Teacher and Director Beliefs About Their Simultaneous Implementation of the Montessori Method and Quebec's Educational Programme

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Abstract

Teacher and Director Beliefs About Their Simultaneous Implementation of the Montessori Method and Quebec's Educational Programme

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Concordia University, 2022

Teachers and directors of early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres in Quebec have to conform to provincial guidelines when implementing their educational programme. Those in centres that identify as Montessori are simultaneously faced with the sometimes-conflicting directives of the Montessori method and Ministry guidelines. This dissertation responds to the dilemma of facing such a dual frame of reference. I report the results of an investigation which explores the beliefs and reflections on the experiences of teachers and directors in four ECEC centres that identify as Montessori in the province of Quebec. Based on a review of the literature, I designed a mixed method project with two related studies. Study 1 was a questionnaire targeted towards Ministry-recognized centres in the province of Quebec that identify as Montessori. Results from this initial study helped to paint the current landscape with data collected from 25 Montessori-inspired centres in the province, and also provided a source for recruitment of potential participants for Study 2. The second study was a deeper investigation, which used a qualitative design to explore the beliefs of teachers and directors from four individual centres that identified as Montessori. The study explored teacher and director beliefs about their implementation of the Montessori method and of Quebec's educational programme. This was pursued through the use of questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews that provided rich descriptions of the phenomenon under study. Thematic analysis of the data led to five core

themes, which emerged inductively from facing the dual frame of reference, namely: each child is unique, pedagogical approaches promoting children's learning and development, teacher's role in promoting children's learning and development, parent's role in promoting children's learning and development, and challenges faced in promoting children's potential. However, besides the noted similarities in beliefs, variations and contradictions also appeared. The results indicate that distinctions in beliefs - both among participants and within centres - emerged particularly around the notions of free play, pretense, creativity, and parental involvement. On this basis, further research is recommended to explore the effects of such suggested inconsistencies in Montessori programme implementation on both practical and scholarly platforms.

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This dissertation would not have been completed were it not for the continual cheerleading and support of my husband. My partner at home and at work, he carried the load whenever I retrieved, and encouraged simple baby steps when the climb appeared overwhelmingly steep.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who teach from the heart.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the Study

Eighteen years ago, I set out to establish an early childhood education and care (ECEC) environment in the province of Quebec that would allow young children to thrive at such a formative time of development. With a Master of Arts in Early Years Education (Columbia University), a Master of Education in Educational Psychology (McGill University) and a Montessori Early Childhood Diploma (London Montessori Centre) in hand, I had at my fingertips a variety of curricular approaches to consider. Having been personally drawn to many aspects of the Montessori method, I decided to establish a Montessori-inspired ECEC setting enriched with thematic centres and supplemented by additional materials that would allow for free and pretend play. However, restricted by the practical realities of a bilingual population and the daily needs and routines of young children, I found myself pondering what curricular components to prioritize and what to incorporate into the children's daily programming. Over the course of the years, I have been experimenting by keeping some Montessori components, shedding others, incorporating teacher-directed activities and different types of play. Today, eighteen years later, and in line with the familiar trajectory of an adolescent phase inching towards adulthood, I find myself questioning and challenging my preschool's mission, disoriented by some of its contradictory practices and in need of consolidating and asserting its identity.

Coincidentally, it was around that time that provincial regulations adopted new measures to evaluate ECEC programme quality (Ministère de la Famille, 2019b). The process features that have been targeted are based on the guiding principles set out in Quebec's educational programme - some of which converge with, but others of which contrast with, Montessori's core beliefs. This new reality introduced additional characteristics for me to consider as I

contemplated my own centre's identity. More specifically, it led me to question how other ECEC centres in Quebec that identify as Montessori address and conform to provincial expectations. The aim of this dissertation was to respond to this dilemma by exploring the beliefs, interpretations, and reflections on the experiences of practitioners in such centres. Admittedly, with my own teacher training in the Montessori method, and my own preschool implementing many aspects of the Montessori curriculum, I was aware that my personal perspective could colour my outlook in the process. Nevertheless, while accepting my subjective experience and positioning, my aim was to interrogate those Montessori assumptions that I had so readily adopted eighteen years ago. More specifically, I examined how the Montessori method has acclimatized to Quebec's ministerial stipulations by exploring teacher and director beliefs in their implementation of the Montessori method in 21st century Quebec.

Overview of the Study

I began this investigation with a review of the literature in Chapter Two. I first set the stage and considered the general purpose and mission of ECEC services nationwide before focusing more specifically on the province of Quebec. I then examined Quebec's most current educational programme, along with the guiding principles and the main instructional practices it has established for its ECEC settings. I moved on to outline the variety of ECEC philosophies present in the province and, in pursuing my personal interest, explored in greater depth the Montessori method. As I considered the method's guiding principle, known as *the theory of normalization*, I examined its main characteristics and the corresponding components of its curriculum, and highlighted similarities and differences with Quebec's educational programme.

I then addressed the current scholarly interest in the Montessori method, acknowledging that limitations to recent studies included the diverse ways in which the Montessori method has

come to be applied in practice. This realization led me to question how the method manifests itself in present-day Quebec by exploring the belief system of those practitioners implementing this pedagogy in the province.

I pursued this exploration in Chapter Three by embarking on Study 1 and painting the landscape of ECEC centres that identify as Montessori in Quebec. More specifically, I considered their general characteristics, as well as the similarities, the differences and the patterns amongst them. Based on the information gathered from the results, I then moved on to Chapter Four to present the main study of this research project, Study 2, which looked more closely at the beliefs of teachers and directors of four of those centres. An ensuing discussion on the implications from my findings is presented in Chapter Five, with limitations to the study – as well as recommendations for both practical implementation and future research - shared in Chapter Six. Ultimately, as I set out to interrogate Montessori assumptions, my aim was to gain a clearer understanding of the extent to which each of these practitioners believed they abided by Quebec's curriculum guidelines and by Montessori's prescribed teachings. In my quest to better understand how the Montessori method has transcended both time and culture, such a step provided me with the opportunity to address this question within a specific and local current context.

Purpose of the Study

With regards to the landscape in the province of Quebec, the question arises as to how practitioners in Montessori settings believe they have adapted to meet the guidelines of the Ministère's educational programme. The challenge of ECEC settings in the province is in reconciling Quebec's Ministerial guidelines with those of the Montessori curriculum. Currently, there are some ECEC programmes that identify as Montessori and that diligently follow the

prescribed Montessori method. Others refer to themselves as Montessori, but implement the method more flexibly in their own way, balancing it in varying degrees with the guidelines as set out by the Ministère's educational programme.

With respect to the present study that I have embarked on, this first led me to consider the over-arching question: "How does the Montessori method manifest itself in early years settings in Quebec?" Although the initial intention was to complement teacher and director interviews, and document reviews with classroom observations of the teacher participants in their natural environments, such a step was not possible under the current restrictions relating to COVID-19.

As such, as I set out to explore how some ECEC centres that identify as Montessori simultaneously abide by the guidelines of Quebec's Ministère and those of the Montessori method, I focused more specifically on exploring the beliefs of teacher and director practitioners in these centres.

Research Questions

My over-arching research question became "What are teacher and director beliefs on their implementation of the Montessori method in early years settings in Quebec?". To address this issue, I began by first investigating the following two questions:

- What are teachers' and directors' beliefs on their implemention of the Montessori method?
- What are teachers' and directors' beliefs on their implementation of Quebec's educational programme?

Embarking on such an investigation, by implication, then led me to reflect on the third question:

- What are the variations, the contradictions and the complexities involved in the ways teachers and directors perceive the implementation of the Montessori method in 21st century Quebec?

Certainly, many characteristics of the Montessori method are reflected and addressed in the Ministère's educational programme, such as recognizing the child's individual pace of development and matching learning activities to each individual's interests and abilities. However, clear distinctions also remain, such as the Ministère promoting the notion of creativity, incorporating opportunities for open-ended free play, endorsing the importance of pretense, and encouraging parental involvement. Working with the assumption that some ECEC practitioners follow Montessori's prescribed tenets, it was valuable to explore their beliefs in conforming to, or diverging from, Montessori's original theories and methods. This provided me with a platform to reflect on their beliefs on the fidelity of the Montessori method as it was originally prescribed, and it painted a clearer picture on the likely experiences of practitioners of Montessori early years classrooms in 21st century Quebec.

In this quest, I have designed a mixed method project with two related parts. The first study was a survey targeted towards all Ministry-recognized ECEC centres in the province of Quebec that identify as Montessori. I collected initial data that provided a lay of the land, so to speak, within which further investigations ensued. Implementing a survey allowed me to explore the range of characteristics that make up an ECEC centre that identifies as Montessori in Quebec, and shed provisional light on the general similarities, differences and patterns amongst them. Based on the information gathered, a deeper investigation in a second part to the project was conducted.

The second study was a qualitative project that explored the beliefs of teachers and directors of four individual ECEC centres that, although not officially Montessori certified, identified as Montessori in the province of Quebec. I opted not to include my own centres in this study so that the participants' responses would not be clouded by our existing relationship, and so as to maintain a general sense of objectivity. This second study not only allowed the eliciting of centre-specific findings but also offered a consideration of the commonalities between the beliefs of the practitioners of each of the centres, as well as the nuances between them and the uniqueness of each one. Ultimately, the goal of the second study was to gain a richer and deeper insight into the variability of the beliefs of practitioners in Montessori-identified ECEC centres in the province of Quebec.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research project is rooted in its attempt to extend the body of knowledge aimed at shedding light on the application of the Montessori method in modern-day ECEC classrooms. Although physical observations of classroom practice were not possible at the present time due to restrictions relating to COVID-19, steps towards this were instead accomplished by investigating the beliefs of teacher and director practitioners in such pedagogical settings. With current scholarly research on the application of the Montessori method still in its infancy (Courtier et al., 2021), the present study aims to add to the literature by examining the perspectives of teacher and director practitioners in such settings.

More specifically, this research project brings to light the variations, the contradictions and the complexities involved in the ways teachers and directors perceive the implementation of the Montessori method in Quebec. By providing such deep insight on the variations in beliefs of

practitioners in ECEC classrooms, this study also suggests the diverse ways in which this pedagogical method has come to be applied in practice.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature

Between birth and the age of five, a child's brain undergoes phenomenal transformations, with early experiences associated with long-lasting influences on brain development as well as mental functions later in life (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). Numerous studies have also been published on the correlation between high-quality early childhood programmes and later academic and social success (Children's Action Alliance, 2005; Fontaine et al., 2006; McDonald Hooks et al., 2006*),* with cases such as the Perry Preschool Program (Schweinhart et al., 2004) and the Abecedarian Project (Campbell et al., 2012) providing compelling evidence that such programmes can have significant and lasting benefits on participants well into adulthood. Studies have also demonstrated the opposite to be true – particularly when pertaining to more vulnerable populations: low quality programmes do not benefit, and could even pose a risk to, children's later outcomes (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Melhuish et al., 2015).

With the benefits of attending quality ECEC institutions having been studied both locally and globally, the mandate and responsibility of childcare in Canada has been allocated to the individual provinces and territories around the country (Howe et al., 2018). These provincial and territorial jurisdictions govern a variety of issues in the sector, ranging from more tangible regulations such as structural requirements, teacher qualifications and child/teacher ratios, to more process-oriented guidelines such as interpersonal interactions, classroom activities, and overall pedagogical programming. With guidelines varying broadly across the country, and for the purpose of this paper, I first review the general purpose and mission of ECEC nationally

before focussing more specifically on the current landscape in the province of Quebec.

The Purpose of ECEC

The ECEC sector was first established across the country to extend care and, not long after, developmental and learning opportunities to young children (Prochner, 2000). Social norms nationwide initially meant that parents were primarily responsible for their children's care and education in the early years. In fact, long before the official establishment of childcare centres around the country, mothers who could not tend to their children would, when necessary, leave their young ones with neighbours, close relatives, or extended family members (Parr, 1992). Such a responsibility that was assumed either by family or by community allowed mothers to tend to the demands of their chores or their work outside the home with greater freedom and ease of mind. However, for reasons grounded by the realities of both immigration and industrialization, a gradual shift towards more formal ECEC services began to emerge by the early 19th century (Prochner, 2000).

Though their initial purpose was to provide custodial care to families, to improve women's job prospects, and to help build a stronger labour force in general, some childcare centres began to take on a more specialized educational role. Whereas the purpose of childcare focused predominantly on the health and welfare of young children, the purpose of early education targeted learning goals more specifically. It aimed, for example, to instil societal values in young children, to expose them to Bible studies or to teach them practical skills such as sewing and cooking (Prochner, 2000). More formal structures within certain early education settings went on to lead to the emergence of nursery school programmes, whereby education, discipline and child development were at the forefront of their objectives (Wright, 2000).

Furthermore, various initiatives burgeoned to improve children's school readiness skills prior to the start of compulsory education at the elementary school level.

Today, the ECEC sector serves the combined purposes of offering quality supervision and care to young children and to take the opportunity to create rich learning experiences and environments that instil both values and skills and promotes children's development. In doing so, the sector not only provides respite to parents by supporting them in their participation in the workforce, but also offers stimulating early experiences that may be beneficial to a young child's development. As such, these early years settings are now increasingly recognized as the first rung on the educational ladder.

Mission of the Sector

Today, ECEC services are provided across Canada with the prime intention of extending quality care and promoting positive early learning experiences to support the development of the young child. As the research continues to demonstrate the lasting benefits of quality early experiences on the development of the brain and other aspects of children's development, the ECEC sector nationwide has taken the step to develop and implement both programmes and measures that help build solid foundations for later learning. With a general commitment to the overall wellbeing of the young child - physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively - ECEC services across the nation strive to foster healthy child development. They do so by offering accessible support to programmes for children of all abilities. In fact, after attending the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002, Canada went on to develop a national action plan, which identifies the value of promoting education and learning – with a particular emphasis on positive, stimulating and nurturing experiences in the early years – as a key foundation for lifelong learning, health, and behavior (Walker & Pearson, 2005).

In reinforcing this declaration, the general mission of the ECEC sector has progressed from mainly offering early childhood care to incorporating an educational component that also encompasses active learning. Today, the sector strives to acknowledge young children as capable and full of potential, and to provide them with a positive start in life. In fact, in response to federal/provincial childcare agreements that were established in 2005, comprehensive early years curriculum frameworks have been introduced in each of the provinces around Canada, as well as one in the Northwest Territories. The purpose of these frameworks is to support early childhood practitioners by highlighting the guiding principles and the main areas of learning for young children. The use of the curriculum frameworks does vary from one province to the other, with some provinces using them simply as a guide in their early childhood settings, and others requiring certified training in the proposed curriculum. For the purpose of this dissertation, I focus more specifically on the context of the province of Quebec.

ECEC Landscape in Quebec

In Quebec, the ECEC curriculum framework provided by its governing body, the Ministère de la Famille (herein after referred to as the Ministère), is an educational programme entitled *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a). Its tri-fold mission first calls to ensure the general health and safety of each child in care. More specifically, it calls for the creation of a warm environment that is sensitive to the various needs of each child – one that is able to promote and address a child's physical and emotional well-being, and to appropriately stimulate each child enough so as to meet their fullest potential. The mission also strives to offer appropriate experiences so as to encourage each child to progress at their own pace in each area of development, while conforming steadily to the socio-emotional demands of group life.

Finally, the mission of the Ministère's programme recognizes the critical role it can play in addressing and incorporating individual children's developmental needs.

To comply with its mission, the Ministère instils stringent requirements on the structural features critical to ensuring a child's physical safety and well-being (for example, classroom square footage, maximum group sizes, child/teacher ratios, first aid training and teacher certification). These requirements are directly tied to permit issuance and renewal. In addition, the Ministère has more recently also adopted new measures to evaluate programme quality. These process features are based on the Ministère's core principles (discussed below) and look more specifically at variables in the four general areas of child-teacher interactions, classroom layout, lesson planning, and staff/parent relations (Ministère de la Famille, 2019b).

This newly-introduced evaluation procedure, piloted in the spring of 2019, focuses on children ages 3 to 5 years old and comprises of classroom observations, teacher and director interviews, and parent surveys. However, although it aims to ensure that guidelines as set out in its educational programme for childcare services are practiced (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a), it stresses that this measure is neither a compliance inspection nor a staff performance review (Ministère de la Famille, 2019b). This evaluation procedure is implemented by Serviplus, a third party organization, mandated by the Ministère to evaluate the quality of the educational experience in ECEC settings. Yet, when Serviplus presents the ECEC centres with the results of its respective evaluations, these are presented as "successful evaluation" or "unsuccessful evaluation". This is with the understanding that an unsuccessful evaluation be followed up with a proposed improvement plan by, and a second visit to, the centre in question (Ministère de la Famille, 2019c).

Core Principles of Quebec's Educational Programme

The Ministère's designated quality traits are based on a collection of different perspectives from leading child development theories (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a). These traits find their origins in Dewey (1902) and Rogers' (1969) humanistic approaches, which view the young child as an individual filled with potential, with curiosity, and with a natural desire to learn. The educational programme also draws from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach, which acknowledges the influence of the child's biological characteristics, the immediate environment that surrounds the child as well as the cultural and socioeconomic context in which the child lives. It leans on Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, which argues that special bonds with primary caregivers early in life are associated with more favourable outcomes cognitively, socially, and behaviourally. Finally, the programme draws from both the constructivist theories of Piaget (1962), who stressed the importance of active learning, in particular in the context of play, as well as Vygotsky's ideas regarding the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), which determines how scaffolded support provided in meaningful learning experiences can help the child stretch beyond their current capacity.

A Partnership with Parents

These foundational theories lead to a set of core principles around which the Quebec educational programme revolves. First and foremost, the programme emphasizes the significance of the partnership between parents and teachers (referred to as "educators" in the document). It proclaims that the young child's development is best supported by the shared participation of their parents and also by all those teachers who play an active role in the ECEC setting in which the child is enrolled. Such a partnership encourages the child to transfer their attachment to alternative adult figures in the absence of the parent.

So critical is this principle to the educational programme that the Ministère introduces it as its first principle, upon which other guiding values will depend. The document declares: "les autres principes nécessitent la contribution précieuse des parents pour être appliqués à leur pleine mesure" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 64). With an established mutual trust, parents will be more willing to share personal information about the child's cultural and family background, thus equipping teachers to provide more personalized intervention measures if and when such cases arise. The programme takes into consideration the parents' integral role in the child's education and encourages a framework for an exchange of ideas and information, respecting the fact that, although the teacher may be the professional expert in the process, the parent is the expert on the individual child. Ultimately, it reinforces the benefits gained from healthy, regular, two-way communications between parent and teacher, and suggests that decisions regarding the child are best taken when shared.

Each Child is Unique

The second core principle around which the educational programme revolves acknowledges that each child is unique, with individual interests, needs, and pace of development. It calls for teachers to acknowledge that, although children bear hereditary traits, those traits are also affected by environmental factors. As such:

> On ne s'attend pas à ce que tous les enfants fassent toujours la même chose en même temps. Le processus de l'intervention éducative propose les moyens nécessaires pour mettre en œuvre un accompagnement individualisé de chaque enfant, à l'intérieur d'un groupe (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 76).

The document suggests that this be best done not by planning whole-group activities but by reflectively observing each child and planning individual activities accordingly.

The Child as the Principal Agent of Learning

Third, the curriculum recognizes the central role the child plays in their own learning. It reinforces the fact that the young child has an intrinsic motivation and a natural ability to learn. On this basis, the document warns of the potential repercussions of extrinsic reinforcements, stating that "le recours excessif au renforcement extrinsèque (récompenses et félicitations, par exemple) plutôt que l'appel à l'autoévaluation de l'enfant" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 93) could have adverse effects on the child's sense of initiative and creativity. The document also encourages teachers to incorporate a fluid classroom schedule – one that would allow children to choose their own activities and materials and to initiate their own learning experiences. It states that, conversely, should activities be predetermined by the classroom teacher without taking into consideration the child's current interests, abilities and attributes, the child would not be able to thrive to their fullest potential (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 79).

A Whole Child Approach to Development

Yet another core principle in the educational programme stresses that the child's areas of development are essentially interrelated and integrated to contribute to the development of the whole child. The programme states that all areas of development unfold simultaneously (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 90), consequently influencing their respective areas of development. More specifically, the child's physical and motor skills lead to an exploration of the environment, which in turn promotes cognitive development. Such learning experiences, often framed within the social contexts of classmates and caregivers, support both socio-emotional and language development. The document goes on to state that this evolution can be scaffolded by the teacher who can support the child through their zone of proximal development to attain new heights of learning about the world.

Promoting Creativity. When discussing the child's global development, the educational programme pays particular attention to the notion of creativity, which it states is closely associated with cognitive growth (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 92). The document defines creativity as the ability to make new connections between familiar concepts or to solve problems with solutions that are original to the child. It encourages the creative process not only through more evident activities such as painting, dancing, and pretend play scenarios, but also through problem solving in everyday living situations. In particular, there is encouragement to accept non-conformist, yet constructive, behaviours and to support risks taken in the learning context as well as errors experienced as a possible result.

Promoting the Development of Executive Functioning Skills. Also introduced within the context of a child's global development is the concept of executive functioning (EF) – a point of interest in this dissertation since the concept echoes Montessori's guiding principle of the theory of normalization, discussed in greater detail in the Overview on the Montessori Method section, below. As with the tribute paid to the concept of creativity, Quebec's educational programme also associates EF with cognitive growth, noting that this too is a skill that is present and exercised in all aspects of a child's life (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 94).

EF skills are made up of distinct, separable entities – namely, inhibitory control (i.e., resisting impulsive actions and responses to distractions), working memory (i.e., holding on to and manipulating information in the brain), and mental flexibility (i.e., maintaining or shifting attention in response to different demands) (Baggetta & Alexander, 2016). In the document, the Ministère adds to these components the notion of planning (i.e., devising a strategy to attain a goal). These aspects join forces to attend to more complex executive functions. Although definitions for EF vary broadly (Baggetta & Alexander, 2016), there is a general consensus that

well-developed EF skills help children to learn to avoid distractions, to follow multi-step instructions, and to successfully achieve intended goals (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010). The Ministère sums it up in the document: “Les fonctions exécutives sont responsables des comportements qui visent l’atteinte d’un but” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 94).

In its position that both creativity and EF play important roles in a young child’s cognitive development, the Quebec’s Ministère document goes so far as to expand on their potential promotion in detail within its educational programme. More specifically, the document allocates formal sections on these two topics when exploring each of the child’s various areas of development. Although its suggestions to promote creativity within the context of each area of development are general, claiming for example that language and art activities may enhance creative development, suggestions to promote EF are more specific. For example, in its segment on motor development, the document suggests that EF skills can be exercised through activities such as hide-and-seek games, songs and fingerplay, dance routines and obstacle courses. In the segment on cognitive development, recommendations include exercising the child’s attention by restricting visual distractions, and exercising memory by providing opportunities for reflection on accomplishments throughout the course of the day. In the sections on language and on socio-emotional development, teachers are encouraged to provide ample opportunities for private speech and for interactive expression, more particularly in situations such as circle time activities, symbolic play, story telling and project planning. The Ministère concludes: “C’est à travers des interactions sociales significatives avec leurs parents et les adultes qui interviennent auprès d’eux, (…), et des expériences plaisantes de plus en plus exigeantes que les enfants

construisent leurs habiletés en matière de fonctions exécutives" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 97).

The Importance of Play

Finally, the educational programme reinforces the principle that the young child learns best through play, and that providing opportunities for the child to initiate play will support all aspects of development. Play is acknowledged as being integral to children's learning, with many benefits arising from it. So much so, in fact, that the United Nations today recognizes play as a significant component and a specific right in the life of a young child (UNICEF, 1989, Ministère de la Famille, 2019a). Play in early years settings allows the young child to make sense of the world in which they live, to re-enact and transform scenarios, and to experiment with a variety of feelings and ideas. In the process, the child has an opportunity to exercise each area of development, including language and communication skills, fine and gross motor skills, social and emotional skills, as well as cognitive skills such as problem solving, scientific reasoning, and critical thinking. The Ministère states, "Pour le jeune enfant, c'est le moyen par excellence d'explorer le monde, de le comprendre, de l'imaginer, de le modifier et de le maîtriser" (2019a, p. 81). Furthermore, the document concludes "Le jeu de l'enfant lui offre aussi un contexte d'apprentissage signifiant." (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 82).

Cognitive Forms of Play. Quebec's educational programme refers to both the cognitive and social forms of play. The cognitive forms of play pay tribute to Piaget's theoretical contributions to the field. In particular, the programme cites Piaget's various types of play, which he describes in accordance with his proposed stages of cognitive development. More specifically, it reinforces Piaget's argument that the developmental sequence of play is composed of practice

play, symbolic play, constructive play, and games-with-rules, and that each one is considered as a valuable and unique developmental construct of its own (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a).

Piaget believed that play offers children a venue in which to practice previously acquired skills and that each type of play reflects a child's thoughts during a particular stage of development. In the case of practice play, the child explores their surroundings and exercises sensori-motor capacities. As the symbolic function gradually appears during the preoperational stage of a child's development, one in which the ability of object permanence is strengthened, the child is able to create mental images of objects and is able to store them in mind for later use. As symbolic thought is produced, pretend play begins to assimilate new experiences into existing schema (Piaget, 1962). Constructive play involves the stacking and building of objects for the purpose of producing a structure or a puzzle, and in the process exercises problem solving, cognitive processing, and sometimes creative skills. Games-with-rules, such as board games or hide-and-seek, involve cooperation with peers and a respect for either predetermined rules or rules that the children negotiate themselves during the play. The Ministère's purpose in outlining these forms of play is to uphold its recommendation that ECEC settings provide ample opportunities for their practice.

Social Forms of Play. The social forms of play discussed in the educational programme refer to Parten's work, which examines the idea of social engagement in play and proposes a system for classifying social participation in play. Parten (1932) reflected on the increasingly complex development of the child in areas such as self-control and cognitive ability. In reinforcing how playful interactions with others can contribute to a child's overall development, the Ministère document outlines the main types of social play - namely onlooker, solitary,

parallel, associative, and cooperative play. Here too, the purpose in outlining these types of play is to encourage teachers to recognize and support their development in contexts of play.

Key Instructional Practices

The Role of the ECEC Teacher

At the heart of the pedagogical approach in Quebec's ECEC educational programme lies the crucial role played by nurturing, responsive teachers. With the understanding that the ECEC establishment is often the first stepping stone in the initial separation between a child and their parents, the Ministère document actively highlights the importance of focusing on the attachment relationship between caregiver and child. Basing its perspective on Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment, the Ministère document stresses the importance of the teacher's relationship with the child as a primary agent for development. "Les spécialistes du domaine de la petite enfance s'entendent pour dire que la composante de la qualité la plus déterminante pour le développement des jeunes enfants est l'interaction du personnel éducateur (…) avec ceux-ci." (Ministère de la famille, 2019a, p. 30). By implementing active techniques such as observing, listening, and engaging with their young charges, ECEC teachers guide the children to construct their own knowledge as they flow through their daily experiences. The responsive nature of early childhood practitioners reinforces the importance of addressing a young child's emotional health, consequently ensuring the child is emotionally available to grow, to develop, and to learn to their fullest potential.

In order to best guide the children in their care through the various aspects of development, the Ministère document outlines four steps teachers should take to support optimal learning. First, teachers should take the time to observe the children so as to best recognize each of their interests, their strengths and their areas of need. Second, basing their intentions on their

observations, teachers should plan for classroom materials and learning experiences accordingly. Third, having established their intentions, teachers should then set their proposed plans into motion. Finally, teachers should reflect on the steps previously taken, not only to evaluate each of the elements they had put into play, but also to give consideration to how these can be improved moving forward (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 47).

Observation is a critical element of the ECEC teacher's role (p. 51), since it allows the teacher not only to become familiar with the needs and capabilities of each child in their care, but to gauge the support required to help each one to attain new heights. "Une connaissance approfondie du développement des jeunes enfants et de chaque enfant en particulier permet d'interagir avec chacun en tenant compte de sa zone proximale de développement, de ce qu'il peut faire avec un peu d'aide et de lui proposer des défis appropriés." (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 32). Such an understanding would not only allow the teacher to accompany the child in extending their abilities to the next phase of development, but would also be an essential element when striving to support each child to meet their fullest potential (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 92). To do so, the teacher is encouraged to keep in mind the needs of all learners - more specifically to extend appropriate activities that will address the needs of visual, tactile and auditory learners - so as to best capture their attention and encourage their willing participation.

Guided Projects. One way of providing enriching learning experiences is for the teacher to implement child-initiated, teacher-guided projects. In exercising an observant and responsive nature, the teacher is able to identify themes and areas of interest, as well as current events (such as the loss of a tooth, or a tempestuous snow storm) that are of particular significance to the child. The Ministère document advocates the benefits of such project-based learning by encouraging steps such as activating previous knowledge, brainstorming ideas, proposing and

executing a plan, and circling back for a thoughtful reflection. In the document, and in reinforcing one of its guiding principles that the child is the principal agent of their learning, there is careful attention to the fact that such activities should emanate from or be proposed to, but not imposed on, the child (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 37).

Certainly, there are developmental benefits to such project-based learning opportunities. By brainstorming ideas and planning projects, carrying them out, predicting and evaluating their outcomes, and making connections with their own lives, children's critical thinking skills are exercised. However, such steps can similarly be exercised in the context of more open-ended free play scenarios and the Ministère document calls primarily for teachers to provide opportunities to learn through play. In fact, with the concept of play forming a central role in the Ministère's educational programme, the advice is: "Le jeu occupe une large portion du déroulement de la journée, puisqu'il est le moyen privilégié d'apprentissage des jeunes enfants" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 35).

Opportunities for Free Play. Since teachers are responsible for physically arranging the classroom stage for learning, organizing the classroom layout, equipping the environment with toys and materials, they are encouraged to create a platform for such play-based learning opportunities. By suggesting a variety of centres around the classroom, teachers are advised to set up areas for symbolic play, for construction, for art, for puzzles, board games and other table-top manipulatives (Ministère de la famille, 2019a, p. 41). Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to supply the children with versatile materials that can have multiple purposes (such as empty containers, nesting boxes, plastic covers, sand and tissue paper), which the Ministère guidelines suggest are more beneficial to a child's development than items limited in their use, such as train sets (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 42). Besides the variety, the document calls for the

material at hand to be “en quantité suffisante” (p. 42) so as to sufficiently equip the children in their care. The variety of materials on hand in a learning environment thus serves as a tool for teachers as they accompany each child through natural dialogue and reflection, helping to extend moments of play which, in turn, further deepen opportunities for learning and development.

Adult-Accompanied Play. Quebec’s educational programme aims to maximise the potential benefits of play (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 88) and, as such, suggests that play periods be accompanied by the teacher. So critical is this perspective that it is stated that this is in fact one of the main responsibilities of the teacher and that “L’accompagnement du jeu exige une observation soutenue pour pouvoir l’enrichir en procurant à l’enfant de nouveaux éléments, objets de jeu, matériaux, questions ou vocabulaire, qui lui permettent de réaliser des apprentissages” (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 88). It goes on to provide hands-on suggestions for the teacher, ranging from putting forward potential thematic ideas and linking themes to one another, to encouraging team work, and modeling conflict resolution strategies. Although not mentioned directly in the document, all of the suggestions listed in the educational programme are referenced from the *Tools of the Mind* curriculum, a preschool programme designed by researchers specifically based on Vygotsky’s teachings (Bodrova et al., 2011).

The *Tools of the Mind* programme illustrates the strong support provided by recent studies that pretend play positively contributes to children’s development, particularly of self-regulatory EF skills (Bergen, 2002; Berk & Meyers, 2013; Carlson & White, 2013; Hedges et al., 2013; Blair & Raver, 2014; Carlson et al., 2014). The programme is designed to explicitly improve EF skills by guiding preschoolers through structured make-believe scenarios. Although, to date, there is a lack of substantial evidence as to the effects of the curriculum on the development of EF (Baron et al., 2017), Quebec’s Ministère framework follows the guidelines

closely, indicating that they "favorisent des niveaux de jeu supérieurs chez les jeunes enfants" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 88). In fact, with the educational programme's focus on striving to promote and strengthen EF skills, such a reference effectively complements the Ministère's own objectives on the topic.

Types of Activities Promoted

It is in these varied contexts of play and project-based learning that the Ministère document suggests key instructional techniques that can be implemented by the teachers. In supporting one of the guiding principles that the child's areas of development are interrelated and integrated to contribute to the development of the whole child, the educational programme proposes a variety of activities targeting socio-emotional, language, cognitive, and motor development. For example, the document suggests fine motor skills be strengthened by cutting, gluing, and painting activities as well as by re-enacting everyday activities such as pretend cooking, washing, and writing within the context of symbolic play settings. Recommendations for refining sensory awareness include, for example, offering opportunities to guess smells, match textures, and explore various bells and musical instruments. Suggestions for strengthening cognitive development include exploring measurement concepts such as length, width and depth, and geometric concepts such as shapes, forms, and sizes. More skill-based activities such as sorting, matching, and exercising one-to-one correspondence are also proposed. For science, mention is made of plant and animal characteristics as well as learning about life cycles. For language, recommendations focus on the teaching of phonemes as opposed to letter names, and encouraging the concept of inventive spelling. Ultimately, the document recommends children be exposed to literacy skills through games, pretend play activities, and authentic daily experiences such as following a recipe or drafting a letter.

It is through the promotion of such activities and the delivery of such a play-based programme that the Ministère document supports the young child's development. Its educational programme is aligned with that of the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignment supérieur (MEES) and serves as a bridge between Quebec's early years settings and the subsequent elementary school programmes for 4- and 5-year-olds governed by MEES. Since the Ministère document only requires one third of a programme's teaching staff to be qualified in early childhood education (and two thirds of the staff once the ECEC centre has been in operation for over five years), the educational programme also serves to establish a common ground for all teachers, qualified or not, to work from. As the document reflects on the potential benefits of positive interactions, and the thoughtful design of both environments and experiences, the Ministère document encourages the attainment of spontaneous learning opportunities that will form the foundations for lifelong learning. Ultimately, the goal is to prepare the young children in its care to maximize their school readiness skills and to enter kindergarten ready to succeed.

The Various ECEC Curricula of Privately-Owned Centres

Although the value of quality ECEC has been established, and the Ministère has even identified its own qualifying ingredients, discrepancies remain in what constitutes the concept of quality in ECEC, in how it is defined, and how it is measured. In fact, in its recent report on monitoring quality in ECEC, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – whose mission is to share best practices, shape policies and establish international norms – states that "monitoring quality is complex, and presents various challenges. Defining what quality is, and how it can be coherently monitored, given the variety of different settings under consideration, is not an easy task" (OECD, 2015, p. 14). Although Quebec's provincial guidelines predominantly encourage ECEC centres to provide play-based environments, these

guidelines are to date not compulsory and the newly adopted measures to evaluate programme quality do not serve as a compliance tool. As such, classroom practices around the province come in many forms and various early years curricula exist.

Recognized ECEC centres in the province of Quebec include early childcare centres, also known as Centres de la petite enfance (or CPE's, which are government-subsidized, nonprofit entities managed by a board of parents), and privately owned and managed daycare centres (that may or may not be government subsidized). Other types of ECEC services also exist in Quebec but are not covered in this paper. These include home childcare providers (for individuals receiving up to six or nine children in their care, with a respective set of Ministry guidelines to abide by), non-regulated childcare services (such as day camps and community organizations) as well as the increasingly prevalent preschool education programmes for four-year-olds that are governed under the jurisdiction of the MEES.

Although all recognized ECEC centres are encouraged to adhere to the guidelines as set out by the Ministère, actual activities and environments may differ from one setting to the next, depending on both the leadership of the centre directors who oversee the implementation of their respective programmes and the compliance and aptitude of the individual teachers. Even though both CPE's and privately-owned daycare centres have the autonomy to set their own specific curriculum, more specialised programmes such as Reggio Emilia, Waldorf, and Montessori are typically found in the private sector where for-profit centre owners strive to differentiate themselves from more affordable, subsidized alternatives in a competitive marketplace.

The Reggio Emilia approach, for example, is a philosophy that guides young children and their teacher to embark collaboratively on creative projects that encourage exploration and discovery based on the interests of the child (Biroli et al., 2018). The Waldorf method, also

known as Steiner education, aims to cultivate the child's imagination and creativity by integrating the arts in all academic disciplines. Its ultimate goal is to educate the whole child through developmentally appropriate activities promoting growth in mind, body, and spirit (Nicol & Taplin, 2012). The Montessori method is implemented by Montessori-trained teachers who direct toddlers and preschoolers to take charge of their own learning at their own pace through a prescribed series of progressively-complex, didactic materials (Lillard, 2005/2017). Each of these curricular approaches can be found in private daycare centres around the province.

Despite efforts to distinguish themselves from the CPE's, the challenge of these private centres that lean towards more specific philosophies is to ensure that their guiding principles remain consistent with their own philosophies yet also remain simultaneously in line with the Ministère's educational programme. In an attempt to respond to this dilemma, I explore below the Montessori method in greater detail, paying particular attention to the similarities and differences it bears with Quebec's educational programme. Such a step thus provides me with a platform from which to then explore how this method, which is particular to my personal area of interest, manifests itself in contemporary Quebec.

An Overview of the Montessori Method

The reasons that parents are drawn to the different educational philosophies no doubt vary. With regards to the Montessori method, for example, for some parents, the Montessori name serves as a buzzword in their understanding of early childhood education and – be it based on concrete knowledge or on misconception – consequently also serves as a benchmark to quality services. In some cases, despite a general lack of understanding of its benefits and its outcomes, yet inflicted by popular fads such as the "Prince George Effect" (i.e., wanting to follow in the footsteps of renowned personalities such as the future king of England), parents

have shown a keen interest in the method (Associated Press, 2016). In other cases, parents who enroll their children in Montessori centres have done so based on the positive perception they have of the philosophy as well as the attraction they have to the Montessori principles of self-directed learning and respect for the child and their pace of development (Hiles, 2018).

Theory of Normalization as the Core Principle of the Montessori Method

The Montessori method was created in the early 1900's by Maria Montessori, a now iconic figure who had then challenged the conventions of her time by studying male-dominant disciplines such as engineering and medicine. Montessori established a name for herself as she moved on from medicine to advocate for the education of young children and explored the potential of those who lived in poverty or who faced special developmental needs (Povell, 2010). She designed a pedagogical technique that effectively educated a variety of such learners in her native Italy. Although Montessori had begun her work with the disadvantaged in the slum tenements of Rome, her approach then migrated to the United States to address the needs of middle-class Catholic parents who were dissatisfied with their parochial schooling system. Despite it having initially been created for families who were less privileged, the Montessori method now tends to cater to more affluent families from a variety of cultures (Povell, 2010). Notwithstanding resistance from progressive educators such as Dewey and Kilpatrick (Hiles, 2018), the Montessori method has since nevertheless established itself as a leading early childhood education method, not only in North America, but all around the world.

It was in conceptualizing her theory of normalization, and in designing an early childhood programme that would explicitly highlight the promotion of executive functioning (EF)-related skills, that Montessori became a true leader in the field of pedagogy (Lloyd, 2008). Through her initial observations of children, Montessori noted that, when provided with freedom

within a carefully-prepared environment to choose activities that would suitably meet their needs, young children would become instinctively focused and engaged. In one of her more prominent works, *The Absorbent Mind*, she wrote, "Following an inner guide, the children busied themselves with something (different for each) which gave them serenity and joy. Then another thing happened never before seen in a group of children. It was the arrival of 'discipline' which sprang up spontaneously" (1967b/1995 p. 202). Montessori claimed that disruptive behaviours such as a hand that moves aimlessly, a body that moves clumsily or a mind that wanders were not "attributed to the personality itself", but that "they come from a failure to organize the personality" (p. 203). She believed that when providing the child with opportunities for "constructive activity, then all these energies combine and the deviations can be dispersed. A unique type of child appears, a 'new child'; but really it is the child's true 'personality' allowed to construct itself normally" (p. 203). This, Montessori referred to as the process of normalization, which she illustrated with four core characteristics (love of work, concentration, self-discipline, and sociability), described below.

The term normalization may today be misconstrued, with non-Montessorians potentially misinterpreting it to mean a neurotypical child. In fact, in a 2008 analysis of Montessori's theory of normalization, Montessori-trained participants admitted to avoiding the term altogether for fear of being misunderstood (Lloyd, 2008). They preferred to focus instead on the observable behaviours that emerge, as per the theory's characteristics mentioned below. However, in initially coining the term, Montessori believed it to reflect the truly normal characteristics of childhood, which emerged naturally when children's developmental needs were met. More recently, the term has evolved and has been described as "the shift from disorder, impulsivity, and inattention to self-discipline, independence, orderliness, and peacefulness" (Diamond & Lee,

2011, p. 962). In today's Montessori classrooms, normalization aligns with the Quebec Ministère's document, specifically the description of EF and is more succinctly understood by practitioners as the process by which a child learns to work productively and cooperatively towards an intended goal (North American Montessori Center, 2011).

Love of Work

Montessori outlined the four characteristics that she claimed made up the concept of normalization (Montessori, 1967b/1995), the first one being the love of work. She stated that "it is imperative that a school *allow a child's activities to freely develop* (italics in the original)" (Montessori, 1967a, p. 9), and went on to note that, when involved in activities that they had chosen themselves, "normalized children acted in a uniform manner, i.e. they continued to *work, concentrated, on something, serene and tranquil* (…): they *worked with the maximum effort*, and *continued their activity till the task was completely finished and with exactitude* (italics in the original)" (Montessori, 1949, p. 302).

Montessori also believed that a child should be free to engage in an activity for as long as they wanted. She rationalized that children find particular pleasure in practicing and repeating familiar tasks (p. 310). Understandably, young children take varying amounts of time to carry out specific tasks and should be accorded a flexible time frame in which to do so. She claimed that growth comes from the repetition of an exercise and that "repetition is the secret of perfection" (Montessori, 1967a, p.92). For this reason, Montessori believed that teachers should avoid limiting the young child's opportunity to choose an activity and should also encourage them to practice it freely. Such a belief supports the Ministère's stance on the child as the principal agent of their learning as well as its opposition to imposing specific activities on young children.

Montessori also believed in encouraging freedom of choice within a well-prepared learning environment so as to promote a child's intrinsic sense of motivation. She opposed extrinsic incentives and rewards, believing that these interfered with the child's genuine motivation to learn (Montessori, 1967a, p. 13). She promoted a classroom free of rewards and evaluation predominantly by incorporating a control of error in her learning materials – a system that provides natural feedback to the child on whether the task has been completed correctly or not. Such a characteristic avoided evaluative feedback from the teacher and brought the intrinsic nature of learning to the forefront instead. As a result, Montessori believed that young children were driven by a genuine interest in their tasks, which exercised the development of self-discipline and promoted a sense of intrinsic motivation. This perception again echoes the Ministère's views on the subject and reiterates its views on the disadvantages of extrinsic rewards.

Concentration

The second characteristic of normalization is that of concentration. Montessori believed that the construct of normalization belonged not just to a few but to all children, so long as the right environmental opportunities were extended to them (Montessori, 1967b/1995). The onus, however, would be on the teacher as observer to direct the child successfully towards suitably engaging and challenging activities to help attain these characteristics. To accomplish this - and once again reiterating the Ministère's affirmation that each child is unique - the teacher needed to acknowledge each child's individual pace of development, and to be aware of what Montessori referred to as the child's sensitive periods. These sensitive periods were critical windows of opportunity in a child's development during which the child becomes instinctively receptive (or "sensitive") to learning particular new skills (Montessori, 1966). Matching a child's sensitive

periods to suitable activities was argued by Montessori to lead to the notion of normalization during which emotional traits such as compassion, patience and self-control would naturally develop.

Montessori declared that if the child was suitably matched to progressively challenging activities, within a differentiated classroom setting, the teacher as facilitator could then tap into the child's innate ability to concentrate. Under such conditions, she noticed, "One of the greatest and most interesting factors was the extraordinary discipline of normalized children, each occupied in the work of his choice" (1949, p. 296). To support this experience, Montessori developed a series of hands-on, didactic materials with increasing levels of difficulty. She believed that engaging with such objects would capture the attention of the wandering mind of the child.

To better promote the child's concentration, Montessori aimed to minimise disruptions and interruptions. To support this, she called for a three-hour uninterrupted "work cycle" of hands-on activity, to provide the child with sufficient time to delve into their chosen activities and to develop their "inner guides" (Lillard, 2005/2017, p. 126). Such advice runs parallel to the Quebec Ministère's outlook on the young child's ideal daily schedule, with the Ministère stressing that uninterrupted time for play should be provided "pendant une période suffisamment étendue pour lui permettre de complexifier son jeu" (Ministère de la famille, 2019a, p. 35). However, Montessori went on to specify that the suggested three-hour period of activity should not to be cut short by interruptions such as recess, extra-curricular activities, or even (parent) visitors into the classroom to sustain as long as possible the concentration that has been initially attained by the child (Lillard, 2005/2017, p.122).

Self-discipline

The third characteristic of normalization is that of self-discipline. Montessori claimed that self-discipline was exercised through the manipulation of the classroom materials, which were designed to be used for an intended purpose and in a specific way. Such an expectation required thoughtful organization on the part of the child, who would need to plan out how to execute the multi-step approach to complete the activity successfully. In the case of the Pink Tower, for example, the icon of the Montessori materials, the child would be expected to prepare the workspace carefully by unrolling a small carpet, to dismantle the ten-piece block tower meticulously one cube at a time, to put it back together thoughtfully in gradually incremental order of size, to check the completed activity for control of error, and finally to return it progressively back to the shelf. Such an expectation requires the child to complete the work cycle, which involves seeing a close-ended activity to its end (Howell et al., 2013). Montessori confirmed, "For it is from the completed cycle of an activity, from methodical concentration, that the child develops equilibrium, elasticity, adaptability, and the resulting power to perform the higher actions, such as those which are termed acts of obedience" (1917/1965a, p. 106). This, however, clearly contradicts the Ministère's call to equip the classroom with versatile materials that can be used and explored freely in a variety of ways by the child.

Montessori's concept of self-discipline is closely tied to the notion of EF discussed earlier in the Ministère's educational programme, which claims that EF are the skills responsible to help attain an intended goal (Ministère de la famille, 2019a, p. 96). Yet whereas the Ministère pairs the notion of EF with that of creativity throughout its document, Montessori instead appeared to suppress the exercise of creativity. Although a child is free to explore the materials in the classroom, they can only do so with the materials that have already been formally introduced according to the sensitive periods of the child. Furthermore, the child can only use the

materials in the specific way they have been presented and for their intended purpose. This, along with the fact that Montessori discouraged the notion of fantasy in preschoolers, did not cater to pretend play activities in the classroom (discussed in further detail below) and instead focused the child on the concrete world around them, may suggest that the Montessori philosophy does not support children's creativity and imagination.

Those who support the Montessori method think otherwise and believe that the Montessori classroom does, in fact, promote creativity. Considering the definition of creativity as a habit of mind that involves invention, problem-solving, and adaptation, Cossentino and Brown (2015) see the Montessori classroom as an environment that explicitly promotes "the cultivation of cognitive flexibility, risk-taking, and tolerance of ambiguity" (p. 230). Fleming et al. (2019) also claim that the freedom of choice in the use of classroom space and time, the mixed-age classrooms, and the teacher's role as a facilitator in the learning experience all play a part in nurturing children's creative development.

Although limited in number, some studies have explored the relationship between a Montessori education and creativity (albeit not specific to preschoolers). Lillard and Else-Quest (2006) conducted a study with 5- and 12-year-olds examining creativity (among other measures of academic and social development). Participants were students who had applied to a public inner city Montessori school through a lottery system, with some having randomly been assigned to the Montessori school, and others who attended non-Montessori public inner-city schools, private schools, and charter schools. Lillard and Else-Quest concluded that the 5-year-old Montessori participants were significantly more likely to use higher order reasoning when faced with social problems, and that the 12-year-old Montessori participants were significantly more creative in essay writing. Denervaud et al. (2019) noted that the Montessori participants in their

study outperformed peers from traditional school settings in creative skills across age groups. Fleming et al. (2019) also referenced a German study by Heise et al. (2010), claiming that Montessori students "showed higher levels of creativity and better performance in geometry" than their non-Montessori counterparts from "traditional teaching methods" (p. 3). In a more recent study exploring to what extent students in a rural public Montessori school differ from those in a rural public non-Montessori school on an assessment of creative potential, Culclasure and Fleming (2018) also concluded that Montessori students performed substantially better on divergent-exploratory tasks and that they revealed substantially higher scores than their non-Montessori counterparts. However, no mention was made on what characteristics participants had been matched, thus it is not clear if other variables such as socioeconomic status, parental motivation, and resources were responsible for the differences.

Sociability

The fourth characteristic of the process of normalization is sociability, which may be explained by the self-control that is required in regulating one's own feelings, considering the perspective of others, and expressing positive personality traits to function successfully within a social context. Montessori believed in creating a contextual framework for this characteristic to exercise it and consequently dedicated a portion of her curriculum specifically to the promotion of social behaviour. In her curriculum, Montessori's lessons on grace and courtesy are equally important to those on math, language, and sensorial activities and reinforce her belief in educating all (not only intellectual) aspects of child development. These lessons address specific skills tending to social courtesy, self-care, and care of the environment.

The larger sized and mixed-age nature of classroom groupings that are characteristic of a Montessori environment further support the notion of sociability. The larger classroom sizes

aimed to reach up to 35 preschoolers to one teacher, offering a broader range of personalities with whom the children could interact and exercise their social skills. Montessori claimed that "When the classes are fairly big, differences of character show themselves more clearly, and wider experience can be gained" (Montessori 1967b/1995, p. 225). Contesting classroom groupings that are segregated by age, Montessori also claimed that the mixed-aged nature of groupings helped children to reinforce concepts learned through modeling and reciprocal teaching. She stated: "There are many things which no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with the utmost ease. There is between them a natural mental 'osmosis'" (Montessori 1967b/1995, p. 226).

To further promote harmonious relationships with others, yet in clear contrast to the Quebec Ministère's suggestions on the topic, Montessori intentionally limited the quantity of learning materials in the classroom, ensuring that there only be one specimen of each object.

> … if a piece is in use when another child wants it, the latter - if he is normalized - will wait for it to be released. Important social qualities derive from this. The child comes to see that he must respect the work of others, not because someone has said he must, but because this is a reality he meets in his daily experience (Montessori 1967b/1995, p. 223).

Through this process, certain social qualities are thought to develop, namely inhibition control, patience, and an awareness of others and their needs. Ultimately, Montessori aimed to best prepare the child to become a respectful, productive member of society.

Montessori claimed that all four characteristics mentioned above must be present to acknowledge the appearance of normalization. She also believed that normalization was in fact "the most important single result" of a teacher's work (Montessori 1967b/1995, p. 204).

Parental Involvement

Although the tendency today is to encourage parental involvement in ECEC settings and to strengthen partnerships with parents (as seen in the Quebec Ministère's leading core principle), back at the turn of the 20th century, Montessori did not believe this to be a necessary ingredient in her quest to promote normalization. On the contrary, she aimed to minimize adult presence in the classroom, at times single-handedly managing up to 50 children at once (Lillard, 2005/2017). In upholding the concept of a "Children's House" – the name of her first establishments – Montessori aimed to create a learning environment for children alone so that they could rely on themselves, or on one another, when faced with a challenge or a dilemma. Montessori also feared that parental involvement in the classroom could influence the child's choices or areas of interest. Ultimately, Montessori wanted the teacher to be responsible for creating a protected learning environment in which the child – with minimal disruptions or distractions – could unfold to attain a state of normalization.

One cannot ignore, however the personal trajectory that may have contributed to Montessori's perspective. Admittedly, Montessori's first classrooms were created for children who lived in poverty (Montessori 1967a, p. 37) and whose parents could be relied on neither for their physical presence nor for their emotional support. Montessori wrote:

> During the day the children were abandoned by their fathers and mothers as they went out in search of work. These circumstances, which might seem to preclude any favorable outcome for a school, proved to be a necessary condition. They created a neutral atmosphere as far as any educational influence was concerned (p. 38).

However, one lesser-known fact is that, in the midst of her flourishing career, Montessori herself had mothered a child out of wedlock, and had sent the child away to be brought up by another family. Only reunited with her son Mario when he was fifteen years old, one can only wonder

how such a separation during her son's formative years could have contributed to Montessori's outlook on the importance of parental partnerships in ECEC settings. Instead, Montessori chose to direct her emphasis on the young child's relationship with the classroom teacher.

The Montessori Method

The Role of the Montessori Teacher as "Directress"

Central to the premise of the Montessori method is the dynamic triad of the child, the teacher, and the environment. The teacher's role is to promote the child's self-directed engagement with the learning materials within the prescribed "prepared environment". Montessori was very specific in her recommendations on how the teacher should behave with the children, and highlighted the importance of emotionally warm and sensitive teachers. She stated, "A teacher… must be ready to be there whenever she is called in order to attest to her love and confidence. To always be there – that is the point" (Montessori, 1956, p. 76). Although her perspectives were novel to the field in the early 1900's (Lillard, 2005/2017), such a statement is today consistent with contemporary notions on the importance of secure attachment - as seen in the Quebec Ministère's call for nurturing, responsive teachers.

Having established the necessary emotional characteristics of the ideal teacher, Montessori went on to stress the importance of balance.

> We must never force our caresses on him, greatly as we may be attracted by his fascinating graces; nor must we ever repel his outbursts of affection, even when we are not disposed to receive them, but must respond with sincere and delicate devotion. (Montessori, 1917/1965a, p. 332)

With her particular views on the task of childhood as becoming independent – reinforced by her famed quote "Help me to do it alone!" (Montessori, 1948, p. 103) – Montessori believed it was

equally important for the teacher to step back and to leave the child alone, especially when the child was fully absorbed in concentration. After all, such a state of concentration would be one of the sought-after character traits of the normalized child that she was striving to cultivate.

To fulfil this everchanging task, the teacher's main responsibility was to use their sensitivity to closely observe the children in their care and to guide them towards new, appropriately-challenging activities. As it is evident in Quebec's ministerial guidelines, observation is also a critical core responsibility of the Montessori teacher. Teacher interaction is reserved for the formal presentation of a new activity, and teacher intervention is set aside for when the child is either being unproductive and disengaged, or is disrupting others. Montessori aptly coined the classroom teacher as "the directress" for the role played in directing the child to suitable learning materials according to each individual's sensitive periods. Ultimately, the Montessori directress' role was to guide the child towards purposeful activity, to leave them free to explore it and to learn organically from their experiences.

The other role of the Montessori directress was to maintain order in the environment. The classroom environment needed to be carefully planned and executed so as to allow the child the freedom to explore within the limits of the classroom. The materials in this so-called "prepared environment" were structured and set out in a specific and orderly fashion. "One of the reasons why children feel a sense of calm and repose (spiritually) in the Montessori school is just because it is an environment where everything has its proper place and must keep to it" (Standing, 1957, p 108). Such a sense of order was believed to prevent an unfocused expense of energy, allowing the child to focus more and consequently allowing the teacher to observe and guide the individuals in the classroom with fewer distractions. However, for the successful

maintenance of the prepared environment and implementation of the specifically designed materials, special Montessori training was, and continues to be, recommended.

The Montessori Teacher Training Curriculum

Teachers wishing to implement the method in an accredited Montessori setting must be trained by an accredited programme and certified accordingly. Of such programmes, perhaps the most renowned is the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), which was established by Maria Montessori herself. Equally prominent is the American Montessori Society (AMS), which came about to acknowledge the reality of the Americanization of the Montessori method and its adaptation to the cultural context of teaching in the United States (Povell, 2010). All Montessori training courses include both an in-depth reflection on the role of the teacher as well as a familiarity with the array of specifically-designed materials and the respective lesson plans for their use.

The curriculum is broken up into five areas of practical life, sensorial, math, language, and culture (Montessori, 1965b). In contrast to today's pretend dramatic play and housekeeping centres, practical life activities involve real (as opposed to pretend or toy) materials to support the child to adapt authentically with autonomy and skill to their real-life surroundings. The practical life section of the curriculum is divided into care of self (with activities such as brushing hair, spooning rice, pouring water, buttoning, zipping, and lacing) and care of the environment (with activities such as sweeping, polishing, caring for plants, washing dishes, and folding laundry). Besides promoting independence, the practical life routines also exercise precision of thought and movement, as well as self-control and concentration. The sensorial activities offer the child an opportunity to refine each of the senses (such as by matching smells, textures, and bell sounds), to isolate qualities (such as height, length and width), and to exercise

the ability to order and to classify. Although very specifically designed in sets of ten (to help children to kinesthetically internalise the decimal system for later math activities) and instructed to seriate the material from left to right (to naturally introduce the literacy-linked notion of directionality for later language lessons), concepts tackled are similar to those targeted by the Ministère guidelines.

The math activities follow the sensorial ones, supporting the child in moving from concrete to abstract concepts of working with quantities, place values, and the four basic operations of early arithmetic. The language activities tackle phonemic awareness through the use of tactile materials such as sandpaper letters and the movable alphabet, and support the sounding out methods of inventive spelling techniques. The culture activities explore the natural world in which we live – namely through lessons in art, music, geography, zoology and botany, with similarities once again resounding with the Ministère's suggestions for science-related topics. It is through such a curriculum that Montessori believed that the teacher could match appropriate activities to each child's needs, and that each child was best supported to reach their ultimate physical, intellectual and social-emotional potential.

Play in the Context of the Montessori Method

In setting out to cultivate a state of normalization in young children, and by developing a very precisely-prescribed programme (Montessori, 1965b), Montessori developed a reputation as a curriculum theorist who was opposed to the concept of play. Admittedly, Montessori had clear opinions about certain types of play and their effect on the child at specific stages of development. Montessori advocated Karl Groos's practice theory of play, reflecting on its preparatory aspects towards adult life (Groos, 1898; Rubin, 1982). In her classrooms, she provided children with child-sized equipment to experiment with adult activities (e.g., small

brooms for sweeping and small jugs for pouring) in a pressure-free environment. For Montessori, play served the purpose of socialization and, with this responsibility in mind, she referred to her perception of play as the "work" of childhood. Although her intention was to validate and show respect for children's activity, it was potentially this label that has led critics to question her outlook on play.

Where she differs from proponents of play are in her views on pretense and fantasy, more specifically with regards to children under the age of six. Montessori believed that during this stage of early childhood, a child's developmental path was to construct their mind by adapting to reality. In her book on *The Absorbent Mind* (1967b/1995), she explained that for the young mind to adapt to reality, the child should be provided with purposeful and active experiences. On one occasion, she watched a young boy move away from playing with toy trains and airplanes to working with the wooden cabinet of geometric shapes. She stated:

> When the mind, which had been running about in fantasy apart from the hands which had nothing to do, became a guide for the hands which were doing something real, there suddenly came a united individuality and the real work in its turn was now nourishing the mind. (1949, p. 294)

Based on such observations, she created a section to her classroom that incorporated what she referred to as exercises of practical life. With authentic activities ranging from sewing buttons with real needles to preparing snacks with real knives and breakable dishes, the children could imitate actions they saw around them at home.

For Montessori, pretense was not a means towards development but a sign of unsatisfied desires. When children were playing house, they were expressing a genuine wish to keep house. As she provided them with options for real housekeeping tasks around the classroom, she

addressed their need for purposeful activity. Consequently, she observed that the desire to engage in pretense disappeared. She noted, "I understood that in a child's life play is perhaps something inferior, to which he has recourse for want of something better" (Montessori, 1966, p.122) and concluded that children are more naturally drawn to what helps them to construct themselves. For Montessori, pretense was primarily a key to learning about the unattended needs of the child.

Similarly, Montessori believed that fantasy also thwarted the child's innate drive to adapt to reality and for this reason she discouraged adult-imposed fantasy, such as the telling of fairy tales. She stated that children in early childhood were not yet grounded enough in reality to distinguish between fantasy and reality, and declared, "it is we who imagine, not they; they *believe*, they do not imagine (italics in the original)." (Montessori, 1918/2004, p. 200). Montessori went on to state that the real world offered enough to stimulate young minds in this early stage of life, and that this alone was enough to ignite the child's sense of imagination. Imagination was a notion experienced and created by children themselves through the sensory exploration of the world around them. Montessori noted that as young children concentrated their imagination on real things, they lost interest in fantasy and in pretense.

Current Research on Play in the Montessori Curriculum. Despite this controversial viewpoint, contemporary research on play in Montessori settings remains limited, although Lillard - an advocate of the Montessori method - has conducted some studies on the topic. In one study, Taggart, Heise, and Lillard (2018) offered children ages four to six years the choice between real and pretend versions of nine activities, such as washing dishes, cutting vegetables and feeding a baby. They noted that children strongly preferred real activities and only chose pretend activities when they expressed being afraid or unable to participate in them. Since school

type was not considered as a variable in this study, Taggart, Fukuda, and Lillard (2018) went on to research whether being enrolled in a Montessori school – which limits opportunities for pretense and offers more practice for real activities – influenced children's preferences. The authors concluded that all children preferred real activities to pretend ones, and that this preference was stronger amongst children in Montessori settings. However, it is important to note that a shift in thinking about the benefits of incorporating pretend play into the Montessori programme is also beginning to take place. More frequent, yet informal, discussions are appearing in anecdotal reports, in Montessori publications and within Montessori associations (Torrence, 2001; Soundy, 2012), reflecting evolving teacher beliefs about the potentially rewarding role of pretense in the Montessori classroom.

Programme Fidelity

Despite its clearly prescribed curriculum, the Montessori name is neither trademarked nor protected by copyright, and schools can freely use its label without fully abiding by the explicit guidelines set out by accrediting organizations such as AMI, AMS, or the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA). As such, there can be variations in the implementation of the Montessori method, with programme fidelity (i.e., allegiance to the originally prescribed tenets of Montessori's works) compromised. Although some ECEC centres willingly present themselves as accountable by pursuing an accreditation process, not all Montessori centres do, and there is great variety in the ways in which the method is implemented from one classroom, or one centre, to the next (Lillard, 2005/2017). Similarly, many non-Montessori ECEC centres can share some of the Montessori centres' identifying characteristics and Montessori materials, making it difficult to attribute certain elements solely to a Montessori setting.

With the different Montessori-accrediting organizations, with so many interpretations of what constitutes a Montessori programme, with programme fidelity ranging from high to low, and with a lack of consensus on defining the essential elements of a Montessori classroom, Montessori ECEC centres are difficult to identify, with specific numbers difficult to determine. AMS estimates that there are over 22,000 Montessori schools around the world - approximately 500 of which are in Canada (Israelson, 2013) - with numbers continuing to rise steadily. Although numbers specific to ECEC centres could not be verified, accredited ECEC centres are supposed to comply and conform to the core attributes prescribed by Montessori, whereas nonaccredited centers are free to do as they wish.

More specifically, with regards to the Montessori Early Childhood Curriculum, these early years centres call for multi-age groupings ranging between 2.5 and 6 years of age, larger classroom groupings of approximately 24 children, a minimum of four days attendance per week, a set of fundamental Montessori materials laid out in a specific order on the classroom shelves, a two- to three-hour uninterrupted work cycle, and lead classroom teachers who hold Montessori certification from a recognized teacher education programme (Association Montessori Internationale, n.d.; American Montessori Society, n.d.; Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators, n.d.). In addition, effective July 2020, AMS also requires lead teachers to hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree, or equivalent (American Montessori Society, n.d.). Besides these structural expectations, accrediting organizations also establish process-oriented guidelines, which focus on aspects such as the child's active engagement in the learning process, child/teacher interactions, teacher observation methods, and assessment systems. Although their accreditation programmes vary slightly from one another, it is by ensuring

compliance to such guiding tenets that the accrediting organizations guarantee the highest level of authenticity of a Montessori centre.

However, one natural adjustment to the originally-prescribed Montessori method is the adaptation of an early years programme to the culture and the circumstances of the community it is servicing (Marshall, 2017). The Montessori curriculum was initially introduced for children of "unemployed laborers, beggars, prostitutes, and criminals recently released from prison" (Montessori, 1967a, p. 35) and, even though the method quickly extended not only to the middle class but also to the aristocracy (p. 39), one must bear in mind that the method was nevertheless introduced in the early 1900's and that considerations for current needs and ideas are to be expected. Although contemporary lower-fidelity programmes implement some of the Montessori characteristics, they also supplement themselves with other, non-Montessori activities and/or materials (Lillard, 2012), or adapt themselves in a variety of ways, such as by shortening the length of the work cycle, by organising groups according to age or by integrating pretend play components into the day. As a result, these centres are at times now lightheartedly referred to as "Monte-something" or "Non-tessori" schools by advocates of the Montessori method (Mader, 2018). Some individuals believe that such ECEC centres tend to exploit the Montessori name without adhering to its core elements. In fact, several articles in the popular media acknowledge this reality and highlight the indiscriminate use of the Montessori name (Foundation for Montessori Education, 2015; Malik, 2011; Mader, 2018).

Such a tendency not only misleads parents with regards to the service they may be accessing, but also complicates research methods for studies wishing to explore the impact of a Montessori education on the development of young children. This is because studies investigating the impact of a Montessori programme at times fail to highlight the different types

of Montessori implementation that exist, neglecting to note that certain centres that refer to themselves as Montessori may not fully adhere to its tenets, with some lower fidelity programmes also contributing to the Montessori early years landscape. Consequently, this makes comparisons and generalisations in research questionable.

Although such contextual adaptations can play a role in ensuring the longevity of a programme, Montessori puritans wonder whether such modifications compromise the effectiveness of its original teaching method and its intended results (Foundation for Montessori Education, 2015). In fact, recent studies have questioned whether authenticity matters to a Montessori programme. Lillard (2012) went so far as to explore student gains (ages 33 to 76 months old) in different types of Montessori settings and found children in high-fidelity Montessori programmes had significantly greater gains in executive functioning, reading, math, vocabulary, and social problem-solving skills than their peers in lower-fidelity Montessori programmes. It should be noted though that, with the Montessori early years curriculum accentuating topics such as math and phonics with the purpose of attaining normalization, such observations are not surprising.

Renewed Interest in the Montessori Method

There has, in recent years, been renewed interest in the Montessori method. Even Amazon founder, Jeff Bezos, announced in 2018 that he would invest $2 billion towards an initiative to develop a network of high-quality Montessori-inspired ECEC centres in underserved communities (Weise, 2018). A variety of writing on the topic has also increased, with literature touching on several aspects relating to the Montessori method. Books have been published claiming a scientific basis for the Montessori method (Lillard, 2005/2017), tracing its path onto the American educational landscape (Povell, 2010; Gutek & Gutek, 2016) and suggesting

parental tips to raising a child the Montessori way (Seldin, 2017; Davies, 2019). The children's literature scene has also been affected, with picture books appearing on the life and works of Maria Montessori (Bach, 2013; Ney, 2013; Sanchez Vegara, 2019) and on what it means to be a student in a Montessori classroom (Collins, 2013).

Although research on the topic of Montessori has historically been limited, more scholarly, peer-reviewed articles are appearing in the published literature. In 2015, the AMS launched the *Journal of Montessori Research*, establishing a platform that would support scholarly research related to Montessori education. The journal contributes not only to the Montessori community but also to the broader field of education. The more dormant, European-based *Journal of Montessori Research and Education*, initially launched in 2016 with the similar intention of contributing to the development of Montessori education, recently resurfaced with a new volume appearing in 2019. In 2018, the American Educational Research Association (AERA) established a Montessori education Special Interest Group to promote and disseminate research and information relating to Montessori philosophy and education. That same year, the University of Kansas also inaugurated a Center for Montessori Research within their Achievement and Assessment Institute, aiming to engage in collaborative research to examine the potential influence of a Montessori environment on the broader field of education and human development.

Recent Research on the Montessori Method

The studies that are now being published range broadly in subject matter. While some touch on teacher attitudes, perceptions and beliefs towards a variety of topics such as family priorities (Epstein, 2015), inclusion (Danner & Fowler, 2015), identity (Christensen, 2016) and technology (Jones, 2017), others either focus directly on the academic outcomes of a Montessori

education (Lopata et al., 2005; Laski et al., 2016) or more indirectly on factors relating to academic success. For example, studies examined the relationship between the Montessori learning environment and the development of executive functioning skills (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Ervin et al., 2010; Lillard et al., 2017; Phillips-Silver & Daza, 2018), as well as its relationship to intrinsic motivation (Rathunde & Csikszetnmihalyi, 2005), and to fine motor development (Rule & Stewart, 2002; Bhatia et al., 2015). Yet despite generally positive results regarding the benefits of a Montessori education, very few studies have attempted to isolate the individual components of the Montessori method to consider what aspect of it might contribute to the positive effects they find (Marshall, 2017).

Characteristics such as the three-hour uninterrupted "work cycle", the mixed-age nature of classroom groupings and the larger classroom sizes, the progressively complex didactic materials in each of the five areas of the curriculum, the auto-corrective component that is built into the materials, the restrictions on parental involvement, the lack of extrinsic rewards, as well as the absence of free and pretend play activities all intertwine to establish a method that Montessori believed would best support the child to reach their ultimate physical, intellectual and social-emotional potential. The challenge, however, is in pinpointing which of these characteristics – or combination of characteristics – play an active role in contributing to positive outcomes. Such an exploration would contribute to research on the impacts of Montessorian approaches and inform Montessori programmes about which curricular components would be important to preserve.

Limitations to Recent Studies

Despite the growing number of studies that have been published, as well as the quality of the peer-reviewed journals in which they appear, challenges in methodology are noted. For example, despite the benefit of establishing randomised controls in educational research (Torgerson & Torgerson, 2001), doing so for studies on Montessori education has proven to be difficult. The lack of quality randomized control trials has been due to the challenge of randomly assigning students to Montessori schools and creating an appropriate control group. As such, studies have matched participants in Montessori settings and in comparison settings on a variety of additional variables. Results, however, remain questionable as they could potentially be biased by parental influence reflecting the nature of parents who opt for a Montessori education versus those who do not. Similarly, results may also reflect the effect of socio-economic status, since most Montessori schools tend to be fee-paying, thus making it difficult for low-income families to register their children. In comparing the academic achievement of Montessori and non-Montessori schools, Lopata et al. (2005) attempted to address this shortfall by matching schools on characteristics such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status, and controlling for parental choice by choosing schools with similar selection criteria. In a later project, Lillard and Else-Quest (2006) also attempted to be more methodologically sound by establishing experimental and control groups based on participants selected through a lottery to attend a Montessori school.

Other limitations in recent studies have also included small sample sizes, the absence of longitudinal data, differences in the length of time participants had previously attended Montessori schooling, the participants' age during attendance, and the type of teacher drawn to implementing the Montessori method (Murray, 2010; Marshall, 2017; Hiles 2018). These are all aspects that make generalizations about findings weak. One study did attempt to address some of

these limitations. In examining high-school outcomes from students who received a Montessori education, Dorhmann et al. (2007) included a large number of participants (n = 201), matched its control group based on gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status, and followed students from the age of 3 to 11. Although the participants were not matched on IQ, 51.8% attended highly selective high school programmes. The study noted that, though no significant differences were found in factors associated with English and social studies, it did find that those students who had received a Montessori preschool and elementary education had demonstrated significantly higher math and science test scores. This study, however, did fail to control for parental choice, which could potentially affect the parenting style in the home environment and its consequent influence on the child.

It is understandable, then, that attributing an observed effect to a Montessori education is a challenge. Furthermore, aiming to successfully isolate a specific element or elements within a Montessori programme, to see which aspect(s) of the programme could correlate with the observed effect, is also a challenge. Consequently, as the need for more research examining aspects of Montessori outcomes gradually builds momentum, there also appears a need to develop reliable instruments that would measure Montessori instructional practices, as well as fidelity to the authentic Montessori curriculum (Murray et al., 2019).

The varying applications of a Montessori classroom reinforce the need to ensure a consensus when conducting research that examines the effectiveness of the educational method. Studies such as those conducted by Lillard and Else-Quest (2006) and Dohrmann et al. (2007), did so by matching non-Montessori comparison programmes to Montessori schools that were specifically associated with the prominent AMI – the accrediting organization that was founded by Montessori herself with the aim of maintaining the integrity of her life's work. Interestingly,

in both cases, results were favourable to social, cognitive, and academic outcome measures. In contrast, studies implemented by Karnes et al. (1983) and Miller and Dyer (1975), although notably much older, had examined Montessori programmes that were only partially implemented: for example, neither study hosted a mixed-age group and, furthermore, Karnes et al. (1983) observed a programme that only implemented a thirty-minute work cycle per day. Of interest, both studies had observed weaker effects.

Clearly, the Montessori method has been implemented in a variety of ways, and the limitations faced in contemporary research on the topic direct us to consider what the method can look like in different contextual settings. These varying examples of Montessori classroom settings encourage us to actively shed light on the discrepancies that do exist in the implementation of this approach. Such a perspective would help us to acknowledge the uniqueness of how a Montessori classroom is implemented today and would pay tribute to the variety of ways in which the method may be interpreted. This, in turn, would offer not only researchers, but also practitioners and parents of young children with an experiential understanding of how the Montessori method has been interpreted. This would also take into account the culture and community needs, as well as the different ways in which a Montessori classroom may be characterised today.

The Present Study: Exploring the Montessori Landscape in Quebec

Having reviewed the ECEC landscape in the province of Quebec, and presented an overview of the Montessori method, the question arises as to how practitioners in Montessori settings believe they simultaneously abide by Quebec's educational programme and by Montessori's prescribed teachings. The challenge that such practitioners face is in reconciling the two sets of curricular guidelines and in weathering a dual frame of reference. By embarking on

the present study, I addressed this issue within a specific and local current context and, ultimately, examined teacher and director beliefs on how the Montessori method has transcended both time and culture.

Research Questions

My main research question is "What are teacher and director beliefs on their implementation of the Montessori method in early years settings in Quebec?". To address this issue, I began by investigating the following two questions:

- What are teachers' and directors' beliefs on their implementation of the Montessori method?
- What are teachers' and directors' beliefs on their implementation of Quebec's educational programme?

This, in turn, led me to reflect on the third question:

- What are the variations, the contradictions and the complexities involved in the ways teachers and directors perceive the implementation of the Montessori method in 21st century Quebec?

To address these questions, I designed a mixed method project with two related studies. The first study was a survey targeted towards all Ministry-recognized ECEC centres in the province of Quebec that identify as Montessori. This initial investigation allowed me to determine the range of characteristics (such as location, governance structure, language(s) of instruction) that make up an ECEC centre that identifies as Montessori. In addition, it provided me with the opportunity to recruit potential participants for the deeper investigation that ensued in Study 2.

The second study was a qualitative project that explored the beliefs of teachers and directors of four individual ECEC centres that identified as Montessori in the province of

Quebec. This investigation not only allowed the eliciting of centre-specific findings but also offered a consideration of the commonalities between the beliefs of the practitioners of each of the centres, as well as the distinctions between them and the uniqueness of each one. Ultimately, the goal of the second study was to gain a richer and deeper insight into the variability of the beliefs of practitioners in Montessori-identified ECEC centres in the province of Quebec.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY 1 – Establishing the Landscape

Methodology

Research Design

Following ethics approval from Concordia University's Office of Research, the first study was aimed at conducting an overview of the Ministry-recognized ECEC centres in the Quebec that identify as Montessori. This overview included the current availability of, and variations in, Montessori ECEC programmes in the region. This initial exploration was done through the use of an online survey.

Participant Recruitment

The criteria for participation in this study were that the participant was a director at the helm of a Montessori ECEC centre in Quebec, and that the centre was recognized by the provincial governing body, the Ministère. To identify this target population, I used the Childcare Establishment Locator on the Ministère website. The Childcare Establishment Locator allows users to search for childcare services by proximity, region, name, or keywords. When I performed a search using the keyword "Montessori", the Childcare Establishment Locator generated 67 names across the province. Note that this process did not take into consideration centres that may identify as Montessori, but do not include the term "Montessori" in their officially-registered name.

To expand on the search conducted through the Ministère's website and to enquire about their own school locator service for local accredited centres, I contacted the following Montessori accreditation bodies: AMI, AMS and CCMA. No additional names were generated through this process. I also contacted the teacher training centres, Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) and North American Montessori Teachers' Association (NAMTA), to search their directories of Montessori ECEC centres. In addition, I consulted local publications that target parents of young children and publish annual directories for child-friendly services, specifically the magazines *Montreal Families* and *Montréal Pour Enfants*. Finally, I ran an internet search for Montessori ECEC centres in the province of Quebec. All the names generated by these three additional searches had already been identified by the Ministère's Childcare Establishment Locator, and therefore no additional centres were added.

Of the 67 centres that were invited to participate in this study, six (8.95%) opted out formally, citing as their reason a busy schedule, the fact that they were no longer implementing a Montessori programme (despite retaining "Montessori" in their name) or their rejection of the relevance of the survey. Twenty-five centres (37.31%) were successfully recruited to participate. The remaining 36 centres (53.73%) did not reply to multiple telephone and email invitations to participate.

Questionnaires

The tool used in this study was an online survey specifically designed to collect primary data that would provide a detailed overview of the Montessori early years landscape in Quebec (Appendix A). The survey gathered data from each of the participating centres (n = 25) and investigated their main characteristics. The 41-item questionnaire was shared through the online tool, Survey Monkey, with French and English versions available. In particular, the study

presented a series of questions relating to the auspice and processes in place at each centre. Regarding structure, participants reported whether their ECEC centre was private or public, and whether it received government subsidies or was privately funded. Participants also reported on the number of children enrolled at their centre, age groupings, and class size. The directors shared information on their professional qualifications and years of experience, including the qualifications of their teachers. Regarding process, the questionnaire asked about the variety of classroom materials available and the opportunities available to teachers for on-site Montessori (or other) pedagogical training. Questions about the demographics of each centre were also included.

The questions were presented in various formats, and answers ranged from yes/no, numerical and multiple-choice responses to open-ended opportunities for participants to clarify their answers and provide specific information and examples. The participants were also asked in what ways their centre identified as Montessori and to comment on their experiences regarding the necessity to conform simultaneously with the guidelines and requirements of the Ministère and those of the Montessori method.

Procedure

Once the list of potential participating centres was compiled, the director of each centre was contacted, first with an introductory telephone call, then by email. This initial step allowed me to establish personal contact with each of the potential participants, to introduce the project and to ask if the potential participants would take receipt of an electronic survey. Potential participants were informed that the questionnaire would take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. I initiated this contact purposefully because I expected that it would result in a greater number of responses. The online questionnaire was then sent electronically, accompanied by a

consent form (Appendix B) and a cover letter (Appendix C). The letter briefly explained the purpose of this study and provided each potential participant with an individual participation identification code. The cover letter also indicated that participants had 14 days to submit their responses. The consent form and letter were also available in French. When potential participants failed to respond to the first email, a follow-up phone call was made and two follow-up emails were sent.

Data Analysis

Once the data were collected, each questionnaire was checked to ensure it had been completed correctly. Survey results were analyzed using the method of descriptive analysis. The information gathered was summarized and organized to highlight emerging themes and patterns. These descriptive statistics reflected data such as the percentage of centres that are officially accredited Montessori centres and the percentage of centres that have Montessori-qualified staff. This information was then enriched with the responses collected from the open-ended questions. The open-ended answers were thematically coded and categorized so as to understand the extent to which centre directors identify with the Montessori philosophy, how they apply the Montessori method in Quebec, and what experiences they face in conforming simultaneously to the guidelines of the Ministère's educational programme and to those of the Montessori method. This form of descriptive analysis was implemented as a first step towards addressing the overarching research question: "What are teacher and director beliefs on their implementation of the Montessori method in early years settings in Quebec?" In addition, such analysis would help to establish any patterns and associations that emerged from the collection of the data.

Results

Directors' Qualifications and Experience

The results showed that the highest level of education achieved by the centre directors ranged from an Attestation of College Studies (or AEC) (n = 2), a Diploma of College Studies (or DEC) (n = 5), a Bachelor's degree (n = 11), to a Master's degree or higher (n = 7). Of those, 72% had ECE training (n = 18) and held provincially recognised diplomas, while 28% were not (n = 7). A large proportion of the participants were Montessori qualified (n = 19) with certification from the Canadian Montessori Teacher Education Institute (n = 8), North American Montessori Center (n = 4) and AMI (n = 4). The qualifications of the remaining three were obtained from other independent sources. A small proportion of the participants (n = 4) were not Montessori certified.

The directors' experience in early childhood education ranged from 0 to 35 years, with a mode of 15 and a mean of 17.68. Their years of experience in a Montessori setting also ranged from 0 to 35 and a with mode of 15 and a mean of 12.8 years. The number of years that centre directors had been in their leadership role ranged from 0 to 26, with a mean of 9.32 years and a mode of 10 years.

General Characteristics of the Centres

Thirteen of the 25 participating centres (or 52%) were located in the greater Montreal region. The remaining 12 centres (or 48%) were located in cities and municipalities around the province of Quebec. The participating centres had been in operation from 3 to 55 years, with the mode of 10 years (M = 19.09 years) for the 23 participating centres that answered this question. The language of instruction was reported by all 25 participating centres to be French (n = 12), bilingual French / English (n = 10), English (n = 1) or trilingual French / English / Spanish (n =

2). The majority of the centres were private, non-subsidized centres (n = 19), while four were private, subsidized centres, and the remaining two were categorized as Centres de la petite enfance (or CPE's, which are government-subsidized, nonprofit entities managed by a board of parents). All the centres but one described their family population to be largely professional, multicultural, and in the "middle to higher" income bracket. The one exception reported its family population as "*milieu défavorisé*" (i.e., of disadvantaged background).

When asked if they were holders of the additional permit required for infants younger than 18 months of age, the majority of the 23 centres that answered this question (73.91%) reported that they were not. A permit for 10 infants was held by 21.74% of the centres (n = 5). The remaining 4.35% had a permit for 15 infants (n = 1). Of those six centres with permits for infants, five went on to answer a question about actual enrolment. Of those five, 80% were at full capacity and 20% functioned at 80% capacity. Of the 24 centres that reported being in possession of a permit for children over 18 months, the number of available spots per centre ranged from 24 to 75, with a mode of 60 and a mean of 49.46 spots. Actual enrolment ranged from 14 to 74, with modes of 26, 43 and 70 appearing twice each, and a mean of 45.17. All the centres functioned on a full-day basis, with opening times ranging between 6.00 am and 8.30 am, and closing times between 3.30 pm and 6.00 pm. Ninety-six per cent of participants reported their children attended full-day programmes five days per week. Three of the participating centres (12%) said they were accredited by AMI.

Curricular Progamming of the Centres

Seventy-six percent of the participants reported mixed-aged groupings, with the remaining 24% separating their groups by age. All mixed-age groupings divided infants into one group (when infants were present), toddlers into another group (ranging in age from 18 months

to 2.5 or 3 years) and preschool-aged children into the older group (ranging in age from 2.5 or 3 to 5 or 6 years). Of the 24 centres that responded to this question, 66.67% reported that additional activities provided by visiting specialists complemented the core programme. Such activities included classes in music, gym, yoga, dance, karate, science as well as additional languages such as English, Spanish, or Mandarin. All 24 respondents said that their classrooms were furnished with the typical range of didactic Montessori materials, specifically those that are used in the activities categorised as practical life, sensorial, math and language. Twenty-three of the 24 centres indicated that they also carried the Montessori materials for the culture category. (For examples of materials per category, see Table 1 on page 62 below). In addition, many centres reported that they used non-Montessori teaching materials. However, such materials are recommended by Montessori accreditation organisations and included art, music, and sports materials. Furthermore, 79.16% of participants indicated that, in addition to these materials, they also carried other materials, citing mainly "educational toys". Comments regarding these supplementary teaching aids included that they were offered to the children at specific times of the day, namely during early-morning drop-off, end-of-day care, after lunch and prior to nap time.

Teacher Experience

When asked about whether their teachers were Montessori trained, 19 of the 24 participants who responded to the question said at least one member of staff was Montessori trained. The number of Montessori-trained staff in a centre ranged from 1 to 14, with a mode of 2 and a mean of 2.95 individuals. The percentage of Montessori-trained teachers in proportion to the total number of teachers employed ranged from 9.1% to 100%, with a mode of 33.3% and 50% appearing three times each, and a mean of 36.9%. When asked how many Montessori-

trained teachers were also ECE qualified, the numbers ranged from 0 to 7, with a mode of 1 and a mean of 1.62 teachers. In proportion to all teaching staff employed at a centre, these Montessori and ECE-qualified teachers represented between 0% and 80% of overall teachers employed, with a mode of 0 appearing six times, and a mean of 24.1 teachers.

When asked if they offered some form of Montessori training to their staff, 18 of the 24 (75%) centres that responded to this question said that they did. Of the respondents, 11 specified that they offered access to on-site and in-house training. Three participants specified that they offered access to formal Montessori certification programmes.

Experiences in Conforming Simultaneously to the Ministère Programme and the Montessori Method

When asked if the directors had taken part in the Ministère's *Évaluation de la qualité educative*, the evaluation procedure mandated by the Ministère to evaluate the quality of the educational experience in ECEC centres, only two of the 23 participants who answered this question said that they had taken part in it, while 21 had not. When asked what aspects of their programme the participants associated with the word "Montessori", nine referred to social-emotional traits such as the promotion of confidence, cooperation, courtesy and growth. The concept of autonomy was mentioned by all nine. Four respondents highlighted the Montessori concept of "sensitive periods", referring to the developmental window of opportunity during which a child is most capable of absorbing a new skill. These respondents spoke of the importance of creating a framework in the classroom that allowed the child the freedom to choose from an array of activities and to progress through the programme at their own pace. Seven respondents referred to the classroom's physical environment by using the Montessori-coined phrase "the prepared environment", highlighting the stimulating environment of a

Montessori classroom, including the range of Montessori teaching materials and the teacher presentations that accompany the use of those materials.

When asked how they experience having to conform to the guidelines and requirements of both the Ministère's approach and the Montessori method, four participants viewed the Montessori method as superior to the method prescribed by the Ministère. The respondents indicated that they believed the Ministère failed to adequately address the interests and potential of the child, whereas the Montessori method paid attention to the child's sensitive periods and worked within a prepared environment to promote academics, an intrinsic love of learning and autonomy, ultimately resulting in capable children. Two participants communicated that it was difficult to align the two teaching philosophies and that meeting the requirements of both programmes demanded a great deal of extra work from them. Another six participants indicated that to conform to both approaches, they had to alter their teaching programme by including additional components, such as free play, social opportunities, collaborative projects, arts and crafts. They also reconsidered their teacher-child ratios and the way they grouped the children. Two of those respondents claimed that such adjustments made it easy to align the two methods. Three participants responded that the two philosophies in fact shared the same goals, particularly in the light of the Ministère's most recent educational programme, although the two approaches differ in how those goals are reached.

This preliminary study provided an overview of the availability of, and variations in, some of the centres that identify as Montessori in Quebec. In particular, it highlighted variations in the centres' location, their governance structure, their language(s) of instruction, various components of their curricular programming, as well as a tendency to cater to a demographic population from a "middle to higher" income level.

Table 1

Examples of Didactic Materials per Montessori Classroom Category

Montessori Category	Examples of Materials
Practical Life	Dressing frames, activities for sweeping /scrubbing /mopping /washing/ pouring/ spooning/ squeezing/ threading/ twisting.
Sensorial	Pink Tower, Broad Stair, Long Rods, Knobless Cylinders, Colour Tablets, Geometric Cabinet.
Math	Sandpaper Numerals, Numerals & Counters, Introduction to Decimal Quantity, Introduction to Decimal System, Teen Boards, Tens Boards.
Language	Sandpaper Letters, Sand Tray, Metal Insets, Large Moveable Alphabet.
Culture	Globe of Land & Water, Globe of Continents, Land & Water Forms, Puzzle Maps, Animal & Plant Picture Cards.

Note. Adapted from https://amshq.org/Educators/Montessori-Schools/Starting-a-School

CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY 2 – Exploring Teacher and Director Beliefs

Methodology

Having painted the landscape with the participation of some Ministry-recognized ECEC centres that identify as Montessori in the province of Quebec, I moved on to Study 2 to explore in greater depth the beliefs of teachers and directors from four of these centres.

Research Design

A qualitative methodology referred to as a *generic approach* was used for this study. A generic qualitative approach, also known as a *basic qualitative* or an *interpretive approach* can, as per Kahlke (2014), "stand alone as a researcher's articulated approach". The qualitative design was chosen for its focus on the study of a phenomenon or a research topic in context, often in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hays & Singh, 2012). As with the research questions above, qualitative topics tend to be exploratory in nature, either not having been previously examined or needing to be examined from a different angle. In an educational setting, where practitioners such as ECEC teachers and directors interact daily with children, with colleagues and with administrators, the beliefs and the phenomena that may be encountered by them need to be understood in context, not only to potentially guide future practice, but also to influence policy (Hays & Singh, 2012). With this in mind, the qualitative approach was appropriate since it provided a platform for practitioners to express their personal opinions, beliefs, and attitudes, and to reflect on their experiences in implementing the Montessori method in early years settings in Quebec.

The generic approach to qualitative enquiry was chosen as it can draw on the strengths of established methodologies whilst maintaining the flexibility required. Caelli et al. (2003) define the generic approach best in negative terms as research that "is not guided by an explicit or

established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known (or more established) qualitative methodologies" (p. 4). As with previous studies that have intentionally not claimed full allegiance to an established methodology (Merriam, 2002; Litchman, 2010; Lim, 2011), this study uses a generic approach as it seeks to understand how the participants involved make meaning of their world and their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Lim (2011) summarizes it well, claiming that a generic qualitative approach aims to provide a rich description of the phenomenon being studied, with the methods used generally being "highly inductive; the use of open codes, categories and thematic analysis are most common" (p. 52).

The generic qualitative design to this study was guided predominantly by semistructured interviews - as well as a preliminary questionnaire, and the follow-up review of centre-specific documents - which allowed the participants to express their subjective beliefs anonymously without concern for repercussion or backlash (Patton & McMahon, 2006; Percy et al., 2015).

Questionnaires

The questionnaire for participant directors complemented the questionnaire that they had initially filled out in Study 1. Participating directors were informed that the questionnaire would take approximately 10 minutes to fill out and that they would have a 14-day timeline to complete and return their responses. Participating teachers were informed that their questionnaire would take approximately 15 minutes to fill out and that there would be a 14-day timeline for them to complete and return the survey. Details of the questionnaires are described below.

Interviews

To begin to understand individual beliefs on implementing the Montessori method in Quebec, interviews were the main source of data collection. Due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, these were held on a virtual platform (Zoom or Skype). The interview sessions were

semistructured, with questions predominantly of an open-ended nature that allowed for the unfolding of descriptions, explanations, and personal interpretations. Each interviewee was asked a short list of issue-oriented questions. Ample time was provided for the interviewee to elaborate on points raised and to consider other influencing conditions to the answers. Ultimately, the interviews provided a framework in which the participants could describe in detail how they implemented the principles of the Montessori method and those of the Quebec educational programme, in order to shed light on the complexities of conforming to both sets of guidelines simultaneously. All interviews were held in French, with the exception of Director D's interview, which was held in English. Details of the interviews are described below.

Classroom Observations

Although the initial intention was to complement teacher and director interviews with classroom observations of the teacher participants in their natural environments, such a step was not possible under the current restrictions relating to COVID-19.

Document Review

As a source of secondary data collection, time was set aside to review some of each centre's documents so as to corroborate findings from the interview sessions. Semi-public documents, such as the Ministry-required *Régie interne* and the *Programme éducatif*, as well as the centre's lesson plan templates, report card templates, and observation and evaluation tools used, served as valuable and supplemental sources of data. Other documents of interest were the more public promotional materials, such as the centre's own website or the "*Ma garderie*" website which centralises general information pertaining to ECEC centres in the province. Such documents provided a window into a variety of contexts that went beyond what was discovered through the interview process. The aims of the document review were to confirm previous

findings from the interview process, to illuminate new understandings, and to reveal further questions to pursue, if any. A list of the documents reviewed per centre can be found in Table 2 on page 67 below.

Table 2

List of Documents Reviewed per Centre

Centre	Documents Reviewed
Centre A	Centre's Website
	Programme éducatif
	Rapport de progrès de l'enfant
	Sample of *Fiche d'initiation*
Centre B	Centre's Website
	Photographs
	Sample of Daily Agenda
	Portrait global de l'enfant
Centre C	"*Ma garderie*" Website
	Photographs
	Chronologie des exercices Montessori
	Développement de l'enfant
	Régie interne
	Rôle du comité parents
Centre D	Centre's Website
	Photographs
	Programme éducatif
	Dossier éducatif de l'enfant
	Tableaux de suivi
	Régie interne
	Montessori Teacher Training Powerpoints
	Lesson Planning Template

Participant Recruitment

Following ethics approval from Concordia University's Office of Research, and after a preliminary review of Ministry-recognized ECEC centres in the province of Quebec that identify as Montessori (Study 1), purposeful sampling procedures were employed to recruit participants, and to identify and select information-rich cases whose study would illuminate the research questions being investigated (Patton, 2002). Inclusion criteria originally required that some of the participating centres be Montessori-certified, but despite three centres originally claiming that they were certified (in Study 1), one centre did not respond to several invitations to participate in the study, and further investigation (in Study 2) revealed that the two remaining centres were actually not certified. Therefore, with no Montessori-certified centres having been identified and confirmed through this research, only non-Montessori certified centres were recruited. Inclusion criteria also required that the participating centres had been in operation for a minimum of five years. To gain a thorough understanding of the beliefs of the professionals implementing the programme, an emphasis was placed on examining the viewpoints of the teachers and directors within each of the participating centres.

To select the potential participants for this project, directors who had participated in Study 1 were purposefully selected on the basis of their accessibility when responding to emails and telephone calls in Study 1, as well as the developed and informative nature of their answers to questions in the survey in Study 1 (that is, answers that appropriately and reflectively addressed the open-ended questions in the survey). More specifically, a heterogenous purposeful sampling strategy was used, aiming for maximum variation of characteristics within the sample. With this in mind, variations were considered in the centres' geographic location, governance structure, supply of classroom materials, classroom age-groupings, and whether the centres had

undergone the Ministère's *Évaluation de la qualité educative*. This intentional selection was used with the aim that "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). The directors were contacted individually, first by email, and then with a follow-up telephone call. This initial communication introduced the current study of the research project as an opportunity to become even more familiar with the participating centres, through director and teacher questionnaires, interviews, and review of nonconfidential documents. Twelve directors were identified for this study, with four that agreed to participate (33.33%). Directors who agreed to participate were sent a cover letter electronically (Appendix D), which briefly introduced this research project and provided each potential participant with an individual participation identification code. This was accompanied by a consent form (Appendix E), as well as a link to the online questionnaire (Appendix F).

In the email and during the telephone call, the centre directors were asked to provide access to all of their centres' staff who taught children ages 2.5–5 years old, by forwarding a similar invitation to participate in this study. The centre directors were asked to forward by email to all potential teacher participants the cover letter (Appendix G), the accompanying consent form (Appendix H), and a link to the electronic questionnaire (Appendix I). Inclusion criteria for teacher participants required that participants be teachers of children aged 2.5 to 5 years old. This age bracket coincides with the Montessori early childhood classroom, which hosts mixed age groups of 2.5- to 6-year-olds, with the final year of the three-year cycle referred to as kindergarten (American Montessori Society, 2020a). The 5-year-old age ceiling in the inclusion criteria acknowledged the Ministère's maximum age for children in ECEC settings. Ultimately, one teacher from each centre accepted to participate in this study. This reflected a teacher

participation rate of 20% for Centre A and for Centre B, a teacher participation rate of 33.33% for Centre C, and a teacher participation rate of 6.25% for Centre D.

Participants

A total of eight participants took part in this study: one director and one teacher from each of the four participating centres. A brief description of each of the participating centres, as well as a breakdown of participant demographics, can be found in Tables 3 to 6.

The Directors

The results from the questionnaire revealed that the directors varied from the 35-44 to 55-64 age range. Their years of experience in ECEC settings ranged from 6 years to 35 years, with a mean average of 20.75 years. Three of the four centre directors were qualified in ECE, two of whom were also Montessori qualified. Director A was not Montessori qualified but presented herself as self-taught, relying simultaneously on reading books on the topic and on the expertise of the only Montessori-qualified teacher in her centre (Teacher A). Director B was qualified in neither ECE nor in Montessori, but relied on the expertise of an in-house pedagogical director. Director C completed her AMI qualifications in 1986, and Director D completed her qualifications with the Canadian Montessori Teacher Education Institute in 2015. Three of the four centre directors were also the owners of their centres.

Director A and Director D had purchased their respective preexisting Montessori centres and learned about the Montessori method on their journey to becoming owners and directors of their centres. Director B – a mother of a child who once attended the centre – had an academic background in administration. She leaned on the expertise of an assistant director for Ministry-related regulations and on that of a pedagogical director for the implementation of the Montessori method. Director C founded her own Montessori centre and simultaneously fulfilled

the role of director and of the main Montessori teacher. When asked in the questionnaire to rate their level of understanding of each of the two ECE pedagogical programmes in question - with 1 being *very low understanding of the programme*, and 5 being *very high understanding of the programme* - the directors reported a score of 4 or 5 for their understanding of the Montessori curriculum, with a mean average of 4.5. They reported a score of 3 to 5 for their understanding of the Quebec educational programme, with a mean average of 4.25

The Teachers

The results from the questionnaire revealed that the teachers varied from the 25-34 to the 55-64 age range. Their years of experience in ECEC settings ranged from 6 years to 20 years, with a mean average of 11.25 years. Each of the participating teachers was qualified in ECE according to Ministère requirements. However, only Teacher A also held the Montessori qualifications for this age group. Teacher B had been working in a Montessori setting for 20 years and had been unofficially trained by Montessori-qualified colleagues at her previous place of employment. Teacher C had embarked on a Montessori qualification programme in 2013, only to leave it unfinished. (She explained that she did not have the intention to complete the teacher training programme and opted instead to only learn the main foundations of the Montessori method. She preferred instead to divert her teacher training experience to a general ECE programme that would later be recognized by the Ministère). Teacher D, who had been working in a Montessori setting for 10 years, recently decided to pursue the Montessori certification programme later in the fall. When asked in the questionnaire to rate their level of understanding of each of the two ECE pedagogical programmes in question - with 1 being *very low understanding of the programme*, and 5 being *very high understanding of the programme* - the teachers reported a score of 3 to 5 for their understanding of the Montessori curriculum, with

a mean average of 4.25. They reported a score of 1 to 5 for their understanding of the Quebec educational programme, with a mean average of 3.

Table 3

Description of Centre A

Centre A	Director A	Teacher A
Noncertified Montessori centre	45–54 age range	35–44 age range
Located in Greater Montreal area	Identified as Latin American	Identified as Colombian
Private, subsidized centre	Purchased current Montessori centre	Teacher in 2.5–5 years classroom
Multicultural, underprivileged community	30 years experience in E.C.E.	7 years experience in E.C.E.
24 years in service	10 years in current role	7 years in current role
French, English, and Spanish programme	D.E.C.* in E.C.E.	A.E.C.* in E.C.E.
58 children enrolled	Not Montessori qualified	Montessori qualified (infants & 2.5–6 years)
Groupings: 18–30 months; 2.5–5 years		
7 teachers employed		
6 teachers qualified in E.C.E.*		
1 teacher also qualified in Montessori		

**Note.* E.C.E. = Early Childhood Education

D.E.C. Diplo ̂ e d'études collégiales (Diploma of college studies); A.E.C. Attestation d'études collégiales (Attestation of college studies)

Table 4

Description of Centre B

Centre B	Director B	Teacher B
Noncertified Montessori centre	35–44 age range	55–64 age range
Located in south western Quebec	Identified as French Canadian	Identified as Belgian
Private, nonsubsidized centre	6 years experience in E.C.E.	Teacher in 2.5–5 years classroom
Anglophone and francophone community	1 year in current role	20 years experience in E.C.E.
Linked to Montessori elementary school	Not E.C.E. qualified	7 years in current role
20 years in service	Not Montessori qualified	D.E.C.* in E.C.E.
French programme		Not Montessori qualified
29 children enrolled		
Grouping: 29 children 3–5 years		
5 teachers employed		
5 teachers qualified in E.C.E.*		
4 teachers also qualified in Montessori		

**Note.* E.C.E. = Early Childhood Education

D.E.C. Diplo ̂ e d'études collégiales (Diploma of college studies)

Table 5

Description of Centre C

Centre C	Director C	Teacher C
Noncertified Montessori centre	55–64 age range	25–34 age range
Located in south western Quebec	Identified as French (France)	Identified as Central African (Gabon)
Private, nonsubsidized centre	Founder of current Montessori centre	Teacher in 2.5–5 years classroom
Professional francophone community	35 years experience in E.C.E.	6 years experience in E.C.E.
23 years in service	23 years in current role	2 months in current role
French programme	B.A. in E.C.E.	A.E.C.* in E.C.E.
19 children enrolled	Montessori qualified (2.5–6 years)	Incomplete Montessori qualification
Grouping: 19 children 2.5–5 years		
3 teachers employed		
1 teacher qualified in E.C.E.*		
1 teacher also qualified in Montessori		

**Note.* E.C.E. = Early Childhood Education

A.E.C. Attestation d'études collégiales (Attestation of college studies)

Table 6

Description of Centre D

Centre D	Director D	Teacher D
Noncertified Montessori centre	45–54 age range	35–44 age range
Located in eastern Quebec	Identified as Italian Canadian	Identified as French Canadian
Private, nonsubsidized centre	Purchased current Montessori centre	Teacher in 2.5–5 years classroom
Professional francophone community	12 years experience in E.C.E.	12 years experience in E.C.E.
9 years in service	9 years in current role	1 year in current role
French and English programme	A.E.C.* in E.C.E.	A.E.C.* in E.C.E.
8 children under 18 months old enrolled	Montessori qualified (2.5–6 years)	Will pursue Montessori qualifications (2.5–6 years) in the fall
65 children over 18 months old enrolled		
Groupings: 0–18 months; 18–30 months; 2.5–5 years		
10 teachers employed		
6 teachers qualified in E.C.E.*		
0 teachers qualified in Montessori		

**Note.* E.C.E. = Early Childhood Education

A.E.C. Attestation d'études collégiales (Attestation of college studies)

Data Collection

Questionnaires

The first set of instruments used for data collection were the questionnaires for participating teachers and directors. The questionnaire for participating directors complemented the questionnaire that the directors had filled out in Study 1. It consisted of an 11-item survey gathering demographic information, enquiring about their previous experience in early childhood education, rating their understanding of the Quebec educational programme and the Montessori method, and asking for their opinion on the ideal early years programme (Appendix F). The questionnaire for participant teachers was a 17-item survey consisting of demographic questions and enquiring about the teachers' qualifications and experience in the field of early childhood education (Appendix I). It enquired about the participant's age bracket, home language, level of education, pertinent qualifications, and length of experience in Montessori and early years settings. It also invited participants to rate their understanding of the Quebec educational programme and the Montessori method, and asked for their opinion on the ideal early years programme. All documents were available in English and French.

Interviews

The next instrument used was the semistructured interviews of director and teacher participants (see Appendix J and Appendix K for a list of respective interview questions). One interview was conducted with each teacher and with each director, and interview sessions lasted 60 to 90 minutes. The interviewees were asked a list of questions, with time allocated to allow for emergent questions as they arose. The open-ended questions were designed to elicit descriptive responses from each participant, encouraging them to reflect on their beliefs and experiences as a Montessori practitioner in Quebec. More specifically, the open-ended questions

were geared towards the ways in which the practitioners incorporated the general principles of the Montessori method and those of the Quebec educational programme. The question frame was adopted from Patton's *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (2002), which outlines several types of interview questions that serve as important templates when developing a framework for interview questions. More specifically, the interviews incorporated experience questions to elicit observable behaviour (e.g., "If I followed you through a typical morning, what would I see you doing?"), knowledge questions to enquire about factual information (e.g., "How does your centre adopt the principles outlined in Quebec's educational programme?"), opinion questions to understand the participant's interpretations and expectations (e.g., "In your opinion, what is the teacher's role in the classroom?"), feeling questions to elicit an affective perspective (e.g., "How do you feel about parental involvement?"), sensory questions to consider what is seen, heard and touched (e.g., "When you walk through the classrooms, what do you see and hear?"), and probing questions to expand on the participant's responses (e.g., "Can you give me an example?").

Interviews were audio-recorded. A contact summary sheet based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) work was also used immediately after each interview to best capture initial impressions of the researcher, making them available for further reflection and analysis by the researcher (Appendix L).

Photographs

Since on-site classroom observations were not possible, to capture data from the physical learning environment, photographs of the classroom layout and of the materials on the shelves were taken and shared by three of the participating centres (Centres B, C and D). Although Centre D shared pictures of its Montessori materials, its participants did not share pictures of the

adjacent space with non-Montessori materials. Centre A did not share any pictures, but photographs of its classroom shelves were located on its website.

Document Review

An eight-step process (O'Leary, 2014) was implemented to evaluate the supplemental documents. First, documents were selected on the basis of their usefulness and relevance. Second, an organization and management scheme were developed. Third, physical copies were made to allow the researcher to incorporate annotations. Fourth, documents were assessed for authenticity, ensuring that they were drafted by the professionals at the centre themselves. Fifth, documents were then explored for their biases. Sixth, tone and style were also explored. Seven, questions such as who the author is, and who the target audience is, were considered. Finally, the content of the texts was summarised for later analysis. Such summaries were inserted into a document summary form: a sheet outlining the summary of each document, its significance to the contact involved, and its significance to the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (Appendix M).

Data Analysis

Questionnaires

The data collected from the questionnaires were used as foundational, background information for the ensuing interviews. The results from each participant were summarised and organised to highlight emerging themes and patterns that were then expanded on in the interviews. The results were analysed using descriptive statistics, to reflect information such as the proportion of participants with strong understanding of the Montessori method and/or the Quebec educational programme.

Interviews

Immediately following the interviews, the contact summary forms were used to facilitate reorientation when transcribing and analysing the interviews. Audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim by the author. Each transcript was then reviewed on two additional occasions and checked for accuracy against the audio-recordings. Participants were contacted and sent a copy of the transcript of their interview; they were invited to verify wording and to expand on their responses if they wished, though none did so. Following this careful review of the transcripts, data analysis ensued.

Thematic Analysis. Thematic analysis is often the suggested method of data analysis for generic qualitative studies (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest et al., 2012; Percy et al., 2015). Braun and Clarke (2012) define thematic analysis as "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p. 57). They go on to elaborate that as a result of focusing on meaning across a set of data, a researcher can then make sense of the participants' shared meanings and collective experiences. For this reason, the method of thematic analysis was chosen for this study. More specifically, the method of analysis chosen for this study was guided predominantly by Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to thematic analysis (2012). The six phases to Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis are: (i) familiarizing yourself with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing potential themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the report. Within this six-phase approach, some techniques were also borrowed from Saldaña's text, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2016).

Familiarizing Yourself with the Data. An important part of this first phase involved listening to the audio-recordings a minimum of three times, as well as reading and re-reading the

transcripts of the interviews. Making informal and casual notes on the data as the reading – and listening – unfolded was an important part of this process. This note-taking strategy allowed for a more analytic approach to the reading – and listening – of the data. It also allowed for more intimate familiarity of the content of the data set.

Generating Initial Codes. To accomplish the first step of coding the data, each interview transcript was laid out on the left two-thirds of the page, with a wide right-hand margin set aside for writing codes and notes (Saldaña, 2016). The text was then separated into various contextual units (sentences, paragraphs, textual segments) with a line break between units whenever the topic changed (see sample transcript in Appendix N). The first cycle of open coding was inductive, and focused on noting emerging, descriptive codes that summarized the primary topic of each unit of the interview transcripts (e.g., work requires concentration) (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). This first reading also incorporated in vivo codes that were pulled verbatim from the interview transcripts and noted in quotation marks (e.g., "le jeu n'a pas de but"). This step was iterative, and was followed by further cycles of coding that allowed for existing codes to be refined (e.g., work promotes child's potential) and for new codes to emerge.

Searching for Themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p. 82). Similarly, Saldaña (2016) describes the function of a theme as a way to categorise data into a topic that organises a group of repeating ideas. With this in mind, codes that shared unifying features were clustered together, reflecting a meaningful and coherent pattern in the data. Consistencies and repetitive patterns were noted, with particular attention paid to how these might relate to the principles of the Quebec Ministère guidelines and the Montessori method. Braun and Clarke (2012) compared

this phase of searching for themes to the work of a sculptor, with the sculptor's stone representing the raw data collected, and the work of art representing the analysis. The point made here is that "many variations could be created when analyzing the data" (p. 63).

In this third phase of data analysis, connections were made between the codes developed during the open coding process, and initial thematic categories were created. For this process, an Excel document was used, with each column representing a new category (see Table 7 for an example, and Appendix O for a sample). The codes from the open coding process were then inserted into the corresponding rows, with a separate colour used to represent each participant. The categories that were generated from the first interview transcript were carried forward and were used with the second transcript, at which point additional categories were also constructed as they emerged. This process was implemented progressively with all eight interview transcripts. The qualitative codes that emerged during the whole coding process were assigned, organized, and categorized manually. They were assembled to allow for content analysis and pattern detection, with quotes from the participants highlighted for confirmatory evidence.

Table 7

An Example from Phase 3 "Searching for Themes": Moving from Codes to Categories

Category	Beliefs on Work	Beliefs on Play	Use of Toys
Code	Children work	"*L'enfant apprend par le jeu*"	Toddlers have toys
Code	Montessori worktime prevents outdoor play	Play requires less time of child	Toys facilitate diaper changing
Code	Work time	Importance of play	"*La seule chose c'est les jouets… Sinon je me considère purement Montessori*"
Code	*"Ma liste de travail"*	*"C'est quoi jouer et c'est quoi travailler?"*	"*Je sais qu'il y a des garderies Montessori qui ne sont pas d'accord avec les jouets*"
Code	*"Il faut respecter son travail"*	Play is not bad	Disapproves of toys
Code	*"Je ne suis pas d'accord du tout qu'il y a des jeux dans la classe parce qu'on travaille"*	*"Je suis vraiment d'accord avec l'enfant apprend par le jeu. C'est vraiment important"*	*"Ce n'est pas un matériel de travail*"
Code	*"C'est quoi jouer et c'est quoi travailler?"*	*"Le jeu est plus spontané"*	No control of error
Code	*"On commence le travail"*	In Montessori, play is didactic	*"Je ne suis pas d'accord du tout qu'il y a des jeux dans la classe parce qu'on travaille"*
Code	*"C'est une zone de travail"*	*"Jouer n'a pas un but"*	*"Jamais dans le temps de Montessori : Ils n'ont pas accès au matériel*"

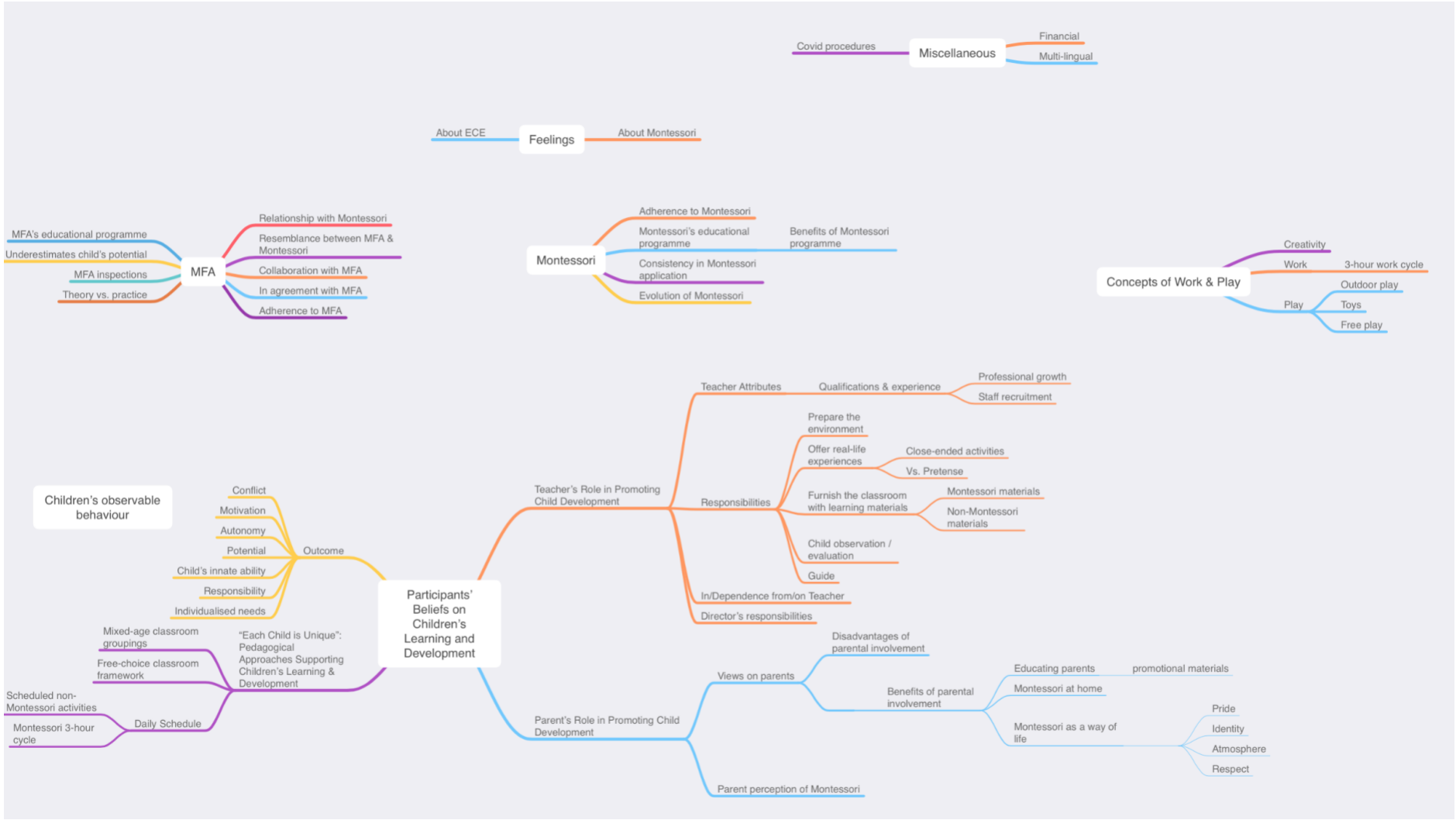
Note. Colour coding: Director A; Teacher A; Director B; Teacher B; Director C.

Reviewing Potential Themes. This fourth phase of thematic analysis required a repetitive review of the developing categories in relation to the coded data set. As a first step here, categories were checked once again against the data, and adjustments were made when necessary. For example, codes that no longer seemed to fit in a category were either discarded or relocated to another category. Similarly, some codes were duplicated and were added to another category. The boundaries of certain categories were redrawn so as to capture relevant data more meaningfully. Some categories merged together; others were broken down into more specific categories. A "miscellaneous" category was created to house any code that did not seem to fit into any of the categories. As a second step of this phase of thematic analysis, the multiple categories generated were woven together into separate themes. A thematic map was used to explore and organise the categories into theme piles. This mind-map provided an initial visual tool to allow for the exploring of relationship between categories and between themes (see Figure 1). This reinforced Saldaña's (2016) claim that when similar categories are clustered together, such foundational work would then lead to the creation of higher-order constructs.

These themes were once again reviewed against the complete data set. The aim was to capture the most relevant elements of the data, as well as the overall tone of the participants, particularly in relation to the study's research questions.

Figure 1

Thematic Analysis: An Initial Mind Map



Defining and Naming Themes. A name for each overarching theme was then generated, with a corresponding description allocated to each theme. This description defined what was specific and unique to each theme (see Table 8 in Results chapter below). An effort was made to ensure that the themes each had a singular focus, were interrelated but did not overlap, and directly addressed the study's research questions. Furthermore, the fine-tuning of the thematic map reflected how the themes could be woven together to create a coherent narrative (see Figure 2). This process was recursive: the analytic narrative involved initial writing drafts around each theme, followed by a review and a reconsideration of the themes constructed. The data presented in the narrative were connected to the study's research questions and were reported in the Results section below. The interpretation of the data, as well as their connection not only to the study's research questions, but also to the scholarly research within this field of study, were presented in a separate Discussion section below.

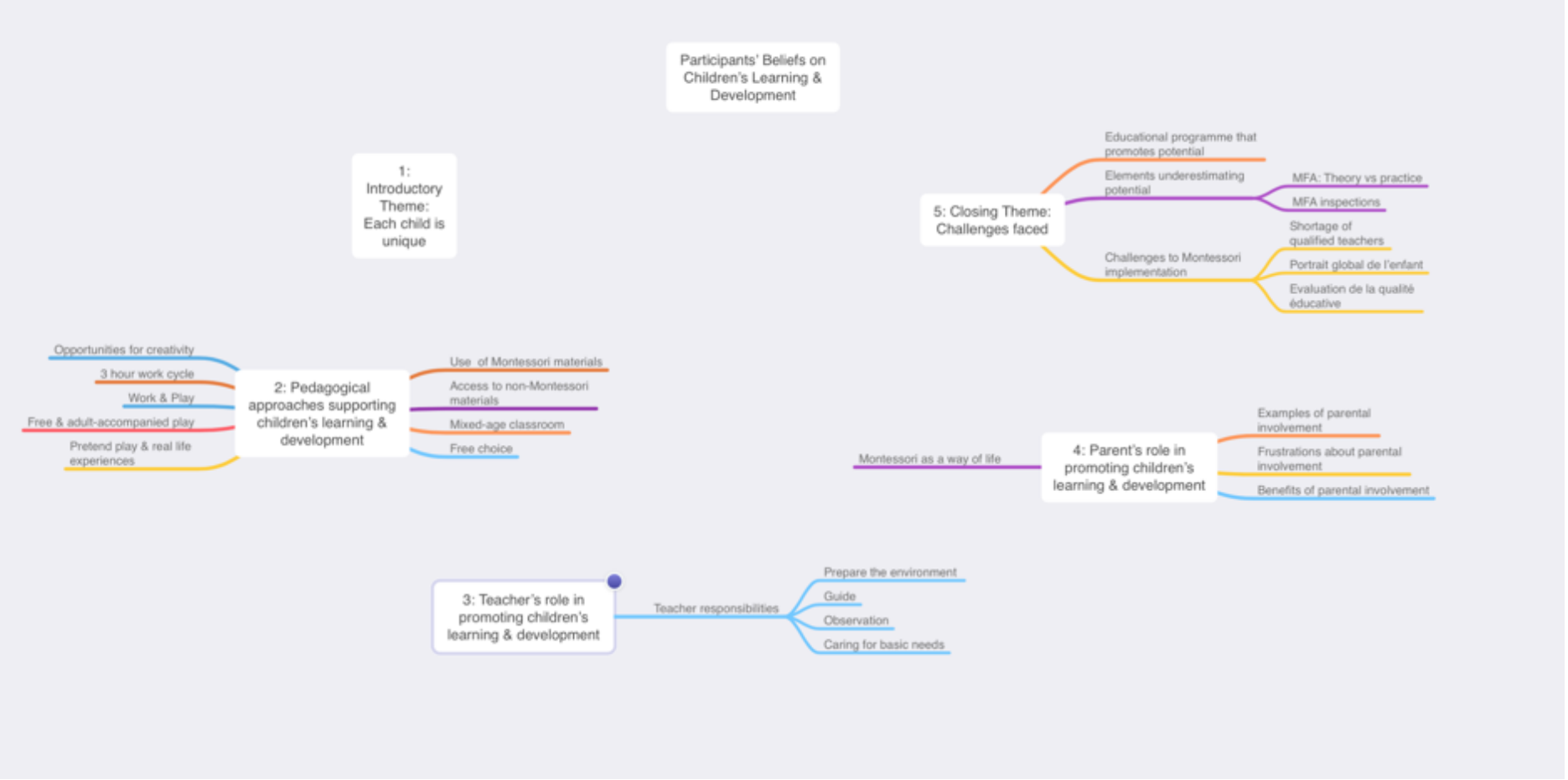
Producing the Report. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), the final phase of thematic analysis is the writing of this dissertation. They advise:

> The purpose of your report is to provide a compelling story about your data based on your analysis. The story should be convincing and clear yet complex and embedded in a scholarly field. Even for descriptive TA, it needs to go beyond description to make an *argument* that answers your research question (p. 69).

Below is the endeavour to do just that.

Figure 2

Thematic Analysis: Final Mind Map



Photographs

Photographs of the physical environment of the learning centres and of the materials within them were used as supplementary materials, and were reviewed and compared to the other data sources for confirmatory or contradictory information.

Document Review

Using the document summary forms created, the supplementary materials were also reviewed and compared to the other data sources for confirmatory or contradictory information.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires a sense of trustworthiness to be established not only to ensure that the study has been executed appropriately and to demonstrate research strengths, but also to note research limitations (Hays & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, establishing trustworthiness allows the researcher to demonstrate credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). Trustworthiness within this present study was established via multiple methods such as triangulation, member checking, and thick description. Credibility has been established as one of the major criteria to determine if conclusions make sense in qualitative research (Shenton 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012). In this present study, credibility was ensured by establishing appropriate research methods. More specifically, the procedures implemented for data collection and data analysis were based on underlying theoretical frameworks that have been detailed in depth in the Research Design section above.

Triangulation

Triangulation involves the use of different methods and multiple sources as forms of evidence at various parts of qualitative enquiry (Shenton 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012). The

multiple methods of data collection used besides the interviews and questionnaires also included the review of photographs and semipublic documents. Another form of triangulation involves the use of a range of informants, so that "individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behaviour of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people" (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). In this current study, an effort was made to have at least two participants per participating centre. Similarly, site triangulation was achieved by having participants from four different participating centres. This was done with the aim of reducing the effect on the study of factors that may be particular to one institution. Such measures taken ensured consistency between the different avenues pursued and methodological triangulation in the data analysis process.

Member Checking

Member checking has been cited as the key strategy for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012). Member checking requires involving the participants in the research process with the intention of accurately portraying their intended meaning. This technique was implemented during the interviews to clarify participant responses, with the use of probes such as "Can you give me an example?" and "Can you elaborate on that?". Member checking was also implemented after the interviews were transcribed to ensure accuracy. This was done by sending each participant a copy of the transcript of their interview, asking for confirmation, and inviting them to expand on their responses if they wished - although they did not do so.

Thick Description

Shenton (2004) explains that detailed description of the phenomenon under scrutiny "can be an important provision for promoting credibility as it helps to convey the actual situations that

have been investigated" (p. 69). Throughout this written report, detailed and in-depth quotes from each of the interviews have been provided, and maintained in their language of origin. This was done with the intention of best reflecting the views of the participants, without interference from the process of language translation.

Dependability

The dependability of a study refers to the consistency of its results over time and across researchers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012). It asks for stability in the data inquiry process and requires the use of techniques that would ensure that if the work were to be repeated, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). According to Shenton (2004), the research design should be constructed in such a way that it can be viewed as a prototype model, with enough detail provided to allow the reader to assess the extent to which the researcher has implemented appropriate methodology. To accomplish this task, detailed descriptions have been provided throughout the Method section of this study, ensuring that the reader can clearly understand the research practices used. Coding was also simultaneously performed by my two supervisors at the beginning of the coding process to establish consistency in the codes created.

Confirmability

Hays and Singh (2012) define confirmability as "the degree to which findings of a study are genuine reflections of the participants investigated" (p. 201). Achieving confirmability requires interference from the researcher to be prevented, so promoting objectivity and neutrality. Shenton (2004) reinforces the importance of taking steps in qualitative research to ensure that the findings are a result of the participants' experiences, not the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), one key tactic that can

be used to ensure confirmability is to provide a thorough background on the researcher so as to expose any predispositions. This information was shared in the opening statement that over-arches the preliminary Study 1 and this present Study 2.

Results

This present study set out to explore the variations, contradictions, and complexities involved in the ways teachers and directors perceive the implementation of the Montessori method in 21st century Quebec. Throughout the course of the interviews, the teachers and the directors shared an array of beliefs and experiences in implementing both the Montessori method and Quebec's educational programme. Although some of the participants' beliefs were similar and others varied, all were constructed towards one over-arching theme that represents the participants' beliefs on children's learning and development. Following the six-step analysis procedure, five emergent themes were uncovered: (i) the introductory theme that each child is unique; (ii) pedagogical approaches promoting learning and development; (iii) the teacher's role in promoting learning and development; (iv) the parent's role in promoting learning and development; and (v) the closing theme of challenges faced in promoting potential. Table 8 below communicates what was specific and unique to each theme.

Table 8

Phase 5: "Defining and Naming the Themes"

Theme	Description
Each child is unique	Expressions and examples of beliefs and experiences that the young child is viewed as an individual, each with their own pace of learning and development.
Pedagogical approaches	Expressions and examples of beliefs and experiences of classroom practices that promote children's learning and development, as well as reflections on the semantic language used around these practices.
Teacher's role	Expressions and examples of the teacher's role and responsibilities in the classroom that promote children's learning and development.
Parent's role	Expressions and examples of the parent's role in promoting children's learning and development. This includes reflections on parental communication, parental education and parental involvement, as well as advantages and disadvantages of parental involvement on children's learning and development.
Challenges faced	Reflections on challenges and obstacles faced in attempting to promote the child's full potential. This includes beliefs on practices that underestimate or thwart the child's potential.

Each Child is Unique

The participants' views on children's learning and development revolved around the shared, foundational belief, and the introductory theme, that each child is unique. On both its website and in the *Programme éducatif* that it had to submit to the Ministère as part of its accreditation process, Centre A claimed:

> Notre programme éducatif est basé sur la méthode Montessori. La philosophie Montessori repose sur le constat que chaque enfant est unique, qu'il a sa personnalité propre, son rythme d'apprentissage, ses forces et ses faiblesses.

However, in its *Programme éducatif*, Centre A acknowledged that the child's individual nature was not only addressed by the implementation of the Montessori method, but that it was also promoted by Quebec's educational programme. It went on to state:

> Chaque enfant a un potentiel intrinsèque qu'il lui faut développer, un intérêt spontané d'apprendre (…) En concordance avec le programme éducatif *Accueillir la petite enfance* et la philosophie et la méthodologie Montessori, les fondements théoriques humanistes du développement de la personne, l'approche écologique, l'approche de l'attachement et l'apprentissage actif et accompagné s'appliquent quotidiennement à notre organisation et guident le personnel dans leurs interventions auprès des enfants et leurs familles.

Director A reinforced her centre's mission and illustrated the belief that each child learns at their own pace by sharing an experience about a 3-year old boy who had been naturally and continually drawn to the math section of the Montessori materials, and who had discovered the mathematical operation of multiplication without so much as a formal presentation from his teacher. Director A insisted that no one had forced the young boy through this learning process and expressed, "C'était quelque chose de très naturel. C'était incroyable!"

Teacher A underlined this belief by mentioning Montessori's notion of sensitive periods – that window of opportunity in early childhood when a young child can absorb a new skill with minimal effort. She reported, "Il y a des périodes sensibles qui sont innates à nous (…) On ne peut pas dire à un enfant 'vient pour apprendre' : Parce qu'il est né pour apprendre." She went on to assert that not only does her centre view each child as an individual, but that the staff implements its teaching methods accordingly too.

> Une chose que j'aime beaucoup ici c'est qu'on ne voit pas les enfants comme un groupe de classe (…). On voit chaque enfant pour qui il est (…). On les voit comme individuels, et on les gère comme individuels, pas comme une classe.

In reference to one of the Ministère's guiding principles that each child is unique, Teacher A confirmed, "Oui, chaque enfant est unique et on travaille avec chaque enfant individuellement selon son rythme et ses intérêts. Tout le monde est différent."

Although Centre B did not share a copy of its *Programme éducatif*, it did also claim on its website that it worked with each child according to their own individual pace of learning. It wrote: "Nous visons le développement global de chaque enfant selon ses besoins, en offrant un enseignement en français dans des classes multiniveaux de petite taille. Les enfants peuvent ainsi s'entraider et évoluer à leur rythme respectif."

As with Teacher A, Teacher B also referenced Montessori's sensitive periods in this context:

> J'aime le concept des périodes sensibles: Un enfant qui est dans sa période sensible va travailler toujours dans le même environnement parce que c'est important pour lui à ce moment-là pour son développement. Et d'autres enfants ne vont pas aller dans un environnement parce que ça ne leur parle pas du tout, ou parce que ça leur fait peur.

Teacher B went on to explain how she was surprised at first at the discovery of what young children were actually capable of when given the opportunity to exercise certain skills: “En venant de l’Europe où les parents sont très protecteurs auprès des enfants… On habillait nos enfants jusqu’à cinq ans, mais quand je suis venue ici, j’ai découverte qu’ils pouvaient faire ça de très, très tôt.” This revelation led to her belief that different children learn and develop at their own individual pace. She stated:

> Un enfant de trois ans peut aussi être au niveau d’un enfant de quatre ou cinq ans. Au niveau de l’apprentissage, il y en a qui connaissent déjà leurs chiffres, quand il y a des grands qui ne les connaissent pas encore. Donc ça permet à chaque enfant de développer des points d’intérêt.

Centre C also acknowledged that each child learns at their own pace. In its *Régie interne* (another Ministry-required document outlining the rules of internal governance) it explained that its educational programme revolved around the Montessori method, whereby the child could develop within an individualised approach to learning: “Il trouve là un cadre d’apprentissage individualisé: il s’implique avec le matériel de son choix, l’utilise en apprenant à son rythme.” Director C, also a teacher at the centre, asserted, “Quand j’arrive le matin, je ne sais pas ce que je vais faire. J’ai ma planification, je vais suivre mes enfants, au rythme de chacun.” Her colleague in the classroom, Teacher C, also attributed this ability to follow the child’s individual pace to the Montessori method. She explained of the pedagogy, “L’enfant était libre d’aller choisir du matériel, qui était mis à son service. En fait, il allait selon son envie interne.”

As with Centre A, Centre D also paid tribute to both the Montessori method and to the Ministère’s programme when describing its pedagogical approach in its *Programme éducative*. It stated, “Nous offrons une approche Montessori en suivant le programme éducatif Accueillir la

petite enfance." However, in the very next paragraph, it only acknowledged the Montessori method when it claimed: "Le programme éducatif Montessori privilégie la stimulation du développement global de l'enfant de la naissance jusqu'à l'entrée à la maternelle. Ce programme repose sur les 12 points principaux…", which included "L'enfant travaille à son propre rythme. Par conséquent, il ne sera pas brimé par un enfant plus lent ou trop rapide." Director D supported this claim by expressing "Children learn on their own beat when they are ready." When Teacher D was invited to describe a typical morning in action, she reinforced this belief that children learn and develop at their own pace and declared, "Je vois des enfants qui sont à des étapes différentes."

Pedagogical Approaches Promoting Children's Learning and Development

Although this shared belief that each child learns and develops at their own pace was unanimous across the centres, the participants had varying insights on what pedagogical approaches best promoted this in practice.

Mixed-Age Classroom Groupings

When Director B was asked which components of the Montessori method she believed were essential to contributing to learning and development, she immediately answered "Définitivement la classe multi-âge." This was reinforced in her centre's *Programme éducatif*, which explained "Les enfants peuvent ainsi s'entraider et évoluer à leur rythme respectif." When answering the same question, Teacher B went into more detail about the benefits of a mixed-age classroom setting. She shared:

> Le groupe d'âge mixte c'est vraiment important pour l'estime de soi. Les grands montrent aux plus jeunes, mais les plus jeunes aussi montrent aux grands. Depuis quelques années, je vois beaucoup d'anxiété chez les enfants, que je ne voyais pas autant avant. Il y a de

> plus en plus d'anxiété et ça peut la diminuer. Le groupe d'âge mixte pour les enfants de notre âge, c'est très important.

Director C also attributed social-emotional benefits to her mixed-age classroom setting, although she did not attribute this specifically to the Montessori method. She observed that the children at her centre "sont respectueux avec les autres, qui offrent beaucoup d'entre aide." Teacher C supported her director's claims and described similar benefits to her mixed-age classroom setting. She reflected, "C'est comme une famille de différents âges qui s'entraident." She was, however, the only participant to also consider the behind-the-scenes challenges of a mixed-age classroom:

> Il y a aussi un défi : Il y a beaucoup d'entraide. C'est important pour les enfants, mais ça demande plus de travail de l'enseignante: Elle doit faire des choses adaptées à chaque niveau. Il faut répondre aux enfants de deux ans, et trois ans et quatre ans.

Director D and Teacher D also appreciated the daily opportunities for mutual help, teamwork and leadership, whereby older children acted as mentors to their younger classmates. Each of these participants attributed these positive social-emotional skills to the benefits of their mixed-age classroom settings.

A Classroom Framework That Offers Free Choice

All four teacher participants, as well as Director C who also teaches in the classroom, mentioned the notion of free choice as a classroom framework that is beneficial to the children's development. Teacher A mentioned that she appreciated this framework of free choice as it provided a platform for autonomy and discovery in the classroom: "Quand les enfants commencent à travailler, à découvrir, à commencer à se sentir à l'aise et autonome dans la classe, pour faire des choix et des décisions. C'est quelque chose que j'aime." Teacher B also

expressed an appreciation for this framework: “J’aimais la façon dont je voyais les enfants fonctionner dans la classe. La liberté du mouvement, le choix du travail qu’ils aimaient.”

However, only Director C and Teacher C attributed this free choice framework specifically to the Montessori method. Director C said : “J’ai connu Montessori grâce au libre choix. Donner à l’enfant la capacité de pouvoir choisir ses activités, et que ça ne soit pas toujours l’adulte qui gère. L’adulte est guide mais ne gère pas pour l’enfant.” Teacher C also shared that what drew her to the Montessori method was that “L’enfant était libre d’aller choisir du matériel, qui était mis à son service. En fait, il allait selon son envie interne (…) L’enfant ira vers ce qu’il veut travailler ou découvrir.” Also appreciating the benefits of a classroom framework that offers free choice, Teacher D admitted that, with time, her own classroom skills had evolved to integrate this framework:

> Moi, j’ai intégré beaucoup de choses: au lieu de suivre une structure très fermée…disons, là on fait la collation, là on a une période d’activités…Les enfants qui sont là depuis le matin, ils peuvent prendre leur collation par eux-mêmes, se servir par eux-mêmes, des choses comme ça.

Montessori’s Three-Hour Work Cycle

The participants also expressed their viewpoints on the notion of Montessori’s *three-hour work cycle* as an important component in the child’s daily schedule. According to Montessori’s writings, this daily uninterrupted block of time was believed to be required for the child to immerse themselves in their learning environment, so as to develop focus, and to become fully involved in the activities at hand. The participants’ perspectives on the need for a three-hour uninterrupted block of time as part of their daily schedule differed.

In Centre A, both participants held on to the importance of implementing the three-hour uninterrupted block of activity time for the child's best interest. Director A ensured that the centre's schedule protected the Montessori three-hour activity period in the morning by not scheduling any outdoor play for the children. She reported, "Les grands ne sortent pas le matin à l'extérieur. Sinon ça serait trop court pour eux… Leurs activités Montessori sont plus longues." Teacher A confirmed this claim and explained that this block of time was required to promote the *normalisation* of the classroom (i.e., according to Montessori's writings, the natural developmental process that reflects concentration, self-discipline, and deep engagement in the activities at hand.)

> La période de trois heures est importante parce qu'il a besoin du temps pour avoir cette dynamique de travail. Si c'est moins, on commence mais on ne va jamais arriver à avoir cette normalisation de la classe. (…) En après-midi, après la sieste, on sort dehors. Pas le matin, pour avoir un temps de travail.

In Centre B, Director B reported that the classrooms also implemented the three-hour work cycle and even named this uninterrupted block of time (alongside the mixed-age classroom and the Montessori materials) as one of the essential components to early years learning and development. She claimed, "Les trois heures ininterrompues… Ils ne sont pas interrompus. Le matin c'est le travail Montessori. Ils ne sortent pas dehors." In practice however, and in contrast, Teacher B at the centre felt otherwise. She expressed that a three-hour period was too long for some children and that she preferred instead to go according to the children's actual needs. Sometimes, this meant offering longer periods of outdoor play instead: "Le cycle de travail de trois heures: c'est un peu long pour certains enfants. (…) Quelquefois on prolonge le temps dehors parce que les enfants font quelque chose de vraiment intéressant."

The participants in Centre C also upheld the importance of incorporating outdoor play into the children's schedule at the cost of interrupting the three-hour Montessori work cycle. Director C said : "Les trois heures du cycle de travail: C'est très difficile de les garder. Ça veut dire 8h30 à 11h30 sans jouer dehors. Les trois heures, je ne peux plus le respecter." To further demonstrate how strongly she felt about incorporating outdoor play into the children's schedule, she referenced home-based daycares and said emphatically: "Je suis *contre* les garderies familiales. Les enfants sont devant la télé, ils ne jouent pas dehors (…) C'est la garderie de zoo." Teacher C at the centre shared similar thoughts about the uninterrupted block of time, claiming "Les trois heures, je n'ai pas besoin de ça. Trois heures, ce n'est pas faisable en matinée. L'enfant arrive, le rassemblement, la collation, s'habiller, sortir… non, pas possible!"

The participants in Centre D revealed more uncertainty in their reflections. On the one hand, Director D insinuated a willingness to work towards the three-hour work cycle, not only in the morning, but in the afternoon as well. She said, "What is hard for us to implement is three hours of work in the morning and three hours again in the afternoon. We haven't figured out a solution on how to do that." Yet, on the other hand, Director D ensured that the children's morning schedule allowed for thirty minutes of daily outdoor play, reflecting a preference for outdoor play than for an uninterrupted three-hour period of classroom activity. Teacher D was the most ambiguous in her reflections on the implementation of the three-hour work cycle. She expressed "Je suis en partie d'accord du trois heures, dans le sens que dans un idéal, oui." She felt, however, that in practice, due to the nature of today's children and to the knowledge base of colleagues who may not share the same vision as her, that implementing the three-hour work cycle was not possible.

> Mais je pense que forcément ça peut se faire progressivement, dépendamment de ce qu'on voit dans le réel. Mais je pense que pour se rendre jusqu'à trois heures, avec la réalité des enfants d'aujourd'hui, dans le contexte qui fait que rarement on peut être avec des gens (des collègues) qui connaissent la pédagogie, et qui sont dans cette voie-là, ce n'est pas possible de se rendre jusqu'à trois heures rapidement. Moi, je n'ai pas connu le trois heures. Je pense que je pourrai le connaitre.

Free and Adult-Accompanied Play

One of the key instructional practices proposed in the Ministère's educational programme is the opportunity to engage in free, and in adult-accompanied, play – an area neglected in the original Montessori method. Opportunities for indoor free play were offered in each of the participating centres, but the participants explained that these were limited to the early morning drop-off session, the end-of-day session, or days when recess was held indoors. Director D specified that access to her centre's indoor gym-turned-free play area was on a needed basis only:

> In the two and a half to five-year-old classroom, there are no toys whatsoever. All the way through to 6 pm. We do have a gym room downstairs where sometimes the children who need to move can go and be out of the classroom.

In addition to the early morning drop-off session and the end-of-day session, Teacher B also offered free play in her classroom on Friday mornings, not so much as a willingness to provide the children with opportunities for play, but as a method to free her from engaging with the children as she tended to her weekly administrative classroom responsibilities. She revealed she offered free play time "Le vendredi matin... Ça nous permet de faire les obligations administratives, comme le message de la semaine pour les parents, les fiches d'assiduités..."

However, she did occasionally also adapt her classroom activities away from the Montessori materials and towards toys to meet the children's evolving needs on other mornings of the week. She reported, "Si je vois qu'ils en ont besoin, je leur dis 'va te chercher un casse-tête', etc. De temps en temps, ils ont besoin de faire autre chose."

Director A and Teacher B both agreed that free play provided an option for activities when the children became more tired towards the end of a school term. Director A likened it to going away on holiday and returning to work refreshed and reenergised the following week: She said, "Ils avaient pris une semaine de pause… Le cerveau c'était ouvert, ils étaient rafraichis. Pour les adultes, c'est pareil: on prend une semaine de vacances, on revient avec plein d'énergie et on travaille mieux et plus content." Although Teacher B stated that the children had controlled access to free play materials in her classroom, her Director B claimed otherwise. She said "Nous offrons le jeu libre à l'extérieur et pendant l'heure du diner. Jamais dans le temps de Montessori: Ils n'ont pas accès au matériel."

Teacher A, Teacher C, and Teacher D each stated that they offered access to free play settings in areas outside of their own classrooms. In fact, Director D clarified that she removed all free play opportunities from her centre's classrooms when she noticed the teachers allowed for free play at the cost of engaging with the Montessori materials. She justified this by stating that "Montessori *is* jeu libre…it is.", referring to the fact that the children in her centre were free to roam the classroom and pick the activity of their choice to engage in. After a moment of consideration, she continued "Or is it *choix* libre?".

When further exploring the participants' beliefs on free play, Director A, who explained that perhaps it was because she had been trained in general E.C.E. and not in the Montessori

method, declared that she believed it was beneficial to young children's creative development. She stated:

> Je sais qu'il y a des garderies Montessori qui ne sont pas d'accord avec les jouets. Mais je ne crois pas que les jeux libres sont mauvais. Nous, on les fait en début et en fin de journée. Ça donne la chance à l'enfant de créer à partir de lui-même. Donc pour moi, c'est pas mauvais, et c'est permis chez nous.

Teacher A reiterated that her centre offered opportunities for free play at the start and end of each day, with materials such as dolls, a kitchenette, and Legos made available to the children at that time. However, her perception of what constitutes free play differed from her director's:

> Les jeux libres, c'est dans le service de garde. Mais dans notre classe aussi, quand je fais une présentation à une fille et une autre fille veut venir voir, elle est libre de le faire, même si elle n'appartient pas à mon groupe mais à celui de ma collègue.

When asked why Teacher A had non-Montessori materials in her centre if she did not agree with the idea, she responded: "Ce n'est pas pour trouver de coupables, mais la directrice, la tête de la garderie les permet." With Director A using words such as "c'est permis chez nous" and Teacher A using the words "Ce n'est pas pour trouver de coupables", the impression provided is that despite the presence of non-Montessori materials, that the move to include them could be viewed as not conforming to the Montessori method.

Director B and Teacher B also stated that there were non-Montessori materials in the Montessori classroom, in particular free play materials such as a kitchenette and dress-up accessories. Teacher B stated that these were accessible, at the teacher's approval, during the free play times mentioned above. Although she too acknowledged not conscientiously accompanying

children in play, Teacher B referenced her observation role during their free play sessions, and that this included monitoring for potential help in conflict resolution:

> On regarde comment ils s'organisent, comment ils jouent ensemble. Ils viennent nous chercher pour nous donner 'des gâteaux' à manger, mais on n'accompagne pas les enfants dans le jeu libre, sauf s'ils viennent nous voir. On regarde de loin si on doit intervenir.

Teacher B also acknowledged the benefits of interactive play, stating that games with rules allowed her to observe the children exercising the concept of teamwork, and of winning and losing. She shared, "J'aime beaucoup pour voir qui est capable de jouer en équipe, qui est capable de perdre."

Director C also recognized the importance of free play in the development of young children. She listed some of the free play materials on offer in a classroom adjacent to the Montessori classroom, such as dolls, Legos, wooden blocks, cars and trucks but she clarified that in her role as classroom teacher, she did not accompany the children in play: "Ces jeux-là ne sont pas guidés. Moi, j'observe. Ce sont des jeux libres – pas guidés. Je ne peux pas être en même temps l'acteur et la personne qui observe." Director C went on to explain that since the Montessori experience required her to accompany children through their learning, that she opted to keep their play opportunities as free, and not adult-accompanied, play.

When reflecting on why a Montessori teacher who identified as "Montessorienne née" chose to incorporate free play into her programme, Director C considered the context in which Maria Montessori had progressively withdrawn toys from her learning environment. She reflected:

> (Maria Montessori) a donc éliminé les jouets tranquillement. Je ne pense pas qu'elle soit contre le jeu libre dans l'idée que c'est super important. Bon, le Ministère a donné son

> programme éducatif *Jouer c'est magique*. Donc le jeu libre est quand même très important chez les jeunes enfants. Mais ça vient d'une situation reliée à l'état précis qu'elle se retrouvait dans la classe, qu'elle a enlevé les jeux libres.

To reconcile these two conflicting directives, Director C reported that she respected the Montessori guidelines by choosing not to incorporate any free play materials into the Montessori classroom, but instead to set them up in the same way as she would her Montessori materials (i.e., in small, separate baskets on a shelf, and easily accessible to the children) in an adjacent play-based classroom.

Teacher C agreed that there were benefits to free play. She stated "Avec les jouets, les enfants peuvent aussi apprendre…Ils développent le coˆé affectif." However, she diverged from her director's belief as to where the free play activities could take place. Instead, she suggested:

> Quand on sort les jeux, il n'y a pas de matériel Montessori. Ça ne se mélange pas. Mais je crois que ça pourrait se mélanger. Sauf, bien sûr, si le jeu fait trop de bruit, ça va déconcentrer les autres enfants. Mais dans le jeu où l'enfant apprend, on pourrait les offrir en même temps (que les activités Montessori).

Director D reported that she grouped all the free play materials in a separate room in the building's basement, which carried an armoire with a variety of toys such as dolls and accessories, Legos, kitchenette, cars, and trucks. She said, "If an educator feels like getting out of the classroom for 20 minutes, by the time they go downstairs, they can do 15 minutes of pretend play there." No other mention was made of the benefits entailed in the free play experience. On the contrary, Director D stated, "Play does not have a goal. A child can free play with anything without having a specific goal to his idea or his play", with such a statement revealing the director's belief that the goal would be defined by the teacher, and not intrinsically by the child.

Teacher D also diverged from her director's statements. She expressed that she agreed with the benefits of free play, although this was not the only way a child could develop:

> Je suis en partie d'accord que l'enfant apprend par le jeu. Pour moi, ça reste un peu personnel, mais je pense que c'est un moyen de développement et que ce n'est pas la seule façon dont un enfant puisse se développer. De baser le programme seulement sur le jeu libre, je trouve ça limitant.

Despite these particular examples of free play, none of the teachers stated that they led or engaged in adult-accompanied play as per Quebec's ministerial guidelines. Teacher A specified:

> Les jeux accompagnés, il y en n'a pas vraiment. Ni pendant la journée, ni durant le service de garde. Elle (l'éducatrice du service de garde) fait une table avec poupées, une table de cuisine, une table Legos, mais elle n'est pas mêlée dans le jeu avec les enfants.

Director C considered the concept of adult-accompanied play in relation to the children's Montessori activities and stated of her classroom's opportunities for play:

> On a tous les jeux possibles: Les jeux de scènes entre pompiers, policiers, ambulanciers… Ces jeux-là ne sont pas guidés. Moi j'observe. Ce sont des jeux libres – pas guidés. Je ne peux pas être en même temps l'acteur et la personne qui observe. Donc les jeux libres sont plus importants que les jeux guidés. Parce que tout ce qui est guidé est dans l'ambiance Montessori.

Pretend Play and Real-Life Activities

Although the Ministère encouraged opportunities for symbolic pretend play, Montessori's views on pretense and fantasy were different, particularly with regards to children under the age of six - a time she believed children were not yet grounded enough in reality to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Teacher B reinforced this belief and stated "Chez Montessori, on ne fait pas semblant, *on fait*". This statement represents one aspect of the participants' beliefs on pretense, each of whom shed light on the importance of the Practical Life section of their classrooms during their interviews. The Practical Life section is one of the main categories of the Montessori curriculum, and it traditionally incorporates authentic activities ranging from sewing buttons with real needles to preparing snacks with real knives and breakable dishes. The purpose of this section is for the children to authentically practice actions they see around them at home, thus rendering them more autonomous when faced with the eventual need to exercise the skill in question. Each of the classrooms studied displayed a range of Practical Life activities in line with the Montessori curriculum, with exercises such as scooping rice, sponging water, and pinning clothes pegs (see examples of photographs in Appendix P). Director D reiterated that she noticed her children demonstrated a true sense of pride and accomplishment when engaging in real-life activities. She observed, "The look in the children's eyes when they have done something with real materials is priceless. It does not even compare to what they think they have accomplished with plastic goods." Director D objected to having toy foods around the classroom and stated that for a skill to be transferable, it needed to be introduced and practiced in an authentic format.

Despite placing an importance on engaging in real-life activities, Teacher B and Teacher D also declared that they had observed their children naturally gravitating towards pretend play during outdoor recess activities, although this was not a form of play that they actively promoted. If a child approached them and engaged them in a pretend play scenario, neither teacher interrupted the process, and both affirmed that they played along. In fact, this led to Teacher D further considering the importance of this form of play. She went so far as to request the

purchase of a set of pretend play costumes from her centre, with the aim of more actively promoting this type of play with her group and was awaiting feedback on her request.

Director C supported this type of play, and described the room adjacent to her Montessori classroom:

> J'ai tout un coin dinette, de scénette, de jeu libre pour jouer au restaurant. *Je commande un café, une tarte*… Ils ont les pommes, les poires, les ustensiles… il y a un échange. Ils jouent à trois. Ils font des échanges. Ils font *comme si* on était au restaurant, *comme si* on est à l'épicerie…

This statement contrasts clearly with Teacher B's statement above, when she shared "Chez Montessori, on ne fait pas semblant, *on fait.*"

Opportunities for Creativity

The Ministère's educational programme pays particular attention to the notion of creativity and encourages early years centres to provide opportunities for its unfolding. The Montessori programme, in comparison, appeared to suppress the exercise of creativity. Although a child is free to explore the materials in the classroom, they can only do so with the materials that have already been formally introduced according to the child's stage of development. Furthermore, the child can only use the materials in the specific way they have been presented and for their intended purpose. Added to the fact that Montessori discouraged the notion of fantasy in young children and did not cater to pretend play activities in the classroom, instead focusing the child on the concrete world around them, this suggests that the Montessori philosophy does not support children's creativity and imagination.

The directors of each of the centres suggested that opportunities for the display of creativity appeared mainly during Circle Time conversations, during free play sessions at the

start and end of each day, and in the art corner that was available to the children during Montessori activity time in each of the classrooms studied. The teachers of each of the centres specified a series of materials and mediums in each of their art corners that invited the children either to engage in self-expressed art, or to imitate in their own way the template of an art piece modelled by the teacher – in their opinion an opportunity to exercise creativity.

Teacher A believed that the notion of creativity was more subtle than simply what was displayed in painting, dancing, and pretend play scenarios: “Les enfants sont créatifs tout le temps. On n’a pas besoin de leur donner des Legos ou de la pâte à modeler pour regarder leur créativité.” She believed creativity was internal and that it appeared in the child’s oral expression, the stories that were told, and the questions that were asked. She did not believe that a child needed hands-on materials to display creativity. Teacher D agreed, as she explained that creativity could be found in the way a child approached a problem or puzzle, and that a child’s instinctive ideas should not be stifled. She did, however, also state that the children in her classroom could not use the Montessori materials as they pleased; they would be redirected if they used them in a way that was different to what was presented to them by their teacher. For example, if a child used the Montessori cylinders to build a house with them, “Ça serait redirigé.”

Teacher B had a different perspective. She believed that once the child showed mastery of the way the Montessori materials were supposed to be used, they could then unleash their creativity and explore different uses for the materials. She explained:

> Dans le Montessori, une fois quand un enfant prend une activité et qu’il l’a bien fait, par exemple avec es Triangles Constructifs: quand il les connait bien, quand il peut les

> assembler, les nommer, il aura la liberté de pouvoir faire ce qu'il veut… il peut faire un robot, un bateau… L'étape suivante, il peut passer à la créativité.

However, Teacher B confirmed that most creative experiences revealed themselves during art and free play activities: "Dans le jeu… dans la cour… dans le dessin il y a énormément de créativité." Teacher C also believed the children's creative experiences unravelled mainly during free play opportunities: "À ce niveau, c'est plus dans les jeux libres. Alors plus dans les jeux libres et à l'extérieur." However, with regards to channeling the children's creativity through art – and despite her director, Director C, having given a list of examples of art activities at the children's disposal –Teacher C expressed, "Il n'y a pas beaucoup d'art. C'est dommage."

Reflecting on the notion of creativity in a Montessori early years classroom, Director B admitted, "C'est plus difficilement observable." Director C expanded on this point; she claimed that different early childhood pedagogies offered different strengths, and that the creative component was in fact limited in a Montessori environment. She explained that early childhood pedagogies could not be everything to everyone, and that parents should not explore the Montessori method if they were looking to promote creativity. She concluded, "Il faut rester sur les rails… Ce n'est pas une école d'art, c'est une école Montessori."

The Use of Montessori Materials

Each of the four centres carried an array of Montessori materials on their shelves (see example of photographs in Appendix Q). Teacher A believed that the Montessori materials were superior to other children's toys, with benefits embedded in them (such as the auto-corrective nature of their design that allowed a child to correct themselves without intervention from an adult) that were not present in other materials. She went on to state that stacking Montessori's

iconic Pink Tower (a set of ten pink wooden cubes of progressively smaller sizes) had benefits that would not be found in other, non-Montessori-designed set of blocks sold commercially.

Teacher B explained that she started off the school year displaying non-Montessori toys on the shelves, to allow herself the time to teach her children how to recognise and respect the Montessori materials once they were also out on display. The latter, she explained, were to be used delicately, with purpose, and in a very specific way. She stated, "On présente les activités Montessori aux enfants et on observe comment ils le font. Parce que c'est important par exemple qu'ils le font de gauche à droite", referring to the methodical Montessori way which requires that materials are arranged and worked with from left to right, as an indirect preparation for reading and writing western script.

Director D revealed that on those occasions when families were invited into the classrooms for special events, the Montessori materials would be made inaccessible. She laughed when she justified this, saying "we learn to physically cover the material, because otherwise some parents decide to take the material and show the children what to do with it. So now we move everything out of the way."

This concept of adhering to only a specific use of the Montessori materials stemmed from the beliefs that the participants had adopted through their training of, and experience in, the Montessori method. The participants validated their impressions of the Montessori materials by explaining that these were part of a progressively complex array of materials, each one designed to be used with a specific purpose and goal in mind. As Teacher B and Director D explained, the Montessori materials were only to be used by the child if they had been previously and officially introduced by the teacher who, in turn and after a period of observation, ensured that the child was developmentally ready for the presentation.

Such opinions on restricting the use of the Montessori materials were unanimous. Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Director D each exemplified this point by declaring that the child would be corrected or redirected if they were to use the material in a way other than that demonstrated by the teacher. Director D, who owned the Montessori Centre D and who also owned another non-Montessori centre, acknowledged that her children in the non-Montessori centre could use their classroom materials freely in a way that they could not in Centre D. When Director A stated "Ils savent qu'ils ne peuvent pas prendre ce qu'ils veulent quand ils veulent. C'est une question de respect et de normes à suivre", she effectively summarised the shared belief among the participants that the children did not have unrestricted access to the Montessori materials.

Access to Non-Montessori Materials

Each of the four centres also carried a variety of non-Montessori materials (see example of photographs in Appendix R). The participants' opinions on the presence and use of such materials in their classrooms differed. Although all four centres offered children access to non-Montessori materials in a different classroom setting at the start and end of each day, only Centre A and Centre B incorporated non-Montessori materials into their Montessori classrooms.

Teacher A stated that there was a small variety of additional, wooden, education materials such as those manufactured by the company Melissa and Doug on the classroom shelves alongside the Montessori materials. She went on to clarify that, had the choice been hers and not her director's, she would not have included such non-Montessori materials on her classroom shelves at all. She justified this by saying, "Pour moi, c'est des super beaux jouets, mais ce n'est pas un matériel de travail. Parce que ça ne respecte pas les consignes: il n'y a pas un control d'erreur, il n'y a pas d'objectif primaire et secondaire, il n'y a pas la suite et le précédent. Ce

n'est pas une activité Montessori." In her opinion, non-Montessori materials did not have the built-in autocorrective component that Montessori materials do, nor the concrete direct and indirect goals that would target a particular aspect of the child's development. They simply were not Montessori-designed materials.

In contrast, Teacher B said that she willingly offered access to non-Montessori materials in her classroom for certain moments in the day:

> Il y a des écoles Montessori qui ont zéro jouets dans la classe, mais nous non. On a des jeux libres qu'ils peuvent prendre à certains moments de la journée. Si je vois qu'ils en ont besoin, je leur dis 'va te chercher un casse-tête'.

She offered puzzles and dinosaur figurines as examples of non-Montessori designed materials in her classroom. Teacher B went on to explain that in her classroom, the non-Montessori materials did not need to follow the same set of rules as the Montessori materials did:

> Je les fais respecter les jouets, mais ils peuvent les utiliser comme ils veulent du moment que ça ne brise pas, ni fait mal aux autres. Mais pour le matériel Montessori, La Tour Rose par exemple, il faut d'abord la faire dans l'ordre, et après ils pourront faire des extensions possibles. Mais tandis qu'un jeu, ils peuvent faire directement ce qu'ils veulent faire avec. Par exemple, s'ils ont des cubes ils peuvent faire ce qu'ils veulent avec. Mais la Tour Rose, il faut la faire comme on leur a montré. On donne plus de liberté avec les autres matériels, mais on leur demande de le faire avec respect sur le tapis aussi. Le matériel Montessori, ils doivent le ranger aussi d'une façon en particulier. Mais les jouets ne vont pas avoir une présentation.

Whether the centres' non-Montessori materials were embedded into the classroom setting or were found in a separate classroom, they were displayed in small quantities and in separate

baskets, as would be the Montessori materials (see example in Appendix S). Such an organization allowed the children to have access to the baskets without requiring the intervention or help of an adult. It also allowed the children to set up their materials on the appropriate individual carpets that would delineate their workspace, as they would their Montessori materials.

Reflections on the Concepts of Work and Play

Montessori centres tend to call the children's engagement in their activities work as opposed to play. Work was also the term used by each of the participating centres, as was highlighted in their various promotional and administrative documents. In the Programme éducatif that it had to submit to the Ministère as part of its accreditation process, Centre A stated that "Dans la méthodologie Montessori, le jeu est appelé 'travail', où les jouets sont les 'activités (matériel)' et l'aire de jeu 'l'ambiance'" (Appendix T). When it went on to outline a typical daily schedule, it referred to the block of time set aside for children to engage with the classroom materials – according to Montessori's writings – as la période de travail. Aligning with the centre's promotional documents, Director A referred to the children's engagement with the Montessori materials as work, using phrases such as "Ils travaillent avec le matériel Montessori" throughout the course of the interview. Teacher A used the same language when referring to the children's engagement with the Montessori materials, with phrases such as "Les enfants commencent à travailler" and "Ils travaillent ensemble."

Centre B also referred to the notion of work on its website when it described children's engagement in the Montessori classroom, stating "Il travaille seul ou en petite équipe et peut ainsi explorer à son rythme" (Appendix U), with Director B and Teacher B echoing the same vocabulary during their interviews. Similarly, Centre C referred to children working individually

or in small groups in its *Régie interne* – another document outlining the rules of internal governance, which is required to be submitted to the Ministère (Appendix V). Director C and Teacher C reinforced this language during their interviews. Centre D also used this terminology in its own *Programme éducatif,* stating that the child worked according to their own rhythm and their own choice of activities (Appendix W). Again, both Director D and Teacher D used the same terminology.

When it came to using the word *play*, Director A refrained from using the term altogether, instead expressing "Les enfants choisissent une activité" when referring to a (beginning or end of day) period of free play. Teacher A also refrained from using the word play. When questioned on the avoidance of the word, she replied: "Est-ce que l'enfant va à la garderie pour jouer? Pour moi, c'est travailler. Je fais tout ce que je peux pour qu'il travaille." Director B considered the terminology used in her centre and reflected on the possible interchangeable nature of the terms work and play, "C'est la sémantique: que veut dire *le jeu*? La définition du mot peut être inclusive: les enfants s'amusent avec le matériel Montessori." But after a brief pause, she added, "Mais, si le jeu est non guidé, non encadré… c'est autre chose." In contrast, Teacher B allocated the words more consistently to separate scenarios. She reserved the word work for those times that the children engaged with the Montessori materials ("Ils travaillent sur la Tour Rose") and the word play for those times that the children engaged with non-Montessori materials ("Ils jouent avec les dinosaurs").

In her interview, Director C also assigned the word work to engagement with Montessori materials and the word play to engagement with non-Montessori materials. However, when she reflected on the distinction between the two terms she too, as with Director B, considered the interchangeability of the terms. When engaging with the Montessori materials, she said:

> On appelle ça un travail, mais l'enfant il joue. Je suis désolée… Mais pourquoi on dit travail? Parce qu'on amène la concentration, la discipline intérieure, l'organisation pratique du travail, le suivi des séquences logiques. Ce sont des références au mot travail et de productivité. Donc je dis aux parents 'Allez regarder dans le dictionnaire, mais votre enfant il fait ça mais il joue en même temps et il s'amuse'. Mais c'est notre jargon.

Teacher C, who had only been working in a Montessori setting for two months, was particularly perplexed when invited to consider the distinction between the two terms.

> L'enfant apprend en manipulant, par le jeu. Le jeu, c'est une manière de manipuler. C'est indiscutable. Alors, dans une classe Montessori, est-ce qu'il est en train d'apprendre par le jeu? C'est très mélangeant. Pour une autre personne, le jeu peut ne pas avoir de but. Il travaille par le jeu. J'aimerai mieux comprendre c'est quoi le jeu, et le travail, et à les dissocier. L'enfant qui joue à la poupée, mais il travaille la motricité fine. Mais on ne peut pas dire qu'on travaille avec la poupée (she laughed). On a associé le mot jeu avec quelque chose d'enfantin.

In their interviews, some of the participants went on to reflect on why they opted for the word work instead of play when referring to the children's learning activities. Teacher A believed that work had more depth to it than play. She claimed:

> Le travail est une activité que l'enfant fait parce qu'il obéit ses périodes sensibles, son désir de savoir qu'est-ce que c'est d'aller plus loin. L'enfant se concentre et voyage dans le monde de l'activité dont il s'engage, et le jeu c'est une activité qui ne demande pas autant de temps à l'enfant. Oui, c'est aussi important de socialiser, de s'amuser, de faire des jeux de rôle, mais dans le travail, il y a plus de profondeur et ça exige plus de l'enfant.

Teacher B explained that if the activity had a purpose and a sense of order to it, it was essentially deemed work.

> Un travail a un objectif d'apprentissage derrière. Ça va être un apprentissage de manipulation, d'ordre, un travail de concentration. Il doit le faire de gauche à droite, de haut en bas, on va lui montrer comment faire pour apprendre à s'organiser. S'il travaille avec les animaux, il apprend comment prendre sa boite, comment les mettre de haut en bas…. Mais quand l'enfant joue, il peut mettre son matériel comme il veut. Il n'est pas obligé de mettre un tel matériel à un tel endroit. Il peut les mélanger. Le jeu est plus spontané.

Teacher C also analysed the concept by saying that if the activity had a purpose or a goal, it was deemed work. She stated:

> Le travail, c'est quand il y a un but. Pas le but de l'enseignante, mais un but interne. C'est-à-dire, l'enfant qui répond à son besoin. Jouer n'a pas un but. On fait les choses d'une façon non-ordonnée. On a associé le mot jeu avec quelque chose d'enfantin.

Despite this statement, Teacher C was the only participant to consider alternative labels to the term work. She expressed that she found the term work too rigid and continued to say:

> Le travail, c'est peut-être le mauvais terme ou la mauvaise définition, mais au lieu de dire travail, je dirai *explorer*. Il est en train de répondre à son besoin interne. Quand on dit *travailler* ça peut mener à la confusion. Le mot travail est utilisé en Montessori, mais est-ce que c'est un bon mot? Ça, je ne sais pas.

Teacher D echoed the general opinions above, expressing that work activities had a goal and offered the child a deeper sense of sustainable satisfaction than play. She claimed, "Avec les jeux de plastique divertissants, l'enfant va être dans un plaisir un peu plus éphémère. Alors que dans

un travail, il peut aller au bout de l'activité; il peut développer un contentement plus profond." Director D reiterated this viewpoint and explained:

> Play does not have a goal. A child can free play with anything without having a specific goal to his idea or his play. Whereas work has a beginning sequence and an end. So, when a child is concentrated on his work, he might think he is actually playing, and I really do believe that the children see it as play. But we categorise it as work, because the level of concentration it takes for a child to complete an activity, or decide he is not doing well…*do I just take everything back?*…*do I put it away?*…*do I ask for help?*…these are a lot of processes that go on in a child's mind.

The Teacher's Role in Promoting Children's Learning and Development

Each of the participants shared their opinions on, and provided examples of, the teacher's roles and responsibilities in promoting the children's learning and development.

Maintaining a "Prepared Environment"

Director A, Teacher A, Director C, and Director D each expressed the importance of maintaining a *prepared environment* – a term used in Montessori settings to refer to the structured and orderly fashion in which the didactic learning materials are set out around the classroom. While Director A, Teacher A, and Director C each reported that one of the teacher's main responsibilities was to establish such a well-kept and stimulating learning environment in which the child could thrive, Director D expanded:

> The prepared environment is very important, but not just to prepare it so that it is available. It has to be inviting. It is the child's home while he is not home. You want it to be comforting, secure. You want the child to feel confident.

Teacher as Guide

When further exploring participants' beliefs on the teacher's role in promoting learning and development, Director A believed that one of the main responsibilities of the classroom teacher is to guide the child towards autonomy and "de les *aider à faire seul*, comme le disait Montessori". Teacher A viewed herself as an instrument between the child and the world, stating "Je suis juste un instrument pour faire les liens entre le monde et l'enfant". She went on to explain the role of guide in more detail: "Vous regardez un guide qui prépare l'espace pour que l'enfant puisse grandir, accomplir tous ces désirs pour la découverte au monde." Teacher A was emphatic that the child required her participation in order to blossom: "Je peux conditionner l'environnement pour qu'il puisse apprendre. Est-ce qu'il le fait tout seul? Non. C'est moi qui conditionne, c'est moi le guide, c'est moi qui prépare l'environnement, et je le laisse partir tout seul. Parce qu'il est capable." Of interest, Teacher A was the only participant to look beyond the role that the teacher and the parent played in the development of the child, and considered the broader elements also at play:

> Il faut que tout le monde travaille autour de l'enfant. Oui, c'est vrai, moi je suis leur guide. La garderie doit donner aussi quelque chose à l'enfant. Pas l'institution tel quel. Ses parents, ses grands-parents lui donnent aussi quelque chose. On peut agrandir les couches autour de l'enfant…. La culture, le langage, le pays, tout ça joue un rôe dans le développement de l'enfant.

Director B also referred to the teacher's main role as guide, with Teacher B elaborating on her role in matching a child's current stage of development to an appropriate Montessori activity: "Si l'enfant hésite toujours pour y aller, il n'est pas encore prêt. Mais je vais le guider. Je vais lui montrer, mais je ne vais pas lui mettre de la pression."

Director C began by giving a brief history of Maria Montessori before reinforcing her beliefs on the core role of the classroom teacher. She reported, “Maria Montessori, elle était en Italie, en Inde, en Hollande… Elle a créé une nouvelle façon de voir l’enfant et de le guider à travers ses apprentissages”, and then explained, “L’adulte est guide mais ne gère pas pour l’enfant”. Director C concluded emphatically, “Elle est un guide. Ce n’est pas elle qui déclare la vérité au niveau de tout”.

Director D and Teacher D also described the teacher’s role as that of a “guide”, accompanying the child towards the appropriate learning experiences and gradually towards their full potential. Director D explained of the teacher: “She is a guide for the children. She guides them through their experiences based on their interests. Being aware of each child’s interests and where they are at in order to bring them to the next level.” Teacher D elaborated on her role as guide, and went on to clarify that her role was not to offer unwarranted help, but to provide scaffolded support only when necessary. She stated that a teacher represents “une posture d’aide, d’accompagnement, mais pas d’aide inutile. De guide.”

The Importance of Observation

The technique of classroom observation is a key instructional strategy in both the Montessori method and in the Ministère’s educational programme. In both contexts, active observation is stated as a critical element in the teacher’s role, for it allows the teacher to recognise a child’s interests, their strengths, and their areas of need. Based on such observations, a teacher in either context is then encouraged to plan for classroom learning experiences accordingly. All eight participants emphasized the importance of observation, since this component not only allowed them to become familiar with the needs and capabilities of each child in their care, but also to gauge the support required to help each one to attain new heights.

The participants also stated that their role as observer allowed them to match activities to each child's needs and to present these activities accordingly.

Director A expressed that the most important role of the classroom teacher was that of observer:

> Premièrement, pour moi c'est très important d'être attentive pour observer les comportements des enfants, de les soutenir s'ils en ont besoin… Comment elle observe les besoins de l'enfant, comment elle fait le suivi, les besoins de l'enfant, et ensuite, en se basant sur ses observations, comment elle planifie après ça pour les besoins de l'enfant.

When reflecting further on this topic, Director A was the only participant to mention that, as with the Montessori method, the Ministère's programme shared the importance of this key instructional strategy. She affirmed, "(Le programme du Ministère) se concentre aussi sur l'observation des enfants, qui est très important pour pouvoir élaborer un plan de suivi. Ça, j'ai aimé du programme: D'élaborer un plan en fonction de l'enfant." Her colleague, Teacher A, acknowledged only the Montessori method for this key classroom strategy. Regarding Maria Montessori, she reported: "La base de son travail c'est l'observation qui lui a donné sa théorie. Elle a pris tout ce qu'il y avait dans son époque pour comprendre certaines choses, mais l'observation quotidienne de l'enfant, c'était la clef pour elle."

Teacher B also highlighted her role as observer. She explained that her classroom observation helps to guide future presentations and planning. She explained, "On les observe comment ils le font. Ça nous donne une ouverture pour la prochaine présentation, pour savoir quoi leur présenter plus tard." Director C echoed this practice and reported how she begins her days in the classroom "Je vais aller en fonction de mon groupe, je vais l'observer et je vais y aller avec." Teacher C also explained the teacher's core role in the classroom as "Elle observe,

elle répond… Moi, je suis beaucoup dans l'observation." She elaborated that before reactively interrupting or helping a child, she prefers to hold back and to observe, so as to give the child the space to see what may unfold next: are they capable of accomplishing a task alone, or do they require some guidance? Interestingly, Teacher C was the only participant to also mention the importance of observation by the child for their own learning. She claimed, "On présente (les activités) d'une manière pour que l'enfant puisse apprendre. On ne va pas parler. L'enfant va juste observer notre mouvement."

Director D summed up the importance of observation by sharing: "Children learn on their own beat when they are ready. By observing, you can understand where each child is headed. Sometimes we try to speed things up when it is unnecessary and causes failures". Teacher D upheld her director's view on the importance of observation, claiming that it provided a space for the child to develop a greater sense of autonomy. She described her dominant role in the classroom as: "Vous me verrez beaucoup dans l'observation. Plutôt qu'un établissement normal, où l'adulte va aller beaucoup solliciter… l'enfant, avec moi, progressivement dans l'année… il entre avec une plus grande autonomie."

Caring for Basic Needs

With the participants each focusing on the role of teacher as managing the prepared environment, guiding the children towards scaffolded learning experiences and observing the children to guide future instruction, only one participant of the eight mentioned the more fundamental role of an early years classroom teacher as attending to the basic needs of a young child. When asked to describe the role of the classroom teacher, Teacher B reported:

> Elle est observatrice, elle fait des présentations, elle veille à la dynamique du groupe: S'il y a trop de bruit, on utilise la clochette. On donne des repères aux enfants pour les

> restructurer. On s'occupe aussi des soins de base. On essuie les fesses, on les apprend à coucher, à se laver les mains. Tout ce qui est propreté et soin de l'enfant.

In contrast, Director D took a firm stand against a caregiver role. Her words reflected a clear disassociation from identifying as a caregiver of young children. She stated emphatically, "Je ne suis *pas* un service de garde! Je fais autre chose que de garder."

The Parent's Role in Promoting Children's Learning and Development

The parent's role in the life of a young child is also highlighted in the Ministère's educational programme, with the Ministère emphasizing the significance of the partnership between parents and teachers. The programme states that the young child's development is best supported by the shared participation of their parents and of all those teachers who play an active role in the ECEC setting in which the child is enrolled. In contrast, Montessori aimed to create a learning environment for children alone - a "Children's House"- so that they could rely on themselves or on one another when faced with a challenge or dilemma. Montessori also feared that parental involvement in the classroom could influence the child's choices or areas of interest. Ultimately, Montessori wanted the teacher to be responsible for creating a protected learning environment in which the child – with minimal disruptions or distractions – could unfold.

Montessori as a Way of Life

The participants shared an array of beliefs about Montessori as being more than simply a classroom pedagogy, but extending it to being a way of life. Director A affirmed "Montessori, ce n'est pas juste le matériel, c'est une philosophie", and Teacher B expanded, "Quand on est dans Montessori, ça impacte notre vie partout." Director C echoed, "La pédagogie Montessori vient avec une philosophie de vie… Un milieu de vie avec des valeurs qui sont données." Director D

also reflected, “The possibilities that Montessori can offer any child, that it can offer any household. That you can bring it home and lead your life by Montessori principles”. Director B elaborated on this idea and said, “Quand il y a une harmonisation entre valeurs de famille et d’école, ça c’est l’important.” Given this shared outlook, some of the participants also expressed a sense of caution or frustration when considering parental involvement.

Frustrations About Parental Involvement

Such a viewpoint was shared by four participants who, each in their respective ways, expressed some form of frustration when reflecting on parental involvement. Director A observed that children became lazy when in the presence of their parents, and explained, “C’est comme si tu donnais la chance à l’enfant de penser: OK, je peux être paresseux dans un contexte, mais pas dans l’autre.” She went on to consider the child’s behaviour when the child was in the presence of their parent at the centre: “Je vois que quand l’enfant vient avec le parent il dit *Je ne peux pas, je ne veux pas*… mais quand il est avec l’éducatrice, oui, il est capable et il peut le faire!” Teacher B was particularly vocal about her feelings on parental presence at the centre:

> Les parents, quand ils sont là, c’est très difficile avec les enfants. Quand on avait des bénévoles, c’était très difficile. L’enfant prend des petites attitudes. Avant, on les laissait entrer dans la cour pour chercher leurs enfants… c’était la foire! Le transfert de l’autorité était difficile pour les enfants. Quand les enfants ont deux autorités, ils ne savent plus qui écouter.

She went on to give examples of the disruption caused to the general running of the classroom when parents used to have access to the classroom prior to the restrictions placed by the current pandemic. She ended her reflections on the topic by laughing, “La Covid nous a libéré des parents!”.

Along similar lines of thought, Director D believed that parental presence not only disrupted the children's concentration on their work, but was also disruptive for the teacher. She claimed:

> Pre-Covid, parents used to come in to drop off their children, but we had a sign on the classroom doors saying to please knock and wait for the teacher to come. Because otherwise, the parents would just come in and start chatting away and it was very disruptive, especially when we had worked so hard to create a calm environment (…) The parents are not part of our every day. It is less disruptive for the teacher that way. The children who are not used to it, then he loses his concentration when the parent is there.

Teacher D also supported the practice of limiting parental presence in the classroom. She believed that adult presence distracted the children in the classroom and that "C'est très important pour moi, pour préserver la concentration des enfants, parce que c'est leur classe."

Benefits of Parental Involvement

Despite these objections, other participants expressed the benefits of encouraging parental involvement, particularly for the effect that it has on children's development. In considering the impact of having a home-school partnership for the well-being of the child, Director A stated adamantly:

> Moi, je ne suis pas d'accord avec la limite de participation des parents. Comme le dit le slogan du Ministère, les parents sont des partenaires dans le développement de l'enfant. Et pour moi c'est très important. C'est important pour avoir la même chose à la maison qu'à la garderie.

Teacher A at her centre agreed. She expressed it was important to develop a relationship with her classroom children's parents:

> Ça fait partie de notre travail aussi comme enseignante puisque les parents sont les premiers enseignants de l'enfant et ils ont une influence énorme sur l'enfant. Si on ne gagne pas la confiance et si on n'a pas ces liens professionnels, ça va être très difficile de travailler avec l'enfant.

Despite her grievances on the matter, Teacher B also expressed that a collaboration with parents was particularly beneficial when it came to working with children with special needs.

Like Director A, Director C also modeled a willingness to collaborate with parents. She reported, "Je ne suis pas vraiment d'accord sur la restriction de l'implication parentale (…) C'est important que le parent au départ se sente bien pour que l'enfant puisse aussi se développer." Director C went so far as to speculate that if Maria Montessori were with us today, "elle aurait adapté sa pédagogie à la société actuelle, et au développement et aux demandes de la production qu'on exige des adultes et des enfants." Following in her director's footsteps, Teacher C, who had only been at the centre for two months, reiterated, "On collabore avec les parents. C'est très important de partager avec eux. Ce qui nous lie à l'enfant, c'est le parent." As the least experienced of the eight participants, Teacher C concluded her reflection on the topic by making the thoughtful comment: "L'observation (de l'enfant) se fait aussi à travers mon interaction et ma collaboration avec le parent. C'est un plus."

Examples of Parental Involvement

Despite their viewpoints on the benefits of parental collaboration, parental participation was limited in each of the four centres to specifically orchestrated moments, such as inviting a parent to share a special talent at circle time or taking part in an end-of-year celebration. For example, Teacher A reported parental presence was limited to "Pour les activités spéciales"; Director B reflected, "Dans des limites très encadrées, c'est mieux." Teacher B admitted, "On

aime les inviter parfois pour partager quelque chose de culturel (un autre pays, une profession, etc.).” Teacher C also welcomed parents for limited amounts of time: “Le parent peut toujours venir observer l’enfant, mais de rester, je ne vois pas la nécessité”; and Director D admitted:

> I know the new Ministère programme wants you to welcome parents more. But we have other ways to communicate with them. We tell them how their child is doing, etc. We have holiday shows, Mother’s Day events…but other than that, the parents are not part of our every day.

In addition, three of the four centre directors expressed that parental views were at times not aligned with the Montessori philosophy and, to overcome this obstacle, they promoted the importance of educating the parents about the Montessori method, so that home and centre would work in the same direction. Director A explained:

> Plusieurs fois par année, on fait des activités pour inviter les parents dans la garderie. On les laisse entrer dans la classe, ils deviennent comme les enfants: On offre les présentations aux parents et on leur montre les activités.

She explained that it was an important process to offer parents the opportunity to experience first hand the same learning opportunity as their child was receiving. She believed that such an experience would strengthen the parents’ wish for their child to participate in such a learning environment: “Quand les parents la subissent (cette expérience), ils voudraient aussi que leur enfant puissent vivre ce qu’ils n’ont pas eu.”

Director A also expressed a wish to create video segments to introduce the Montessori method to her parent community. Director B and Director C explained that they shared a variety of communication tools, such as newsletters and information evenings, to equip the parents with the general tenets of the Montessori method. Director C went on to explain that having parents

reinforce the Montessori tenets at home would encourage them to promote their child's sense of autonomy: "L'implication des parents dans un système Montessori, c'est alors de redonner aux parents le fait de faire confiance à vos enfants. Les enfants ont beaucoup de capacité: donnez-leurs la possibilité de le faire."

Teacher D, who had initially shared "Je pense qu'à petites doses, l'implication parentale est importante", contemplated the importance of questioning what the parental presence may serve on any occasion. She concluded, "Il y a un équilibre à trouver. Dans la collaboration. Est-ce que c'est trop? Pas assez? Est-ce que c'est le besoin du parent ou de l'enfant?"

Challenges Faced in Promoting Children's Potential

An Educational Programme that Promotes Potential

Five of the participants expressed the belief that the Montessori programme encouraged each child to develop at their own individual pace in a way that the Ministère's programme did not. Director A reported:

> Le (programme du) Ministère est bien conçu mais ils n'ont pas compris le potentiel de l'enfant… Je suis convaincue à 100% que (Montessori) va développer le plein potentiel de l'enfant (…). Avec Montessori, on peut aller beaucoup plus loin pour aider l'enfant à développer son potentiel au maximum.

Teacher A echoed those beliefs and claimed, "C'est aussi important de socialiser, de s'amuser, de faire des jeux de rôle, mais dans le travail (Montessori) il y a plus de profondeur et ça exige plus de l'enfant." Teacher B explained that the individualised approach in the Montessori classroom allowed the children to meet their personal potential. She stated:

> Un enfant de trois ans peut aussi être au niveau d'un enfant de quatre / cinq ans. Pour les jeux dans la cour ou au niveau de l'apprentissage, il y en a qui connaissent déjà leurs chiffres... Donc ça permet à chaque enfant de développer des points d'intérêt.

Teacher C reinforced those views and explained, "Le matériel Montessori est adapté à tous les âges. Donc l'enfant qui a deux ans pourrait prendre le matériel adapté à son niveau. Pareil pour l'enfant de cinq ans. Ils peuvent jongler le matériel." Teacher D summed up those views when she claimed that "avec Montessori, ça va plus loin (…) dans les apprentissages, le potentiel."

Although these participants acknowledged that the Ministère's programme also promoted the child's potential in theory, they believed that the Montessori method did so in more concrete ways. Teacher A stated, "Montessori suit les composants du Ministère, mais (le Ministère) manque les details." Through Montessori's curricular framework, these participants agreed that the goals set in the Montessori curriculum were higher than those set by the Ministère's programme. They expressed that the Montessori method presented more challenging learning opportunities to young children and that it offered them opportunities to reach their true potential, whereas the Quebec educational programme underestimated this potential. When reflecting on the new evaluation tool recently introduced by the Ministère, Teacher B concluded, "J'étais choquée. Je trouvais que c'était infantilisant".

Each of the participants specifically praised the Montessori method for its ability to explicitly promote autonomy and responsibility around the classroom. Director A highlighted Montessori's famous quote "Help me to do it myself" when she explained her centre's philosophy according to Montessori. Teacher A confirmed that "L'autonomie, c'est notre travail en classe." She placed an importance on the auto-corrective nature of the Montessori materials in helping to promote autonomy in young children:

> Le matériel dans la classe, qu'il soit auto-correctif, pour moi c'est très important. Sinon, ça enlève l'apprentissage de l'enfant et son autonomie, ça brise l'autonomie de l'enfant s'il n'arrive pas ou s'il a besoin de la présence de l'adulte ou l'intervention de l'adulte pour arriver à faire son activité.

When asked what she valued the most about the Montessori method, Director B explained, "J'aime le développement de l'autonomie, la motivation intrinsèque, et que l'enfant soit au centre de l'apprentissage", and Teacher B reinforced the answer to the same question by stating, "Je l'aime beaucoup. Surtout le coˆ é *Apprend-moi à faire seul*. J'aime le niveau autonomie (…) qu'on le laisse faire."

Director C also attributed these characteristics to the Montessori method. She stated that she enjoyed working with "des objectifs Montessori tel que le plus grand qui est *Aide moi à faire seul*. Travailler sur l'autonomie progressive, la prise de responsabilité, le sens du défi." Teacher C recalled one aspect of the Montessori method that impressed her was the Practical Life section of the curriculum. She reported, "La vie pratique était pour moi une bonne chose parce que ça touchait aux choses de la vie quotidienne. C'était très bon pour apprendre à l'enfant d'être autonome". Director D reiterated this belief, stating that Montessori's Practical Life activities help to instill autonomy in young children, with Teacher D reinforcing the claim, "Je pense qu'avec Montessori, ça va plus loin (…) Plus loin dans l'autonomie."

Elements Underestimating Potential

The Ministère's Educational Programme: Theory vs. Practice. With the exception of Teacher B, each of the participants shared some thoughts on the resemblance between the educational programme that is outlined by the Ministère and that of the Montessori method. Director A stated "Le programme du Ministère a les mêmes bases", with Teacher A expanding,

"On peut faire un lien entre les deux si tout le monde est flexible." Director B went a little further than simply noting a resemblance between the two programmes. More specifically, she believed the Ministère's programme was inspired by Montessori. She claimed "Il s'en inspire…c'est noble!". Director C agreed and said "C'est du copie-col Montessori!" and then went on to explain that it is only normal to rely on previous pedagogies when creating a new one, and that "Tu ne peux plus inventer la roue qui tourne". However, she did express a frustration in that the Ministère did not acknowledge this similarity in its references: "Le Ministère manque l'honnêteté de ne pas citer Montessori."

Teacher C also believed that the two programmes were similar in element and specified "Oui, ma classe reflète ce programme du Ministère, surtout si on se met d'accord sur le mot *jeu*. On doit être d'accord sur la définition exacte du mot." Director D, as with Director B and Director C, also believed that the Ministère's programme evolved some of its aspects from the Montessori method: "I feel that over the years, the Ministère's programme has been modified to become more and more towards a Montessori approach. They have brought changes to it to make it more Montessori". As with Director C, she too expressed frustration at the lack of referencing of Montessori: "There are a lot of refences throughout the Ministère's programme without mentioning Montessori. It's frustrating". Teacher D agreed that the two programmes were not so different to one another. She believed that, "Ce n'est pas aussi séparé que ça" and that "L'idée (du Ministère) est la même, mais dans la pratique, ce n'est pas le même moyen pour s'y rendre."

The participants in Centre C both believed that, even though the Ministère had established an educational programme that promoted potential, in practice this was not the case. Teacher C, who had worked in non-Montessori settings in the province, claimed that in her previous experiences, the Ministère's educational programme was not applied in practice. She

said, “Dans les garderies, ce n’est pas comme ça. Il y a une réalité qui est autre que ce qu’on prétend dire ou faire.” Director C reflected that, despite the theoretical educational programme, the Ministère’s inspections that are part of an ECEC centre’s permit renewal process, neglect to consider the pedagogical practices and only evaluate health and safety measures.

The Ministère’s Permit-Related Inspections. To obtain or renew a permit, a centre must undergo a formal inspection process implemented by the Ministère. Besides pointing out that the Ministère neglects to inspect or evaluate any aspect of the pedagogical programme, Director C also expressed her frustration at some of the health and safety measures in place. These, she believed, thwarted a young child’s potential for growth. To illustrate this frustration, she shared a story:

> Avant, j’avais des poissons dans un petit aquarium dans la classe, deux petits poissons rouges, je trouvais ça magique pour les enfants! Mais le Ministère nous a interdit tous les animaux. Ça m’enrage… de plus en plus de règlements. On enlève de plus en plus. On ne travaille jamais vers le haut. Montessori, on travaille sur l’individualité. Je n’ai jamais eu de problèmes avec mes poissons parce que je leur explique comment on soigne les poissons rouges. Mais le Ministère, c’est autre chose.

Teacher B also expressed frustration at the health and safety measures imposed by the Ministère. She believed that restrictions on classroom materials such as needle work, the use of small beads, or free access to scissors underestimated a young child’s abilities, and deprived them of opportunities to exercise their autonomy. She recounted:

> Il y a du matériel qu’on ne peut plus utiliser, comme pour le piquage. On doit les laisser sous clef. On les enlevait quand le Ministère venait, et on les ressortait après. La même chose pour les petites perles: on doit les mettre dans une boîte fermée. Les ciseaux

> devaient être en l'air, loin, pas en accès libre… Ça enlève la liberté des enfants. Je n'ai jamais connu un enfant se briser avec le piquage ou avec les ciseaux, parce qu'on leur apprend. Je n'ai eu pas un seul accident avec le matériel Montessori.

Elements Impeding the Implementation of the Montessori Method

Besides the Ministère's inspections preventing the full application of the Montessori method, the participants also shared their thoughts on other obstacles impeding its implementation.

Facing Qualified Teacher Shortages. Although this was not mentioned by any of the teacher participants, each of the director participants mentioned the difficulty in finding staff who are qualified in both the Montessori method and in early childhood education according to the Ministère's requirements. Director A reported: "Le recrutement du personnel, c'est très difficile. Déjà de trouver des personnes en petite enfance du niveau général, et encore plus difficile, formées en Montessori", and Director D concurred. Of those two requirements, Director B revealed that the first priority would be to conform to the Ministère's permit-issuing requirements: "Notre première priorité, c'est d'être qualifié pour le Ministère". Director C was particularly hurt by the fact that the Ministère recognises and accepts the Montessori programme when it is presented as a pedagogical approach in her *Programme éducatif*, but that it does not recognise or accept its teacher training qualification. She said: " Le programme Montessori, c'est reconnu, mais la qualification Montessori n'est pas reconnue. Une éducatrice en service de garde avec le diplôme Montessori est non-diplômée pour le Ministère. C'est là que le bât blesse."

To circumvent this obstacle, the directors shared their experiences in providing Montessori training in their own ways. Director A offered her own in-house training programme, implementing a series of videos inherited from the centre's previous director, and followed this up with an exam, as well as in-class observation and support sessions to new staff. She admitted

that the time-consuming aspect of this training programme was a challenge: “C’est un grand défi parce qu’on passe beaucoup de temps avec elles… J’ai investi beaucoup de mon temps.”

The burden for Director B was not time-consuming in nature, but financial. Her centre offered teachers access to an online Montessori teacher training programme, sharing the costs involved equally: “On forme nos éducatrices en payant 50% au départ, et on les monte une échelle salariale quand elles ont complété leur formation”. As with Director A, Director C also reported she spent her personal time training new staff members, although her approach was not as formal. Instead of following a specifically-designed programme, she relied on modeling her classroom behaviour: “Pour le Montessori, je leur dis: *Écoutez ce que je dis. Faites ce que je fais*. Pour une transmission par expérience. On reste dans la classe, je leur montre ce qu’elles doivent faire ”. Director D also spent time with new hires and, as with Director A, offered a more formal in-house training programme. She would begin with a general Montessori training session covering each aspect of the curriculum, and would then refine it according to each teacher’s particular needs:

> There is more involvement when I hire for my Montessori daycare. I let them know that they are required to attend the training; it’s part of the hiring process. I give a global *formation* to all, then I realised some of them may need more help on tone of voice, how they are in the classroom, or how to observe, how to stay back without hovering over the children, or more help with presentations and materials…

In comparison, when asked how she supported her staff in her other, non-Montessori centre, Director D replied: “I don’t support my other (non-Montessori) daycare staff in this way. They come in trained according to the Ministère. They don’t receive more training from me”.

Le Portrait global de l'enfant. *Le Portrait global de l'enfant*, referred to interchangeably by the participants as *Le Dossier éducatif,* is a new tool recently introduced by the Ministère, which requires centres to evaluate each child in their care. The Ministère requires that a centre shares this portrait with parents two times per year, highlighting the child's motor, cognitive, language, and social-emotional development. The participants shared some of their experiences in personalising and implementing this new tool, which was originally designed to evaluate not the Montessori programme but that of the Ministère.

Director A began by claiming that evaluating children's development was something her centre had been doing many years before the tool was introduced and that the newly compulsory tool of the Ministère's remained vague compared to hers.

> Le Ministère vient d'ajouter le dossier éducatif, qui n'est que maintenant exigé. Quand j'étais dans la rencontre du comité consultatif, je leur ai dit, nous on fait ça depuis 23 ans. Nous, on l'avait depuis toujours. Il est encore très vague, mais au moins ils commencent…

Teacher A admitted that she taught one programme, but used the evaluation tool of another: "On évalue la liste du Ministère, mais ça ne reflète pas notre programme."

In comparison, Teacher B, shared her initial reaction to the new evaluation tool, "D'abord j'étais choquée. Je trouvais que c'était infantilisant", but then decided to create her own template with the help of colleagues:

> On a refait le portrait global, où on a créé les compétences Montessori ainsi que les quatre domaines du Ministère. On avait un bulletin avant ce portrait global, mais il n'y avait pas ces points. On a dû intégrer les deux dans notre portrait global. Il y avait des choses qui pouvaient se regrouper. On a mis les choses qui n'étaient pas dans l'autre…

Director C did the same, but admitted that integrating the two evaluation tools into one was a challenging project to work on:

> C'était un travail de longue haleine… un gros travail. J'ai travaillé avec mon autre éducatrice Montessorienne qui a un bac en éducation du Québec. On a pris ce que nous demandait le Ministère au niveau de toutes les compétences du développement global. On les a écrit tel quel pour pouvoir évaluer les enfants, et donc les nommer dans une ligne de vie, dans une courbe de travail.

Director D did not mention any attempt to merge the two evaluation tools, but was candid in reporting that she prioritised addressing the Ministère's new requirement and implementing the now-mandatory, *Portrait global de l'enfant*:

> The new *Portrait de l'enfant* asks us to explain the child's development in terms of the four domains of development. We have no choice and we have to do it. We used to do a report card in the past which we have had to change. Yes, I am asking my teachers to do two things: to observe for the *Portrait*, and for the Montessori programme. For my parents, what I am obliged to give them is the *Portrait de l'enfant*. I am not obliged to give them any Montessori observation. These are unfortunately a little bit on the backburner. It is a struggle for us.

Despite this outlook from her director, Teacher D seemed to find her own way to organically integrate her evaluation of the children's Montessori learning experiences within the *Portrait global de l'enfant:* "L'évaluation se passe assez bien. C'est facile pour moi pas de l'enrober. Moi, j'ai l'habilité de le faire subtilement puis m'intégrer, mais ce n'est pas tout le monde qui pourrait nécessairement avoir cette façon flexible de l'adapter." She reflected that even though this was an easy process for her, it was not necessarily so for others. To address this

potential challenge, she suggested: “Ça serait intéressant pour les milieux Montessori d’avoir une section en plus des autres sphères de développement qui pourraient nous permettre d’ajouter un certain nombre de choses du point de vue Montessori”, a step that Centre B and Centre C have already embarked on.

L’Évaluation de la qualité éducative. *L’Évaluation de la qualité educative* is a pilot project introduced in 2017 by the Ministère, which aims to evaluate the educational aspect of a centre’s pedagogical programme. *L’Évaluation de la qualité educative* is currently being implemented progressively across the province, targeting select classrooms of children ages three to five. Director D reported that, since the Montessori mixed-age classroom that ranges in age from two and a half to five years did not fit its age-bracket criteria, her centre had not yet undergone this evaluation:

> I did not go through the *Évaluation de la qualité educative*. When they called me a few years ago, I told them we were multi-age, they knocked me right off. Because they do three to five-year-olds specifically, and we start at two or two and a half years.

Surprisingly, then, Centre A - who also hosts mixed-age classrooms - did participate in this pilot project, with Director A reporting that she was happy with the experience and proud to represent her centre. She disclosed that the general feedback was positive, but that the report did comment on one area with room for improvement:

> Le rapport nous a dit que les éducatrices ne parlaient pas assez avec les enfants, mais dans notre programme les enfants sont très autonomes... chacun fait ses activités. Les éducatrices, elles interagissent seulement quand elles ont besoin. C’était leur seul commentaire : que l’enfant devrait avoir plus de chance de… de… d’avoir plus d’interactions, en fait.

This comment highlights the directors' and teacher's belief of a challenge similar to that found in the implementation of the *Portrait global de l'enfant,* whereby a tool that has been designed to evaluate the Ministère's programme is being used to evaluate Montessori's.

Although none of the other centres had taken part in this pilot project, Director C had thoughts to share on the topic. She believed that despite the educational programme that the Ministère was striving to implement in its centres across the province, the only consistent form of evaluation currently happening are the formal inspections that take place to ensure centres are conforming to health and safety measures: "Oui, on a un titre pour notre programme éducatif, comme *Jouer c'est magique*, etc. mais quand le Ministère vient, ce n'est que d'une structure sanitaire et sécuritaire."

Director C suggested that, for this pilot project to be successful, the Ministère would not only need to have enough personnel to enforce it, but that the personnel would also need to be appropriately trained. She recommended that this type of evaluation be implemented simultaneously, alongside the current health and safety inspections:

> Ça prend deux volets obligatoires : ce qu'ils ont mis sur la qualité éducative dans les services de garde, ça devrait être intégré en même temps avec une inspection. La formation de l'inspecteur du Ministère ne devrait pas être juste basée sur des questions sécurité, oui, il faut un volet sécurité à tout niveau, mais aussi un volet pédagogique.

Showing some enthusiasm for this *Évaluation de la qualité éducative*, Director C concluded: "Espérons que leur projet pilote ne reste plus un projet pilote."

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

Interpretation and Implications

ECEC settings that identify as Montessori in the province of Quebec are faced with the task of abiding simultaneously by the guidelines as set out by the Ministère's educational programme and by those prescribed by Maria Montessori. In an attempt to better understand how practitioners conceive of the Montessori method in a Quebec context, this research project set out to investigate teacher and director beliefs on the topic. As a foundational step in this investigation, Study 1 targeted all Ministry-recognised ECEC centres that identify as Montessori in Quebec. Besides painting the landscape of such ECEC centres in the province and determining the range of characteristics with which they identify, I embarked on this initial exploration also to establish the opportunity to recruit potential participants for the deeper investigation that ensued in Study 2. The main study, Study 2, then moved on to explore how practitioners from four early years centres that identify as Montessori believed they reconciled the two sets of curricular guidelines. By extension, the study allowed for reflection on the variations, the contradictions, and the complexities involved in the ways teachers and directors perceive the implementation of the Montessori method in 21st century Quebec.

Although previous studies have been conducted on practitioners' beliefs on the application of the Montessori method, these have focused on the perspectives of teachers, and on the classroom adaptation of the method in general (Adams, 2015; Atli et al., 2016; Daoust, 2004; Hsiao, 2003; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020). One study did explore the identity of one individual Montessori teacher (Christensen, 2016) and revealed dilemmas that were referred to as the "push and pull between multiple identities" (p. 36), which were part of the Montessori teacher's lived experience. This present study extends the literature in an original direction by

focusing on the beliefs of teachers and directors who are faced with conforming to two sets of pedagogies simultaneously, namely the Montessori method and the Ministère's educational programme.

The results from the study provide deep insight on the variations in beliefs of practitioners in Montessori early years classrooms in the province, and present the diverse ways in which this pedagogical method has come to be applied in practice. Consensus was reached on the understanding that each child is unique, with participants illustrating this statement by shedding light on their practice of tailoring classroom activities to the specific needs of the individual child. They reiterated their support for this core principle from both Quebec's educational programme (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a) and from Montessori's teachings (Montessori, 1966) by providing examples of how they adapted learning experiences to different levels of skill and interest within their classroom. With participants each expressing that they approached teaching and learning situations accordingly, this introductory theme acted as the foundational springboard from which other themes emerged.

Pedagogical Approaches Promoting Children's Learning and Development

In an attempt to uphold the notion that each child is unique, the participants shared their thoughts on which pedagogical approaches best promoted individual potential. Although some of the techniques they highlighted were attributed specifically to the Montessori method, it is important to note that such approaches are not exclusive to a Montessori classroom. For example, the mixed-age classroom, which some of the participants had embraced as a beneficial framework for social-emotional development, is a classroom framework that is also endorsed by the Ministère. In fact, in its educational programme, the Ministère mentions mixed-age classroom groupings as a suitable option for forming groupings in ECEC settings (Ministère de

la Famille, 2019a, p. 58). Furthermore, a number of centres around the province host mixed-age class groupings while bearing no affiliation to the Montessori philosophy.

Similarly, the participants commented on the importance and the benefits of a classroom that promotes free choice, with two of them attributing this characteristic specifically to a Montessori setting. Again, the participants neither acknowledged nor expressed an awareness of the fact that the Ministère also promotes a free choice classroom structure within its play-based approach. Yet this was clearly communicated in the Ministère's educational programme, and illustrated with phrases such as "(L'enfant pourra) reprendre tous les jouets de son choix" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 133) and "L'enfant cherche à maîtriser son environnement en tentant d'exprimer ses choix" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 158). When they spoke of freedom of choice, the participants referred to the child's ability to move around freely in the classroom and to choose at will an activity from those that had been previously presented to them. They distinguished this from teacher-centred learning environments, preferring instead, as Director C illustrated, "que ça ne soit pas toujours l'adulte qui gère". In contrast, the participants did not acknowledge the very lack of freedom reflected in the fact that the children were limited to using these materials in only very specific ways, nor that they were restricted from taking materials that had not been previously presented to them.

A third pedagogical technique that the participants shared their opinions on was the uninterrupted three-hour activity period, which Montessori believed would provide the child with sufficient time to delve into their chosen activities and to develop their "inner guides" (Lillard, 2005/2017, p. 126). Although opinions here varied, with some participants holding firmly the belief that the children's learning experience required an uninterrupted three-hour period of activity, and others showing more flexibility with this specific length of time, none

communicated the similarities between Montessori's guidelines and those of the Ministère on that matter: In fact, this Montessori guideline runs parallel to the Ministère's own suggestion which, although not specifying a three hour time frame, stresses in its educational programme that uninterrupted time for play should be provided "pendant une période suffisamment étendue pour lui permettre de complexifier son jeu" (Ministère de la famille, 2019a, p. 35). Again, this concept of offering an uninterrupted period of activity to attain a deeper sense of concentration is not exclusive to Montessori's teachings: Csikszentmihalyi had introduced the related theory of flow in 1975 based on research that studied people who were "motivated by the quality of an experience as a function of the relationship between challenges and skills" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 16). In fact, research has also since been done on the commonalities between Montessori's state of normalization and Csikszentmihalyi's theory on flow (Rathunde, 2001; Kahn, 2003; Llyod, 2008). Flow, which represents that sense of losing track of time when one is immersed in an activity, includes components of deep engagement and concentration, both of which are parts of the concept of normalization. When reflecting on the two inter-related concepts, Csikszentmihalyi even quipped, "My goodness, this is fascinating. Dr. Montessori regarded normalization or *flow* as the norm of the species!" (Kahn, 2003, p.3).

Such unacknowledged similarities in pedagogical approaches support the participants' self-ratings of their understanding of the Quebec educational programme and of the Montessori curriculum. When asked in the initial questionnaire to rate their understanding of each programme, both the directors' and the teachers' mean average for their understanding of the Montessori method was higher than that of the Ministère's programme.

When contemplating which pedagogical approaches best promote children's learning and development, the participants also shared their thoughts on the benefits of incorporating play.

The results from this study indicated differing beliefs and likely experiences revolving around the concept of play: Some participants recognized its benefits, as established by play theorists such as Fröbel (Fröbel et al., 1912), Piaget (1962), and Vygotsky (1967). Others identified more with the classical theory of play best articulated by Groos (1898) and viewed this period of early childhood as a preparation for adulthood. Their perception that engaging in playful activities may be less beneficial to young children than engaging in real world activities echoed a recent article by Lillard and Taggart aptly entitled *Pretend Play and Fantasy: What if Montessori was Right?* (2019). More specifically, the inconsistencies in opinions between the teacher and her director in Centres A, B, and D were particularly notable, with questions remaining on how such contradictory perspectives under one roof are reconciled in practice. When Director C, who considered herself an authentic "Montessorienne née" had admitted "Le jeu libre est quand même très important chez les jeunes enfants" and had revealed that she adapted her Montessori programme accordingly, her statement served as an example of how a practitioner who identifies strongly with the Montessori method has nevertheless acclimatized to modern-day teaching and learning experience that incorporates components of play. This resonates with the anecdotal reports appearing in Montessori publications, which reflect evolving teacher beliefs about the potentially rewarding role of play in the Montessori classroom (Torrence, 2001; Soundy, 2012).

Under the umbrella of free play, the participants also shared their perspectives on pretend play. Admittedly, the Practical Life section in Montessori classrooms, which offers opportunities for non-pretend, real-life activities, is understood to carve a prominent role in the Montessori centres under study. The participants had shared their thoughts on the benefits of this section of the programme on child development. However, some participants observed that young children also had a natural tendency towards, and interest in, pretend play activities. This attitude

reinforces the shift in thinking that is gradually appearing within the Montessori community, which suggests an increased awareness of the benefits of pretend play (Honig, 2006; Ohlhaver, 2001). Noting observations of spontaneous engagement in pretend play within the Montessori classroom, and also recognizing its importance in child development, Soundy (2012) even proposed a position statement to Montessori practitioners on the topic, addressing the possibility of incorporating pretend play into the Montessori early years classroom.

Such a perspective in turn raises the question in the recent studies mentioned in the section on "Current Research on Play in the Montessori Curriculum" above (on page 42), about children's preference for real activities in contrast to pretend ones (Taggart, Heise, & Lillard, 2018; Taggart, Fukuda, & Lillard, 2018). In previous literature, Lillard (2013) had also argued that Montessori's constructivist approach offers a form of "playful learning" in which the benefits of pretense could also be addressed by implementing certain aspects of the Montessori method (such as self-direction and freedom of choice). Bergen (2013) however was critical of such a stand, suggesting that although playful learning without pretense could have notable developmental outcomes, the effect of avoiding pretense on the child's development had not been investigated.

Besides such differing attitudes towards pretense, differing attitudes towards creativity were also noted in the current study. Whilst some of the participants expressed their belief that the play opportunities that were provided at their centres offered an avenue for young children to display and exercise creativity, others admitted that creativity was a component that was not actively promoted in their Montessori environment. Such views were worthy of study given the widely cited importance on both pretense and creativity with respect to young children's learning and development (e.g., Russ, 2014; Singer et al., 2006). The participants' acceptance of such a

perspective also stands in clear contrast with the Ministère's evidence-based claim that "la creativité est plus précisement associée au développement cognitif" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 92).

In fact, not only did the participants' beliefs illustrate that they did not actively promote creativity in young children, questions arose as to whether their practices instead stifled it. This issue came to light from the participants' reflections on the use of the Montessori materials in the classroom: Each of the participants shared their opinion supportive of restricting the use of Montessori materials to a specified procedure; some participants elaborated that the children would be corrected or redirected if they were to use the material in a way other than that demonstrated by the teacher. Such an attitude reflects the limited opportunities extended to young children, not only in exploring materials creatively, but also in symbolically manipulating objects in pretense. One could debate why the same value was not placed on the non-Montessori materials at the children's disposal, and why such restrictions on usage were not extended to them. Conversely, why would the Montessori materials not be granted the same flexibility in usage as other classroom materials, so as to allow for exploration and creativity through their manipulation?

Mention has been made above (in the section on "Self-Discipline" on page 31) on the few studies that had explored the relationship between a Montessori education and creativity (Cossentino & Brown, 2015; Culclasure & Fleming, 2018; Denervaud et al., 2019; Fleming et al., 2019; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). These studies claim that Montessori settings promoted traits such as cognitive flexibility, risk-taking, and tolerance of ambiguity, and that students in Montessori settings performed better in divergent-exploratory tasks. However, there is also evidence of differing perspectives to the claim that the Montessori method promotes aspects of

creativity. For example, Kirkham and Kidd (2017) looked at creativity from a different perspective and assessed students' creativity using the Test of Creative Thinking – Drawing Production. They found that the drawings by Montessori students were not rated as highly as those completed by their Steiner counterparts, and suggested that the reality-oriented approach of the Montessori curriculum could inhibit creativity. By extension, the question remains as to whether play is the best, or the only, route to creativity.

Along those same lines, as they shared their thoughts on the value, the rules and the restrictions placed around the Montessori materials, the participants did not acknowledge the presence of other, didactic materials on the market that similarly incorporate Montessori-like features. Puzzles, for example, long predate Montessori's materials and can be argued to also embed a self-correcting component. Instead, the participants distinguished in their reflections only between Montessori and non-Montessori materials as two, separate, binary frames of reference. This perception that is specifically placed on the Montessori classroom materials is in clear contrast to that of the Ministère. In its document on the Quebec educational programme, the Ministère suggests supplying the children with versatile materials that can have multiple purposes, which it claims are more beneficial to a child's development than items limited in their use. It states, "Le matériel de jeu le plus approprié pour soutenir le développement global et l'exercice de la créativité est un matériel polyvalent, c'est-à-dire un matériel qui permet différents usages" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 42). Should the participants consider extending the same flexibility to the use of the Montessori materials, this would not only allow for the promotion of creative exploration, but it would also instill consistency in the application and expected use of all the materials within the child's learning environment.

As it stands, however, the participants viewed the Montessori materials in a different light to the other materials at the children's disposal. Hand in hand with this perspective came the notions of *work* and *play*, with participants using the term *work* when referring to the children's engagement with the Montessori materials. When using the term work, the participants attempted to convey that children required more concentration and gained more developmental benefits from the experience than they would through play. In an article examining Montessori's rhetorical construct of work, Cossentino (2006) summed up the notion by explaining that "work is not an escape from 'real life', but rather a path towards its fulfillment" (p. 66). Yet what is important to note is that, despite some of the participants' remarks, play too can have developmental purpose and goals (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1967, 1978; Howe et al., 2005), even though these may not be set explicitly by the teacher. Furthermore, one definition of play is that, as with Montessori's notion of work, it too is child directed (Fleer, 2009)

As the participants thought more reflectively about the difference between the two terms, their beliefs on the notions of work and play escalated in varying directions, with thoughts ranging from "Est-ce qu'il joue? Pour moi, c'est du travail" to the contrasting "C'est un travail, mais il joue." Admittedly, Montessori's multilayered construct of work does overlap with current understandings of play (Bruner et al., 1976; Czikszentmihalyi, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Vygotsky, 1967): it is an activity that is child-directed. It is designed to liberate, rather than mold, the child's personality. It is a joyful experience driven by a natural desire for exploration and mastery. This overlap was reflected in the participants' viewpoints: With one participant expressing that the difference between the two notions is based on semantics, and another admitting that using the term work is a form of Montessori jargon, their serpentine explanations

on the dichotomy between of work and play could all ultimately aim towards the oft-cited quote that, in fact, *play is the child's work*.

The Teacher's Role in Promoting Children's Learning and Development

The results from the interviews revealed that the participants also believed that the teacher played a prominent role in promoting the children's development. Besides being responsible for creating a stimulating environment with didactic materials within which a child could thrive - a responsibility that is addressed in both the Ministère's programme and in Montessori's writing - the results also highlighted the importance of the role of teacher as guide. Here too, the data resonated with the recommendations from both Montessori and the Ministère, as the participants described the teacher's role as that of guide, matching activities to each child's developmental needs, and ultimately acting as the link between the child and their learning experience.

To guide the children in their care most effectively, the participants believed that the practice of active observation was also a critical element in the teacher's role. Yet again, this form of active observation to guide and feed future teaching and learning experiences was a classroom practice that is not only highlighted in Montessori's writings, but is also elaborated on in detail in the Ministère's educational programme, where it gives detailed guidelines for the steps towards an effective observation model. Under the chapter entitled *Le processus de l'intervention educative* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p.46), the Ministère clearly lays out the measures to choose, to plan, and to implement educational experiences for the children, with observation acting as the first step in the process.

Despite these various similarities, throughout the course of their interviews, some of the participants distinguished themselves from the Ministère by referring to themselves as "nous"

and to the Ministère as “eux”, suggesting they were on opposite teams on the playing field. With statements such as “Ils n’ont pas compris tout le potentiel de l’enfant ” and “(Le programme du Ministère), c’est une base, mais nous, on peut aller plus loin dans les apprentissages, dans le bien-être, dans l’autonomie, le potentiel…”, they also distanced themselves from the standards set by the Ministère. They go so far as to distinguish themselves from the standards of the Ministère that, when asked about the teacher’s main role, only one of the eight participants identified and acknowledged their responsibility towards the basic physical (feeding and toileting) needs of the children in their care. In contrast, this caregiving responsibility is the first one highlighted in the Ministère’s document, which states:

> Favoriser le développement global de l’enfant implique entre autres que le personnel éducateur offre des expériences éducatives variées (…) qui soutiennent les composantes suivantes:
>
> **Le développement physique et moteur**
>
> La santé et la sécurité, les besoins physiologiques (l’alimentation, le sommeil et l’hygiène) (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p.99)

This tendency to disassociate from the Ministère, and the positioning that the responsibility of a Montessori teacher is superior in status to that of the role of caregiver, was best reflected in Director C’s emphatic claim: “Je ne suis *pas* un service de garde! Je fais autre chose que de garder.” Such a claim discredits the actual childcare services that the participants provide throughout the course of their day. It also sheds light on the broader tendency to disassociate education from care, leading to question whether such attitudes from the practitioners themselves play a part in reinforcing the already demeaned perception of the role of the early years’ childcare provider.

The Parent's Role in Promoting Children's Learning and Development

Through their reflections, it became evident that the participants also had a variety of beliefs on the role that parents play in the learning and development of the child. Most had recognised Montessori as a philosophy and as a way of life, with values that can be extended to the home. Yet, in practice, the participants' reflections on parental involvement as a way to encourage such a harmony differed, with some participants commenting on how the children's behaviour was negatively impacted by the presence of their parents in the centre. Although such restrictive practices are in line with Montessori's vision of a "Children's House" (Lillard, 2005/2017), which encourages a learning environment almost exclusively to children, this tone is in stark contrast to the one set by the Ministère, which emphasizes the significance of the partnership between parents and teachers. Not only does the Ministère highlight the importance of quality interaction between parents and teachers (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a, p. 44), it does so based on the ecological perspective of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Admittedly, despite having vocalised some frustrations about parental involvement, some of the participants shared opinions that were in contrast to Montessori's preachings, and that supported the Ministère's stance to promote a partnership with parents (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a). Although these were mainly limited to specifically orchestrated moments, the participants did acknowledge the value of family engagement. They gave concrete examples of parental involvement in their centres, citing as a benefit the continuity for the child between the programme and the home.

Challenges Faced in Promoting Potential

The data from the interviews also pointed to the study's final theme, which highlighted some of the challenges that the participants believed thwarted the child's potential. Even though

some of the participants had shared evidence that they believed that the Ministère's expectations of young children were lower than those of the Montessori method, and that the Montessori method pushed the children further in their abilities and in their autonomy, they also acknowledged that there were similarities between the two pedagogical programmes. Several participants made reference to the belief that both programmes had the same base and that, in theory, both endeavoured to meet the child's potential. However, the frustration that was expressed came from the opinion that, even though there were similarities between the programmes, the Ministère did not formally recognise nor cite its inspiration from the Montessori philosophy. Admittedly, throughout its educational programme *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a), the Ministère not only cites its inspiration from theorists such as Dewey, Rogers, Bowlby, Bronfenbrenner, Fröbel, Bruner, Bandura, Piaget and Vygotsky, but it also makes reference to early years pedagogical programmes such as Reggio Emilia, High Scope and Tools of the Mind.

The participants' reasons for their frustration could be visually confirmed by referring to the cover page of the Ministère's educational programme *Accueillir la petite enfance* (Ministère de la Famille, 2019a). Of the three illustrations on the front cover, one picture is of particular interest to this study (see Figure 3 below, or Appendix X for full cover page): In it, five children are at a table engaging in activities, four of which are the distinct Montessori-designed Long Rods, Knobbed Cylinders, Sound Cylinders, and Binomial Cube materials. Even though the children displayed in the picture are not using the materials in accordance with a Montessori presentation (with the boxes, lids and pieces laid out in a certain fashion), they are nevertheless specific materials from Montessori's repertoire of sensorial activities. Whether intentional or not, this photograph could be viewed as a form of discrete reference to the Montessori method.

However, no other formal citations to the Montessori method, nor any formal recognition of the Montessori teacher training certification, are made by the Ministère.

The lack of recognition of the Montessori teacher training certification by the Ministère led to another challenge experienced by the participants, in particular by the directors who were responsible for staffing their centres: that of finding adequately qualified Montessori ECEC teachers. In fact, recent articles have appeared in local media addressing the current problem of shortages of ECEC teachers in general (Quebec government responds, 2020; Quebec announces new measures, 2021; Lajoie, 2021). The articles reported that these shortages were fuelled by the effects of the pandemic – whereby centres required additional teachers so as to avoid the mixing of class groupings - but that they were also reinforced by poor working conditions and unattractive salary scales. Considering that ECEC centres that identify as Montessori in Quebec would, in addition, ideally seek teachers with Montessori certification, this issue that is shared by some of the participants can be viewed as an issue of genuine practical and administrative concern. Such a concern could partially be addressed if the Montessori teacher training certification were provincially recognised. In this way, teachers with Montessori certification could be regarded as qualified according to Ministry standards. In turn, this would play a positive role in ensuring qualified teacher ratios are met in ECEC settings in the province.

Also cited as causes that impede the effective implementation of the Montessori method were the formal evaluation tools that are imposed by the Ministère in ECEC settings. More specifically, participants had referenced both *Le Portrait global de l'enfant* and *L'Évaluation de la qualité educative* as compulsory tools that have recently been introduced by the Ministère to evaluate the child's developmental progress and the quality of the educational programme respectively. Although no research has been conducted on how effective these evaluations tools

are, questions nevertheless arise. For instance, acknowledging the fact that the core guidelines embedded into these evaluation tools have been set to ensure a minimum standard of service provided, how does the Ministère effectively evaluate a child or a programme according to a set of criteria established by themselves, but that may not mirror the criteria being promoted or implemented in the classroom? This conflict is just one of the several dilemmas faced by practitioners in ECEC settings that identify as Montessori in the province.

Figure 3

Photograph from Cover Page of "Accueillir la petite enfance"

The results reported in this study provide some context for understanding the variations and contradictions involved in the way practitioners reflect on their application of the Montessori

method in ECEC settings in Quebec. The results revealed that the participants believed that there were theoretical similarities between the educational programmes that are presented by the Ministère and the Montessori method. The results that emerged from the study also reflected that the participants revealed shared beliefs on the common characteristics between the programmes. This was the case when they discussed certain pedagogical approaches that promote learning and development, such as mixed-age groupings, a classroom framework that offers free choice, and an uninterrupted period of activity. This also became apparent when the participants shared their thoughts on the teacher's role in the classroom. However, discrepancies were noted when some of the participants attributed those common characteristics specifically to the Montessori method, when they evidently also prevailed in Quebec's educational programme. With regards to the differences between the programmes, some participants displayed fidelity to the Montessori method and disagreed with contrasting characteristics suggested by the Ministère, whereas others expressed a willingness to incorporate such ideas into their Montessori methodology. This was the case when they reflected on the notions of play, pretense, and creativity in early childhood. This also became evident when the participants shared their thoughts on parental involvement in their centres.

This study captured the participants' beliefs about the application of the Montessori pedagogy in newer or more innovative ways, whilst adhering to its underlying philosophical principles. Although some participants demonstrated a willingness to adapt certain aspects of Montessori's prescribed curriculum to meet more local, modern-day needs, others refrained from doing so, showing greater fidelity to the programme and to its founder. As such, the results reported in this study contribute to existing literature on the topic by suggesting experiential inconsistencies in the implementation of the Montessori method. They provide a platform on

which to consider the relationship between fidelity and adaptability, and put to question whether altering the Montessori programme from its original prescription, although diluting its fidelity, is a way to ensure its endurance and its longevity within a more current and local context.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to capture the complexity of beliefs in implementing the Montessori method in ECEC centres in the province of Quebec. Working with the assumption that some ECEC teachers and directors follow Montessori's prescribed tenets, this research project served as a valuable step that explored the participants' beliefs in conforming to, or diverging from, Montessori's original theories and methods. The current study provided a platform to reflect on the practitioners' beliefs on the fidelity of the Montessori method as it was originally prescribed, and it painted a clearer picture on the likely experiences of practitioners of Montessori early years classrooms in 21st century Quebec.

Based on the mixed method project that I designed, the first study used a sample from part of Quebec to paint an overview of the Ministry-recognized ECEC centres in the province that identify as Montessori, and determined the range of characteristics that make up these centres. It allowed for breadth of coverage as initial data were collected to paint the Montessori ECEC landscape in Quebec. By providing a source from which to recruit participants for Study 2, the first study also offered the framework from which further, deeper investigations ensued. The second study was a qualitative project that explored the beliefs of teachers and directors of four individual ECEC centres that identified as Montessori in the province of Quebec. The goal of the second study was to gain richer insight on how practitioners of the Montessori method have acclimatized to Quebec's ministerial stipulations, and on the potential discrepancies involved in implementing this pedagogical method in the province.

Based on the study's analysis, it can be concluded that the participants demonstrated shared beliefs on the common characteristics between the two pedagogical programmes under investigation, with some of those characteristics attributed specifically by the participants to the Montessori method. Where participant beliefs differed stemmed from the distinctions between the pedagogical programmes, in particular those that pertained to play, pretense, creativity and parental involvement. These distinctive characteristics were the ones that I had questioned in the review of the literature above, and the results provided clear evidence that those were also the areas of nuance amongst the practitioners. However, despite both these shared and contradictory beliefs, it is beyond the scope of this study to either confirm that the participants' expressed beliefs reflected their classroom practices or to generalize these findings, since this study, as with all research, bears certain limitations.

Limitations

This research project, which used questionnaires and interviews with participants as its primary source of data collection, was to the best of my knowledge, the first study of its kind to uncover the beliefs, the challenges, and the likely experiences of practitioners in Montessori settings in Quebec. However, with restrictions placed on in-person human research activities and accompanying classroom observations, the study does raise the question of the practitioners' actual lived experiences in relation to their expressed beliefs.

Noting that this is the first documented investigation to compare teacher and director beliefs on the implementation of the Montessori method in modern-day Quebec, the sample size that represented these practitioners under investigation was limited in nature. The first study in the thesis explored the landscape of ECEC centres that identified as Montessori in Quebec, and yielded a 37.31% response rate. Of note, none of the participating centres were Montessori

certified. Of the four centres later targeted to participate in the main and second study, only one director and accompanying teacher per centre accepted to participate. For the directors that were initially recruited, this represented a 33.33% participation rate. For the ensuing teachers that were successfully recruited to participate, this represented a mean average of 22.5%.

This limited participation rate could be attributed to the fact that some centres that carry the Montessori name may not identify as Montessori in their programme implementation or in their philosophy and, as a result, these staff did not wish to participate in this study. This was the case of two centres in Study 1 that had disclosed their reasoning to abstain from the study. Questions also remain about those practitioners who do identify with the Montessori philosophy but who may instead group children by age, or who may not supply the full array of Montessori-designed materials in their classrooms. As it stands, of the eight participants in the study, the sample was fairly homogeneous in that each participating centre claimed to host mixed-age classrooms, with each classroom equipped with materials from all five curricular sections of the Montessori curriculum.

The limited sample size could also be attributed to the fact that some centre directors may not have felt comfortable sharing reflections about their practices to a researcher who also owned and managed her own ECEC centre that identified as Montessori. Admittedly, in my introductory email inviting participation to Study 1, I had presented myself as a Montessori administrator and owner of a Montessori-inspired centre in Montreal, keen to connect with like-minded professionals. I had ensured the potential participants that this study had been approved for PhD level research, with the aim of shedding light on the Montessori landscape in the province, and with the hope of raising awareness of the Montessori method on a scholarly

platform. Nevertheless, one director had abstained, explaining her concern for a conflict of interest.

Alternatively, other unanticipated obstacles faced in this investigation were those precipitated by the realities and the restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. With substantiated teacher shortages in ECEC settings, teachers and directors facing a slew of new policies and procedures that they had to implement and become accustomed to, and with the sporadic closure of centres around the province during provincial lock-downs, it was not surprising that teachers and directors did not have the willingness to offer time to a project of a voluntary nature. Restrictive research practices linked to the pandemic also prohibited researcher visits to the centres in question that would have allowed for physical classroom observations. Such on-site observations would have provided an enriching perspective to the shared beliefs of the teacher and director participants, and would have offered an avenue to explore whether classroom practices in fact reflected the participants' expressed beliefs.

Recommendations for Practical Implementation

For practitioners, this research project highlights a variety of complexities involved in setting out to conform to both the Montessori method and to Ministerial guidelines simultaneously. Variations in the beliefs and likely experiences of practitioners in modern-day Quebec could provide solace to those who have to abide by potentially conflicting sets of guidelines. By illuminating beliefs on the variations in application of the Montessori method, practitioners can be reassured that they can move away from the prescribed tenets that were written over a century ago, modernizing the method and adapting it to meet their more current needs. Furthermore, they may in fact have to do so to meet governing provincial guidelines.

With the two pedagogical approaches overlapping in certain ways, but distinctly different in others, inconsistencies and contradictions in beliefs were apparent. This was not only the case between participants, but also within centres. Questions arise, then, on whether such inconsistencies within a centre matter in practical terms, whom they may affect, and how they could be avoided. For example, with some participants expressing their views on the natural tendency for, and the developmental benefits of, play and pretend play, it would be worthwhile to explore if there is a formal place for these childhood activities within the Montessori classroom – rather than having them be dismissed to the start-of-day and end-of-day sessions of a young child's schedule. Furthermore, could teachers and directors consider offering a more consistent approach to the use of classroom materials? For instance, could they consider allowing the children to use the Montessori materials with more room for exploration and creativity to promote more divergent thinking skills, as they do with the non-Montessori materials? Conversely, would they consider offering formal presentations to the non-Montessori materials so as to conscientiously model their usage to the children and promote more convergent thinking strategies?

Such recommendations to align certain curricular inconsistencies might then also encourage the Ministère to formally recognize the Montessori method as an acceptable pedagogical programme in its ECEC centres. Although it already does accept it as a programme of choice in the *Programme éducatif* that it requires of its centres, the recommendation here would be for the Ministère to extend this recognition to its formal tools of child and programme evaluation (respectively, *Le portrait global de l'enfant* and *L'évaluation de la qualité educative*). For example, the Ministère could allow a centre which implements the Montessori method to integrate the list of prescribed Montessori activities per curricular section into the template of *Le*

portrait global de l'enfant. It could also take into account aspects of the Montessori method when administering *L'évaluation de la qualité educative,* and not penalise some of its classroom characteristics, such as limitations on the use of certain materials, and the absence of pretend play materials in the classroom.

Another area worthy of recognition by the Ministère is the Montessori teacher training certification, which – unlike Diplomas of College Studies (also known as *Diplôme d'études collégiales*, or D.E.C.), and Bachelor's degrees in early childhood education – is not currently provincially recognized. If the only lacking components to the training relate to the physical health and safety of young children, and to the broad strokes of the Ministère's educational programme, then the Ministère could ask that those specific, additional classes (i.e., *La santé et la sécurité de l'enfant* and *l'approche éducative)* be acquired by Montessori-certified teachers as a criterion for provincial recognition. Note that this is an option already offered by the Ministère for ECEC teachers who may be certified outside of the province of Quebec. Another suggestion would be to ask that the Montessori certification be accompanied by three years of experience in an ECEC centre to qualify for Ministry recognition. This is the case for students who graduate with either a university certificate or an Attestation of College Studies (also known as *Attestation d'études collégiales,* or A.E.C.) in early childhood education. Alternatively, Montessori teacher training programmes offered in the province of Quebec could consider incorporating courses equivalent to the Ministère's *La santé et la sécurité de l'enfant* and *L'approche educative* into their teacher certification programme.

Finally, recognizing the fact that the Montessori method had been introduced at the turn of the last century to a particular population, and acknowledging the fact that Montessori ECEC centres now service a population that is very different to the one that it had originally addressed,

the Montessori teacher training programme could also consider incorporating a section on ideas for encouraging family engagement that would not only be in line with modern practices of parental involvement in early years settings, but that would also fit within the Montessori Children's House philosophy. One example would be to invite parents into the classroom, and for the children to offer them presentations of the didactic materials as they would to their younger or less knowledgeable classmates on any typical day.

Recommendations for Future Research

This project provides contributions to the bourgeoning niche of research on the Montessori method. More specifically, the study highlights the variations and contradictions involved in the way practitioners reflect on their application of the Montessori method in early years settings in Quebec. This is valuable insight for researchers attempting to attribute an observed effect to a Montessori education: the potentially varying applications of a Montessori classroom reinforce the need to ensure consensus by establishing the authenticity or uniformity of an environment when conducting research that examines the impact of this education method on the development of young children.

During their interviews, some of the participants had reflected on how the Montessori method would have evolved over time, and how Maria Montessori herself would have adapted certain aspects of her curriculum to evolving research and to changing times. Certainly, as the field of Montessori research begins to unfold, further research is required when considering the effects of a Montessori early years education on various outcomes. For instance, is the Montessori method as effective if certain components within it are adapted? Would it be as effective if children were not in mixed-age groupings, if the work period was shorter than three

hours, if the classroom shelves included non-Montessori materials, or if the core daily schedule included aspects of free play and pretense?

Furthermore, with family engagement and parental partnership playing a larger role in ECEC settings today, further research could be pursued to reconsider the feasibility and the value of parental involvement. With one reason being that parents send their children to ECEC centres for the purpose of childcare while they are at work, can parents be expected to participate in their young child's educational experience in their childcare setting outside of the home, and if so, what does the child gain developmentally from such involvement? Evidently, despite the revelations brought to light from this present research project, clear gaps remain in the literature and further investigations are worthy of being explored.

Based on the analysis from the study, recommendations were put forth for both practitioners and for opportunities for future research. Besides providing solace to those practitioners who may face the dilemma of implementing two separate pedagogical programmes, the findings from this research project could encourage teachers and directors to consolidate their understanding of the Quebec educational programme so as to better acknowledge its commonalities with the Montessori method. Teachers and directors could also consider establishing consistency of application of the Montessori method within a centre, taking into account the importance of agreeing on components such as those of play, pretense, creativity and parental involvement.

In my own personal case, as I circle back to my introductory personal statement above and reflect on the reason that has led me to embark on this very project, I am proud that this study has helped me to reorientate my preschool's mission and to reassert its identity with more clarity and more confidence. This project's platform for rich and descriptive reflections from the

participants, though not to be used as a generalization to the larger population, instead offers me and others like me counter-examples to otherwise typical scenarios. Seeing my own struggles mirrored in different ways and in different contexts has provided me with a newly-defined Montessori landscape on which to position myself. In particular, this study has allowed me to gain an experiential understanding, and to embrace the uniqueness, of what a Montessori classroom can look like in today's province of Quebec.

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Appendix A. Study 1: Questionnaire for Directors of ECEC Centres

1- What is your individual participation I.D. code?

2- How many years has your daycare been in operation?

Number of years:

3- How many years have you been the director at this daycare?

Number of years:

4- What is the language of instruction in your daycare?

Options: English / French / Bilingual French/English / Other (please specify)

Number of years:

5- Your level of education attained is:

Options: High school diploma / A.E.C / D.E.C / Bachelors degree / Masters degree or higher

6- Are you qualified in early childhood education?

Options: yes / no

7- If yes, where is your degree from?

8- If yes, is your qualification provincially recognised?

Options: yes / no

9- Do you have a Montessori Early Childhood qualification?

Options: yes / no

10- If yes, where is your qualification from?

11- How many years have you been working in the field of early childhood education?

12- How many years have you been working in a daycare centre that identifies as Montessori?

13- Is your daycare considered a private non-subsidized daycare, private subsidized daycare or CPE?

Options: private non-subsidized daycare / private subsidized daycare / CPE

14- Briefly describe the general population of families you cater to (socio-economic background, culture / ethnicity, home language)

15- Your daycare permit is for how many children under 18 months?

16- How many children under 18 months are currently enrolled in your daycare?

17- Your daycare permit is for how many children over 18 months?

18- How many children over 18 months are currently enrolled in your daycare?

19- How many teachers of children aged above 18 months do you currently employ?

20- Do you employ specialists to teach a special activity class on a regular basis?

Options: yes / no. If yes, please specify.

21- What are the hours of operation of your daycare?

22- On average, how many days a week do your children attend your programme?

Options: Half days, five days per week / full days, five days per week / part time (please specify)

23- Are the children in your daycare segregated by age or are they in a mixed age group setting?

Options: segregated by age / mixed age group / additional comments

24- Please indicate the number of classrooms per age group.

25- Please indicate the number of children per classroom, per age group.

26- Please indicate the number of teachers per class.

27- Is your centre formally accredited by an organisation such as Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), American Montessori Society (AMS) or The Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA)?

Options: yes / no

28- If yes, which one?

Options: AMI / AMS / CCMA / other (please specify)

29- Are some of your teachers formally Montessori-qualified?

Options: yes / no

30- If yes, how many?

31- How many of your teachers are considered ECE-qualified by the Ministère?

32- How many of your ECE-qualified teachers are also Montessori-qualified?

33- Do your teachers receive any form of Montessori training on-site?

Options: yes / no

34- If yes, please specify:

Options: Completed formal Montessori qualification / Occasional Montessori courses / On-site-training / other (please specify)

35- Do your teachers receive any other form of pedagogical training on-site?

Options: yes / no

36- If yes, please specify:

37- Do your classrooms include formal Montessori materials from the following sections?

Practical Life: *Options: yes / no / please specify*

Sensorial: *Options: yes / no / please specify*

Math: *Options: yes / no / please specify*

Language: *Options: yes / no / please specify*

Culture: *Options: yes / no / please specify*

38- Do your classrooms include non-Montessori toys and materials?

Options: yes / no / *please specify*:

39- Have you undergone the *Évaluation de la qualité educative* conducted by the Ministère?

Options: yes / no / additional comments:

40- Which aspects of your programme do you associate with the word "Montessori"?

41- Describe your experience in conforming simultaneously to the guidelines of the Ministère's educational programme and to those of the Montessori philosophy.

**** Thank you for completing the survey****

Appendix B. Study 1: Consent Form for Directors of ECEC Centres

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

"The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal" – Study 1: Survey

Researcher:

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD Candidate, Dept of Education

Researcher's Contact Information:

Email: yasmine.ghandour@mail.concordia.ca
Tel: (514) 808 7723

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Nina Howe, Professor, Dept of Education
Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl, Associate Professor, Dept of Education

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information:

Dr. Nina Howe:

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Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl:

Concordia University
Department of Education
1455 de Maisonneuve West
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Tel: (514) 848-2424, ext. 8632
Email: sandra.chang-kredl@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study:

N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to gain a clearer understanding of how the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in daycare centres in Montreal. This is done by connecting with directors of daycare centres that identify as Montessori and aiming to gain an understanding of their centre's general traits and characteristics.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to complete a 41-question survey online.
In total, participating in this study will take approximately 15 minutes. The questions are created in various formats, with options for answers ranging from yes/no, numerical and multiple choice possibilities, to open-ended opportunities for clarification purposes.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There is minimal risk in participating in the survey.

Potential benefits include the opportunity to reflect on your current reality as a director of a daycare and to gain insight into your pedagogical practice.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

I will gather the following information as part of this research:

- I will ask whether your daycare setting is private or public, and whether it receives government subsidies or is privately funded.
- I will ask you to report your centre's demographic population, your professional qualifications and number of years of experience, and the number of children enrolled at your centre.
- I will also enquire about classroom groupings and materials, and about teacher qualifications.
- I will ask whether teachers receive any form of on-site Montessori, or other, pedagogical training.
- I will ask in what ways your centre identifies as Montessori.
- Finally, I will ask about your experiences in conforming simultaneously to the guidelines of the Ministère and the Montessori philosophy.

I will not allow anyone to access the information, except myself and my advisors directly involved in conducting the research. I will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information about your centre will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else.

I will protect the information by downloading the responses from the online survey and saving them directly onto the password-protected hard drive of my computer.

I intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results. I will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before [xxxxxx]. There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix C. Study 1: Cover Letter for Directors of ECEC Centres

Date

Dear (Centre Director's Name),

Thank you for accepting to participate in this research project. As I mentioned to you in our recent telephone conversation, this research project is entitled "The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal" and it aims to gain a clearer understanding of how the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in daycare centres in Montreal.

The aim of this study is to connect with directors of daycare centres that identify as Montessori and to gain an understanding of their centre's general traits and characteristics. This is done through the questionnaire (attached herewith), which you have kindly agreed to fill out. The questionnaire should take an approximate 15 minutes to complete, and should be completed within the next 14 days. You can skip any question you do not want to answer, and can stop at any time.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information about your centre will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else. Your individual participation I.D. code for the questionnaire is xxxx.

If you would like to contact me, you can do so by email (yasmine.ghandour@mail.concordia.ca) or by phone (514 808 7723).

My thanks in advance for your participation in this project.

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD candidate

Appendix D. Study 2: Cover Letter for Directors

Date

Dear (Potential Participant's Name),

Thank you for accepting to participate in the second study of this research project, entitled "The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal". The research project's aim is to gain a clearer understanding of the variety of ways in which the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in daycare centres in Montreal. This second part of the research project is to become familiar with the practices of your daycare centre through the process of director and teacher questionnaires and interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of non-confidential documents.

The questionnaire (attached herewith) should take an approximate 10 minutes to complete, and should be completed and returned within the next 14 days. You can skip any question you do not want to answer, and can stop at any time. Interviews (either in person or online) will be held at a time and location that are suitable to you, and will last approximately one hour. Topics covered during the interview will include your opinions of your centre's philosophy, opportunities for play in your centre, and parental involvement in your programme. Please note that the information obtained during the interview and the classroom observation sessions will be confidential.

The information gathered during this process will be coded. That means that the information about your centre will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else. Your individual participation I.D. code for the questionnaire is xxxx.

If you would like to contact me, you can do so by email (yasmine.ghandour@mail.concordia.ca) or by phone (514 808 7723).

My thanks in advance for your participation in this project,

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD candidate

Appendix E. Study 2: Consent Form for Directors

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

"The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal" – Study 2: Multi-Site Case Studies

Researcher:

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD Candidate, Dept of Education

Researcher's Contact Information:

Email: yasmine.ghandour@mail.concordia.ca
Tel: (514) 808 7723

Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Nina Howe, Professor, Dept of Education
Dr. Sandra Chang-Kredl, Associate Professor, Dept of Education

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Dr. Nina Howe:

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Tel: (514) 848-2424, ext. 8632
Email: sandra.chang-kredl@concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study:

N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to gain a clearer understanding of how the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in specific daycare centres in Montreal.

B. PROCEDURES

This is done through the process of director and teacher questionnaires and interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of non-confidential documents.

If you agree to participate, an 11-question survey is completed online and will take an approximate ten minutes to complete. The interview will be held face-to-face or on a virtual platform such as Zoom, and will take approximately one hour. A minimum of three observations per participating classroom will be held on three separate mornings, with hand-written notes taken during the observations. Classroom layout and non-confidential documents will be photographed. All information will be treated confidentially (see section D. below).

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There is minimal risk in participating in this study.

Potential benefits include the opportunity to reflect on your current reality as the director of a daycare and to gain insight into your centre's pedagogical practices.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

I will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Through a questionnaire, I will collect demographic information, I will enquire about your experience in the field of early childhood education, and will invite you to describe your ideal early years programme.
- Through an interview, I will enquire about your opinions and beliefs about your work, as well as your role and practices in the centre.
- Through observations, I will explore the physical layout of classrooms as well as the materials that are on display for the children. I will also observe the teacher's role and practices in the classroom.
- Through document reviews, I will look at promotional materials used in advertising your centre, the centre's "*régie interne*", "*the programme éducatif*", report card and lesson plan templates, as well as any other observation and evaluation tools used.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information about your centre will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else.

I will not allow anyone to access the information, except myself and my advisors directly involved in conducting the research. I will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

I will protect the information by transcribing my interview notes and observations directly onto my computer and saving these documents onto the password-protected hard drive of my computer.

I intend to publish the results of the research. However, your identity will remain anonymous and it will not be possible to identify you in the published results. This will be done by changing your name and disguising any details of the interview which may reveal your identity. I will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before [xxxxxx]. There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix F. Study 2: Questionnaire for Directors

1- What is your individual participation I.D. code?

2- What is your age range?

Options: under 25 / 25-34 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / over 64

3- What is your ethnic / cultural background?

4- What language(s) do you speak at home?

5- Describe any previous experience you have had in the field of early childhood education.

6- What did you do to qualify as the director of a centre that identifies as Montessori?

7- On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your understanding of the Quebec Educational Programme?

Options: 1 (very low) / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 (very high)

8- On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your understanding of the Montessori philosophy?

Options: 1 (very low) / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 (very high)

9- How would you describe your centre's educational programme?

10- What would your ideal early years programme look like?

11- What are the barriers to implementing your ideal programme?

**** Thank you for completing the survey****

Appendix G. Study 2: Cover Letter for Teachers

Date

Dear (Potential Participant's Name),

Your daycare centre has accepted to participate in this research project, entitled "The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal". The research project's aim is to gain a clearer understanding of the variety of ways in which the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in daycare centres in Montreal. One part of the research project is to become familiar with the practices of your daycare centre through the process of a questionnaire, an interview, classroom observations and review of non-confidential documents.

The questionnaire (attached herewith) should take an approximate 15 minutes to complete, and should be completed within the next 14 days. You can skip any question you do not want to answer, and can stop at any time. Interviews will be held at a time and location that are suitable to you. Topics covered during the interview will include your opinion of your centre's philosophy, opportunities for play in your centre and parental involvement in your programme. Please note that the information obtained in the questionnaire, during the interview, the classroom observation sessions and the review of documents will be confidential.

The information gathered during this process will be coded. That means that the information that you share will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else. Your individual participation I.D. code for the questionnaire is xxxx.

If you would like to contact me, you can do so by email (yasmine.ghandour@mail.concordia.ca) or by phone (514 808 7723).

My thanks in advance for your participation in this project.

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD candidate

Appendix H. Study 2: Consent Form for Teachers

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title:

"The Montessori Method in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings in 21st Century Montreal" – Study 2: Multi-Site Case Studies

Researcher:

Yasmine Ghandour, PhD Candidate, Dept of Education

Researcher's Contact Information:

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Faculty Supervisor:

Dr. Nina Howe, Professor, Dept of Education
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Source of funding for the study:

N/A

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to gain a clearer understanding of how the Montessori method manifests itself in practice in specific daycare centres in Montreal.

B. PROCEDURES

This is done through the process of teacher questionnaire and interviews, classroom observations, and reviews of non-confidential documents.

The questionnaire will be completed online. The interview will be audio-recorded. Classroom observations will be video-recorded. Classroom layout and non-confidential documents will be photographed. All information will be treated confidentially.

If you agree to participate, a 17-question survey is completed online and will take an approximate 15 minutes to complete. The interview will be held face-to-face or on a virtual platform such as Zoom, and will take approximately one hour. A minimum of three observations will be held on three separate mornings in your classroom, with hand-written notes taken during the observations. Classroom layout and non-confidential documents will be photographed. All information will be treated confidentially (see section D. below).

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

There is minimal risk in participating in this study.

Potential benefits include the opportunity to reflect on your current reality as the director of a daycare and to gain insight into your centre's pedagogical practices.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

I will gather the following information as part of this research:

- Through a questionnaire, I will enquire about your demographic background, as well as your qualifications and experience in an early childhood education setting.
- Through an interview, I will enquire about your opinions and beliefs about your work, as well as your role and practices in the classroom.
- Through observations, I will explore the physical layout of your classroom as well as the materials that are on display for the children. I will also observe your role and practices in the classroom.
- Through document reviews, I will look at non-confidential documents such as report card and lesson plan templates, as well as any other observation and evaluation tools used.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information that you share will be identified by a code. I will have a list that links the code to your name, but it will not be available to anyone else.

I will not allow anyone to access the information, except myself and my advisors directly involved in conducting the research. I will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

I will protect the information by transcribing my interview notes and observations directly onto my computer and saving these documents onto the password-protected hard drive of my computer.

I intend to publish the results of the research. However, your identity will remain anonymous and it will not be possible to identify you in the published results. This will be done by changing your name and disguising any details of the interview which may reveal your identity. I will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before [xxxxxx]. There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix I. Study 2: Questionnaire for Teachers

1- What is your individual participation I.D. code?

2- What is your age range?

Options: under 25 / 25-34 / 35-44 / 45-54 / 55-64 / over 64

3- What is your ethnic / cultural background?

4- Your level of education attained is:

Options: High school diploma / A.E.C / D.E.C / Bachelors degree / Masters degree or higher

5- What language(s) do you speak at home?

6- What primary language do you officially speak in the classroom with the children?

Options: English / French / Other (Please specify)

7- What is the age-group of the children that you teach?

8- Are you qualified in early childhood education?

Options: yes / no

9- If yes, where is your degree from?

10- If yes, is your qualification provincially recognised?

Options: yes / no

11- Do you have a Montessori Early Childhood qualification?

Options: yes / no

12- If yes, where is your qualification from?

13- How many years have you been teaching in the field of early childhood education?

14- How many years have you been teaching in a daycare centre that identifies as Montessori?

15- On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your understanding of the Quebec Educational Programme?

Options: 1 (very low) / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 (very high)

16- On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you rate your understanding of the Montessori philosophy?

Options: 1 (very low) / 2 / 3 / 4 / 5 (very high)

17- How would you describe your centre's educational programme?

**** Thank you for completing the survey****

Appendix J. Study 2: Interview Questions for Directors

1. What drew you to the field of early childhood education?
2. How do you feel about Montessori philosophy?
3. If I followed you through a typical morning, what would I see you doing?
4. When you walk through the classrooms on a typical morning, what do you see / what do you hear?
5. In your opinion, which components of the Montessori method are essential to contributing to learning effectiveness? (e.g. 3-hour work cycle, mixed-age groupings, Montessori-designed materials, auto-corrective nature of materials, restrictions on parental involvement, absence of free/pretend play)
6. How does your centre adopt Montessori's principles?
7. Which components of the Montessori method do you not adopt in your centre? Why are they not adopted?
8. In your opinion, which components of the Quebec educational programme are essential to contributing to learning effectiveness? (e.g., each child is unique, the child as principle agent of their learning, whole child approach to development, importance of play)
9. How does your centre adopt the principles outlined in Quebec's educational programme?
10. Which components of the Quebec educational programme are not adopted in your centre? Why are they not adopted?
11. In your opinion, what is the teacher's role in the classroom?
12. What creative experiences could I observe?
13. What opportunities for free / adult-accompanied / pretend play could I observe?
14. What opportunities for guided projects could I observe?

15. How do you feel about parental involvement?
16. What opportunities and challenges do you face in implementing the Montessori method in your centre?

Additional Probing Questions:

1. Can you give me an example?
2. Tell me more about that.
3. How do you feel about that?
4. What do you mean when you say…?
5. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

Appendix K. Study 2: Interview Questions for Teachers

1. What drew you to the field of early childhood education?
2. How do you feel about Montessori philosophy?
3. If I watched you in your classroom on a typical morning, what would I see you doing?
4. When you sit back and observe your classroom, what do you see / hear?
5. In your opinion, which components of the Montessori method are essential to contributing to learning effectiveness? (e.g. 3-hour work cycle, mixed-age groupings, Montessori-designed materials, auto-corrective nature of materials, restrictions on parental involvement, absence of free/pretend play)
6. How do you adopt Montessori's principles in your classroom?
7. Which components of the Montessori method are not adopted in your classroom? Why are they not adopted?
8. In your opinion, which components of the Quebec educational programme are essential to contributing to learning effectiveness? (e.g. each child is unique, the child as principle agent of their learning, whole child approach to development, importance of play)
9. How do you adopt the principles outlined by Quebec's new educational programme?
10. Which components of the Quebec educational programme are not adopted in your classroom? Why are they not adopted?
11. In your opinion, what is the teacher's role in the classroom?
12. What creative experiences could I observe?
13. What opportunities for free / adult-accompanied / pretend play could I observe?
14. What opportunities for guided projects could I observe?
15. How do you feel about parental involvement?

16. What opportunities and challenges do you face in implementing the Montessori method in your classroom?

Additional Probing Questions:

1. Can you give me an example?
2. Tell me more about that.
3. How do you feel about that?
4. What do you mean when you say…?
5. Is there anything you'd like to add before we end?

Appendix L. Study 2: Contact Summary Sheet

Interviewer: Interviewee:

Contact Date: Today's Date:

1. Important issues / themes that struck me from this contact:

2. Summarise the information I got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions:

   Question Number: Information:

3. Any other interesting / salient points that arose:

4. What new / remaining questions should I consider with the next contact?

Appendix M. Study 2: Document Summary Form

Site: Date Received / Picked Up:

Name / Description of document:

Contact with which document is associated:

Significance or importance of document:

Brief summary of contents:

Appendix N. Study 2: Sample of Coded Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Yasmine Interviewee: 809B Contact Date: 21 /4/21

What drew you to the field of early childhood education? I got into the field very late in my life, I started off in travel and tourism. Then I moved to the Montreal casino, for 20+ years, and online casinos… I really enjoyed the marketing. In 2008, the company closed, and I had to rethink where I was headed, I wanted to see what it was like to be an entrepreneur. So, I opened up a little centre that did birthday parties and summer camps, and after-school programmes and I realised I enjoyed working with children, and organising, and learning about it. And that's when I bought my first daycare. That was quite later on in my life. I purchased my first daycare in 2009. The first daycare (Kirkland) is not Montessori, it's a MFA programme. In 2011, we purchased Montessori. It was MM. Same name, Premier Chemin. It was probably set up 60% Montessori. It had materials relating to EPL (practical life), Sensorial, and a little bit of Culture. Language and Math were missing.	"*got into the field very late in my life*" Road to MM "*an entrepreneur*" Started with "*birthday parties and summer camps*" First daycare not Montessori NonMM centre MM materials
Did you know MM then? No, I did not know Montessori then. I did not know about ECE other than working a bit at the other daycare for 2 years. So, I did a quick online programme to catch up. For 2 years, we made do with the existing material.	Knowledge of Montessori and ECE was little at first Online programme AEC in ECE
Which proramme did you do? It was part of AMI. I don't even know where my diploma is anymore. But then I later did a training in 2015 with Daniel Jutras. This was in class, in Montreal, so I had to manipulate the material and learn that way. The year before that, I did my AEC in ECE because I did not have that background certification yet. It opened my eyes to Montessori. Jutras has a nice programme because it's not just about the presentation of the materials, but about understanding Maria Montessori, understanding her principles, how to be in the classroom. His programme really opened up my eyes to the possibilities that Montessori can offer any child, that it can offer any household, let alone in a classroom. That you can bring it home and lead your life by Montessori principles.	MM qualification Understanding Maria M and her principles in the classroom ECE qualification MM as a way of life *"The possibilities that Montessori can offer any child, that it can offer any household. That you can bring it home and lead your life by Montessori principles."*

Appendix O. Study 2: Sample of Moving from Codes to Categories

61	Categories:	Pride	Identity	Collaboration with MFA	In agreement with MFA	Resemblance between MFA & MM	MFA's relationship to MM	MFA underestimates child's potential	MFA inspections
Director A	Initial codes:	Congratulate on this research	*« La seule chose c'est les jouets… Sinon je me considère purement*	Wish for MM representation at MFA	Agrees with MFA:	*« Le programme du MFA a les bases »*	MFA considered uniformising ECE programs	*« MFA est bien conçu mais, ils n'ont pas compris tout le potentiel*	MFA requirements
Teacher A		Fully committed to MM	Proud to represent her centre	Collaborated with MFA	Parents as partners	MFA also calls for observation for planning	Preconceived ideas on MM	MM goes deeper than MFA	Limitations of MFA – cannot use some MM materials (needles)
Director B		Did not agree to uniformising ECE	MM-based, with toys	Represented MM at MFA talks	*« Tous les éléments affirmés sont vrais, mais je ne suis pas certaine*	Likes that about MFA	Don't understand MM	Report card	Which must be kept under lock and key
Teacher B		Happy about this research	*« Montessori, ce n'est pas juste le matériel, c'est une philosophie »*	Participated in MFA's pilot project	MFA recognizes MM programme as *a programme éducatif*	MM & MFA same base	MFA doesn't know MM in depth	*« j'étais choquée. Je trouvais que c'était infantilisant*	MFA inspectors : some more tolerant than others
Director C		Proud to represent her centre	Not 100% MM	MM representation at MFA	Now MFA encourages us to look at child's development	MFA follows MM	MFA vs MM *« chicanes »*	Limitations of MFA – cannot use some MM materials (needles)	MFA restrictions re First Aid Kit
Teacher C		*« C'est formidable, et je vous félicite »*	Not 100% MM because of	Create a MM network to be represented at MFA to change MFA	All MFA components are important and inter-related	MFA evaluation tool	MM preceded MFA with this tool	Which must be kept under lock and key	MFA restrictions about signing off on bus song. Do it in hiding
Director D		Staff not as eager as director	other materials	informally represented MM ideas at MFA meeting	*« Oui, les composants du MFA sont vrai : ils suivent la nature de*	*"le dossier éducatif »*	MFA's Dossier educatif does not reflect MM programme	MFA safety restrictions takes child's freedom away	MFA restrictions (fish in class)
Teacher D		Director will try to encourage staff again	Not loyal to MM	MM & MFA collaboration	*« Tous les éléments affirmés sont vrais, mais je ne suis pas certaine de*	*« On peut faire un lien entre les deux si tout le monde est flexible »*	MFA doesn't recognize MM qualification	MFA restrictions (fish in class)	MFA inspections based on health and safety. Not on pedagogy
		Proud of this research	*« C'est notre identité, ça fait partie de nos valeurs. »*		Agrees partly with « child learns through play »	MM & MFA same base	*« C'est là que le bât blesse »*	More and more restrictions	Inspector visits annually only to look at first aid band-aids, etc.
		Pride in centre, would like to take part in evaluation	*« On est beaucoup, beaucoup Montessori. Alors on n'est pas*			MM & MFA similarities	*« Le MFA manque l'honnêteté de ne pas citer MM »*	Take away more and more	MFA inspections
		Proud of this research	*« Montessori, j'ai trouvé qu'il y avait plein de points communs dans*			*« MFA : Il s'en inspire. C'est noble »*	MFA should have honesty to cite MM.	Never work up towards potential	MFA pilot project to evaluate ECE programme cannot be implemented
		"I feel proud that it is Montessori"	*« Ma personnalité, mes valeurs, ma façon de vivre étaient pareils »*			*« Tous les éléments affirmés sont vrais, mais je ne suis pas certaine de*	Lacks transparency	MFA inspections based on health and safety. Not on pedagogy	MFA pilot project to evaluate ECE programme – may lack personnel to
			« Je suis une Montessorienne née »			MFA recognizes MM programme as *a programme éducatif*	MFA cover page & MM materials	Inspector visits annually only to look at first aid band-aids, etc.	Inspector should be trained accordingly
			Pride in centre, would like to take part in evaluation			MFA & MM similarities	MFA doesn't recognize MM qualification	MFA pilot project to evaluate ECE programme – may lack personnel to	I am not afraid of inspector
			MM values same as mine			Cannot re-invent a new pedagogy	MFA recognizes MM programme as *a programme éducatif*	Impression is that we only offer child care in safe environment	Collaborate with MFA because I have to
						« C'est du copie-col Montessori »	Enormous impact	MFA inspections	*Évaluation de la qualité éducative*
						« Tu ne peux plus inventer la roue qui tourne »	Could not understand why: MFA recognition of programme but not	MFA pilot project to evaluate ECE programme cannot be implemented	*Évaluation de la qualité éducative*
						MM and MFA programmes same	Inspector visits annually only to look at first aid band-aids, etc.	MFA limits child's potential	
						MM & MFA same teacher values	*"A lot of refences throughout the MFA programme without*	« De baser le programme seulement	
						"I feel that over the years, the MFA programme has been modified to	*"I would love for Montessori to be recognised by the MFA"*		
						MFA similar to MM			
						MFA & MM merge			
						MFA & MM same			
						« L'idée (du MFA) est la même, mais dans la pratique, ce n'est pas			
						MFA & MM base is the same			

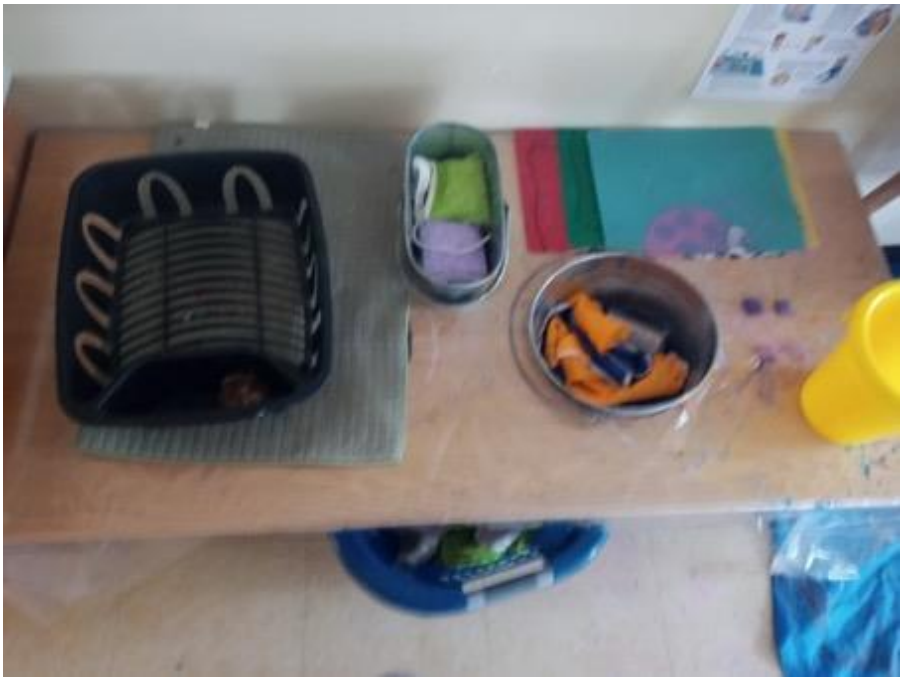
Appendix P. Study 2: Examples of Photographs of Practical Life Exercises

Centre A:

Centre B:

Centre C:

Centre D:



Appendix Q. Study 2: Examples of Montessori Materials on Display

Centre A:

Centre B:

Centre C:

Centre D:

Appendix R. Study 2: Examples of non-Montessori Materials

Centre A:

Centre B:

Centre C:

Appendix S. Study 2: Example of non-Montessori Materials in Baskets

Centre C:

Appendix T. Study 2: Sample from Centre A's Programme éducatif

Dans la méthodologie Montessori le jeu est appelée "travail" où les jouets sont les "activités (matériel)" et l'air de jeu "l'ambiance".

Une salle de classe Montessori est à la fois disciplinée et autodirigée mais sur tout organisé. Les enfants ont accès à du matériel pratique qui leur permet d'apprendre les mathématiques, le langage, les sciences, l'histoire, tout en développant leur curiosité intellectuelle, le respect de soi, et le respect du monde qui les entoure.
Le développement de l'enfant est un processus global et intégré. L'enfant se développe dans toutes ses dimensions : affective, physique et motrice, sociale et morale, cognitive et langagière, et celles-ci agissent à divers degrés dans le cadre de ses apprentissages. Les interventions des éducatrices, l'environnement et les activités proposées dans la garderie stimulent de plusieurs façons l'ensemble de ces dimensions.
Dans la classe Montessori, l'enfant est placé dans un environnement ou il y a différents groupes d'âges. Ainsi, il se retrouve avec des compagnons qui sont plus jeunes ou plus vieux que lui, donc soit plus ou moins avancés que lui. Ceci amène l'enfant à s'adapter progressivement à la vie en collectivité et de s'intégrer harmonieusement. Dans ce milieu, il trouve une famille, une mini-société. Cela permet l'émulation nécessaire à la vie communautaire. De cette façon les enfants sont capables d'apprendre par l'observation et l'imitation, d'avoir un apprentissage collaboratif et d'autres valeurs comme l'entraide et l'aspiration.

Comment les enfant apprennent plus efficacement lorsque l'enseignement est individualisé, les éducatrices donnent des leçons en petits groupes ou individuellement et suivent ensuite les progrès de chaque enfant alors qu'ils complètent leurs projets seuls et à leur propre rythme.

Dans notre approche Montessori, l'environnement est méticuleusement préparé, où les activités sont disposées à la hauteur des enfants, dans un ordre déterminé. Les enfants doivent respecter cet ordre en rangeant correctement le matériel utilisé avant de sélectionner une nouvelle activité. Ainsi, le vaste éventail d'outils pédagogiques mis à la disposition des enfants leur permet d'explorer à leur rythme, de faire des choix, d'expérimenter et de manipuler aussi souvent qu'ils le désirent, le tout dans un univers ordonné. Cet environnement permet aux enfants d'acquérir davantage d'autonomie et d'indépendance, tout en développant l'acquisition d'habiletés qui permettent de contrôler volontairement leurs pensées et leurs actions, telles comment la flexibilité mentale, l'inhibition, la mémoire de travail et la planification (les fonctions exécutives). Tous ces apprentissages facilitent à l'enfant sa transition vers l'école

Appendix U. Study 2: Sample from Centre B's Website

Appendix V. Study 2: Sample from Centre C's Régie interne

RÈGLES DE RÉGIE INTERNE

Le français est la langue d'usage et tous les services seront donnés en cette langue.

MISSION : *aide-moi à faire seul*

Mener l'enfant à la découverte de son environnement.
Observer le monde sous différentes formes et couleurs.
Notions académiques, **entraide** envers chacun
Travailler individuellement ou en équipe avec **autonomie**.
Être à l'**écoute** des besoins des enfants et développer l'**estime de soi**.
S'épanouir dans leur milieu de vie.
S'adapter aux changements.
Orienter leurs initiatives dans le but de les instruire.
Responsabiliser et **respecter** les autres.
Ici, nous avons le plaisir d'accorder une place privilégiée à votre enfant.

Appendix W. Study 2: Sample from Centre D's Programme éducatif

L'approche Montessori

Ce programme repose sur les 12 points principaux suivants:

1. Cette approche est basée sur une multitude d'années d'observation de la nature de l'enfant;

2. Cette approche a été prouvée bonne et efficace à l'échelle universelle : peu importe la race, la culture, la civilisation.

3. Cette approche est basée sur les besoins de l'enfant qui veut apprendre par l'Action. Elle se préoccupe des stades de développement mental et fournit les possibilités de développer toutes les facultés de l'enfant.

4. Elle permet à l'enfant d'agir avec un maximum de spontanéité tout en donnant les connaissances requises pour devenir adulte.

5. Cette approche n'impose pas de discipline formelle et stricte, mais fait en sorte que l'enfant s'autodiscipline.

6. Cette approche est basée sur le respect de la personnalité de l'enfant et non sur l'adulte. Ainsi, l'enfant devient biologiquement indépendant plus vite. Par conséquent, on laisse à l'enfant une marge de liberté assez grande qui conduit à la discipline.

7. Cette approche permet aux éducateurs de s'occuper de chaque enfant individuellement et ainsi répondre à ses besoins réels.

8. À l'intérieur de cette approche, l'enfant travaille à son propre rythme. Par conséquent, il ne sera pas brimé par un enfant plus lent ou trop rapide.

9. Cette approche n'encourage pas la compétition telle quelle, mais surtout le partage, la joie de donner et de recevoir.

10. Puisque l'enfant travaille selon son rythme et son choix, il y a moins de danger d'angoisse ou de complexe d'infériorité

11. L'approche Montessori développe toute la personnalité de l'enfant : son intelligence, sa liberté, la maîtrise de soi, son initiative et son indépendance.

12. Par l'auto-éducation et l'autodiscipline, l'enfant acquiert une bonne maîtrise de soi.

Appendix X. Study 2: Cover Page of the Ministère's *Accueillir la petite enfance*