most important to parents who viewed neighborhood schools as having an unsafe or violent climate. This understanding is embedded in the differential reasons for school choice as reported by Schneider et al. (1998a) for parents of different races and SES.

Bagley, Woods, and Glatter (2001) adopted the standpoint that an important albeit neglected way of gaining insight into why parents choose certain schools is examining why they *reject* schools. This study took place in the United Kingdom, where parental choice is as prominent an issue as it is in the United States (Edwards & Whitty, 1992). Bagley et al. (2001) used data from the Parental and School Choice Interaction (PASCI) study, which investigated the *interaction* between *consumer* and *producer*, parents of children making the transition from primary to secondary schools, and the secondary schools. In the authors' conception, this interaction takes place within "local competitive arenas"

(p. 310). The data was taken from three case study locales: a relatively affluent school district with a history of competition between schools, a semi-rural area, and an economically disadvantaged urban community where members of an ethnic minority (primarily Bangladeshi) comprise roughly 5% of the population. Of 81 parents interviewed, 75% cited one or more schools that they did not want their children to attend (Bagley et al., 2001, p. 312).

Distance was the major reason for rejecting a school, particularly for the parents in the semi-rural area. Second to distance, parents cited *pupils at the school* as a key reason for rejecting a school. This was not an issue for parents in the small community; however, it was important for 33% of the parents in the more affluent community, and 41% of the inner city parents. Parents in both school districts complained of students who displayed behaviors that would deem them poor role models and with whom their children did not belong.

Parents in both the more affluent and low-income school districts also reported rejecting schools due to the school environment and staff (Bagley et al., 2001). As with student behavior, neither issue was important for parents in the small school district. Concerns about the environment were mainly related to the school size, age, and building condition. Criticism of teachers was especially prominent among working-class parents in both the higher-income and low-income school districts. The dominant theme was parents who did not represent middle-class values in the teachers' perceptions "were made to feel unwelcome

and unwanted” (p. 317). Some parents singled out the school administrator as the main reason for rejecting a school. Bagley et al. (2001) assert,

whereas some parents expressed concerns . . . about a school not providing a caring environment and over-emphasizing exam results, no evidence was found of the reverse: namely parents being put off by a school because it did not—according to the impression given by the head teacher—provide an academic environment and placed too much emphasis on a caring environment. (p. 319)

Two additional factors that caused parents to reject schools were a negative reputation and bullying, both reflecting parents’ concerns with school safety.

According to Bagley et al. (2001), the most significant finding was the fact that parents favored a school with “human warmth” over one “where a concern with the *rational academic* [original emphasis] is seen as too dominant” (p. 321). They define human warmth as “an intrinsic concern for all people” that is expressed in communication and interacting with others (p. 321). As interpreted by Bagley et al. (2001), parents prefer to choose a school that has a good balance of “instrumental-academic” and “intrinsic-personal/social value perspectives” (p. 321).

Further findings of Bagley et al. (2001) indicated that the number of parents who favor school choice increased substantially during the 1990’s. Subsequently, the number of magnet schools nearly doubled between the 1980’s to 2000. Magnet schools offer students a special academic focus or thematic environment. The following section discusses magnet schools.

Historical Analysis of Magnet Schools

There have always been school options for children and parents. Originally, parents with the financial resources could send their children to parochial schools, to private tutors, or to private schools. These options are still available to wealthy Americans, and “many still choose these options, but some who can afford to send their children to any school instead choose magnet schools, which are public and cost nothing to attend” (Waldrip, 2005, p. 1). Since their inception, magnet schools have expanded in scope as well as in numbers (Gamoran, 1996). The importance of magnet schools as a tool for providing students with enriched and equitable learning opportunities was reinforced with the passage of the federal Magnet Schools Assistance Program in 1985 (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).

The purpose of the program was to reduce, eradicate, or prevent the isolation of minority students, and to provide instruction that would significantly enhance students’ knowledge and skills. (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Evolving beyond their original goals, school districts are relying on magnet schools to achieve a range of objectives: a) enhancing student learning and reducing the achievement gap based on SES and ethnicity; b) providing public school parents with more educational options; and c) serving as laboratories for innovative educational approaches and techniques with the potential to raise achievement for all students.

Inger (1991) outlined several defining characteristics that enable magnet schools to attract a broad spectrum of students:

- *Program coherence:* Magnet programs are rooted in a specialized core curriculum or pedagogical approach.
- *Positive learning environment:* Magnets provide students with a safe, structured learning environment and convey an image of excellence; the schools strongly support parent involvement and work to imbue students with pro-social values.
- *A sense of shared enterprise among dedicated and enthusiastic teachers and students:* the nurturing environment, image of excellence, and limited placements make magnet school students and faculty feel special about themselves and the school.
- *Career preparation.*
- *A dedicated, charismatic principal.*
- *Implementation of education reforms:* magnets have typically been early adopters of strategies such thematic units, cooperative learning, and collegial professional development.
- *School autonomy:* Staff members usually have the freedom to solve their own problems as they see fit without requiring approval from the local school district; this independence enhances the perceptions of students and staff that the school is unique. (pp. 1-2)

It is apparent that not all magnet schools possess these exemplary characteristics, although most strive to maintain high standards and expand upon their unique qualities. Magnet schools are governed by the same state and local regulations as conventional public schools and are subject to state and local budgetary constraints (Inger, 1991). Even with constraints, “magnets” typically live up to their name. The overwhelming majority of magnet schools have long waiting lists and enrollment is often based on a lottery.

Inger (1991) noted magnet schools are frequently pioneers of educational innovations. For the purpose of reducing racial isolation, teachers organized

cooperative learning activities, encouraged small group discussions, provided activities to appeal to diverse interests and talents, and embedded multiculturalism into class lessons (Klauke, 1988). These strategies have since become part of nationwide magnet programs. Additional features of magnet schools are transforming the environment of regular public schools. Magnet schools foster a culture of mutual respect, appreciation, and trust with staff serving as role models for pro-social behaviors and respect for diversity. The emphasis is on authentic assessments that chart students' progress and reward effort and progress as well as achievement. With individualized learning, students measure their success in terms of their ability to meet self-designated performance goals, which allows all students to feel proud of their accomplishments.

Like private schools, magnet schools offer a wide range of curriculum choices. While some schools are based on the progressive education of Montessori or Dewey, or emphasize arts, music, or technology, others adhere to a traditional curriculum with rigorous academic standards (Klauke, 1988). Regardless of curricular emphasis, students typically have access to a rich variety of learning materials and extracurricular activities.

Several assumptions that underlie the development of magnet schools have been borne out by educational research and have made magnet schools a valuable option for school choice, even within largely homogenous school districts (Waldrup, 2005). First, magnet schools curricula are based on the

understanding that students have individual ways of learning. Second, capitalizing on a student's interest and abilities enables that student to perform better on subjects unrelated to his or her original reasons for choosing the school. Third, the choice translates into higher satisfaction with the school and superior academic achievement. Fourth, magnet schools have demonstrated that every child can learn and it is the role of educators to provide enough options so that ultimately all families will have the opportunity to choose a school that best fits the child's needs and preferences.

By design, magnet schools promote the involvement of stakeholder groups. Most magnet schools begin with a needs assessment conducted with parents, community members, and students. These stakeholders are involved in the process of assessing the needs of the district for the purpose of creating a school that specifically targets those needs (Klauke, 1988). According to Magnet Schools of America (Waldrip 2005), the ideal plan for a comprehensive magnet school includes vision and mission statements, educational goals, objectives, strategies, curriculum or thematic design, funding and marketing strategies, professional development plans, and a strategic plan for implementation. Systematic evaluation is built into the design (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Since magnet schools cannot survive without being responsive to their constituents, they continually seek active engagement, input, and feedback from school families and community members (Klauke, 1988). Parental involvement and empowerment are both associated with high academic achievement (Griffith,

1996). Parents who choose the child's school are more likely to feel involved in the educational process than those who feel the choice of school is imposed by authorities outside their control (Edwards & Whitty, 1992).

Magnet Schools and Choice

The enduring popularity of magnet schools as the number one option of choice has led researchers to focus on the underlying reasons for parents' selection of magnet schools. Goldring and Hausman (1999) investigated the impact of race, SES, and reasons for school choice among four groups of parents residing in the St. Louis City Public School District, which has a controlled choice plan. The four parent groups were:

1. Choosers of magnet schools,
2. Choosers of integrated non-magnet schools,
3. Choosers of predominately African American non-magnet schools, and
4. Non-choosers—parents who send their children to the assigned school without seeking out information on additional options. (p. 1)

The parents represented 26 elementary schools, to include all 10 of the district's elementary magnet schools.

A sizable majority of parents (71%) reported exploring their options for choice, leaving only 29% in the non-chooser category (Goldring & Hausman, 1999, p. 481). Among the choosers, 18% selected non-magnet schools. Although most parents in this group opted to send their children to the assigned district schools, Goldring and Hausman (1999) stressed that they made their decisions after carefully weighing the choices. Other parents opted for non-magnet schools

outside of the local school district. Overall, 38% of the non-magnet parents exercised choice. The majority of choosers in both groups were awarded their first choice of school.

Detailed analyses disclosed notable differences between parents who chose magnet and non-magnet schools and between choosers and non-choosers (Goldring & Hausman, 1999, p. 482). Roughly two-thirds of white parents chose magnet schools; while only 7% chose non-magnet schools and 25% did not exercise choice. Among minority parents, 40% chose magnets, only a few percentage points higher than those classified as non-choosers (36%). One-quarter of minority parents opted to send their children to non-magnet schools (either integrated or non-integrated). Goldring and Hausman (1999) note to a degree the distribution reflects the racial composition of the school district. Magnet schools in St. Louis are required to maintain a racial balance of 55% African American students and 45% white students (with a variance of roughly 5%). Since the proportion of African American families in the district exceeds the magnet school quota, some parents may feel they are more likely to get their first choice if they choose non-magnet schools within or outside of the district.

The influence of SES was more pronounced than that for race. An overwhelming majority of high-income parents (86%) chose magnet schools; a scant 3% chose non-magnets and only 10% did not choose at all (Goldring & Hausman, 1999, p. 482). In contrast, low-income parents were likely to be non-choosers (40%). Only 30% chose magnet schools, with an additional 21%

choosing non-magnet schools. Education and employment status correlated with income, making SES a powerful factor in shaping the composition of magnet and non-magnet schools.

Critics of magnet schools argue that choice reinforces school stratification and benefits white and more affluent families more so than minority and poor families (Klauke, 1988). The counter argument of some critics is choice empowers economically disadvantaged families by providing them with educational options they would not otherwise have; although not all parents, exploit their options for choice, many less affluent parents do (Harrison, 2005). Goldring and Hausman (1999) found support for both perspectives. High-income white and African American parents showed a decisive preference for magnet schools. The majority of parents, regardless of race or income, exercised choice, whether they decided to enroll their children in magnet or non-magnet schools. When the reasons for choice were analyzed, parents who chose magnet schools were most dissatisfied with their local schools. Parents who opted for non-magnet schools were more satisfied with neighborhood schools, and cited proximity, convenience, and values (for example, a preferred teaching style) as their main reasons for their decisions. Goldring and Hausman (1999) conceded for low-income parents, proximity and convenience might have reflected transportation costs or concerns about safety that constrained their choices. They believe most parents chose schools on the basis of what best served their

needs. This assumption reflects Bussell's (1998) finding that parents' major priority is their child's happiness and security.

Hausman and Goldring (2000) continue to investigate the issue by exploring the reasons that parents choose magnet schools and their impact on satisfaction with schools. The sample consisted of 1,220 parents of fifth grade students enrolled in magnet schools in two urban districts where magnet schools play a key role in school choice. The majority of parents were highly satisfied with the school. The main reasons parents cited for choosing magnet schools were academic achievement, values, and safety or discipline. Convenience was given lower priority; in fact, parents who chose the school for convenience were least satisfied with the school. Parents whose choices were governed by academics or values reported the highest levels of satisfaction. A distinction between the two groups was that parents who gave the highest priority to values were more likely to be involved with the school and exert more influence in school decision-making. Even more than reasons for choosing the school, income level had a pronounced impact on parents' involvement with the school (Hausman & Goldring, 2000). Although there was no correlation between income status and satisfaction with the school, income was a significant predictor of parent involvement. Parent involvement appears to have the strongest impact on academic performance for children in the primary grades (Sheldon, 2003).

Magnet Schools and Achievement

Magnet schools are intended to be data-driven (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). However, the diverse characteristics of magnet schools can pose methodological challenges in evaluating and comparing results (Douzenis, 1994). Case study research is often the method of choice for presenting results. For example, Perkins, Sullivan-DeCarlo, and Linehan (2003) provided a detailed description of the New Haven, Connecticut, inter-district magnet program, using the examples of an elementary, middle, and high school as illustrations.

The results presented were impressive. In the Benjamin Jepson Non-Graded Elementary School, students consistently surpass the district averages in reading, writing, and mathematics on the Connecticut Mastery Test (Perkins et al., 2003). It is noteworthy that the design of the Jepson School is similar to that of a Montessori school. The school is grounded in developmental principles that allow children of different ages, interests, and aptitudes to work and learn collaboratively. Teachers monitor student progress through observations, portfolios, and other authentic assessments. Although students of different ages and grades learn together, they are assessed on the basis of grade level. The unconventional structure does not detract from their objective performance as demonstrated by their high standardized test scores. In 1999, for example, 86% of fourth graders scored either as excellent or proficient on the mastery tests.

The Betsy Ross Arts Magnet Middle School, in New Haven, Connecticut, considered one of the nation's best secondary schools, has been cited for high

achievement for approximately 20 years (Perkins et al., 2003). The Hill Regional Career High School, also in New Haven, created in 1983 to provide students with paths to careers in health, business, and technology, has a comparable strong performance. The high school boasts a low dropout rate (5.2% as opposed to 27% in similar urban school systems) and a high rate of graduates advancing to two-year or four-year institutions (86.2%) (Perkins et al., 2003).

Examining several studies of academic achievement by magnet school students, Inger (1991) found some inconsistencies, although the results were largely positive. Inger (1991) attributed the lack of uniformity to the fact that magnet schools, like traditional public or private schools, vary in quality. Inger noted that some magnet schools have exceptional success in educating inner city minority students. In particular, some exemplary magnet high schools have extremely low dropout rates (<2%) and high college enrollments (Inger, 1991).

Reynolds, Ou, and Topitzes (2004) utilizing the Chicago Longitudinal Study, examined the interactions of preschool participation in the Child-Parent Centers. They discovered several factors that potentially mediate educational and developmental outcomes. The contributing factors were grouped into the categories of school support, cognitive advantage (kindergarten literacy), and family support.

Attending a magnet elementary school (in conjunction with low school mobility) was a powerful predictor of high school completion and avoidance of delinquency. Reynolds et al. (2004) used magnet school attendance as a

measure of elementary school quality, attributing the strong positive impact to several features of magnet schools. They noted, "Because of the greater opportunities to learn and higher expectations of performance, students on average learn more in high quality schools than in low quality schools" (p. 1320). This effect is reinforced by the presence of a high proportion of students whose academic performance exceeds national norms and who model values that favor academic success. Reynolds et al. (2004) assert that,

Consequently, not only is the learning environment more supportive of academic and pro-social behavior, which reduces the likelihood of behavioral problems, but the peer environment is more likely to nurture pro-social behavior and reduce association with peers engaging in antisocial behavior. (p. 1320)

Reynolds et al. (2004) acknowledged that magnet school attendance was not the only predictor of positive outcomes; rather, it interacted with cognitive advantage and family support. These variables are interrelated within the context of magnet schools. Cognitive advantage refers to kindergarten literacy skills and the absence of grade retention, and parent involvement with schools and lack of abuse or maltreatment. Magnet schools are structured to instill early literacy skills and allow students to progress continuously at their own pace (Inger, 1991; Klauke, 1988; Waldrip, 2005). Magnet schools also promote school-family partnerships. The benefits of attending a magnet school extend across the domains of school support, cognitive advantage, and family support.

Drawing on Coleman's (1990) concept of social capital, Gamoran (1996) theorized that students in magnet schools would outperform students from regular public schools academically. Gamoran (1996) based his reasoning on the idea that parents who choose a magnet school are investing social capital in the child's educational future. Expanding on the theory, Gamoran (1996) surmised that the students would socialize with peers who shared the school's specialized goals, thus reinforcing incentives for achievement. Additionally, he felt magnet schools students would attend more rigorous courses (Viadero, 1996). Interestingly, Gamoran (1996) reported that magnet school students did demonstrate superior performance in science, reading, and social studies, albeit for different reasons than he hypothesized.

Gamoran (1996) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS), which tracked the performance of more than 24,000 students from 8th through 10th grades. The study encompassed students from public, private, and Catholic schools. The results corroborated Coleman's (1990) findings that Catholic school students have an advantage in mathematics (although the effect was small). However, the magnet school students achieved significantly higher scores on science, reading, and social studies tests than all other student groups (Gamoran, 1996). Delving into the underlying reasons, Gamoran (1996) analyzed data on school climate, students' social bond with the school, and the number of courses students took in mathematics, science, English, and social studies. The only clear correlation was the connection between course-taking and Catholic

school students' performance in math. Social interactions with teachers and peers did not influence magnet school students' performance as Gamoran had supposed. The NELS dataset did not enable Gamoran to pinpoint the reasons for magnet school students' academic success, but it did provide strong documentation of their achievement.

In an *Education Week* interview, Gamoran reasserted his findings that magnet schools provide students with greater academic advantage than private or Catholic schools (Viadero, 1996). In support of magnets, Gamoran added, "Magnet schools don't segregate the way that private and religious schools do. Among those who choose specialized schools, minorities and [poorer] students tend to go to public magnet schools" (Viadero, 1996, p. 6). From this perspective, magnet schools live up to their goal of providing students from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds with access to a superior education.

In the past, few states had policies or programs to increase educational options for families. In the 1980s, this began to change when many districts enacted state-funded programs, tax credits/deductions for education expenses and/or magnet schools. Magnet schools offer students a special academic focus or thematic environment. Of the various magnet offerings, Montessori remains one of the most popular.

Conclusion

While school choice may ebb and flow as a political issue, attention to choice in American education system is profoundly ingrained in the social structure, culture, and political framework of our country.

School choice has always been available to those who could afford private schooling or a home in an area within a desirable school district.

The issue for policy-makers, then, is not whether Americans do have educational choices. Many do. Nor, is the question whether they should have educational choices. Virtually everyone in our democratic society-- increasingly skeptical of institutional authority—agrees that parents should exercise some control over their educational choices. Rather, the issue confronting policy-makers is what kind of choices policy should promote, with what constraints, and for what purposes. (Fuller & Elmore, 1996, p 188)

The first successful experiment with school choice in the American public school system involved magnet schools. Magnet schools were originally planned to counter racial isolation and provide students with an array of educational options. Magnet schools have maintained their popularity and have exceeded their original purpose. The issue of whether magnet schools, or more broadly, school choice plans, actually reduce stratification by race and ethnicity is a point in dispute. Magnet schools are mandated to maintain racial quotas thereby serving their original intent to reduce racial stratification. Parents who exercise choice within the public school sector are generally more affluent and more educated than parents who send their children to assigned schools. Parents who choose magnet schools (or other alternative schools) typically are aware of the

mechanisms of the school system and actively seek out information about the available schools. Often, these parents were already involved in their children's education. From the perspective of social capital, choosing parents are likely to inhabit social networks of informed consumers of education and are willing to make a committed investment in a school that most closely reflects their values.

Montessori schools continue to be a very popular school choice magnet option. According to Lillard (2005) Montessori schools offer a multiage, developmental curriculum where learning is highly individualized and students progress at their own pace. Montessori schools were introduced into the public school system with the inception of magnet school choice; the nation's first Montessori school opened in Cincinnati in 1973 (Waldrup, 2005). An ideal Montessori program achieves a balance between individuality and community; students make choices based on personal interests while interacting with peers in collaborative, multiage learning activities. Longitudinal data (Vaughn, 2002) show that Montessori schools produce high academic outcomes with enduring effects. The positive impact of a Montessori education is particularly significant for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For parents who favor progressive education, Montessori schools are grounded in strong philosophical principles and have produced empirically documented results.

Given all that I have studied thus far about school choice, magnet schools and the distinctiveness of Montessori schools that attract parents, this investigation seeks to explore the following guiding questions:

1. Why do parents choose public Montessori schools for their children?
2. Do parents' educational choices correspond to their values for choosing a school?
3. Do variables of family income and ethnicity affect their choices?

Although research (Bomotti, 1996, Bosetti, 2004) has been conducted on why parents choose a particular type of school (private, parochial, magnet, charter, or local public school, far less is known about why they choose a particular curriculum. The focus of this project is exploring why parents choose Montessori schools over other available options.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The central questions of this study are:

1. Why do parents choose public Montessori schools for their children?
2. Do parents' educational choices correspond to their values for choosing a school?
3. Do variables of family income and ethnicity affect their choices?

Mixed Methods Case

To best answer my questions, I chose to use a mixed methods research medium. Viadero (2005) describes mixed methods as a study that blends different research strategies.

The problem, some educational researchers contend, is that while randomized studies can determine whether an intervention works, they cannot answer key questions about why it works, they can't tell whether it works better where it's well implemented, and they can't pick up on any unexpected side effects. (p. 2)

A Mixed Methods framework was deemed the most appropriate approach towards answering my questions regarding parental choice of Montessori schooling. While the surveys indicated that parents believe public Montessori schooling is effective, surveys alone could not answer the essential question, "Why?" Subsequently, there was a need to conduct semi-structured interviews to delve more into the reasons why parents opt for Montessori.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) view mixed methods research as an attempt to fit together the insights provided by qualitative and quantitative research into a workable solution. They further associate the Mixed Methods approach with the pragmatic method of classical pragmatists Charles Sanders Pierce, William James, and John Dewey “as a way for researchers to think about the traditional dualism that have been debated by the purists” (p. 16). Maria Montessori was considered a pragmatist and many of her followers were convinced about the efficacy of the pragmatic educational approach. Utilizing mixed methods contributes to an advancement of knowledge regarding school choice and Montessori schools. This methodological approach is the most appropriate choice and it best supports the pragmatic pedagogical beliefs of Maria Montessori. Taking a pragmatic and balanced or pluralist position will help improve communication among researchers from different paradigms as they attempt to advance knowledge (Macy, 2003; Watson, 1990).

The purpose for using mixed methods is to amalgamate survey results and interviews into a unified whole. In many cases the goal of mixing is not to search for corroborations but rather to expand one’s understanding (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004b). My goal is to expand knowledge of the inherent complexities regarding parents’ decisions to choose Montessori since school alternatives have increased and there exists many viable, successful school options. I further examine if parents’ educational choices correspond with the

reasons for them choosing Montessori schooling and if variables of family income and ethnicity affect their choices.

When investigating human behavior and attitudes, including how parents make decisions about school choice, it is most fruitful to use a variety of data collection methods (Patton, 1990). Qualitative research broadly defined, means research that derives data from observation, interviews, or verbal interactions and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants (Holloway 1997). Qualitative research categorizes data into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting results. Corbin and Strauss (1990) point out while quantitative researchers seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings; qualitative researchers seek illumination, understanding and extrapolation to similar situations.

The results from qualitative analysis vary to a considerable degree from the knowledge gained through quantitative inquiry; it is not necessary that these two paradigms compete against one another, hence the purpose of utilizing Mixed Methods. Some researchers believe that qualitative and quantitative research can be effectively mixed in the same research project (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, Patton, 1990). For example, Russek and Weinberg (1993) combined both quantitative and qualitative research to their study of school technology resources. They believed that this combination of data provided illumination that neither type of analysis could alone provide. Using mixed

methods enabled me to examine my topic in a more comprehensive, insightful manner.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) describe the two major types of mixed methods research: mixed-model (mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within or across the stages of the research process) and mixed method (the inclusion of a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase in an overall research study). My research was conducted using the across stage-mixed-model design because the mixing took place across the stages of the research process.

Recognizing the overlap between qualitative and quantitative research methods, I supplemented data from self-report surveys (that have close-ended questions) with semi-structured interviews for more in-depth analysis. Evans Montessori parents were asked three questions:

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

By asking these questions, parents revealed more in-depth information than the survey could capture. This study synthesized survey data with parent interviews. "The challenge is one of having a breadth of understanding and yet to bring one's own expertise to the table," said Felice J. Levine, the executive director of the Washington-based American Education Research Association (Viadero, 2005, p. 3). As principal of a public Montessori school as well as a parent who chose to

enroll my child in a public Montessori school, I have a breadth of understanding, and bring my own expertise to this research study.

Research Site

The setting for this study is the Evans Montessori Magnet School located in Park County, which is in the Piedmont area of North Carolina. Evans was originally built in the late 1940's and was the white junior/senior high school prior to desegregation. Parts of the original school were demolished and rebuilt in the 1950's and 1960's with a recent addition of four classrooms completed in 2005.

Although Evans is an older school with many of the physical facility problems that plague antiquated buildings, efforts are made to keep the facility clean and attractive. Currently, Evans is an elementary community that goes from Pre-K to 5th grade and has relatively small, multiage classes taught by specialized Montessori teachers. At the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year, Evans became a Montessori School. Prior to the 2000-01 school year, Evans had been a more traditional school with an "open" philosophy. The Montessori component of the school began with three primary classes of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. The upper grade children eventually moved to another facility to allow Evans Montessori room to expand. Since its inception, the school has grown and during the 2006-2007 school year, Evans Montessori housed six primary classes of pre-kindergarten/kindergarten, four first/second grade multiage classes, two stand alone third grade classes, and three combination fourth/fifth multi grade classes. Up until 2005-06, the school served

a neighborhood zone as well as a magnet population. In 2005-06, the school became a “dedicated magnet”, requiring all students to apply for acceptance through the lottery process.

Instruction is highly individualized. Evans adheres to the Montessori method and has a strong academic emphasis embedded in values that foster responsibility, independence, grace and courtesy. There is flexibility inherent in the Evans Montessori curriculum to accommodate each student’s academic interests and potential. The aim is to encourage active, self-directed learning and to strike a balance of individual mastery with group collaboration. Children enter Evans Montessori in pre-kindergarten as four year olds. Evans Montessori children adhere to the five major curriculum areas (practical life, sensorial, math, language and culture studies). Children also study the Great Lessons either during the school year or as a summer enrichment program.

Although Evans Montessori does not have all of the materials and furnishings of an elite private school, the school district has invested ample dollars toward ensuring the school has the required teacher training and essential materials and supplies.

Academics are not taught in a traditional manner and there is not an extreme focus placed on standardized assessments; however, Evans Montessori is a public school and students adhere to all county and state testing requirements. For the past three years, Evans Montessori has met or exceeded

the academic achievement goals set by the state of North Carolina. Additionally, Evans has also met the criteria for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year.

According to the School Improvement Plan, Evans's School Vision Statement is to foster the Montessori philosophy while teaching curriculum standards in a peaceful learning environment. Though staff members will hold high expectations for all children, each child will be treated as an individual.

- Students are empowered to become independent, productive, life long learners.
- Staff members are empowered to learn, grow, and create a positive work environment.
- Parents are empowered to become active participants in their children's Montessori education. (p. 2)

Approximately 320 students are enrolled at Evans Montessori Magnet School. Approximately 50% are African American, 45% are white, and approximately 5% are Asian, Native American, or Multiracial. The percentage of students receiving free and/or reduced cost lunches is 29%. Since Evans has become a Montessori magnet school, the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch has dropped dramatically from 213 students in 2000-01 to 57 students in 2005-06. The 2006-07 school year marked the first year that all classrooms were taught using the Montessori philosophy and there were no traditional classes.

Based on my professional judgment as a public school principal, building leadership is a key component to a school's success. Additionally, a strong teaching staff is essential. The staff at Evans Montessori is one of the primary

reasons students continually do well academically, socially and emotionally. As a whole, the teaching and support staff are committed to going the extra mile to ensure student success. This success translates into a positive, caring, family oriented school environment.

Parents are a very active part of the Evans Montessori community. Based on school records, parental involvement has increased from approximately 1,200 hours during the 2004-05 school year, to over 3,000 hours during the 2005-06 school year. As of February 2007, volunteer hours had already surpassed the 3,000 mark with over four months left in the school year. Parents willingly become involved. They help organize and assist in funding extra curricular activities which include after school art and music programs, talent shows, Spring Fling, cultural arts programs and sock hops. Additionally, parents have written and received grants and awards to further benefit Evans Montessori children.

Due to the strong Grace and Courtesy Curriculum, high teacher expectations, and parental involvement, out of school student suspensions have decreased significantly. During the 2005-2006 school year, only one student received an out of school suspension.

There have been three different principals during the period of time that Evans has been a Montessori magnet school. I have been the principal of Evans Montessori since July 2005.

Selection of Participants

For my mixed methods research, I used a survey questionnaire (see Appendix A). While it is understood that many recipients typically do not respond to surveys, surveys were sent to all parents at Evans Montessori schools. Of approximately 300 questionnaires, I received responses from 137 Evans Montessori parents. Of the 137 responses, 132 were completed as requested and comprised my final sample. Of the 132, 47 (35.6%) were African American, 75 (56.8%) were white, and 10 (7.6%) identified themselves in the Other category as Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, or multi-racial (on some surveys, parents selected Black/African American and White/Caucasian). Participants completed a two-sided survey. Survey responses were received from parents of children at each grade level. The survey was designed as a two-sided questionnaire. The first side of the questionnaire focused on demographic characteristics, which are consistently found to impact educational decisions including age, race, income status, educational attainment, and occupational status. The questionnaire also included items related to parent's perceptions of child characteristics such as interests, learning preferences, disability or gifted, and particular aptitudes.

The next segment of my mixed method research involved qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews entailed criterion-based research (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) in that certain criteria were established for participant selection. The participants are ten Evans Montessori

mothers. (Two are actually grandmothers; however, they have been the primary care givers since birth or early childhood.) Five are African Americans and five are white. Mothers were chosen to be interviewed because females typically have more influence when making decisions about school choice (Reay, Ball, 1998).

Of the ten mothers, four were classified as low income and six were middle income. Income was determined based on the child's free and reduced lunch status at school. For the purpose of this project, if children qualified for free or reduced lunch prices, their parents were considered low income. If children did not qualify for free or reduced lunch, their parents were classified as middle income. Because I did not inquire about actual salaries, it is possible that some parents who are classified as middle income may actually be in the high income bracket; however, for this study all parents are classified as either low income or middle income based on the child's free or reduced lunch status.

According to the child's free and reduced lunch status, of the five African Americans, two were low income and three were middle income. Of the white participants, three were middle income and two were low income.

In an effort to minimize research subjectivity and bias and setting effects, I used two key informants to help me identify the ten participants. One informant is a classified employee (non teacher) who has been at Evans School since it became a Montessori magnet in 2001; the other is a certified employee who has been at the school for almost five years. According to LeCompte and Preissle

(1993), the use of key informants to aid in subject selection is known as an example of network selection. Further, by using this method to subject selection, trustworthiness was established as described by Lincoln and Gruba (1985) in maintaining reliability and validity within research.

Both informants were provided information regarding participant selection. My goal was to get a cross section of mothers, African American and white, single and married, middle income and low income. Participants were selected to be interviewed only if they had children in the third grade or higher. Since Evans Montessori begins at pre-kindergarten, this ensured that the parents had a minimum of three years experience in the Montessori setting.

All participants were ensured anonymity and were told that neither they nor their children would be identified. For this reason all children are referred to as males or “he” regardless of their actual gender.

I started with a pool of ten mothers and two alternates. Of the original ten, none declined to be interviewed; two of the African American mothers even commented that they were pleased that I had asked to interview them. One said, “This is the first time that anyone has asked me to do something like this.” Both of these mothers are classified as low income.

Data Collection

The data collection methods included background information on the school. This background information provided an overview of the environment in which learning takes place including the physical plant, school vision, school

climate (such as safety and discipline, the curricula, teaching strategies, and educational materials).

The participants were presented with a survey. The survey was designed as a two-sided questionnaire. The first side of the questionnaire focused on demographic characteristics, which are consistently found to impact educational decisions. Many researchers have reported affects for race or ethnicity, income status, and educational attainment, and occupational status; subsequently each of these categories was included in the survey. The questionnaire also included age categories. Montessori school parents tend to be older than parents who enroll their children in regular public schools. The questionnaire was designed to provide a descriptive profile of the parent group. The questionnaire also included items related to child characteristics such as interests, learning preferences, disability or gifted, and particular aptitudes. The child's age and grade level and whether parents have more than one child in the school were a part of the research design.

The survey questionnaire contained items relating to reasons for choosing a school. The questionnaire included items on academic emphasis, test scores, values, class size, individualized instruction, learning environment, discipline, safety, racial and ethnic diversity, convenience, proximity, teaching strategies, curriculum, and educational resources and materials. The respondents were also asked the sources they used to gather information on schools. Commonly reported sources include magnet fairs, social networks, research (including

Internet searches), and classroom observations, consultations with teachers, and reading or hearing about a school or curriculum that seems to be a good match for their child.

Additional questions addressed the sources of information that parents used to determine their choice of schools. Their knowledge of other educational options, and their child's experiences, perceptions, and academic progress were addressed as well. The questionnaires were designed with open-ended questions and a space for parents to add additional comments.

An additional data source was semi-structured interviews with ten Evans Montessori mothers. The self-report close-ended survey questions were supplemented with semi-structured interviews for more in-depth analysis. This study synthesized survey data with parent interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was an on-going activity throughout the research process. The initial analysis occurred with the quantitative surveys. Approximately 300 surveys were distributed to Evans Montessori families. Of the original 300, 137 were returned; of the 137, five were not filled out completely, so 132 samples comprised my final data set. To maintain anonymity, parents were instructed to put no identifying information on the two-sided survey.

Data were collected from the surveys and first entered into a Microsoft Access Database file. All of the appropriate fields were created and data were entered. Data was transferred from Microsoft Access to a Microsoft Excel

Spreadsheet. From the Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet, the data was put into an SPSS data file, where every piece of data was coded, and words were translated into numbers. For example, a parent's response of "Black/African American" for "Ethnicity" was coded as "1" under the Ethnicity field; a parent's response of "White/Caucasian" for "Ethnicity" was coded as "2" under the Ethnicity field. In places on the survey where parents were asked yes/no questions, a response of yes is coded "1" and a response of "no" was coded as "0". Missing data was not coded as 0, but left blank. However, every percentage is based on the 132 total number of Evans Montessori parents. All tables were produced using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Predictive Analytics Software.

Analysis is sometimes difficult to distinguish from transcription. Mishler (1991) noted, "How we arrange and rearrange the interview text in light of our discoveries is a process of testing, clarifying, and deepening our understanding of what is happening in the discourse" (p. 277).

For the qualitative research portion, ten parents were interviewed and the following three questions were asked:

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

Answers to the semi-structured interviews revealed more in-depth information than the surveys captured. The semi-structured interview responses were audio taped and transcribed by a transcriptionist. Although the audio tapes

were transcribed, I listened to them as I read the transcriptions . Frequently occurring words and phrases, impressions, concepts and themes were recorded. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Constant Comparative Method was used to analyze the data. In this method two approaches were employed to analyze the data: unitizing and categorizing.

Unitizing is a coding operation that identifies information units isolated from the text. Categorizing enabled me to order and relate classes of events. Using these two essential processes involved continual revision, modification and adjustment until all new units were placed into appropriate categories and the inclusion of additional units provided no new information. The final step was to review categories for overlapping themes. "The qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data" (Patton, 1990 p. 406). The process of unitizing and categorizing enabled me to determine how to represent the narratives.

After the data was examined, the responses were analyzed and discussed within the broad context of school choice and the narrower issue of public (magnet) school choice. The findings were also discussed in the context of the existing literature. Yin (2003) emphasizes that case study research should be grounded in the body of literature on the topic.

Due to the strong philosophical roots of the Montessori curriculum, the responses of Montessori parents were assessed to determine how closely they

match Montessori ideals. Responses were also assessed to determine whether the parents' educational choices matched their reasons for choosing a school.

This investigation presents a comprehensive, insightful account of the dynamics of navigating school choice decisions. Specifically, the focus is why parents choose the Montessori school over other alternatives and if their educational choices match the reasons for them choosing Montessori schooling. A secondary focus is if variables of family income and ethnicity affect their choices. Thus, this study simultaneously examines the broad issue of school choice and the reasons that parents choose a progressive curriculum.

The study is interpretive by design. A single case study using the mixed methods approach, with multiple data sources was deemed to be the most appropriate medium for presenting a rich, detailed portrayal of parents who choose Montessori schools and their reasons for doing so.

Subjectivity

All research is subject to researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1988) posits researchers should be attentive to their own subjectivity and should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research.

In an article, entitled: "In Search of Subjectivity-One's Own," Peshkin (1988) articulates,

Subjectivity is not a badge of honor, something earned like a merit badge and paraded around on special occasions for all to see. Whatever the

substance of one's persuasion at a given point, one's subjectivity is like a garment that can not be removed. (p. 17)

My research focuses on why parents choose public Montessori schools for their children. As principal of a public Montessori School, Evans Montessori, as a parent of a child attending Evans Montessori, and as a student at a major university in North Carolina , my subjectivity is embodied in three garments that can not be removed, one as parent, one as a principal, and one as a student.

In order to identify his subjectivity during a fieldwork experience Peshkin (1998) uncovers six Subjective I's as described in the following list:

1. *the Ethnic-Maintenance I,*
2. *the Community Maintenance I,*
3. *the E-Pluribus-Unum I,*
4. *the Justice-Seeking I,*
5. *the Pedagogical-Meliorist I,* and
6. *the Nonresearch Human I.*

This list was useful as I identified my own subjectivity and the “actual or imagined impact” (p. 18) that it had on my research.

The Ethnic-Maintenance I is the core of my existence. Being an African American shapes my life, my thinking and my being. As an African American woman, when I listened to some of the African American participants speak about what they wanted for their children in the future, I could sense my emotions being stirred. Some parents talked about wanting their children to attend college.

Being the principal of the school, I was aware that some of these parents had not attended college, so I sensed that this was a dream unfulfilled in their own lives. Listening to these parents reminded me very much of my father's dream for his children. Although he never went to college, he had a burning desire for his children to attend. As I listened to the African American mothers speak, I made extra efforts to be attentive to exactly what they were saying and not to put more emphasis or meaning into their comments.

The Ethnic Maintenance I also surfaced while listening to some of the participants speak about the importance of ethnic diversity in school. I temporarily wondered if these sentiments were being expressed because of political correctness, because I am African American, or because it is their honest assessment. At any rate, I remained cognizant of my feelings and made every possible effort not to allow insularity to interfere with what I was hearing.

The Community-Maintenance I emerged during this study because of the school community in which I conducted my research. When my surveys were conducted, I had been the principal at Evans Montessori for almost a year. While I was aware of some subjectivity because I had formulated an opinion about the school, I was less concerned when reporting the quantitative results because these were self-report surveys and not open to much interpretation.

Additionally, while conducting my interviews of parents at Evans Montessori, I recognized how the parents sensed being connected to the school community. As principal of Evans, the *Community Maintenance* I felt a bit of pride

as I listened to the parents speak of their many positive experiences. During the interviews, there were occasions when parents made affirmative comments about me and my leadership skills. Since I was aware of my subjectivity, my goal was to maintain a pleasant look throughout the interviewing process. I resisted the urge to nod in agreement, blush or poke out my chest.

The E-Pluribus-Unum I surfaced as I reflected upon the peace curriculum taught in Montessori schools. The peace curriculum is one core unifying tenet of Montessori schools. In fact, the symbol of Montessori schools is the Peace Dove and Maria Montessori actually won two Nobel Peace Prizes for her work.

One parent in particular spoke about how un-peaceful two former Evans Montessori employees had been. She continued for several minutes describing these incidents in great detail. While most parents spoke of the peacefulness and pleasant environment, this parent had much to say to the contrary. When I recognized that my feelings were stirred, and, thus, that my subjectivity had been evoked, I began to listen more carefully to her comments to ensure that I was giving her remarks as much credibility as the others.

From an ethnic standpoint, I am clearly aware that African Americans have not always received justice in this country. For this reason, *The Justice Seeking I* is a part of my overall persona. Moreover, as a former special education teacher working with students who had learning differences, I have always been an advocate for justice in the treatment of all children. Though this happened infrequently, when a parent would discuss acts of injustice by

students, staff members, or school district officials, I maintained a neutral look even though at times I felt infuriated.

I was attentive to the *Pedagogical-Meliorist I* particularly when listening to parents speak about their children's educational experience. Nine of the ten participants freely used the term "hands-on" learning, but very few parents related it to any particular content. While many parents stated the importance of "hands on" learning, few actually made curricular connections. One parent did highlight the importance of "concrete hands-on learning experiences". When I felt myself wanting to tell parents more about the pedagogical content of the Montessori Method, and how the manipulative materials are used to build upon and expand knowledge, I was aware that my subjectivities were being evoked. I had to conscientiously remind myself, I was a student conducting research, and not the principal of the school.

The *NonResearch Human I* was the cross between my research self and my human self. Peshkin (1998) articulates that the *Research Human I* has a byproduct which is affection, "which tends to reduce the distance between self and subjects that scholars presume is necessary to learn and write about a person, place or institution" (p. 20). Since I am a familiar face, the principal and a parent, the distance between my subjects and I was lessened.

No one declined my invitation to be interviewed. I think it is partially because I am the principal, and also because in general, the parents seem to like

me. Further, I like the parent population as well. A couple of parents even described feeling honored to be asked to be a part of the interview process.

Peshkin (1988) posits that the more positive experiences you have, the more you soften the harsher edges of your experiences. Since I genuinely cared about my subjects, I made extra efforts for this caring not to affect my research. Identifying and monitoring my “subjective I’s” served to be a strength. Although I had prior knowledge of the participants and I could identify with some of their responses, I remained conscientious of the fact I was wearing three non-removable garments throughout this process, one as a student, one as parent; the other as principal. Throughout the duration of my research study, I constantly reminded myself that my primary role was a student conducting research.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter contains an analysis of why parents choose public Montessori schooling and if their educational choices correspond with their values for choosing Montessori schooling. Further analysis describes variables of family income and ethnicity and their impact on parental choice.

A mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques was deemed the most suitable research design for obtaining and illuminating the intended information. Self-report survey data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews for in-depth analysis. For the purpose of qualitative analysis, a sample of 10 Evans Montessori parents was presented with the following open-ended questions.

Protocol Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. Why do parents choose public Montessori schools?
2. Do parents' educational choices correspond to their values for choosing a school?

3. What is the impact of family income and ethnicity on school choice?

The first question is addressed via qualitative interviews. Questions two and three are derived from a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data. The three questions will be covered in order in this chapter hence the presentation of results begins with the qualitative analysis.

Narratives (Montessori Moms)

The participants for the qualitative portion of the study were 10 Evans Montessori mothers with children in grade three or higher. The sample consisted of five African American mothers and five white mothers. Four were from low-income families and six were from middle-income families. Two respondents (one African American and one white) were actually grandmothers who were the child's primary caregiver. The term "parent" or "mother" is used interchangeably. To assure anonymity, all children were referred to as "he" regardless of the child's actual gender. The demographic breakdown of the participants is presented in Table 1.

The following three questions were asked:

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

The responses were audio taped and transcribed by a transcriptionist.

Data analysis was an on-going activity throughout the research process.

Frequently occurring words and phrases, impressions, concepts and themes

Table 1***Demographics of Montessori Moms***

Name	Marital Status		Race		SES	
	Single	Married	African American	White	Middle Class	Low Income
Cynthia		X		X	X	
Jane	X		X			X
Tisha		X	X		X	
Alice		X		X	X	
Christine	X			X		X
Sasha	X		X			X
Queenie	X		X		X	
Lisa		X		X	X	
Bonita		X	X		X	
Barbara	X			X		X

were recorded. The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss's 1967) was used to analyze the data. In this method two approaches were employed to analyze the data: unitizing and categorizing.

Unitizing is a coding operation that identifies information units isolated from the text. Categorizing enabled me to order and relate classes of events.

Using these two essential processes involved continual revision, modification and adjustment until all new units were placed into appropriate categories and the inclusion of new additional units provided no new information. The final step was to review categories for overlapping themes. "The qualitative analyst's effort at uncovering patterns, themes, and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data (Patton, 1990, p. 406).

At a later stage in my analysis, the data were coded into categories representing the following themes:

1. Academics (grades, testing, college prep, etc.)
2. Growth and Development (potential, challenge, progress, advancement, excel, opportunities)
3. Discipline/Safety (home/school)
4. Diversity/Culture
5. Montessori specific (hands-on, pacing, interest)
6. Independence (independent thinker)
7. Magnet
8. Exceptional Learner (disabilities, accelerated)
9. Financial Issues

These themes were chosen because they were mentioned by a minimum of two participants and by as many as nine of the ten participants. The number of

times that each theme was mentioned is summarized in Table 2 (see Appendix D for a graphical representation of these data).

Table 2

Number of Parents Mentioning Each Theme

Theme	Number of Times Mentioned	By Whom
1. Academics (grades, testing, college prep, etc.)	8	Cynthia
	4	Tisha
	5	Alice
	2	Queenie
	5	Lisa
2. Growth and Development (potential, challenge, progress, advancement, excel, opportunities)	3	Cynthia
	6	Jane
	2	Tisha
	3	Alice
	3	Christine
	3	Sasha
	4	Queenie
	5	Lisa
3	Bonita	
3. Discipline/Safety (home/school)	7	Cynthia
	7	Jane
	1	Tisha
	23	Alice
	2	Queenie
	1	Lisa
3	Bonita	

Theme	Number of Times Mentioned	By Whom
4. Diversity/Culture	2	Cynthia
	2	Alice
	1	Queenie
	1	Lisa
5. Montessori Specific (hands-on, pacing, interest, student/teacher ratio)	4	Cynthia
	2	Tisha
	2	Alice
	8	Christine
	3	Sasha
	1	Lisa
6. Independence (independent thinker)	2	Tisha
	2	Sasha
	1	Queenie
	2	Bonita
7. Magnet	2	Jane
	1	Alice
	1	Christine
	2	Sasha
	1	Lisa
8. Exceptional Learner (disabilities, accelerated)	2	Alice
	2	Christine
9. Financial Issues	1	Alice
	1	Queenie
	2	Lisa

After further analyzing the data, these nine themes were compressed into the following four dominant themes.

Dominant Themes

1. *Self-Actualization*: referring to personal growth and fulfillment, intrinsic motivation to be the best person one can become. References to the child's happiness and interest in school as well as to individual growth and development were classified under this heading.
2. *Moral Character/College*: referring either to moral character or to aspirations for college.
3. *Academic Achievement with Anxiety*: desire to see the child achieve at a high level but with evidence of undue concern or pressure.
4. *Academic Achievement without Anxiety* – desire to see the child achieve without evidence of stress.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Several comments fit into two or more categories. For example, academic achievement was sometimes mentioned in conjunction with college aspirations. Several comments referring to developing the child's fullest potential could be construed as either self-actualization or academic achievement without anxiety.

For example, this comment by Queenie, combines self-actualization, moral character, and academic achievement: "I want him to be independent, an independent, responsible young person, intelligent also and academically equipped."

In some cases, the comments were paradoxical, such as wanting the child's fulfillment yet revealing excessive stress on achievement. This is reflected in the statement of Christine:

There are so many things I guess I could want. I want him to be able to do whatever he wants. He's so bright. He really is. His main issue is the ADHD. So he's got challenges that he has to overcome and I would love for him to be able to overcome them and it may be easier to overcome them in the future. He's so smart that he can just excel. He's got enough brainpower in him to be a doctor or a lawyer. He had an above average IQ, so he's overly smart. I think he needs to be drawn out. It needs to be taken out so he can do better. I want him to continue to feel like he's being challenged.

The two most notable findings were the overwhelmingly positive tone of the parents' accounts and the similarity of responses by parents across race and income. Consistent with Montessori's philosophy, the overarching theme of the narratives was self-actualization. Many responses describing the child's experience at school fell into this category:

He has loved coming to Evans Montessori; he really does enjoy it, especially his teachers. He's just loving the activities, great, great, great. Plus he's doing well. (Queenie)

He has very positive interaction with his teachers. He's very excited about school. He wants to excel and do his best. He's been here since kindergarten and has really adapted well to Montessori, so I've seen some tremendous change in him. He tries to handle situations not just at school, but even at home in a peaceful manner. So that has been a blessing, I've seen him maturing greatly. (Bonita)

Actually I think my child has had a good, rather a great experience here. I enjoy the school and so does he. (Sasha)

I want him to continue to be challenged in school and outside of school. I want these very critical years of learning and thinking - I want him to be that sponge and I want to be able to provide him any and every opportunity to be able to broaden his mind. (Lisa)

He loves it here. He has the whole time. He likes doing things and getting his hands in it. But that's the main reason we tried to be here because he likes to be involved in what he's doing, not just book work. (Cynthia)

Moral development was implicit in several comments classified under self-actualization. For example:

Montessori not only encourages the development of education but the development of the whole person - how to realize that you can do more than just help yourself or family but other people. The world is out there and there are no limitations to education to how much help you can provide to bring peace to the world. (Cynthia)

The last questions span both the child's experience and the parent's reasons for sending the child to the Evans Montessori School. The survey data revealed that the Evans Montessori School parents engaged in a range of information-seeking strategies before deciding upon the school. The qualitative accounts show an excellent match between the parents' preferences based on the survey report and their elaboration of the Montessori school. Some comments explicitly mentioned the Montessori philosophy:

I love the Montessori philosophy; it's ironic for us to be in Montessori in public school because there's a cost that goes with that. I work at another magnet and my children could go there, but I prefer Montessori. I love the hands on education because I think children learn better when they use more hands on experience instead of using a lot of paperwork. (Bonita)
I had read up about Montessori and I have a friend whose child is in Montessori and I like the approach of where it's more hands on and I like it

because they get to move to the different centers, they're not tied down to a desk. (Tisha)

You do have Park County standards that you have to meet obviously, but at the same time because it's Montessori you have a little bit of leeway. I think there's different ways of learning, not everybody has to learn the exact same way in the Montessori classroom verses the traditional classroom where everybody has to learn the exact same way all the time. (Christine)

I was very familiar with the criteria of the teaching in Montessori schools, and I wanted him to start off in the magnet program. I have been really happy with his development ever since he's been in the program. (Jane)

In the survey report, the Evans Montessori parents awarded the highest priority to their child's development as an individual as their main concern in choosing a school. This was clearly reflected in responses related to the child's experience and aspirations for the child's future as well as in reasons for choosing the school. Other aspects of the Montessori curriculum also figured prominently in the narratives, notably the emphasis on hands-on learning and individual attention. For example:

It has been challenging. I like that he learns through concrete experiences and abstract as well, using hands-on materials has been good for him. (Lisa)

If they don't excel in an area, they still can improve at whatever level. And if they do excel in an area, they can keep moving ahead. That and the hands on environment is what I like a lot. (Alice)

Several parents spoke favorably of group work and described a friendly and respectful social climate. The word "peaceful" appeared in several

comments. One account conveyed the advantages of multi-age groupings whereby the child stays with the same teacher for more than one year:

Before I could get him to start appreciating the academic part, he had a lot of emotional problems that had to be dealt with. That interfered with his behavior. And it was fortunate that from kindergarten on to the third grade, he was put with a teacher that he stayed with from kindergarten to third grade. And they established a close rapport that helped him feel like he 333 was a family member not just a teacher and student. So he was always happy to complete and achieve to the highest level for her. And whenever he ran into some problems she didn't hesitate to help him into get some solutions to them. (Jane)

The ethnic composition of Evans Montessori School is approximately 50% African American, 45% white, and 5% Asian, Native American, or multiracial. A few parents directly mentioned diversity:

I came and visited the school and I also looked at the makeup, the percentages, the different races diversity and stuff like that. Those things are important to me and it was good mix. Those were the things that helped me decide that I wanted him to come to this school. (Queenie)

The more he is there, the more he appreciates and understands culture and that we are in a global society and it is not just about your neighborhood that you live in. I think that is probably the greatest thing that we have gotten. (Cynthia)

This parent added that:

We have been so thrilled with the program. It exceeds even what we could have received from a private school because he is now integrated in a very diverse population, which he may not have gotten at a private school. (Cynthia)

His experience has been a positive experience for the most part. It has been a social experience. It's been diverse. He has been able to meet and

befriend students who are not from backgrounds similar to is. And I believe to my son and to me as a parent that that is rewarding because he needs to see what life is like and school has provided that opportunity for him. (Lisa)

It is interesting to note low-income parents made more direct references to the child's attending college, perhaps because more affluent parents take it for granted that their child will go on to earn a college degree. Low-income parents were also more likely to compare the Montessori curriculum to the traditional school, which may suggest that they saw more possibility the child would attend the local public school whereas middle class parents were confident that the child would attend a school of their choice. There were relatively few comments that were classified as academic achievement with anxiety and these were expressed by both African American and white, poor and middle class parents. Low-income parents expressed equally high aspirations for the child's personal growth and achievement as their more affluent counterparts:

I want him to be himself. I want him to grow and mature in a way that is always positive for him to make good decisions no matter what situation that he's in. (Cynthia)

I want him to shine. I want him to understand that there are no limits. Keep on reaching even if you fail and I don't care how many times you fail, just keep on trying and trying. I want him to have a productive future. I want him to have a bright future. (Sasha)

The overall most striking observation is the congruity between the Montessori philosophy and the statements of the parents who chose the Montessori school. There were very few negative comments and these related to

a specific adult or peer influence. The overriding theme was the confidence the parents expressed that the school was structured to help children reach their potential. Parents found the school equally advantageous for children with learning or emotional difficulties. Words such as “happy,” “pleasure,” “peaceful,” “challenging,” and “rewarding” surfaced in several narratives. The responses were highly personal yet they shared a collective appreciation of the principles of the Montessori curriculum. There were virtually no discernable differences based on ethnicity or income regarding the child’s experience, future aspirations, or reasons for choosing the Montessori school.

The next section discusses the qualitative data.

Survey Findings

The following section presents the quantitative analysis derived from the *School Choice Questionnaire*. Each questionnaire represents a record of information for one child. Approximately 300 surveys were distributed to parents at Evans Montessori Elementary School with a return rate of 45.7% (137 surveys). Of the 137 that were returned, 132 were completed as required and used as my final sample. The questionnaires were distributed by teachers; they were returned to school via the students. To maintain as much anonymity as possible, parents were instructed to give no identifying information. Of the 132 Evans Montessori families, 47 (35.6%) identified themselves as African American, 75 (56.8%) as white, and 10 identified themselves in the Other category (Other includes Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, multi-racial). Some

parents had more than one child, thus Parent Guardian information was duplicated across some records. The questionnaire is structured to provide the following information.

I. Side 1: Demographic Characteristics

A. Parent/Guardian Information

- Age (of parent)
- Ethnicity (of parent)
- Education Level (of parent)
- Occupation (of parent)
- Family Yearly Income

B. Child Information

- Number of children enrolled at the school
- Age of child
- Grade level
- Child's Ability
- Child's Learning Preferences
- Child's Academic Strengths
- Child's Academic Interests

II. Side 2: Reasons for Choosing This School

A. General Information about the School

- Did you look into other schools before sending your child to the current school?

- What other schools or types of schools did you look into?
- What sources did you use to gather information about schools?

C. Your Values about the School

D. Additional Comments

My research results are reflected by the 132 questionnaires (44% of the population) that were completed and returned. Although this is a relatively high return rate for surveys, it is wise to use caution when making generalizations about the entire population of children and parents at the school. Although statistically powerful assertions can not be made, the data is examined to determine basic similarities and differences. Missing values were excluded from the analysis for each variable; therefore some of the percentages are based on numbers slightly smaller than the original sample.

Of the original dataset 5, of the 137 participants did not report their family yearly income. It is interesting to note that of the five surveys that did not report yearly income, three were African Americans, one was white and one was American Indian. Since part of my study is focusing upon how the variable of family income impacts school choice, these five surveys were excluded from the final data analysis. While most parents filled out only one survey for a single child, there were a number of parents who filled out a survey for either two or three children (based on handwriting sampling and demographic data). Thus, results are reported in terms of numbers of surveys, not actual number of parents. Further inductive reasoning, based on analyzing the information

provided on each survey (demographic information, handwriting, etc.), would have to be done to collapse the number of surveys down to the final number of parents who took each survey, since the surveys were completed anonymously.

The following analyses center on parents' information about their child(ren) and reasons for choosing the Montessori school, focusing comparisons on ethnicity and family yearly income (socioeconomic status). See Appendix D for graphical representations of these data.

Ethnicity

Of the 132 Montessori School surveys, 47 (35.6%) of the surveys were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Black/African American*, 75 (56.8%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *White/Caucasian*, and 10 (7.6%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Other*. *Other* includes *Hispanic/Latino*, *American Indian*, and multi-racial households (for example, on some surveys, parents selected *Black/African American* and *White/Caucasian*) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Ethnicity

	Frequency	Percent
Valid Black/African American	47	35.6
White/Caucasian	75	56.8
Other	10	7.6
Total	132	100.0

Family Income

Survey results revealed that 39 (29.5%) were completed by parents who classified their household as making *less than \$40,000* a year, while 93 (70.5%) were completed by parents who classified their household as making *greater than or equal to \$40,000* a year. It is interesting to note that the percentage of parents who reported that they earn less than \$40,00 (29.5%) almost identically aligns with the percentage of free and reduced income parents in Evans Montessori School 29% (based on information provided by the Park County Child Nutrition office). The fact that more than 70% of families report earning more than \$40,000 supports research findings (Waldrip, 2005) that families who choose magnet schools typically earn a higher income. Yet, over 40% of African American families who completed the survey earn less than \$40,000 a year; over 65% of white families report earning more than \$40,000 a year (see Tables 4, 5).

Table 4

Family Income

Income		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Less than \$40,000	39	29.5
	Greater than or equal to \$40,000	93	70.5
	Total	132	100.0

Ethnicity/Family Income

Of the 132 surveys, 42.5% (20 of 47) of *Black/African American* families report a family yearly income of *less than \$40,000*, 12 of 75 (16%) of

White/Caucasian families report a yearly income of *less than \$40,000*, and 7 of 10 (70%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Other* with a family yearly income of *less than \$40,000*. Twenty-seven surveys (57.5%), were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Black/African American* with a family yearly income of *greater than or equal to \$40,000*, 63 (84%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *White/Caucasian* with a family yearly income of *greater than or equal to \$40,000*, and 3 (30%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Other* with a family yearly income of *greater than or equal to \$40,000* (see Table 5).

Table 5

Ethnicity * Family Income

		Family Yearly Income		Total
		Less than \$40,000	Greater than or Equal to \$40,000	
Count				
Ethnicity	Black/African American	20	27	47
	White/Caucasian	12	63	75
	Other	7	3	10
Total		39	93	132

Ethnicity/Child's Learning Ability

Based on the 132 participants, 11 (less than 1%) were completed by parents who classified their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*, and 50 (38%) were completed by parents who classified their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus* (note that parents could leave this survey item blank if their child

was not classified as either Learning Disabled or Accelerated Learner/Focus). Five surveys were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Black/African American* and labeled their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*, 4 were completed by parents who classified themselves as *White/Caucasian* and labeled their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*, and 2 (20%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Other* and labeled their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*. Twenty-one surveys (45%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Black/African American* and labeled their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus*, 23 (31%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *White/Caucasian* and labeled their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus*, and 6 (60%) were completed by parents who classified themselves as *Other* and labeled their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus*. It is interesting to note that although children can be identified as *Learning Disabled* and *Accelerated/Learning Focus*, no parents checked both categories (see Table 6).

Table 6

Ethnicity * Child's Learning Ability

		Child's Learning Ability	
		Learning Disabled	Accelerated Learner/Focus
Count			
Ethnicity	Black/African American	5	21
	White/Caucasian	4	23
	Other	2	6
Total		11	50

Family Income/Child's Learning Ability

Seven surveys were completed by parents who classified their households as earning *less than \$40,000* a year and labeled their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*, and 4 were completed by parents who classified their household as earning *greater than or equal to \$40,000* and labeled their child(ren) as *Learning Disabled*. Fifteen surveys were completed by parents who classified their households as earning *less than \$40,000* a year and labeled their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus*, and 35 were completed by parents who classified their household as earning *greater than or equal to \$40,000* and labeled their child(ren) as *Accelerated Learner/Focus* (see Table 7).

Table 7

Family Income * Child's Learning Ability

		Child's Learning Ability	
		Learning Disabled	Accelerated Learner/Focus
Count			
Family Yearly Income	Less than \$40,000	7	15
	Greater than or equal to \$40,000	4	35
Total		11	50

Child's Learning Preferences/Ethnicity

Hands on learning was selected as the dominant learning preference by all ethnic groups. A total of 115 parents indicated this was a priority. *Visual*

learning and individualized instruction were also favored methods chosen by parents (see Table 8).

Table 8

Child's Learning Preferences * Ethnicity

Learning Preference	Ethnicity			Total
	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Other	
Individualized Instruction	23	49	6	78
Group Learner	22	32	4	58
Hands-on Learner	43	64	8	115
Auditory Learner	13	22	1	36
Visual Learner	31	47	6	84
Interpersonal	26	43	5	74
Intrapersonal	13	40	3	56

Child's Learning Preferences/Family Income

Hands on learning, again, was the leading preference for families earning both above and below \$40,000 with a total of 115 families selecting this as a priority. *Visual learning and individualized instruction* were also dominant methods chosen by parents (see Table 9).

Table 9***Child's Learning Preferences * Family Income***

Learning Preference	Family Income		Total
	Less than \$40,000	Greater than or Equal to \$40,000	
Individualized Instruction	19	59	78
Group Learner	12	46	58
Hands-on Learner	32	83	115
Auditory Learner	8	28	36
Visual Learner	25	59	84
Interpersonal	15	59	74
Intrapersonal	17	39	56

Child's Academic Strengths/Ethnicity

Of the 132 Montessori School surveys, 83 were completed by parents who stated that *reading* was an academic strength for their child(ren), 82 were completed by parents who stated that *math* was an academic strength for their child(ren), 79 were completed by parents who stated that *verbal skills* was an academic strength for their child(ren), and 68 were completed by parents who stated that *reasoning skills* was an academic strength for their children (Note that parents could check all that apply for *Child's Academic Strengths*) (see Table 10).

Child's Academic Strengths/Family Income

Art and *reading* were leading priorities for parents in the below 40,000 income bracket. For parents in the \$40,000 and above income bracket, *verbal*

skills led followed by math and *reading*. (Note that parents could check all that apply for *Child's Academic Strengths*) (see Table 11).

Table 10***Child's Academic Strengths * Ethnicity***

Academic Strengths	Ethnicity			Total
	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Other	
Math	25	53	4	82
Reading	32	45	6	83
Writing	25	29	3	57
Science	12	27	4	43
Geography	6	14	2	22
Social Studies	11	11	4	26
Reasoning Skills	20	46	2	68
Verbal Skills	25	49	5	79
Music	19	25	3	47
Art	25	36	6	67
Sports/Physical Education	1	2	0	3
Dance	1	1	0	2
History	0	1	0	1
Computers	1	1	0	2
Other	0	1	0	1

Table 11***Child's Academic Strengths * Family Income***

Academic Strengths	Family Income		Total
	Less than \$40,000	Greater than or Equal to \$40,000	
Math	21	61	82
Reading	22	61	82
Writing	19	38	57
Science	12	31	43
Geography	5	17	22
Social Studies	10	16	26
Reasoning Skills	19	49	68
Verbal Skills	16	63	79
Music	13	34	47
Art	23	44	67
Sports/Physical Education	0	3	3
Dance	0	2	2
History	0	1	1
Computers	0	2	2
Other	0	1	1

Child's Academic Interests/Ethnicity

Of the 132 Montessori School surveys, 96 were completed by parents who stated that *art* was an academic interest for their child(ren), 90 were completed by parents who stated that *music* was an academic interest for their child(ren), 88 were completed by parents who stated that *math* was an academic interest for their child(ren), and 86 were completed by parents who stated that reading was an academic interest for their children. *Music* and *art* were the leading areas of interests amongst all ethnic groups, followed by *reading* and *math* leading as chief academic interests (note that parents could check all that apply for *Child's Academic Interests*) (see Table 12).

Table 12

Child's Academic Interests * Ethnicity

Academic Interests	Ethnicity			Total
	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Other	
Math	29	55	4	88
Reading	32	50	4	86
Writing	28	30	5	63
Science	12	40	4	56
Geography	6	19	3	28
Social Studies	4	16	1	21
Reasoning Skills	8	26	3	37
Verbal Skills	14	26	5	45
Music	36	48	6	90
Art	33	56	7	96
Sports/Physical Education	1	7	0	8
Dance	3	1	0	4
History	0	2	0	2
Computers	1	0	0	1
Other	0	1	1	2

Child's Academic Interests/Family Income

Of the 132 surveys, 96 were completed by parents who stated that *art* was an academic interest for their child(ren), 90 were completed by parents who stated that *music* was an academic interest for their child(ren), 88 were completed by parents who stated that *math* was an academic interest for their child(ren), and 86 were completed by parents who stated that reading was an academic interest for their children. *Art* was a primary interest for parents in both income brackets followed by math and music (Note that parents could check all that apply for *Child's Academic Interests*) (see Table 13).

Table 13

Child's Academic Interests * Family Income

Academic Strengths	Family Income		Total
	Less than \$40,000	Greater than or Equal to \$40,000	
Math	27	61	88
Reading	25	61	86
Writing	22	41	63
Science	13	43	56
Geography	5	23	28
Social Studies	3	18	21
Reasoning Skills	9	28	37
Verbal Skills	10	35	45
Music	23	67	90
Art	30	66	96
Sports/Physical Education	0	8	8
Dance	1	3	4
History	0	2	2
Computers	0	1	1
Other	1	1	2

What Other Types of Schools Did You Look Into?/Ethnicity

Of the 132 Montessori School surveys, 63 were completed by parents who looked at other *Magnet* schools prior to sending their child to Evans Montessori School, 36 were completed by parents who looked into *Private Independent* schools, and 26 were completed by parents who looked into Public/District Traditional. All three groups, African Americans, Caucasians/Whites and Others awarded greatest priority to looking into other magnet schools. (Note that parents could check all that apply for *What Other Types of Schools Did You Look Into?*) (see Table 14).

Table 14

What Other Types of Schools Did You Look Into? * Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Magnet	Private Independent	Charter	Church-Affiliated	Home-Schooling	Public/District Traditional	Other
Black/African American	19	15	4	3	3	3	0
White/Caucasian	39	19	8	3	15	23	2
Other	5	2	1	0	0	0	1
Total	63	36	13	6	18	26	3

What Other Types of Schools Did You Look Into?/Family Income

The most highly favored option that parents checked into before selecting Evans Montessori was *another magnet* school. Sixty three parents reported this option as their first choice. Both parents that earn more than \$40,000 and parents who earn less than \$40,000 selected this as a priority. *Looking into a*

private or independent school was the second highest choice for both parents who earn above \$40,000 and below \$40,000 (see Table 15).

Table 15

What Other Types of Schools Did You Look Into? * Family Income

Family Income	Magnet	Private Independent	Charter	Church-Affiliated	Home-Schooling	Public/District Traditional	Other
Less than \$40,000	17	7	1	1	5	1	3
Greater than or equal to \$40,000	46	29	12	5	13	25	0
Total	63	36	13	6	18	26	3

What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information about Schools/Ethnicity

Of the 132 Evans Montessori School surveys, 74 were completed by parents who used a *Magnet Fair* to gather information about schools, 65 were completed by parents who used *Another Parent* to gather information about schools, 55 were completed by parents who used a *Social Network* to gather information about schools, 52 were completed by parents who used a *Classroom Observation* to gather information about schools. *White* families used *Magnet Fairs*, *Social Networks* and *Classroom Observations* as their primary means of securing information. *African Americans* relied on *Magnet Fairs* and *Another Parent* to gather information and *Other* families used the *Internet* as their main source of information (see Table 16).

Table 16***What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information about Schools? * Ethnicity***

Ethnicity	Magnet Fair	Social Network	Internet Search	Consultation with Teacher	Classroom Observation	Another Parent	Other
Black/African American	30	13	16	8	10	26	3
White/Caucasian	42	41	22	18	41	38	11
Other	2	1	5	1	1	1	2
Total	74	55	43	27	52	65	16

What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information about Schools?/Family***Income***

Families that make less than \$40,000 used the *Internet* as their primary source of information gathering. Parents that have incomes above \$40,000 used the *Magnet Fair* as their key source of gathering information, followed by *Another Parent* and *Social Network* (see Table 17).

Table 17***What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information about Schools? * Family Income***

Family Income	Magnet Fair	Social Network	Internet Search	Consultation With Teacher	Classroom Observation	Another Parent	Other
Less than \$40,000	13	7	16	11	5	13	6
Greater than or equal to \$40,000	61	48	27	16	47	52	10
Total	74	55	43	27	52	65	16

School Values/Ethnicity

Of the 132 surveys, parents used a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being *very unimportant* or *poor*, and 5 being *very important* or *excellent*; the average ratings of *School Values* ranged from nearly 4.93 all the way to 2.95. On average, parents rated their *child's development as an individual* as the most important value with an overall average of 4.93. *Hands-on learning* as well as *child as independent worker* were rated with an overall average of 4.78. The values rated as least important were *receiving rewards in school* with an overall average of 2.95, *proximity of the school* with an overall average of 3.09, and *homework each day* with an overall average of 3.42 (see Table 18).

Table 18

School Values * Ethnicity

School Values	Ethnicity			
	Total (Average)	Black/ African American	White/ Caucasian	Other
Child's development as individual	4.93	4.96	4.93	4.90
Hands on learning	4.78	4.81	4.75	4.90
Child as independent worker	4.78	4.81	4.73	5.00
Curriculum	4.77	4.96	4.63	4.90
Teaching strategy	4.75	4.81	4.71	4.78
Child's development as group member	4.64	4.55	4.69	4.67
Child's class size	4.66	4.64	4.67	4.78
Child's progress	4.45	4.26	4.59	4.33
Making good grades	4.30	4.60	4.11	4.33
Safety	4.40	4.26	4.45	4.67
Discipline	4.27	4.26	4.27	4.33
Racial and ethnic diversity	4.13	4.20	4.03	4.67
High test scores	3.97	4.40	3.69	4.00
Homework each day	3.42	3.89	3.04	4.10
Proximity of school	3.09	3.15	3.00	3.56
Receive rewards in school	2.95	3.51	2.54	3.44
Overall experience	4.56	4.38	4.65	4.78

School Values/Family Income

Of the 132 Montessori School surveys, on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being *very unimportant* or *poor*, and 5 being *very important* or *excellent*, the average ratings of *School Values* ranged from nearly 4.80 all the way to 3.12. On average, both high income and low income parents awarded the greatest priority to *hands-on* learning. Other high values were awarded to the *child's development as an individual* and as an *independent worker*. The values rated as least important were *receiving rewards in school* with an overall average of 2.95, *proximity of the school* with an overall average of 3.12, and *homework each day* with an overall average of 3.42. These results show that while high and low income parents share similar values for their children's education, high income parents make a stronger distinction of the importance of certain values over others, than low income parents (see Table 19).

Table 19***School Values * Family Income***

School Values	Family Income		
	Total (Average)	Less than \$40,000	Greater than or equal to \$40,000
Child's development as individual	4.80	4.67	4.94
Hands on learning	4.78	4.72	4.81
Child as independent worker	4.68	4.58	4.78
Curriculum	4.65	4.52	4.77
Teaching strategy	4.66	4.55	4.76
Child's development as group member	4.56	4.49	4.63
Child's class size	4.03	4.19	3.87
Child's progress	4.38	4.30	4.46
Making good grades	4.30	4.67	4.32
Safety	4.40	4.53	4.35
Discipline	4.27	4.47	4.18
Racial and ethnic diversity	4.17	4.19	4.14
High test scores	4.20	4.44	3.97
Homework each day	3.42	4.42	3.43
Proximity of school	3.61	4.13	3.09
Receive rewards in school	3.12	3.53	2.72
Overall experience	4.56	4.66	4.53

Conclusion

To best address the issues of parental choice of Montessori schooling, and the impact of race and ethnicity, a mixed methods medium was deemed the most appropriate selection. Combining qualitative and quantitative components was the most apposite approach to illuminate this case.

Ten "Montessori Moms" were involved in a semi-structured interview process. Their responses were analyzed and coded; nine significant themes emerged. These nine themes were compressed into four dominant themes, Self Actualization, Moral Character/College, Academic Achievement with Anxiety and

Academic Achievement without Anxiety. The categories were not mutually exclusive in that several comments overlapped and fit into two or more categories. The two most prominent findings were the overwhelmingly positive tone of the parents' accounts and the similarity of responses by mothers across race and income. In harmony with the Montessori philosophy, the predominant theme was self-actualization; parents want their children to be independent, happy and the best they can be.

A self-report questionnaire requesting demographic information, students' strengths and interests, and parents' values was completed by 132 families. Most parents agreed that their child's development as an individual, and their child's ability to practice hands-on learning was vitally important. Math and Reading were viewed as strong academic areas to be nurtured in the school environment. Test scores, homework, and rewards were regarded as valuable to some degree, but were not as important as individual, intrinsic growth that can not be seen on paper.

A significant number of Evans Montessori families checked other schools prior to selecting Evans. A large percentage of parents checked other magnet schools prior to sending their child to Evans. Private Independent (27.01%) and Public/ District Traditional (19.71%) schools were also considered by many Evans Montessori families. Sources that parents used to gain information about schools varied across racial lines. Whereas most white parents attended a magnet fair, used a social network or did a classroom observation, African

American parents attended a magnet fair, or talked with another parent. Families classified in the Other category used the internet as their primary source to gain information about the school.

Parents were asked to rate several aspects about the school on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = Very Unimportant, 5 = Very Important). Factors such as classroom instruction, school environment, and child development were considered. Evans Montessori parents overwhelmingly value their child's development as an individual as very important. This is consistent with the qualitative, self-actualization findings. Other values that Evans Montessori parents believe are very important include hands-on learning, and their child's development as an independent worker.

Although the results show that Evans Montessori parents share values for their children's education, parents with higher incomes (above \$40,000) showed a distinction of the importance of certain values over others. Lower income parents gave an approximate weighted value to each of the categories.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS/IMPLICATIONS

The findings/implications of Navigating the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: “Why Do Parents Choose Montessori?” A Case Study, are presented in this chapter. The chapter includes the following: a summary of the study, discussion of key findings and conclusions, implications and recommendations for future study.

Summary

The genesis of the school choice movement traces its heritage to the work of Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman. Shortly after the Brown v. Board of Education case, Friedman devised a plan for student vouchers that has been further developed and used in states across the nation including Ohio, Florida, Arizona, Minnesota and Pennsylvania.

As a result of political conservatives’ efforts to control racial desegregation of public schools after the 1954 Brown decision, “freedom of choice” was implemented. This freedom allowed African American students to attend historically white schools, but included parameters such as space and transportation constraints.

Today, school choice covers an extensive plethora of options, including private tutoring, open enrollment plans, magnet schools, tuition tax credits, public

vouchers for private schools and home instruction. The catchphrase “magnets” works to publicize the underlying concept that magnet schools attract substantial numbers of students from different backgrounds. Growing in popularity, magnet schools have a specialized curriculum or theme. Montessori schools remain one of the more popular magnet themes.

The proliferation of magnet schools during the 1970s led to the introduction of the Montessori curriculum into the public school system (Cohen, 1990). Based on Maria Montessori’s philosophy of childhood development, the number of Montessori schools in the United States continues to expand in both public and private school sectors. The most dramatic growth in Montessori public schools has occurred in the past 15 years. Paralleling the upsurge in school reform and school choice initiatives, the number of public Montessori schools has soared from roughly 50 to nearly three hundred.

A distinguishing feature of the Montessori curriculum is respect for the child’s natural intelligence (Brehony, 2000; Edwards, 2002; Weissglass, 1999). Under the guidance of specially trained teachers, children engage in a variety of hands-on learning experiences designed to provide them with opportunities to become independent learners. The curriculum is highly individualized and there is strong emphasis on the quality of the learning experience. The school selected for this case study, Evans Montessori School, located in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, has a long waiting list and is considered one of the most sought after magnet schools in the area.

While there are many studies on why parents choose a particular type of school (private, parochial, magnet, charter, or local public school), few researchers have focused on parents' reasons for choosing a particular curriculum. (In this study, the word curriculum is used broadly to infer activities, instruction, and daily interactions within a school environment). This study sought to fill this gap in educational research. A mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative procedures was selected for the design. The purpose of the study was twofold. Prior research has revealed differences between parents who exercise choice in determining their children's schools (Bomotti, 1996; Bosetti, 2004; Goldring & Hausman, 1999; Hsieh & Shen, 2001) and parents who send their children to the local assigned school. Further research emphasizes that parents of low wealth and/or parents of color navigate school choice decisions differently as they are confined in their choices (Bussell, 1998; Fuller & Elmore, 1996; Hanushek, 1993; Hausman & Goldring, 2000; Harrison, 2005; Wells, 1990). Building on this foundation, I sought to investigate if there were intra-differences based on ethnicity and income between parents who opt for school choice and elect Montessori schooling. The quantitative component compared parents of different ethnicities and income levels who exercised choice in their school selection. The qualitative medium consisted of interviews with a small sample of Montessori parents (five African American and five white, six middle-income and four low-income) to explore in depth their reasons for

selecting the Montessori magnet school and the qualities of the child's learning experience.

The quantitative component survey sample was composed of 132 parents whose children attended Evans Montessori Magnet School. Based on the research, the study presupposed that parents with higher incomes have more options for school choice. Research clearly points out (Bussell, 1998, Hausman & Goldring, 2000) that social networks tend to favor parents with higher incomes and low income parents are constrained in their choices. The families with incomes of less than \$40,000 researched fewer options prior to sending their child(ren) to Evans Montessori than the families with incomes above \$40,000. It is interesting to note the majority of Evans Montessori families did look into at least one other option prior to selecting Evans.

In reporting the sources used to gather information about schools, the families with incomes below \$40,000 (while utilizing many of the choices in the survey including magnet fair, social network, classroom observation, consultation with teacher, internet search, etc) indicated making fewer inquiries to acquire knowledge about the school than the parents with incomes above \$40,000.

While all parents looked into different schools before making the Montessori choice, white parents found magnet fairs, social networks and classroom observations as their predominant mode for obtaining information. African American parents reported that magnet fairs and talking to another parent

were their principal means toward gaining information. Parents in the Other category used Internet searches as their primary method of securing information.

Mathematics and reading were perceived as the main academic strengths for all children while parents of African American and Other children awarded slightly higher priorities in reading, and white parents gave an edge over reading to math. African American parents also rated writing, art and verbal skills as secondary strengths. White parents gave a high rating to verbal skills, with reasoning skills trailing closely behind.

For parents making less than \$40,000, art was rated as a primary strength, closely followed by reading. Parents who had incomes which exceeded \$40,000 viewed verbal skills as their child's number one strength, followed by a tie with math and reading.

In the area of child's academic interests, African American families rated music, art and reading as first, second, and third choices. White parents rated art, math and reading in that order as their prime selections. Families in the Other category rated art and music as their primary choices with a tie between verbal skills and writing for the third choice.

Families whose income is less than \$40,000 prioritized art, math and reading as their leading choices for child's academic interest. Families whose income exceeds \$40,000 chose music as the key academic interest, art as a secondary interest, followed with a tie between math and reading.

Despite demographic differences, the majority of parents agreed on what was important for their children. As a group, the parents gave high priority to their child's development as an individual. They strongly endorsed hands-on learning activities, independent work, and a good curriculum. Consistent with the emphasis on independent learning, extrinsic rewards were given the lowest priority.

All of the parents were asked to evaluate different aspects of a school such as academic curriculum, child's development as an individual, safety, discipline, etc, that are important in making a choice about a school. The scale for each aspect ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being the aspect is Very Unimportant, to 5 being the aspect is Very Important. Evans Montessori parents overwhelmingly value their child's development as an individual; however, African American families attribute the highest priority to that category with a 4.96; Whites/Caucasians and Others rank that category highly as well with a 4.93 and 4.90 respectively. Whites and Others give their lowest preference to Receiving Rewards with a 2.54 and 3.44 respectively. African Americans parents only award a 3.51 to receiving rewards, but actually rate proximity of school even lower at a 3.15.

Racial and ethnic diversity while ranked as important among all three groups was ranked highest by Others, 4.67, followed by African Americans at 4.20, then by whites at 4.03.

There were more discernible differences in the rating of School Values based on family incomes. Low income parents rated only one aspect below a 4.00. Receiving rewards in school was rated a 3.53. Low income parents viewed racial and ethnic diversity (4.19), class size (4.19), safety (4.53), child's progress (4.30), proximity of the school (4.13), discipline (4.47), homework each day (4.42), and high test scores (4.44) all as important aspects of their children's school. These results show that Evans Montessori low income and high income parents share similar values for their children's education, but high income parents make a stronger distinction of the importance of certain values over others, than low income parents.

Knowing that all of Evans Montessori parents explored various school choice options provides a useful backdrop for understanding their reasons for selecting the school. The interviewees were eight mothers and two grandmothers who were the child's primary caregivers. They represented six middle income and four low-income families and were equally divided by African American and white ethnicity. To maintain anonymity, all children were referred to as "he" regardless of the child's actual gender.

The parents were asked to describe their child's experience in school, their aspirations for the child's future, and their reasons for choosing the Evans Montessori School. Their responses were categorized into four themes: Self-Actualization, Moral Character/ College, Academic Achievement with Anxiety, and Academic Achievement without Anxiety. These categories were not mutually

exclusive. Many comments intertwined and fit into two or more categories. The tone was overwhelmingly positive. Reflecting the quantitative responses, hands-on learning opportunities, respect for the child's individual preferences, interests, and learning pace, and emphasis on individual growth and development, figured prominently as strong points of the Montessori school environment. Although few parents explicitly mentioned the "Montessori" philosophy, their responses indicate that they chose a curriculum that was highly congruent with their own values and aspirations for the child's education and future.

Discussion of Key Findings

It is clear that parents who decided to send their child to Evans Montessori School were actively engaged in the school choice process. This finding illustrates the powerful presence of the school choice movement. According to NCES data, parents who choose the child's school tend to be more satisfied with the school than those who enroll their children in the assigned public school (NCES, 2003). This study's report of high satisfaction with the school among parents who exercise choice is also aligned with previous studies (Bomotti, 1996, 2004; Hausman & Goldring, 2000). The qualitative responses of the Evans Montessori parents showed very high satisfaction and enthusiasm for the school, teachers, and curriculum.

Given the persistent influence of certain demographic characteristics in educational research, this study sought to explore the effects of race and income on the school choice process. Effects of race were not as palpable. The high

income parents and the low income Evans Montessori parents have a slightly different profile. All of the high income parents have at least a high school degree whereas some of the low income parents did not graduate from high school. A significantly higher proportion of high income parents have a baccalaureate or advanced degree.

Educational status and income are typically intertwined. On the basis of annual income, roughly 70.5% of the Evans Montessori families are classified as middle or upper middle income (\$40,000 or higher). In contrast, 29.5% of Evans Montessori families have yearly incomes below \$40,000.

One of the foremost arguments for school choice is that it offers more educational options for parents who lack the tuition for private schools. According to National Center for Education Statistics (2003) research, the trend away from assigned local schools toward enrollment in voluntary public schools is most prevalent among low-income families. At the same time, parents with higher education and income tend to be more attuned to educational issues, have greater comprehension of the educational system, and be more aware of school quality (Bomotti, 1996; Bussell, 1998). Reflecting the concept of social capital, Bomotti (2004) observed that while social networks are a key source of information about the schools, "The social network of more highly educated parents is more likely to include professionals with knowledge of the educational system" (p. 395). This raises the issue of whether parents with less education have access to accurate and thorough information. Other researchers have

found that in low-income communities, parents who exercise choice are more likely to be better educated and have higher incomes (Martinez et al., 1994; Schneider et al., 1998b).

The survey data from the present study reflect these findings. Both low income and high income parents consulted another parent as one of their primary sources of information about the school. However, the demographic profile of the low income families invokes Bomotti's (2004) concern over the extent that the parents were informed. Also consistent with social capital, and despite the fact the end result was the same, (meaning all of the children were enrolled in the same school) fewer low income Evans Montessori parents relied on a social network as an information source.

Differences regarding the attributes they value in their child's school also raise the issue of the degree to which less educated and less affluent parents are sensitive to educational quality. While both groups of parents share similar values, low income parents gave more equivalent ratings to each attribute whereas higher income parents were more discerning in awarding higher or lesser importance to each one. Yet, the qualities preferred by the Evans Montessori parents were clearly matched with the characteristics of the Montessori curriculum.

Evans Montessori parents gave overwhelmingly high priority to their child's development as an individual. They also expressed strong preference for hands-on learning activities, the child's development as an independent worker,

curriculum, teaching strategy, and the child's development as part of a group. All these attributes are features of the Montessori curriculum (Brehony, 2000; Cohen, 1990; Edwards, 2002; Martin, 2004; Miller, 2004; Vaughn, 2002). Additionally, the vast majority of Evans Montessori parents described their child as having a dominant preference for hands-on learning, which makes the Montessori curriculum an optimal choice.

An intriguing difference between the low income and high income parents was that the low income parents placed higher importance on academic grades and high test scores, giving elevated priority to good grades and test scores. Schneider et al. (1998a) reported that low-income parents were concerned with high scores on standardized tests while more affluent parents preferred a more progressive educational setting. The present study reveals similar distinctions. Nevertheless, low income parents also place high value on the child's individual development, hands-on learning, and development as an independent worker, teaching strategy, and curriculum.

The survey data revealed an excellent match between the parents' priorities and the Montessori curriculum. Qualitative interviews provided a vehicle for exploring this issue in depth. In previous studies, parents asked their reasons for choosing a school have cited the child's happiness and security (Bussell, 1998), high academic achievement (Schneider et al., 1998a, 1998b), high quality education, small school or class size, and safety (Kleitz et al., 2000). For the present study, these areas were classified under the themes of Self-

Actualization, Moral Character/College, Academic Achievement with Anxiety, and Academic Achievement without Anxiety.

Self-actualization refers to personal growth and fulfillment and intrinsic motivation to be the best person one can become. Many comments in this category contained the term “happy” or otherwise implied that the child was very happy in school. For example, an African American middle class mother stated:

He has very positive interactions with his teachers. He’s very excited about school. He wants to excel and do his best. He’s been here since kindergarten and has really adapted well to Montessori, so I’ve seen some tremendous change in him. . . . I’ve seen him maturing greatly.

A white low-income mother proclaimed:

I want him to be himself. I want him to grow and mature in a way that is always positive for him to make good decisions no matter what situation he’s in.

Several parents simply declared that the child “loves it here” and expressed their own satisfaction with the school. Interestingly, one parent who declared, “I love the Montessori philosophy,” added that, ironically, she works in another magnet school where she could easily send her children. Above all, she favored the hands-on learning experience, which she believes enables children to “learn better” than “a lot of paperwork.” Given that the overwhelming majority of Evans Montessori parents perceive their children as hands-on learners it is not surprising that the respondents saw hands-on learning as a selling point for the Montessori curriculum. Positive perceptions were not limited to hands-on learning

experiences. Parents appreciated the fact that the heavily individualized, multi-sensory curriculum provides opportunities for children of all learning preferences and abilities to succeed. For example:

If they don't excel in an area, they still can improve at whatever level. And if they do excel in an area, they can keep moving ahead. That and the hands-on environment is what I like a lot.

Not all parents were as positive about the lack of pressure to succeed at a specified level as evidenced by the category of academic achievement with anxiety. One respondent, a white middle class parent exemplified this attitude:

I want academics to be the main focus for getting him to the next level . . . education is the key to everything. My son was pretty devastated because he got his first letter grade of a B. In the earlier grades he did not get letter grades and he felt so strongly about being able to go to college, which has always been emphasized with the older siblings that he felt that this B would not allow him entrance into Duke University. So he was upset and cried a lot because of receiving a report card grade of a B.

It is intriguing that the child is only in third grade. Paradoxically, this excessive emphasis on achievement is antithetical to the Montessori philosophy. Montessori's teaching methods were originally designed for children with special needs (Weissglass, 1999). They ultimately proved highly successful for children of all learning abilities. The parent of a child with above average intelligence but a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) expressed high expectations tempered with some concern:

There are so many things I guess I could want. I want him to be able to do whatever he wants. He's so bright. He really is. His main issue is the ADHD. So he's got challenges that he has to overcome and I would love for him to be able to overcome them and it may be easier to overcome them in the future. He's so smart that he can just excel. He's got enough brainpower in him to be a doctor or a lawyer. He had an above average IQ, so he's overly smart. I think he needs to be drawn out. It needs to be taken out so he can do better. I want him to continue to feel like he's being challenged.

The respondent is a white low-income parent who obviously would like to see her child attain professional status. The structured but flexible Montessori curriculum, encouragement of independence, and individualized attention make the school an ideal learning environment for a child who is intellectually gifted but has other learning or behavioral challenges. This is illustrated by the parent's observation that:

He's done really well. He has a lot of problems, he's got some issues with ADHD and things like that, but he's done so much better in this school than I think he would have done in a regular school. He gets more attention.

Similarly, an African American low-income grandmother who has raised the child since birth credited the Montessori teacher with helping her grandchild overcome "a lot of emotional problems he had to deal with." Multiage classrooms are a distinctive feature of the Montessori approach (Cohen, 1990; Miller, 2004). Being with the same teacher from kindergarten to third grade was a vital element of the grandchild's experience:

He's had a great experience. It's changed depending on the teacher, the day, but as far as his experience with the school, he's enjoyed it very much. He has accomplished a lot, he had problems when he began because of the family lifestyle and family concerns, but the school came together, worked with the family and he came out of it.

. . . And it was fortunate that from kindergarten on to the third grade, he was put with a teacher that he stayed with from kindergarten to third grade. And they established a close rapport that helped him feel like she was a family member not just a teacher and student. So he was always happy to complete and achieve to the highest level for her. And whenever he ran into some problems she didn't hesitate to help him get some solutions to them.

Helping children resolve problems is a component of moral or character education. A few responses were directly related to moral character. The same grandmother stated:

I want him to continue to grow and develop with this high moral character. Who he will become will depend on how he sees and treats other people and I want him to excel as far as learning to the highest degree that he can go.

Several parents said they chose the magnet Montessori school because they felt that the child would be exposed to a more positive school climate. These comments transcend ethnicity and social class. Magnet schools have been cited as a valuable resource for urban inner city communities that have historically been deprived of social networks that promote responsibility and achievement (Gamoran, 1996). A learning environment with high expectations for accomplishment is an intrinsic source of social capital. In addition, students within the environment interact with peers who model positive values and pro-

social behavior. Recognition of these advantages was either implicit or explicit in many responses. While many Evans Montessori families have the financial resources to send their children to private schools (27% examined this option), approximately 29.5% have incomes below the median level. Middle and low-income parents place equal value on a school environment that fosters self-discipline and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Some parents who could afford to send their child to a private school considered the Montessori school superior. For example, a white middle class parent declared:

The more he is there, the more he appreciates and understands culture and that we are in a global society and it is not just about your neighborhood that you live in. I think that is probably the greatest thing that we have gotten.

We have been so thrilled with the program. It exceeds even what we could have received from a private school because he is now integrated in a very diverse population, which he may not have gotten at a private school.

The few negative comments were related to very specific issues that do not reflect on the school as a whole. Overall, the responses overwhelmingly confirmed the assumption that parents who exercise choice are satisfied with their child's school. The most striking finding was the degree to which the Montessori school corresponded to the parents' values, their perceptions of the child's experiences, their expectations for the child's education and future. The parents' perceptions of their child's school experience and aspirations for the child's future transcended ethnicity and income.

Implications and Recommendations

Despite the substantial body of research on magnet schools and school choice, there has been limited attention to reasons for choosing a particular curriculum. The Montessori curriculum has a powerful empirical base. It is one of many options open to magnet school parents. A potentially rich area for future research is adapting the questions guiding this study to examine parents' choices of magnet (or charter or private) schools with other curricula or enrichments. According to the market-based argument for school choice, competition for students increases incentives for schools "to perform, improve, and change" (Harrison, 2005, p. 203). Thus information derived from research into parents' preferences for alternative curricula could be used to enhance the curricular features of regular public schools.

A particularly important area for research is exploring strategies for gaining greater participation of low-income parents in school choice. When asked to participate in the interviews two low-income African American mothers remarked that they were pleased at the request. One commented, "This is the first time that anyone has asked me to do something like this." A key application of qualitative research is soliciting input from individuals and groups that have historically been marginalized (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The most powerful strategy for enlisting the active involvement of low wealth parents and parents of color in school choice is gaining their perspectives on barriers to participation and ways that we can all work towards overcoming them.

Conclusion

Navigating the Social/Cultural Politics of School Choice: “Why Do Parents Choose Montessori?” A Case Study provides a valuable contribution in both the areas of school choice and school reform. The findings illustrate that parents who are intent on choosing a school use a range of strategies to gain relevant information and are remarkably astute in choosing a school that is congruent with their particular values and aspirations. Parents who exercise fewer options for school choice are equally concerned about the quality of their child’s learning experience. They make fewer distinctions about what they deem important, which may reflect more limited knowledge and understanding of the educational environment.

The qualitative responses of Evans Montessori parents illuminate why the Montessori curriculum has become so popular. Parents were unanimous in endorsing the hands-on learning approach, individualized attention, and above all, the emphasis on the child’s development as a n individual. Their responses were remarkably similar across income and ethnicity, which makes a particularly compelling argument for making Montessori education a more accessible choice for public school families.

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APPENDIX A

SCHOOL CHOICE QUESTIONNAIRE

School Choice Questionnaire

Demographic Characteristics

A. Parent/Guardian Information

Age

- 20-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- 51-55
- 56-60
- 61-65
- 66 and older

Ethnicity

- Black/African American
- White/Caucasian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian/Asian American
- American Indian
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Other

Education Level

- Did not graduate High School
- High School Graduate/ GED
- Some College
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Other Professional Degree

Occupation: _____

Family Yearly Income

- less than \$19,999
- \$20,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$79,999
- \$80,000-\$99,999
- greater than \$100,000

B. Child Information

Number of children enrolled at this school _____
(Please complete a survey for each child)

Age of Child _____

Grade Level _____

Child's Ability (check all that apply)

- Learning Disabled
- Accelerated Learner/Focus

Child's Learning Preferences (check all that apply)

- Individualized Instruction
- Group Learner
- Hands-On Learner
- Auditory Learner
- Visual Learner
- Interpersonal (learns from interacting with others)
- Intrapersonal (learns by understanding personal goals, independent worker)

The following section asks about your child's academic *strengths* and *interests*. Check all that apply.

Strengths

In what areas does your child excel?

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Math | <input type="radio"/> Music |
| <input type="radio"/> Reading | <input type="radio"/> Art |
| <input type="radio"/> Writing | <input type="radio"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Geography | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Social Studies | |
| <input type="radio"/> Reasoning Skills | |
| <input type="radio"/> Verbal Skills | |

Interests

In what areas does your child enjoy?

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Math | <input type="radio"/> Music |
| <input type="radio"/> Reading | <input type="radio"/> Art |
| <input type="radio"/> Writing | <input type="radio"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Science | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Geography | _____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Social Studies | |
| <input type="radio"/> Reasoning Skills | |
| <input type="radio"/> Verbal Skills | |

Reasons for Choosing This School

A. General Information about the School

Did you look into other schools before sending your child to the current school? YES NO

What other schools or types of schools did you look into? (check all that apply)

- Magnet (what type) _____
 Private Independent
 Charter
 Church-Affiliated
 Home-Schooling
 Other _____

What sources did you use to gather information about schools? (check all that apply)

- Magnet Fair
 Social Network
 Internet Search
 Consultation with Teacher
 Classroom Observation
 Another Parent
 Other _____

B. Your Values about the School

	Very Unimportant	Un- important	Neutral	Important	Very Important
How important is your child's development as an individual?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is your child's development as a group member?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is what your child learns (curriculum)?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is the way your child is taught (teaching strategy)?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to become an independent worker?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to have hands-on learning?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to make good grades?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to be given homework each day?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to have high test scores?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child to receive rewards in school (stickers, treats, etc.)?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is your child's class size?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is racial and ethnic diversity of your child's learning environment?	1	2	3	4	5
How important is it for your child's school to be close to where you live?	1	2	3	4	5
	Poor	Fair	Neutral	Good	Excellent
How would you rate your child's progress at this school?	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate your child's school in terms of safety?	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate your child's classroom in terms of discipline?	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate your child's overall experiences at this school?	1	2	3	4	5
Is there anything you feel should be added to your child's academic curriculum? If yes, what should be added? _____				YES	NO
Is there anything you feel should be taken away from your child's academic curriculum? If yes, what should be taken away? _____				YES	NO

C. Please feel free to add any additional comments.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

March 20, 2006

Dear Parents,

As a parent of a child at _____ Montessori School, you are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Deborah Parker. The purpose of this study is to investigate why parents select specific schools. Potential benefits from participation in this study include parents' gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the issue of school choice.

Your participation in this project will involve completing the attached survey. If you choose not to participate there will be no effect on you or your child. Return of the enclosed questionnaire will be considered your consent to participate.

The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please return the survey in the enclosed envelope. Your responses to this questionnaire will be completely confidential, and it is preferred that you do not identify yourself in any way on the survey. After the survey results are compiled, the results will be reported for the group of respondents as a whole. Survey data results will be kept for five years in a password protected file and in a locked file cabinet.

If you find the questionnaire unsettling, you do not need to complete the activity. If you have questions please call Deborah Parker at (336) 370-8151-parkerd@gcsnc.com, or my professor, Dr. Kathleen Casey at (336) 275-0275 - caseycaseyink@aol.com.

For questions about the rights or research participants, please contact Eric Allen, Research Compliance Officer at UNCG, (336) 256-1482. This activity has been approved by Guilford County Schools Research Review Committee and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Institutional Review Board.

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research.

Sincerely,

Deborah Parker

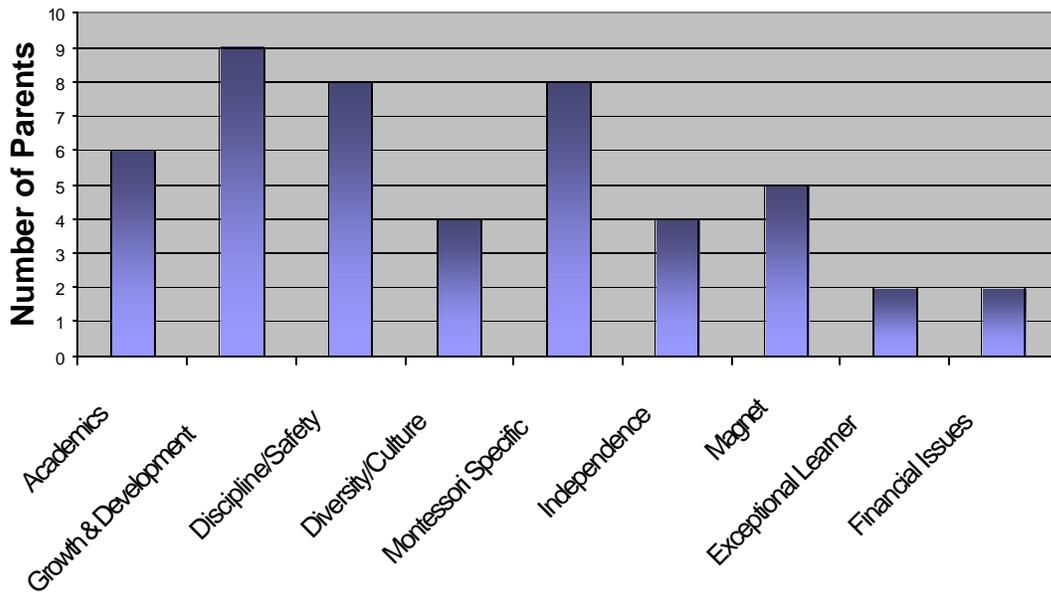
APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Tell me about your child's experience in school.
2. What do you want for your child in the future?
3. Why did you select this school for your child?

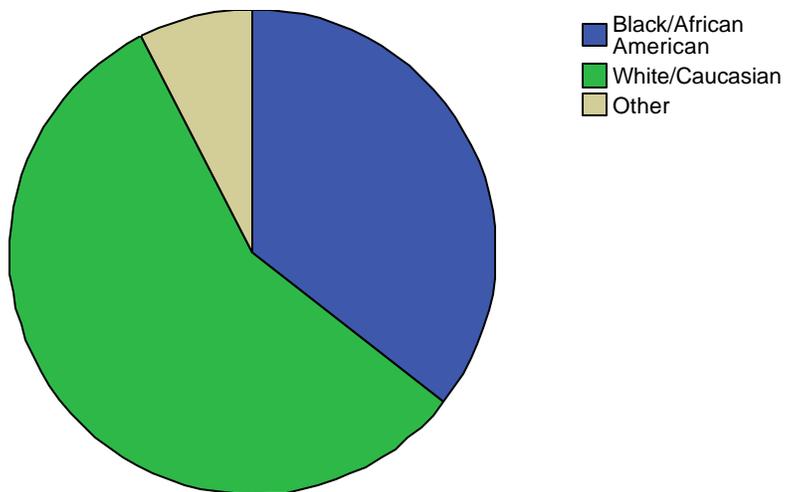
APPENDIX D

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF DATA ANALYSIS

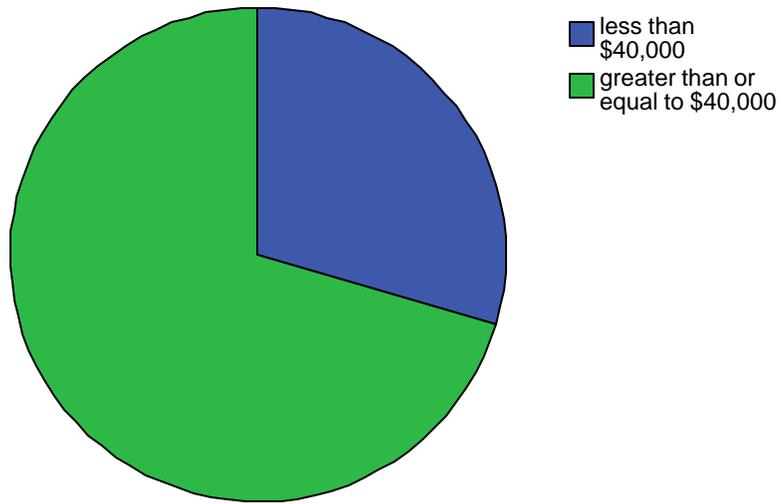
Number of Parents Mentioning Each Theme



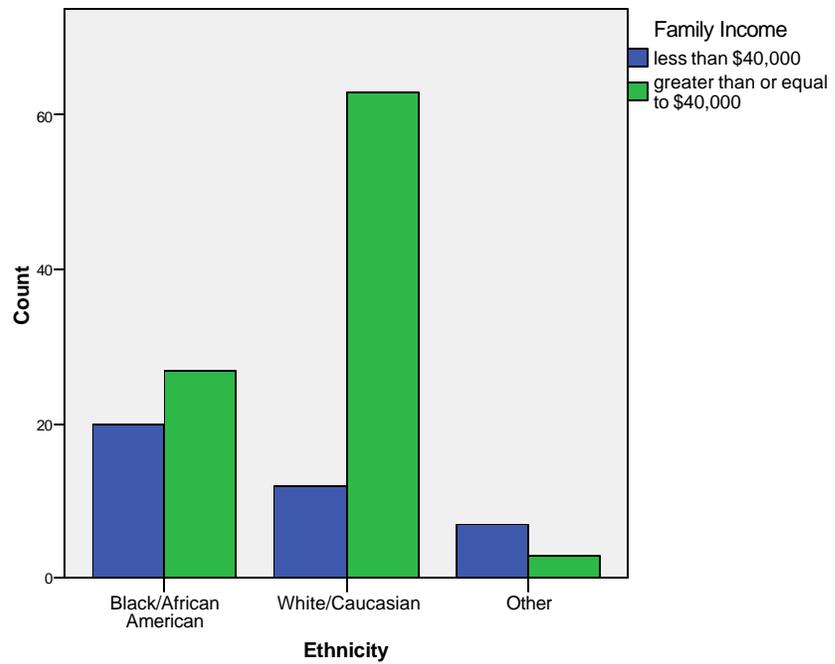
Ethnicity

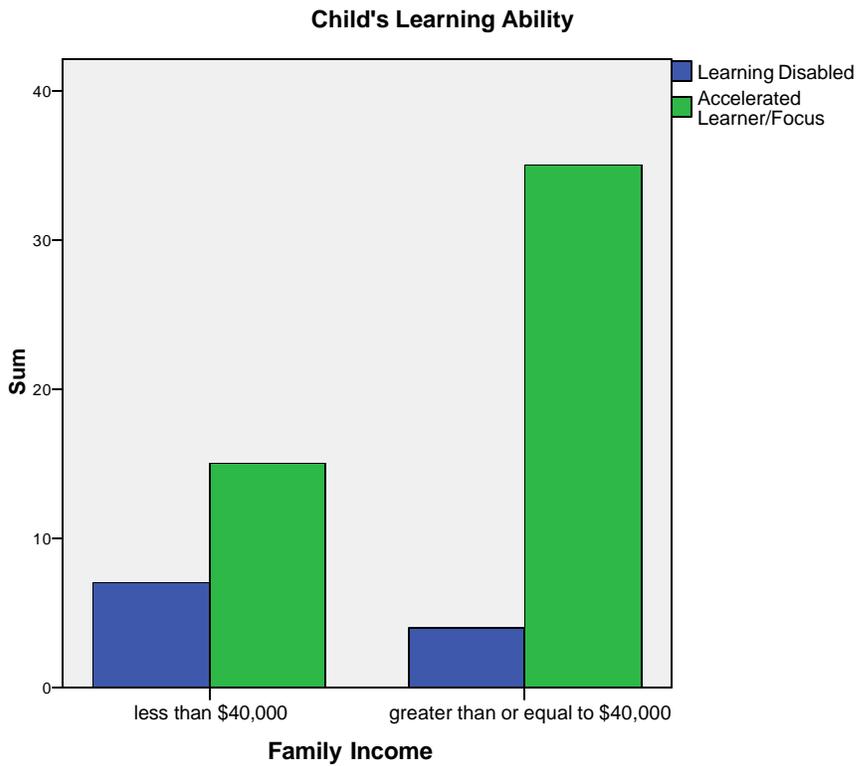
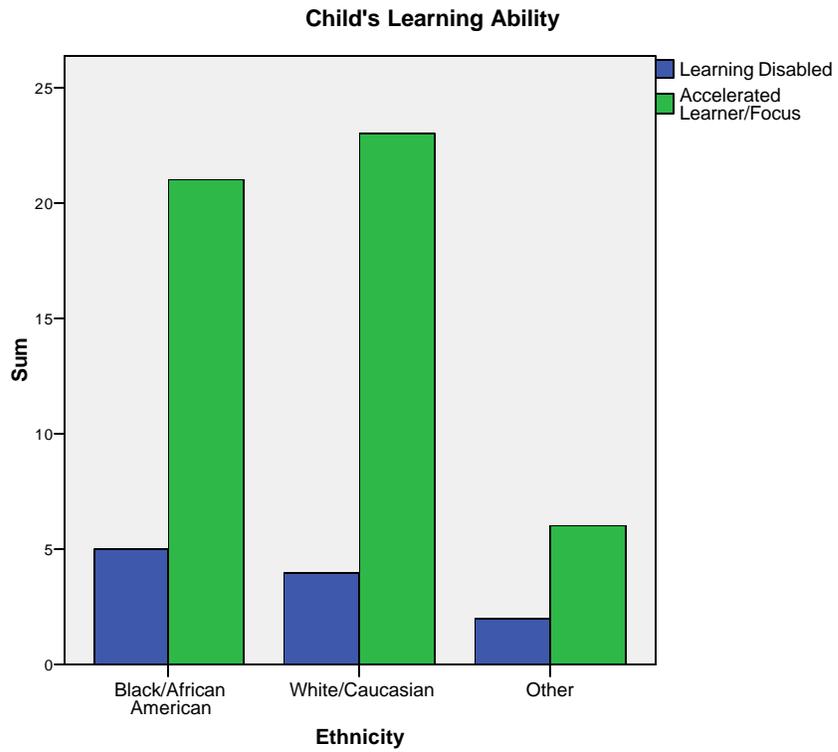


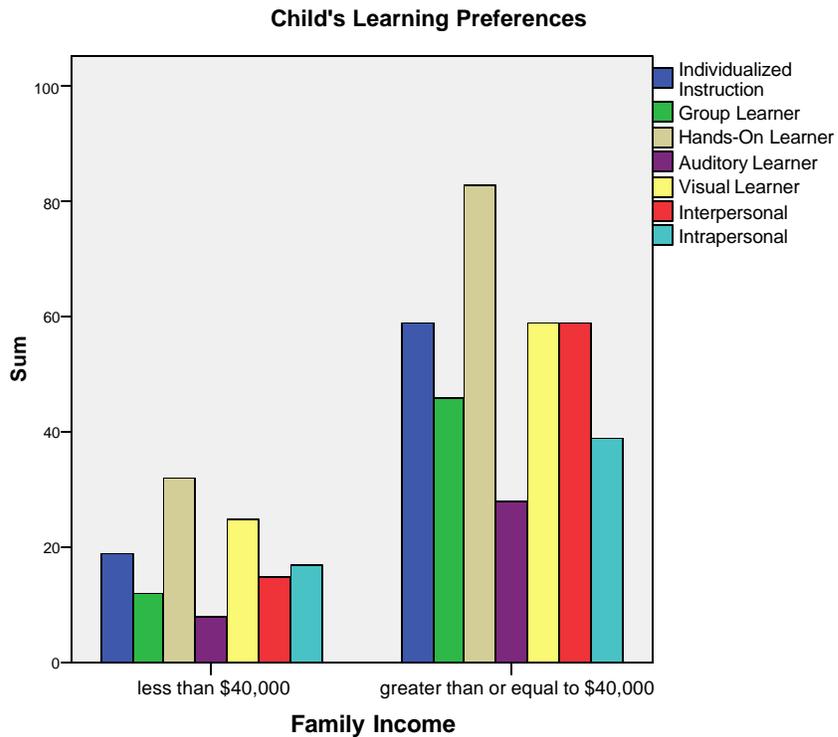
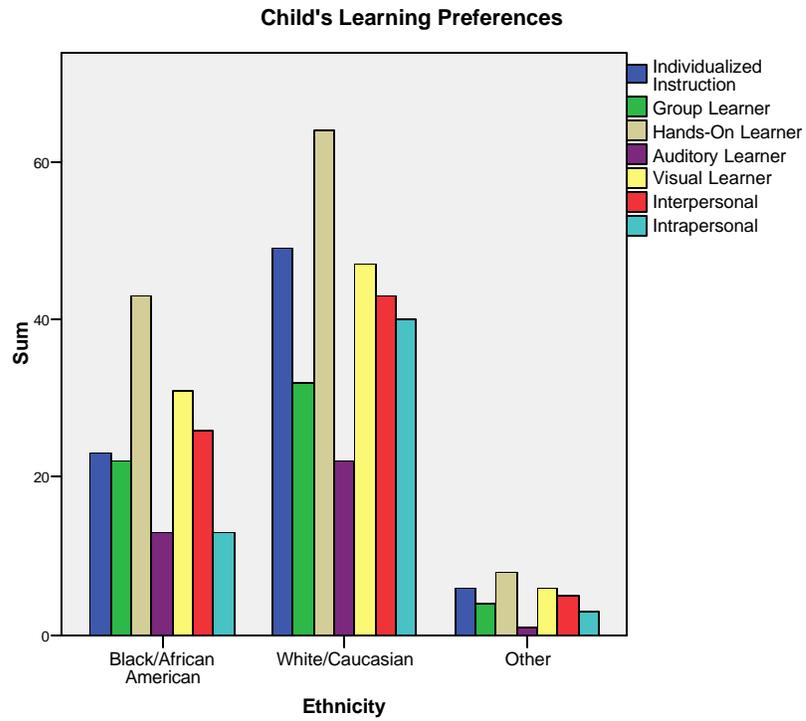
Family Income



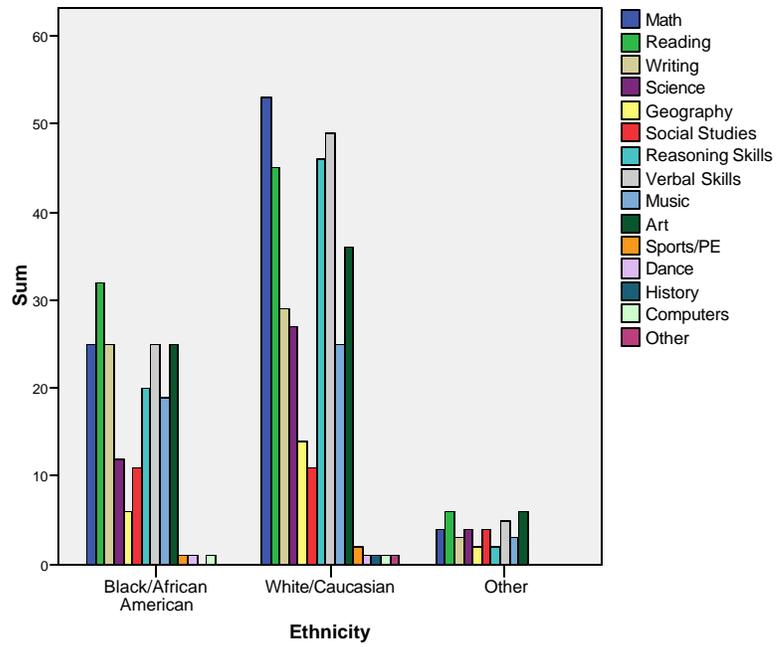
Family Income



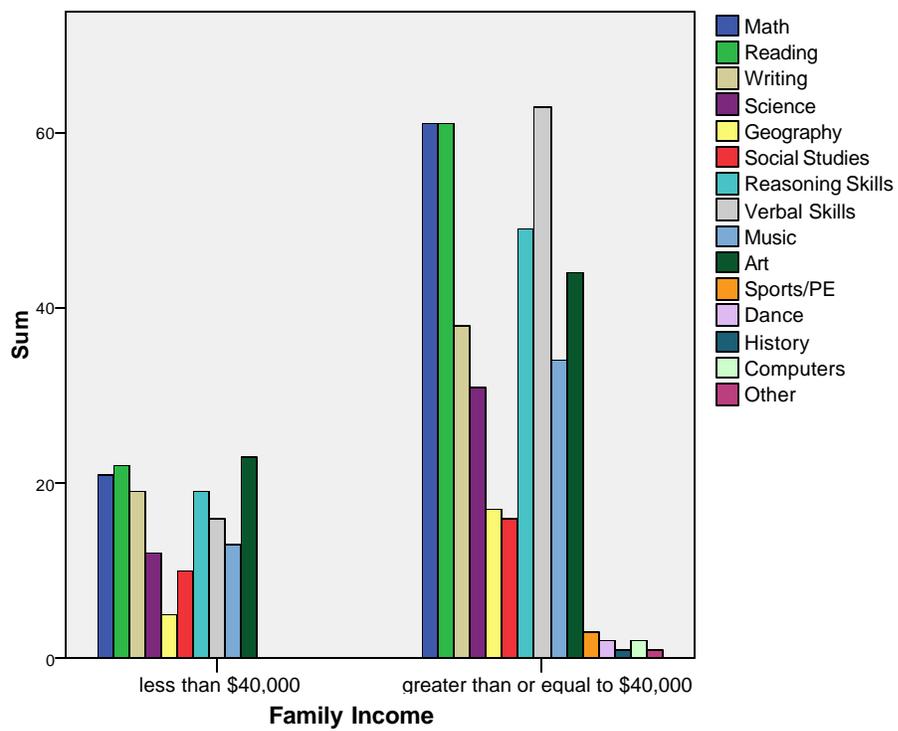




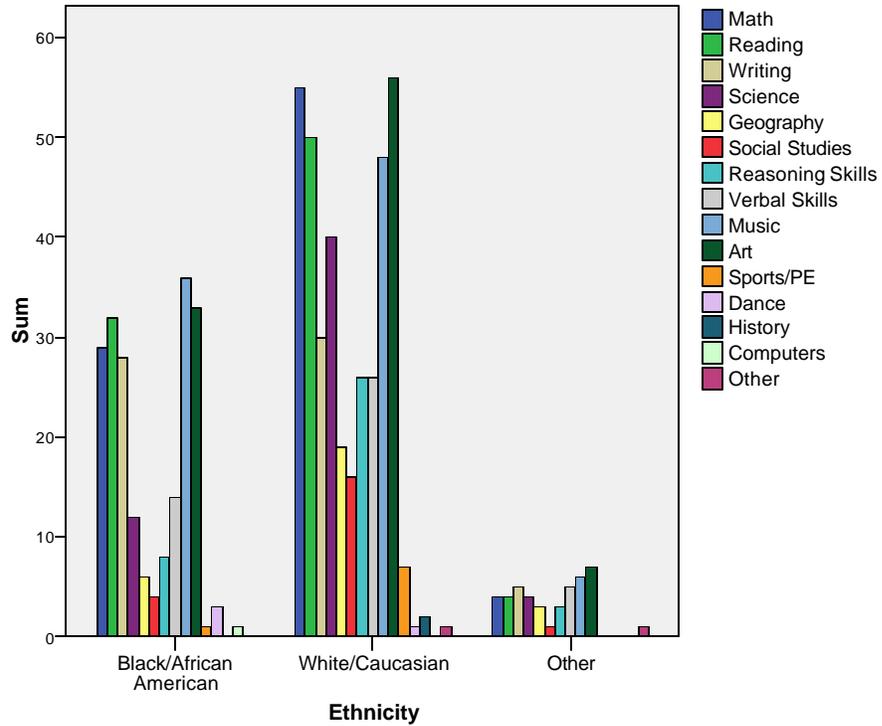
Child's Academic Strengths



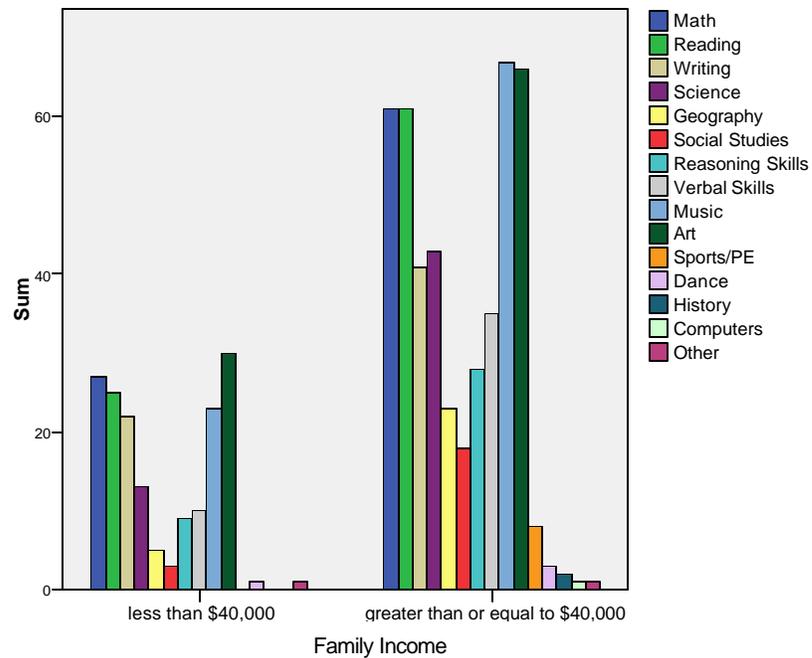
Child's Academic Strengths



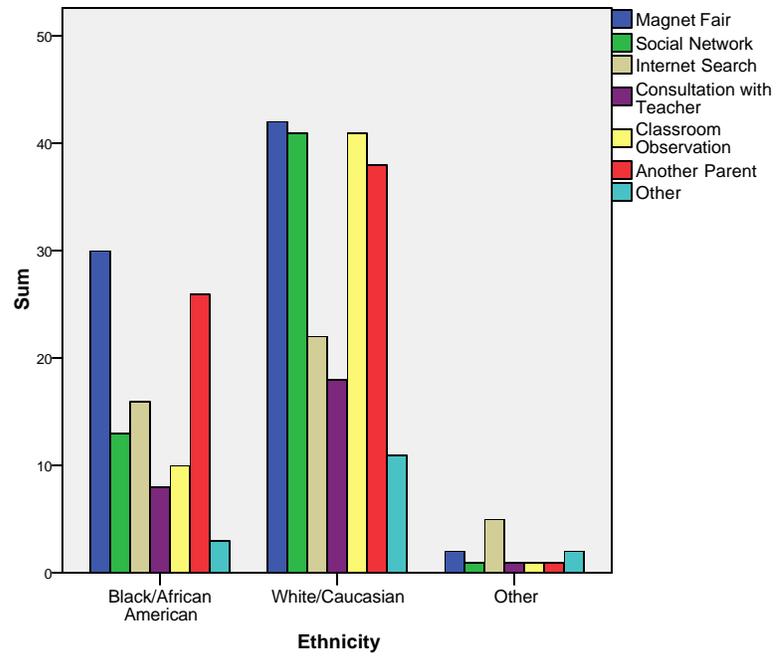
Child's Academic Interests



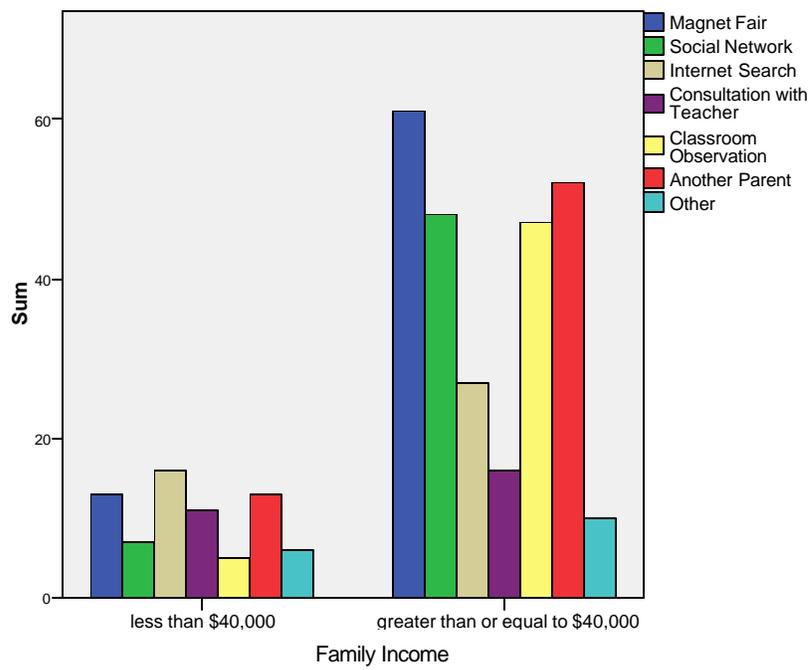
Child's Academic Interests



What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information About Schools?



What Sources Did You Use to Gather Information About Schools?



APPENDIX E**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES/WEBSITES**

- American Montessori Society. (2006). *Journey to the Centennial*. New York: American Montessori Society. 11 pp.
- Child of the World (2007-2008) Centennial Edition, 100 Years of Montessori Education, For Age 3-12 Years (Montessori Materials and Resources) 99 pp.
- Kahn, D. (1995): *What Is Montessori Preschool?* Burton, OH: North American Montessori Teacher's Association. 23 pp.
- Kahn, D. (1980): *Montessori talks to parents*. Nurturing the Creative Personality, Series 2, Volume 3. Burton, Ohio: North American Montessori Teacher's Association. 16 pp.
- Kahn, D. (1979): *Montessori talks to parents*. The Road to Discipline, Series 1, Volume 2. Burton, Ohio: North American Montessori Teacher's Association. 18 pp.
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- Kahn, D. (1979). *Montessori talks to parents*. Language, Literature and the Family, Series 2, Volume 1. Burton, Ohio: North American Montessori Teacher's Association. 19 pp.
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- Montessori, M. (1964). *The Montessori Method*. New York: Schocken Books. 376 pp.

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Public School Montessorian Publication, Jola Publications, Minneapolis, MN. (A marketplace for ideas and information intended to improve the lives of children and adults associated with public Montessori programs)

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