

2017

Spirituality and Montessori Teacher Teams: The Path of the Heart

Lapierre, Christine

Lapierre, C. (2017). Spirituality and Montessori Teacher Teams: The Path of the Heart (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>. doi:10.11575/PRISM/27855
<http://hdl.handle.net/11023/4267>

Downloaded from PRISM Repository, University of Calgary

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Spirituality and Montessori Teacher Teams:

The Path of the Heart

by

Christine Marie Anne Lapierre

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

December, 2017

© Christine Marie Anne Lapierre 2017

Abstract

Maria Montessori based her educational approach on a profound understanding of the spiritual nature of the child, on the spiritual preparation of the teacher, and on the teacher-child relationship. However, she did not elaborate on the nature of teacher teams, nor on the spiritual aspect of teamwork. Though most Montessori early childhood classrooms have two or more teachers who teach together as a team, very little research has been conducted on how these teams work together, nor on how spirituality influences their work. The purpose of this research was to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers brought to their interactions in classroom teams. The methodology taken was a basic interpretive study. The purposeful sample consisted of five Montessori early childhood teachers teaching on three different teams of three teachers, in the same Montessori school in Western Canada. The data collection method included a short questionnaire, an observation of the teacher in the classroom with her team, her selection of an artifact representing spirituality and teamwork, two semi-structured interviews, and a member check. The analysis and interpretation of the findings were organized according to three categories arising from the data and from the theoretical framework: 1) the relationship that the teacher had with her spiritual self, 2) the teacher-child relationship, and 3) the teacher-teacher relationship. This study revealed that the spiritual self of the teacher was important in the development of the teacher-child relationship, and with the team. The Montessori concept of the inner teacher was examined in light of these findings. All the participants stated that spirituality played a role in their team interactions, and that there was congruence between how they related with the children and with each other. Peace was the overriding goal of the teachers for the classroom and with each other. Moreover, love for the child undergirded everything that they did.

Recommendations are offered for Montessori teams, and teams in other areas of work, as well as future research in this area.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my son for supporting me throughout my doctoral journey as I experienced all kinds of adventures.

My gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr Janet Groen, who encouraged me to go deeper and to be undivided in expressing my inner most thinking about my research study. Her frank and stimulating questions encouraged me to delve further and, as a result, to come up with newer ways of approaching my study.

I gained a lot of valuable insights from my committee members, through Dr Jackie Seidel's helpful and enlightening feedback, and Dr Ian Winchester's continuous support to stretch my thinking about my research, at all the key points of my doctoral journey. I also express gratitude to Dr Laurie Hill and Dr John Miller, my external examiners, who posed thoughtful questions and offered beneficial feedback.

I thank Paul Papin for his earnest and constructive approach to coaching me in my writing. Finally, thanks to all my peer mentors, who contributed to the success of my PhD journey. In particular, I express gratitude to Luciano, who flamed my passion for my topic, to Faye, Flora, and Sinela, who were my staunch supporters from the beginning, and to Noha and Hawazen who helped with many technical details.

I dedicate this thesis to my loving son who was an inspiration to me throughout my entire doctoral journey. I learned so much from his optimistic outlook and courageous approach to life.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures.....	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction: The Journey of the Heart.....	1
My Personal Background.....	3
Purpose and Background.....	12
Research Questions.....	28
Assumptions	28
Significance.....	29
Summary.....	30
Chapter 2 Literature Review: Illumining the Heart	32
Introduction.....	32
Vignette	32
Montessori Method and Spirituality	35
The Spiritual Preparation of the Teacher	37
The Teacher-Child Relationship	47
The Montessori Classroom	52
Normalization.	52
Absorbent mind.	54
Sensitive periods.	55
Prepared environment.	56
The Montessori Method, Spirituality and Adult Education.....	58
Summary.....	63
Relational Learning.....	63
Summary.....	68
Teams and Spirituality	68
Summary.....	76
Chapter 3 Research Methodology: Listening through the Heart.....	78
Ontology and Epistemology	79
Qualitative Research.....	84
Research Design	85
Participant selection.	85
Data collection.....	87
Data analysis.	92
Ethical Issues.....	95
Trustworthiness.	96
Credibility.	96
Dependability.	97
Generalizability.....	98

Limitations of the Study	100
Summary.....	101
Chapter 4 Findings: Speaking from the Heart.....	102
Introduction.....	102
The Context of the Montessori School	104
Descriptions of the Participants.....	108
Jane.	108
<i>Training and teaching experience.....</i>	<i>108</i>
<i>Montessori method.....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Artifact.....</i>	<i>111</i>
Martha.	112
<i>Training and teaching experience.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Montessori method.....</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Artifact.....</i>	<i>114</i>
Clara.	115
<i>Training and teaching experience.....</i>	<i>115</i>
<i>Montessori method.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Artifact.....</i>	<i>118</i>
Mary.....	119
<i>Training and teaching experience.....</i>	<i>119</i>
<i>Montessori method.....</i>	<i>120</i>
<i>Artifact.....</i>	<i>122</i>
Sierra.	122
<i>Training and teaching experience.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Montessori method.....</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Artifact.....</i>	<i>124</i>
Summary.....	125
Thematic Analysis.....	126
The Teacher’s Spiritual Self	127
Teacher-Child relationship	132
Congruence between the Teacher-Child Relationship and the Teacher-Teacher Relationship	139
The Teacher-Teacher Relationship.....	142
Verbal and non-verbal communication between the teachers.	143
<i>Verbal communication.....</i>	<i>143</i>
<i>Non-verbal communication.....</i>	<i>148</i>
Relationships between the teachers on the teams.....	152
<i>Fostering self-care.</i>	<i>153</i>
<i>Recognizing each other’s strengths.....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Trust in the team.</i>	<i>158</i>
<i>Learning from each other.....</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Classroom management.....</i>	<i>161</i>
<i>Team duties.</i>	<i>164</i>
Summary.....	164
Chapter 5 Interpretations: Acting from the Heart	168

Introduction.....	168
The Understanding of Love	169
The Epistemology of Love.....	171
Developing the Heart.....	173
Connection with the Inner Teacher	182
Servant Leadership.....	185
Harmony in Communication	188
The Power of the Team	192
Summary.....	195
Chapter 6 Conclusions: The Essence of the Heart.....	199
Recommendations for Practice.....	201
Implications for Montessori teachers.	202
Implications for the Montessori team.....	202
Implications for the Montessori school.....	203
Implications for parents.....	203
Recommendations for Future Research	204
Research in the Montessori field.	204
Research in other areas.....	205
Reflecting on the Heart.....	206
References.....	208
Appendix A: Questionnaire of the Background of the Teacher	219
Appendix B: Request to Bring an Artifact to the Interview	220
Appendix C: Sample Guide to the Semi-structured Interview.....	221

List of Figures

Figure 1. Teacher relationships.....	104
--------------------------------------	-----

Chapter 1 Introduction: The Journey of the Heart

My interest in spirituality began a number of years ago when I progressed through life changes that transformed my way of seeing through my heart. I started to contemplate the deeper meaning of life, and the interconnectedness of all people, nature, and the universe. I learned how to cultivate a more profound understanding of myself, and to extend love and compassion to all life. Focusing my attention on the development of certain spiritual qualities, such as love, joy, hope, wisdom, and forgiveness, I was compelled to climb upwards towards a more peaceful way of being in the world. Since then I have resolutely devoted myself to my spiritual growth and developed practices that have brought me closer to feeling at one with the universe.

After leaving my career in the field of international development where I had worked for many years, I entered the enlivening world of the Montessori early childhood education, after the birth of my son. As part of my training, I learned that Montessori teachers teach the whole child; in turn, I construed that teachers also bring their whole person to their teaching. Furthermore, I contended that when Montessori teachers team teach they also bring their whole selves into the relationships with each other.

Many writers in the field of education referred to this concept as the holistic approach (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2005; Groen, 2012; Miller, 2007). In fact, Heron (2002) called it whole person learning and held that the spiritual is present in every part of life. Palmer (1998a) also maintained that “To teach whole person to the whole person is not to lose one’s professionalism as a teacher but to take it to a deeper level” (p. 10). Miller (2005) affirmed that

when educators adopt the perspective of cultivating the whole person, it is part of holistic education and “the defining aspect of holistic education is the spiritual” (p.2). According to Miller and his colleagues (2014), spirituality has been largely ignored in education in our culture. The focus instead has been on the development of mental abilities. Yet, as Palmer (1998a) so clearly remarked, when a teacher enters the classroom, she takes her spirituality with her. Neglecting that aspect of the teacher would result in fragmentation (Palmer, 1998b). Instead, Palmer (1998a) illumined us on the importance of spirituality that is in essence, “at the heart of every subject we teach, where it waits to be brought forth” (p. 8). Therefore, I believe that a holistic approach is very important to understanding Montessori education. As teachers teach in teams, they engage all dimensions of themselves, including the spiritual, whether or not they are intentionally doing so.

In this thesis, I explored spirituality and Montessori team teaching. In order to do so, in Chapter One I present my personal background to explain why I became interested in spirituality and team teaching with Montessori teachers. In the purpose and background sections I outline what team teaching is and how it is portrayed in a Montessori classroom. In order to situate spirituality and the Montessori approach, I include a section on spiritual concepts of the Montessori Method, and definitions of spirituality drawn from the adult education literature. The Montessori philosophy is a term that Montessorians frequently use to denote the way that Maria Montessori looked at the nature of the child, the freedom of the child, the education of the child, and the relationship between the adult and the child. The Montessori Method, on the other hand, sometimes means the educational method that Maria Montessori developed to put into practice

her philosophy (Polk Lillard, 1972). For the purposes of this research study, I will use the term Montessori Method to refer to all of the above. The field of adult education has a well-developed understanding of spirituality and learning that I draw from to illuminate the topic of spirituality and Montessori teacher teams. I then present my research questions to provide focus for my research study. I end with the significance of the study.

My Personal Background

Over the years as I have become more mindful of my spiritual development, I have attempted to bring a spiritual outlook to the tasks I perform within my family, in my studies, and in the workplace. I agree with Vogel (2000) that everyday activities such as “baking bread, bathing babies, and mowing yards can be spiritual acts” (p.20). Hence, I feel that the more I live in the present and endow each action with a sense of the sacred, the more I live an undivided life (Palmer, 1998b, 2004). That is, I am more than my rational mind, though this was often the emphasis in my schooling. Virginia Griffin (2001) likened this emphasis on the rational to playing the guitar on one string. Her metaphor of a whole person is one who plays all the strings of the guitar. She described one of the strings, spirituality, as an “awareness, wonder, deep sense of awe of the present, and the potential of persons or nature” (Griffin, 2001, p. 124). Griffin also spoke about interconnectedness and the vision that one has of oneself, including one’s purpose in life. The vision that I have of myself is one of wholeness, where I compassionately interact with the world to fulfill my mission in life. I consider my spiritual aspect to be vital to fulfilling my life’s purpose.

As I was moving forward on my journey towards wholeness in life, my child was born, and my heart expanded with love for him. I placed him at the center of my life. When he was young, I became curious about what the best learning opportunities could be for him. I had heard about the Montessori Method from friends, however, I had only a fleeting understanding of what that entailed. Experiencing a number of events in my life that can best be understood as synchronicity (Jaworski, 2011), I began to work in the after-school program at Spring Valley Montessori School, in Federal Way, Washington. This was a novel experience for me and I enjoyed interacting with the enthusiastic and joyful children. To my surprise, one day, the director of the school came to me suggesting that I enroll in their Montessori teacher training course. I had one week to decide whether or not to register. Looking back, I realize that I made my decision in a manner that resonated with Maria Montessori's advice to a young teacher, "To collect one's forces, even when they seem to be scattered, and when one's aim is only dimly perceived-this is a great action and will sooner or later bring forth fruits" (Standing, 1984, p. 30). Within me, the director's words were so compelling that I decided to sign up. This decision changed my life.

Within a short time, I was filled with an immense gratitude to the mysterious forces behind my decision to take the training. I was surrounded by Montessorians who deeply loved the work of Maria Montessori, and I began to discern that I was, what Maria Montessori referred to, as picking up "dropped stitches," from my childhood. Practicing with the Montessori materials inspired me to know more about myself, as well as the development of the child. Increasingly, I found myself filled with the Montessori spirit. I was transformed. I became

excited about the prospect of presenting the material to the children, even in subject areas where I had lost enthusiasm as I was growing up.

My Montessori instructor, Madeleine Justus, inspired me greatly. Recipient of many honors and awards during her seventy years of working with children, training teachers, and lecturing internationally (“Madeleine Joan Justus,” 2016), she was a founding member of MACTE (Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education). MACTE is the “international standard setting and accrediting body for Montessori teacher education” (What is MACTE, 2015). Mrs. Justus took her Montessori training from a close associate of Maria Montessori, in Europe. What was of great interest was that she met Maria Montessori in 1937, at a League of Nations International Congress in Zurich, and the “usually reserved Dr. Montessori kissed her, pregnant at the time with her daughter Marta” (“Madeleine Joan Justus,” 2016). Mrs. Justus moved to the United States with her family and established the first private Montessori School in the Northwest of the United States, in 1951. As she was teaching, she carried the flame of Montessori to us. Little by little I took on the Montessori way of thinking, and when I was ready to go out into the world, as Mrs. Justus had done, to offer my own contribution to the Montessori field, I felt prepared. I did not realize then, that the Montessori Method would have an influence on me for the rest of my life, in how I raised my child, how I would pursue my studies, and how I would eventually extend my knowledge of the Montessori Method into other areas of my life.

Immediately after obtaining my Montessori diploma, I opened up my own Montessori school in my home. My training was so thorough that I knew how to set up a school, how to

make material, and how to teach children from 2 ½ to 6 years old. I purposefully taught art, music, virtues, songs and poetry, along with the Montessori avenues, as part of the holistic approach I had gained knowledge in. Every day, the children were overflowing with joy and enthusiasm. Their parents would recount to me how the children would be journeying home after school in the car, singing their favorite inspirational songs that they had learned during school. I decided that I would explore the kind of learning that was taking place in my Montessori classroom, at a higher level in education. Therefore, when my son entered grade one, I resumed my journey of the heart in studying to obtain a Master of Education in Educational Psychology. The program motivated me to understand learning at a profounder level, and intrigued me to pose stimulating questions which still remain unanswered for me today. Additionally, my studies in Educational Psychology opened the door for me to develop a life-long passion in adult and childhood learning.

Six years ago, my interest in spirituality and Montessori education peaked, when I was team teaching in a Montessori school. Influenced by some thought-provoking educational presentations the year before, I decided I would leave behind a legacy for others, in the field that I was working in. I determined that I would explicitly discuss spiritual concepts of the Montessori Method with my team, that was a new thrust forward in our professional development. This decision stemmed from my motivation to bring greater meaning and purpose to my teaching. As I look back, I can chart my course of entering into the stage of generativity that Erikson discussed in his psychosocial development model (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007): because of my desire to leave behind a legacy, I was open to seeing what

would happen next in my life. Unexpectedly, I came face to face with the spiritual essence of Montessori's work.

To elaborate, six years ago, in the summer, I listened to a compelling presentation on the spiritual preparation of the Montessori teacher. The speaker reminded us that Maria Montessori asked teachers to work on habits that would interfere with the teacher's cultivation of a positive relationship with the child. Specifically, she asked that they work on anger and pride and replace them with humility and patience. I had always thought that qualities such as humility and patience were part of our spiritual selves and hearing Maria Montessori's words strengthened my resolve. I was very enthused with this knowledge.

Consequently, in September, with the start of the new school year, I discussed the highlights of this presentation with my Montessori assistants. We made an agreement to put every effort into remaining calm and patient with the children, and to support each other in doing so. In order to fulfill our commitment, we came up with different strategies to help each other. Among these plans was to increase our awareness of the tension in our bodies, of shallow breathing, of rapid beating heart, and other physical signs that we were experiencing a rising level of irritation and even, anger. When we paid attention to these clues, we would stop what we were doing with a child and go immediately to the other teacher to ask for assistance, so that we would regain our sense of peace with the children. We also tried to speak respectfully, kindly, and gently to everyone. It was a tall order. Yet, with time, we were fortifying our teamwork by relying on each other to handle disagreements and other challenging situations within the

classroom. We were practicing humility, admitting to each other that we could not do it alone. Together, we also became more willing to collaborate, thus strengthening our teamwork.

Re-reading a number of Maria Montessori's books at this time, I had a renewed sense of inspiration about the special relationship that can develop between the adult and the child, and between the teacher and the child. This relationship is based on love for the child. Speaking generally about adults, Montessori (1995) instructed us that, "Whatever be our political or religious affiliations, we are all near to the child and we all love him. It is from this love that comes the child's power for unity" (p.288). Likewise, she emphasized the importance of this love among all people: "Love, like that which we feel for the child, must exist potentially between man and man, because human unity does exist and there is no unity without love" (p. 289). In order to clarify further this quality of love among people, Montessori (1995) stipulated, "This force that we call love is the greatest energy of the universe. But I am using an inadequate expression, for it is more than energy: it is creation itself" (p. 290).

Describing a facet of a teacher's love for the child, Montessori (1989a) offered an example that one would not usually think about in the teacher-child relationship. Addressing how a child's "deviations", which refers to what we would call misbehaviors today, disappear when he begins to concentrate on some work that he has chosen on his own, Montessori explained the role of love:

Nothing matters while the children are still deviated. Everything will correct itself after concentration has come. We may use any means we have to attract the children's attention. Their attention is attracted through activity. Give them activity, attract them

through sweetness. This can also be a method of love because we know what we are aiming at. We know that this energy exists inside the children and urges them on to do exercises which are necessary for their development. It is nature which brings the children to the point of concentration, not you. (p. 17)

Being essentially spiritual in nature, in this relationship the teacher respects the inner spiritual forces within the child that are guiding her to learn. Montessori called these inner forces “the inner teacher” (Montessori, 1989b). More on this topic will be presented in the literature review in Chapter Two. This concept truly inspired me and I surmised that if a child is born with an inner teacher, then this inner teacher is still within us as adults. I contemplated what the relationship with this inner teacher could mean for the teachers. Therefore, in my classroom, as a team, we decided we would develop the relationship with our own inner teacher day upon day, as this inner teacher guided us in our interactions. Consequently, we began to listen to that little voice within that prompted us when to speak and when to be silent, when to intervene and when to observe, when to help out, and when to let the other teacher or the children do it alone. Trust in ourselves and in each other increased.

In addition to adopting these practices, I also applied Maria Montessori’s approach to learning that recognized the importance of the whole child. I asked the teachers that I taught with to work with me to focus on the spiritual aspect of the children. The teachers on my team agreed to try, and we began to teach the children virtues such as patience, kindness, respect, and cooperation. During circle time, we would introduce a virtue, give examples and do roleplaying so that the children would understand what embodying the virtue could look like. During work

time, which is the time of the day when children work independently on material they have freely chosen, when we would see a child exhibiting a particular virtue, we would name it and express our encouragement to the child.

At the same time, as the lead teacher (responsible for the functioning of the classroom) I coached my assistants to become stronger team members. I gave them a lot of autonomy in which to take initiative and to be creative. Day after day, we were committed to supporting the best in each other. We agreed that we would bring up any grievances we might have with each other by the end of each day in order to bring peace to our relationships. The integrative perspective that Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner (2007) elaborated upon helps me to understand now what was happening then in the classroom: an ongoing process that was reciprocal in nature, where we were interacting with all those who were part of the environment for learning. Moreover, the more I developed my leadership skills, the more I became intrigued with what was behind the peaceful environment in my classroom.

Over time, I marveled at how bringing the topic of spirituality into our work seemed to have made a difference in the way in which we worked together. Yet, we did not directly probe into our perceptions of spirituality, nor how it influenced our work. We also did not converse much about our communications with each other in the classroom. These points, among others, eventually motivated me to undertake my PhD, a few years later.

About five years ago, I brought all of these reflections on team teaching to a new Montessori classroom. One of the actions that led to this new position was my initiative in launching get-togethers with another lead teacher over a period of many months. We discussed

in detail several topics dear to our hearts, such as how Montessori approached the development of the whole child, how teachers could better themselves, how teams could work together harmoniously, and how one could bring spirituality into the classroom. These discussions brought us closer together to think in similar ways about the Montessori Method and its influence on the lives of children. Ultimately, we decided we would like to work together to put into practice what we had so deeply discussed about implementing the Montessori Method. One reason why these discussions had been so transformational for me was because I could observe myself interweaving ideas that had arisen from my other Montessori experiences, and assimilating them into meaningful knowledge. Dominice (2000) discussed the importance of integrating disengaged aspects of our experiences into a more coherent way of life, and I felt, in essence, that I was progressing along this path of integration through the development of my heart.

When I did eventually work with this teacher, I stood more firmly on my beliefs about spirituality and teamwork. This led to new habits. For example, as we would prepare for a day with the children, we often exchanged some spiritual wisdom that we both found inspirational. It raised us to a higher level of consciousness and gave us courage to face whatever the day would bring. My experience teaching in that team often came close to “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Flow is a mental state where 1) goals are clear, 2) feedback is immediate, 3) there is a balance between opportunity and capacity, 4) concentration deepens, 5) the present is what matters, 6) control is no problem, 7) the sense of time is altered and 8) there is a loss of ego (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 42-50). I experienced these features so many times that, as

Csikszentmihalyi contended would happen under these conditions, I became stronger and more confident in fulfilling my responsibilities. Since I experienced this state in a team, it may be that an extension of flow applies here.

Since Csikszentmihalyi (1997) elaborated his theory, other scholars such as Keith Sawyer (2007) have studied how flow can be applied to groups. After studying groups of all kinds, including high performing teams, Sawyer (2007) came up with ten conditions for group flow: 1) the group goal, 2) close listening, 3) complete concentration, 4) being in control, 5) blending egos, 6) equal participation, 7) familiarity, 8) communication, 9) moving it forward, and 10) the potential for failure. These conditions were so intriguing that I became interested in whether any teams within my PhD research study would describe some or all of these conditions as they worked together in the classroom.

The teaching experience mentioned above was the last one before beginning my doctorate. It crystallized for me many of the ideas that I integrated into my research study. Altogether, my teaching experiences have convinced me to think of teaching as an opportunity to co-create knowledge with those with whom I was teaching, as English (2000) suggested. In the process, they propelled me forward into a more complex level of questioning about the role of spirituality and Montessori teaching.

Purpose and Background

As I outline what the purpose of this research study was, I explain how I extended Montessori concepts to Montessori team teaching. The purpose of my research was to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers

brought to their interactions in classroom teams. The Montessori concepts were in the area of the teacher-child relationship and the spiritual preparation of the teacher; concepts explored in more depth in the literature review. I realized that in order to study team interactions in a Montessori classroom, I would have to explore other areas of inquiry, because Montessori did not delve into how to develop a strong team in the classroom. Some Montessorians I spoke to at the onset of the development of my research proposal justified her attention on the adult-child relationship as being the greatest need of the times. Montessori (1972a) perceived her life's work as defending the child, and educating adults to better understand their role in relationship to the child:

In going about his dedicated labors on behalf of the child, the adult must realize above all else that his task concerns a revelation of the child's soul. If he does so, the steps he subsequently takes and the aid he offers the child will be of great importance; if he does not do so, all his work will go for nothing. This work must have a twofold objective: constructing a suitable environment and bringing about a new attitude toward children on the part of adults. (p. 91)

Moreover, Montessori (1972b) claimed, "change must be made in the adult" (p. 15) if the child is to fulfill her true potential. More specifically, she cautioned:

Adults have not understood children or adolescents and they are, in consequence, in continual conflict with them. The remedy is not that adults should gain some new intellectual knowledge or achieve a higher standard of culture. No, they must find a different point of departure. The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from *seeing the child* as he is. If such a

preparation is not made, if the attitudes relative to such a preparation are not acquired, he cannot go further. (p. 15)

Maria Montessori, considered “a citizen of the world,” as indicated on a commemorative plaque in Rome (Wolf, 1996, p. 1), is one of the greatest educators of the twentieth century. She was born in Chiaravalle, Italy in 1870. In 1896, she became the first woman in Italy to become a physician. For many years, she worked with children with developmental disorders as part of her duties stemming from her appointment to the Psychiatric Clinic in the University of Rome. Basing her approach of the education of the senses of the child on the work of Froebel, Itard, and Seguin (Montessori, 1972b), Montessori developed unique materials for the children to use. She came to believe that, with a special educational program, their learning could be immensely ameliorated and, indeed, it was. During the ten years after her graduation, Montessori was also involved in her private practice, with hospitals around Rome, in her lectureships at different women colleges, and eventually, with her Professorship in Anthropology. Later in years, Montessori would comment how her life, in its entirety, was an example of her principle that “the preparations of life are indirect” (Standing, 1984, p. 26), and that one must be “obedient to events” (p. 31). As her biographer, Standing (1984) became acquainted with Maria Montessori in 1921, and continued to be in contact with her up to her passing in 1952, collaborating with her in writing articles, teaching in schools, and assisting her in the teacher training. He reflected on how Montessori’s first part of her career built the foundation for her later work with children. Following is a classic example of her life’s mission.

One day a building society in the slum area of San Lorenzo in Rome approached Maria Montessori to open a school for children, between the ages of three to six, who were abandoned during the day while their illiterate parents worked. Montessori (1972b) described the fifty children: “They were tearful, frightened children, so timid that I could not get them to speak. Their faces were expressionless, their eyes bewildered as if they had never seen anything before in their lives...They were like buds that seemed never destined to bloom” (p. 115). Nevertheless, she was gratified to finally try out her method with “normal children.”

Montessori opened the first “Casa dei bambini,” translated as “Children’s House,” on January 6, 1907 (Montessori, 1972b). On opening day, Montessori (1972b) had an intuitive feeling: “For some undefinable reason I felt that a great work was about to begin and that it would prosper” (p. 113). As yet, Montessori had no “special system of instruction” (p. 113), beyond the “objects” she had successfully used with the children who were developmentally delayed. Within a few months observing these children in the classroom, she was surprised at what she was witnessing: “I was like Aladdin with the lamp in his hands, not knowing that it was the key to hidden treasures” (p. 114). She and her teacher were incredulous and “remained for a long time in disbelief” (p. 115). The children’s negative characteristics disappeared and Montessori saw for the first time “the true spirit within the child” (Wolf, 1996, p. 28).

Montessori observed the following startlingly changes in the children. The children placed their whole attention on the material and worked with “a remarkable state of concentration” (Montessori, 1972b, p. 114). Afterwards, they appeared to be “satisfied, rested, and happy,” with “eyes gleaming,” and their efforts left them “mentally stronger and healthier

than before” (p. 114). Montessori acknowledged that it was the children themselves who had shown their true selves to her.

What led to this surprising transformation in the children? Montessori (1972b) construed that her classroom had removed the obstacles to the children’s spiritual development: “A child’s soul freed from impediments was seen acting according to its own nature” (p. 136). Previously, they had lived in situations where their spirituality could not express itself (Wolf, 1996). Additionally, the teacher, who was the porter’s daughter, had no teacher training that, according to Montessori would have prejudiced her against the children. She was calm, humble and remained open to Montessori’s (1972b) guidance, without preconceptions: “This calm consists in a spiritual humility and intellectual purity necessary for the understanding of a child, and which, as a consequence, must be found in a teacher” (p. 137). Additionally, the children were given special material to work with that taught them more than what verbal instruction could have. Furthermore, Montessori had no funds to purchase furniture, so they made child-sized furniture so that the children could work with the material whenever they wanted to.

Montessori’s interventions, at that time, were “anything but scientific” (Montessori, 1972b, p. 118); however, what someone else may have considered insignificant, Montessori deemed important. For example, she noticed that the children would repeat an exercise many times over, for no apparent external reason, before they would be finished working with the material, at an age when adults expected children to have a very short attention span. During this time, they demonstrated the ability to concentrate deeply on their work. Another example was the children following the teacher who would put the materials back in their proper places.

Contrary to the teacher's thinking that they were being disobedient by not staying in their places, Montessori realized that the children had a love for order: they wanted to put the material back in their proper places themselves. This, in turn, led to the astounding discovery that the children could choose their own material according to their own individual interests. Therefore, the principle of free choice was added to the principles of repetition of the exercise, and concentration, that gave her insights into "the unexplored depths of the child's mind" (Montessori, 1972b, p. 119).

Other discoveries included that the children preferred to work with the material, rather than play with toys. They were oblivious to rewards and punishments. They loved silence. When Montessori decided to teach them the delicate art of blowing their nose, an action that adults usually criticized and humiliated the child about, the children broke out in applause. Montessori (1972b) surmised, "children have a deep sense of personal dignity" (p. 126), and "later on the inculcation of this respect for their personal dignity-of even the smallest child-became one of the most prominent elements in the training of her teachers" (Standing, 1984, p. 47).

To return to the reason why this Casa dei Bambini was opened in the first place, because the children were disorderly and undisciplined, defacing the walls of the buildings when they were left alone, the next occurrence seems extraordinary. As the weeks passed by and the children became used to their new surroundings, they developed self-discipline that came from within. Moving around the classroom in a quiet and orderly manner, they selected their work, putting it back on the shelves after they finished, without disturbing their peers. The children had become spontaneously independent, kind, and joyful. A distinct understanding of the child

ensued from Montessori's (1989a) observations about their behavior and interactions at this time, and years later she was to come back to this foundational comprehension about the child that became the fabric of classrooms everywhere:

Freedom and discipline come together. This was a discovery because they are thought to be opposite things. Instead we find that there is no freedom without discipline. Freedom and discipline are a harmonious combination. They are strictly connected one with the other. After a time, the teacher understands that if there is a lack of discipline she must be making a mistake. The children are not having sufficient freedom. So, discipline controls the errors of freedom. If we give perfect freedom we get perfect discipline. (p. 23)

Eventually, in the first Casa dei Bambini, there were a series of other dramatic surprises. Within seven months, the four and five year old children "burst spontaneously into writing" without anyone teaching them (Standing, 1984, p. 47). "This was the greatest event to take place in the first Children's Home," stated Montessori (1972b, p. 131). Their ability to read followed soon after.

Hearing about the changes in the children, visitors began to come to the school. Montessori portrayed the children as they welcomed the visitors as "alert, active and always composed, radiating a spiritual warmth that cheered the hearts of the adults who came in contact with them" (Montessori, 1972b, p. 128). Using an inspiring metaphor, Montessori described the children in this way: "Their lives were unfolding naturally like the lotus that spreads out its white petals to receive the rays of the sun as it sends forth a fragrant odor" (p. 128). The children

exhibited calm and peace, and when a second school opened in Rome shortly afterwards, this time for orphans from a tragic earthquake in Messina, the children eventually began to learn and become composed like those in the first school.

Describing Montessori's spiritual transformation during this period of time, in 1961, Montessori's son, Mario Montessori gave a lecture in London opening with this statement, "the child is already the essence of spirituality" (Wolf, 1996, p. 27). He continued his remarks by declaring that "it was this realization of this spirituality which so overwhelmed his mother that she left everything else she had done previously in order to follow the child" (Wolf, 1996, p. 27). Montessori gave up all her occupations as physician, lecturer, and researcher, and focused entirely on the education of children. Royalties from her books, invitations to lecture, and training courses provided her with the means to replace the income from her physician's work and her other occupations.

Within two years of the first school opening, the wonders of what the children were doing had spread around the world. Visitors from the royal family downwards in Italy, as well as those from all walks of life, including dignitaries from other countries, came to see the children and her classroom. Upon receiving them, Montessori expressed their reactions to what they observed, "Each visitor seemed to find there the embodiment of his own ideals" (Standing, 1984, p. 56). As time went on, articles on the Children's Houses appeared in well-known magazines, such as *McClure's Magazine* in the United States. McClure himself invited Montessori in 1914 to give a course in America, and she accepted, becoming the guest in the family of Thomas Edison. Shortly afterwards, Alexander Graham Bell formed the American Montessori Society, with

Margaret Wilson, daughter of the President Wilson of the United States, as honorary secretary (Standing, 1984). In 1912, Bell had established the first Montessori school in Canada at his home in Baddeck, Nova Scotia where his family spent the summers, with Roberta Fletcher who had studied with Maria Montessori in Rome (History of Montessori in Canada, 2012). However, the Montessori movement in America took a downward turn in the 1920s, due to the misguided statements of William Kirkpatrick, a student of John Dewey (Jeynes, 2007). It was revived in 1960 by Dr. Nancy McCormick Rambusch who worked closely with Mario Montessori, the son of Maria Montessori (The American revival, 2017) to continue his mother's work in America.

In the meantime, people from as far away as Australia, Chile, South Africa, and the Philippines (Montessori Australia Foundation Limited, n.d.) came to Montessori's training courses and were inspired to set up Montessori Societies and schools of their own (Standing, 1984). Montessori (1972b) commented on the experiences of these schools around the world:

The extraordinary rapidity with which this system of education has been adopted for children of every race and every social condition has provided us with an abundance of experimental data and enabled us to identify common features and universal tendencies and thus to determine the natural laws upon which the education of children should be based. (p. 140)

Maria Montessori's name became world known. She was invited to speak and to conduct training courses throughout the world. In the ensuing years, Montessori journeyed to France, Holland, Germany, Spain, England, Austria, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the United States, Argentina, Norway and Sweden. In India, she was training over three hundred teachers from all

over the country when World War II broke out. Being Italian, she and her son were considered enemy aliens by the British government, and they were not allowed to travel internationally during the War. However, Montessori was allowed to continue to train in many cities in India, Kashmir and Sri Lanka during those seven years, until they were finally allowed to return to Europe in 1946.

During her stay in India, she was inspired to develop the major parts of her cosmic plan curriculum for elementary students that she started in the 1930's. In a book she wrote in India about cosmic education, *To educate the human potential*, Montessori (1989d) stated: "If the idea of the universe would be presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder" (p. 6). As the child would learn that all life is interconnected, she would, according to Montessori (1989d), begin to ask spiritual questions such as "What am I? What is the task of man in this wonderful universe? Do we merely live here for ourselves, or is there something more for us to do? Why do we struggle and fight? What is good and evil?" (p.6). These questions would indicate that the child is on a spiritual quest. In referring to cosmic education, Wolf (1996) emphasized: "the most significant spiritual benefit of cosmic education is that it gives both children and adults a sense of purpose in their lives," (p. 95), as well as a sense of meaning to their involvement with the cosmos, to fulfill their destiny. Some scholars believed that Montessori's worldview was influenced by her experiences in India; others stated, "Montessori's spirituality was universalist throughout most of her career" (Miller, 2002, p. 231).

Throughout her lifetime of work, Montessori published many books, gave lectures, trained thousands of teachers, and began a worldwide movement. She was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1949, 1950, and 1951. She passed away in 1952, as she was considering a lecture tour in Africa, with a strong reputation as scholar, researcher, educator, and internationally known advocate of women's rights (Miller, 2002).

I am interested in spirituality and Montessori teacher teams because behind all her educational efforts, Maria Montessori was trying to improve humanity by discovering the true nature of the child (Montessori, 1972a, 1989a, 1995). This, she believed, would lead to greater peace in the world. After many years of observing and working with children, Montessori (1989b) came to the conclusion: "The child is endowed with an inner power which can guide us to a more enlightened future. Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities" (p. 1). From Montessori's viewpoint, I understand that this inner power is of a spiritual nature. Montessori believed that the child has a soul (Montessori, 1989c), spirit (Montessori, 1972b, 1995) and an inner teacher (Montessori, 1989b, 1989c, 1995) that guides the child in his development. Regarding this last point, the spiritual aspect of the child that Montessori (1989c) referred to as the inner teacher, the following statement illuminates this profound thinking:

Hence a prejudice has found its way into the adult-the notion that the life of the child can be changed or improved only through teaching. This prejudice impedes the understanding of the fact that the child constructs himself, that he has a *teacher* within himself and that this inner teacher also follows a programme and a

technique of education, and that we adults by acknowledging this unknown teacher may enjoy the privilege and good fortune of becoming its assistants and faithful servants by helping it with our co-operation. (p. 46)

Lastly, indicating that education was, for Montessori (1989a), a spiritual endeavor on the part of everyone involved in the child's life, she imparted this wisdom; "The secret of education is to recognize and observe the divine in man; that is to know, love and serve the divine in man" (p. 99).

Wolf (1996) pointed out that Montessori's writings about the spiritual nature of the child are central to her educational works. Though she did not define the terms in a detailed way (Formankova, 2007), it may be that when Montessori talked about the soul, it was synonymous with the psyche and included needs such as having a sense of belongingness, feeling secure, feeling loved, and feeling respected (Wolf, 1996). The spiritual needs of the child would then include finding meaning and purpose in life, knowing why it is better to act in one way instead of another way, and to have the desire to connect to something beyond himself. Montessori experimented with the preparation of an educational environment, which instead of adding the spiritual principles to the nature of the child, revealed what was already in the child. According to Wolf (1996), the role of teachers "becomes easier when we realize that we do not have to instill spirituality in a child, we have only to protect it from being trampled and to nourish its spiritual growth" (p. 29).

In turning to the preparation of the Montessori teacher, Montessori encouraged teachers to study one's self. As part of her teacher training, Montessori urged teachers to reflect on how

their attributes either created obstacles or enriched their relationships with children. Though Montessori did not mention how her suggestions would assist teacher teams, I would like to propose that if a teacher were working on her spiritual development, she would become more mindful of the impact of her behavior on the other teachers, and would try to internalize the most positive qualities in those relationships. Miller (2002) indicated that the “spiritual renewal of humanity” (p.229) was part of Montessori’s vision. In starting with the spiritual renewal of teachers, one can envision them as role models for the children to become peaceful adults, by being peaceful themselves in their teacher teams.

In order to further illuminate the reader’s understanding of spirituality and Montessori teacher teams, I turn to the field of adult education where spirituality is a well-developed area (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). In particular, I explore some definitions of spirituality in this field. I elaborate further on these dimensions in the literature review.

To begin with, Tisdell (2003, 2008) defined spirituality in terms of a relationship between an individual and a higher power, as moving along on a path towards wholeness, and as an interconnectedness of all things. Examples of a higher power were: God, Buddha, Jesus, or Nature (Tisdell, 2003). English (2012) mentioned that spirituality concerns a search for meaning and is also about a connection with a “divine being” that leads an individual to desire to live in a rightful manner and to bring about social justice (p.28). Groen (2012) also emphasized the importance of meaning-making, of wholeness, of a relationship with a higher power and of social justice. Another author in the education field, Parker Palmer (1998b), regarded spirituality as “the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and

work” (p.5). For this research study, I contend that spirituality has the following dimensions: a connection with a higher power, a pursuit of meaning and purpose in life, a search for wholeness, and an interconnectedness with all people, nature and the universe. Developing certain key spiritual qualities, such as kindness, love and trust in a higher power, helps one’s spiritual development to continue throughout life.

At the same time, I would like to clarify that many people use the terms spirituality and religion interchangeably. However, in adult education literature (Tisdell, 2008), there are distinctions between the two, as well as some overlap. First, the dimensions of spirituality alluded to in the preceding paragraph are frequently mentioned by participants in studies (Groen, 2004b; Tisdell, 2003). Religion, on the other hand, is seen as “an organized community of faith with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behaviour” (Tisdell, 2008, p.28). Since many people grew up in a particular religion, whether or not they still continue to practice that religion as adults, the religion has become part of the foundation of their lives. Therefore, the religion will continue to influence their experiences of spirituality as they journey through life. Religion can provide direction in how a person leads one’s life spiritually. The prayers, rituals and music may have led people to have spiritual experiences that they may have considered to be sacred. In this case, it is difficult to separate spirituality from religion.

Turning to the topic of team teaching, and considering what term to use for teachers teaching together in a Montessori classroom, I have come to realize that there are multiple terms in vogue. For example, Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004) began by examining what co-teaching is. They pointed out that it consists of two or more people “sharing responsibility for teaching

some or all of the students assigned to a classroom” (p.3). The responsibilities for planning, instruction, and evaluation are shared among the teachers. Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004) maintained that there are four different kinds of co-teaching: supportive teaching, parallel teaching, complementary teaching and team teaching. I will explore each one briefly.

Supportive teaching (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2004) occurs when there is one teacher who teaches the lesson while the other plays a supportive role, and circulates in the classroom to give one-to-one help. Parallel teaching takes place when two or more people divide the classroom into groups and work with the students, sometimes on a rotational basis.

Complementary teaching occurs when one teacher augments what the other teacher is teaching and plays a more active role than in the other two approaches to co-teaching. In team teaching, teachers take turns teaching the lesson and supporting the other teacher. They take responsibility for all the students, including planning and assessing.

I retained the term team teaching, as described above with Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004), as the closest description of what happens with teachers in a Montessori classroom. However, there are differences. In a Montessori classroom, instead of the word “teach,” one uses the term “present.” A teacher presents a lesson on a one-to-one basis, or to a small group. In the meantime, the other teacher will be presenting an entirely different lesson to another child, or group of children. The other children will be working independently. One teacher may take more responsibility for keeping records of the children’s progress, since there is no assessment as is traditionally understood, in the Montessori early childhood classroom. All the teachers are

responsible for maintaining classroom management. One teacher may take the lead in planning for the classroom and interacting with the parents, while the other teachers take a supportive role. I now turn to a discussion on Montessori team teaching.

Interestingly enough, though it is very common today for Montessori teachers to be team teaching, Maria Montessori did not mention anything about the relationship that exists between teachers teaching together in the same classroom. Nor did she discuss how to teach together as a team. This may be why there is no consensus about what term to use for Montessori teachers teaching together. In conversations with different Montessori organizations, I enquired about what term they used to describe teachers teaching together. Some said team teaching, some said co-teaching, some did not use any term at all. For this research study, I use the term team teaching, since many Montessori classrooms in North America refer to the teachers as a team.

Turning to what happens in a Montessori classroom, I found that there was a lot of research conducted on children's learning in the Montessori classroom. However, I could not find any research conducted in the area of Montessori teachers teaching together in the classroom. Moreover, from a holistic point of view, the spiritual dimensions of team teaching in a Montessori classroom were largely unknown. In communications with the leadership of well-known Montessori organizations, such as the North American Montessori Teacher's Association (NAMTA), the Association Montessori International (AMI), the American Montessori Society (AMS), and the Montessori Foundation, as well as prominent people in the Montessori field, I explored what research existed for my study. They all confirmed that within their knowledge, spirituality and Montessori team teaching was an interesting topic that had not been studied to

date. Therefore, I cast my net widely to gather up the wisdom from these organizations in the Montessori field to study a phenomenon that has been close to my heart for many years: the strength of the Montessori team in the early childhood classroom. In doing so, I hoped that I would contribute valuable discoveries from my study that would inform the field of Montessori teaching in particular, and teams in general.

Research Questions

My overarching guiding research purpose was to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers brought to their interactions in classroom teams. In turn, the following questions guided my research study on spirituality and Montessori teacher teams:

- 1) What understandings and perceptions, with a particular emphasis on spirituality, inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 2) Does a spiritual foundation actually inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 3) If a spiritual foundation does inform their practice, how do their perceptions of the spiritual nature of their role influence the verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?
- 4) If spirituality doesn't inform their perceptions, what is it that informs their perceptions of verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?

Assumptions

In proposing this study, I made several assumptions. One was that team teaching is an approach that benefits the teachers. Through team teaching, they have the potential to grow and develop their personal and professional qualities. I also assumed that teachers want to be part of

a well-functioning team, where there is satisfaction of working together. Moreover, I assumed that each teacher has a spiritual aspect that is engaged in teamwork, whether or not the teacher was aware of it. This spiritual aspect makes a unique contribution to how the teachers relate to each other. Their relations with each other would depend on their training, their understanding of their roles in the classroom, their experience, their agreed upon goals, and the extent to which they taught in complementary ways, to name a few possibilities.

Significance

In the Montessori field, there appears to be an under-appreciation of spirituality in general and in team teaching more specifically. In other words, there is a gap in the research. I have been unable to locate any studies on the research focus that I have chosen: spirituality and Montessori teacher teams. Indeed, even Maria Montessori herself had not spoken about this topic. Yet, I believe that spirituality is essential to understanding the Montessori Method and teamwork. Therefore, I also believe that many Montessori teachers are teaching without a clear theoretical framework that Maria Montessori passed on to teachers in her training courses, and there is often little extension of the teacher-child relationship to the teacher-teacher relationship. Hence, one wonders what teachers are learning about their relationships in the classroom during their training, if it does not include spirituality. It is possible that this omission has an impact on how they are teaching and interacting with other teachers.

In fact, Aline Wolf (1996), well-known writer and lecturer who opened the first Montessori school in Pennsylvania in the 1960's, when there was a renewed interest in the Montessori Method, belated this situation. By 1996, Montessori training centers had shortened

training courses. The reduced time spent learning about how to become a Montessori teacher in the spirit of Montessori herself, because of time, financial and other constraints, affected their spiritual preparation as Montessori teacher. They were not as well prepared to undertake the responsibilities laid out earlier in this chapter of supporting the child's development. Keeping in mind this reality, I considered my research study to be important since it sheds light on how spirituality could have an impact on the Montessori teacher team, if the teachers would focus on it more intentionally.

Summary

This chapter presented the main elements that were included in the research study. The personal background explained why this topic is of interest to me and what experiences I brought to the study. The purpose and background situated the study and provided the definitions of key terms. The four research questions structured the remainder of the study.

In the literature review in Chapter Two, I included Maria Montessori's teaching about the spiritual preparation of the teacher and the teacher-child relationship. Since Maria Montessori did not talk about team teaching, I extended what she said about these two concepts to consider the implications for team teaching. Next, since extending her ideas was not enough to fully discuss spirituality and team teaching, I supplemented the literature review to consider topics across the Montessori Method, spirituality, and adult education. Again, I drew on adult education literature because I was examining how teachers are learners in the classroom, and linked that concept to the discussion of spirituality. I also drew on the literature on relational learning and how it aligned with spirituality and team teaching. Lastly, I explored some definitions of teams,

as well as characteristics of high performing teams, and how they related to the Montessori teacher team. This provided background that helped me to understand what the Montessori teachers were experiencing in their teams in my research study.

In Chapter Three, I introduced my methodology, which was a basic interpretive qualitative study. My focus was on the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings of Montessori early childhood teachers as they interacted and communicated in their teams. Using purposive sampling, I recruited five teachers who were teaching in teams in a private Montessori school. Through triangulation, with a questionnaire, teacher observations, artifacts, interviews, and member checks, I was able to discern what spirituality and teamwork meant to the participants.

The fourth chapter presented the findings from my analysis of the data, guided, in particular, by approaches outlined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), Merriam (2009), Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), and Patton (2016). The findings surprised me in some instances and I identified which ones they were. The interpretations in Chapter Five were derived from immersing myself in the findings, listening to them speak to me, and then taking the courage to mention what at first appeared to be implausible probabilities about what was happening in the teams. These led me to reflect deeply on the journey of the heart, the team in the twenty-first century, and the influence of the Montessori Method in other organizations and teams. I placed those reflections with thought, in the sixth chapter.

Chapter 2 Literature Review: Illumining the Heart

Introduction

To begin this literature review, I will present a vignette of my work in a Montessori early childhood classroom with a team teacher, to illustrate the kinds of activities children engage in during work time, and some of the ways in which I interact with my team teacher. I am providing this vignette in order to help the reader understand the complex dynamics that go on in the Montessori classroom. I will then examine Maria Montessori's perspective on the spiritual preparation of the teacher and the teacher-child relationship, central concepts that I am extending to teams in this research study. This discussion will prepare the chalice for me to illuminate what is going on in the vignette by drawing on key concepts and principles that inform a Montessori approach to teaching and learning. Finally, I will conclude the literature review by exploring the following topics: the Montessori Method, Spirituality and Adult Education, Relational Learning, and Teams, because they inform my research proposal.

Vignette

My assistant is happily presenting a lesson on the sensorial material, the broad stair, to a three-year-old child, as they both sit by a mat on the carpet. As a team, we had decided at the beginning of the school year that we would take turns giving presentations to the children, while the other teacher would observe the classroom, and help solve any problems that may arise. We are each doing what we agreed upon. I am standing at one side of the Montessori preschool classroom, in the middle of work time, watching the classroom. I have a sense of trust that my assistant is doing the most effective work that she can. I know that giving presentations to the

children is very meaningful for her. We both come to work with a sense of purpose in what we do, and consequently, our thoughts, words, and actions are filled with a resolve to offer our very best to the children.

It is three-quarters through the year. The classroom is “normalized,” as Maria Montessori would put it (Montessori, 1995). There is a low hum of children’s voices and a sense of peace in the air. My assistant and I are using kind, pleasant voices to talk to the children. We have practiced this way of talking all year, since we decided to speak to the children with serenity and harmony. We try to be our true selves with the children, that self that is positive, honest and authentic.

The children are independently working with material at child-sized tables, on mats on the carpet, or are walking slowly and purposefully to another area to choose some new work. The shelves in each of the avenues, practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, science and culture, are orderly and filled with material arranged from the concrete to the abstract, and from the simple to the complex.

I smile to myself as I glance around the classroom. It has taken consistent effort and now my team member and I can see the changes that have occurred in the children over the last few months. We have been emphasizing virtues such as kindness, caring, patience, and honesty among the children and have been modeling them for the children, in the way we teachers speak to each other and work together. In turn, the children are patient with each other, respecting other children’s work, and speaking with “an inside voice.” It has been worth the effort to teach the children grace and courtesy, to have them practice following the rules, and to monitor their

progress in learning how to use the materials in each of the avenues in the classroom. In the process, they have developed self-discipline and a respect for each other.

I notice a four-year-old child working on a mat with one of the knobless cylinders. Each material has its purpose, and the purpose of this sensorial material is to do grading by size, to see differences in dimensions, and to have co-ordination of movement. I observe that the child is concentrating on her work and has been repeatedly working with this material for the last few days. I do not disturb her. I spend a moment getting in touch with my inner teacher, and look around to see if there is a child who is ready for a presentation. I place my glance on a child who is putting back a box of pink word cards, along with the movable alphabet. I remember from my notes in his file that he is ready to learn the ten board in mathematics. I go over to him and ask, "I have something to show you. Would you like to come with me? I would like to show you the ten board." The child is eager to learn, and takes my hand. Together we go to the mathematics area in the classroom and take the ten board off the shelf. I go through the steps of the presentation as I was shown in my Montessori training. I show him how to put the material back on the shelf and he decides to take it out by himself to continue working with it. I leave him alone to practice.

I go over to my team member and in a grateful voice, thank her for watching the children while I was giving the presentation. We had not exchanged any words prior to my giving this presentation. After working with each other for many months, looking at what the other teacher was doing was all that we needed to make the decision of what to do next in the classroom. This flexibility in our behavior exists because we have exchanged ideas for some time on how to

better cooperate with each other during work time. I am courageous and confident enough to rely wholeheartedly on my assistant to do what is best, and in turn, she has told me that she also trusts me. She has shown herself to be true to the Montessori Method, as we understand it. We take an interest in how each other is doing throughout the day, and inside of me there is a great sense of peace.

Montessori Method and Spirituality

Before I delve into what this vignette reflects, and what some important principles inherent in Montessori learning are, I will set the scene by presenting a few aspects of Montessori education and spirituality. Throughout the years of her work with children, Maria Montessori “pursued her educational work with a spiritual consciousness verging on mysticism” (Miller, 2002, p. 227). Like many scholars who have been inspired by her discoveries about the nature of the child, Miller (2002) contended that her vision of peace and education (Montessori, 1972a, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c) called for a “complete transformation of virtually all modern assumptions about teaching, learning, childhood, and the very purpose of human existence on this Earth” (p. 227). In summing up her life’s work around the child, education, and peace, Montessori (1972a) wrote in her inspiring manuscript, *Education and Peace*, published in 1949:

The child is richly endowed with powers, sensitivities, and constructive instincts that as yet have neither been recognized nor put to use. In order to develop, he needs much broader opportunities than he has been offered so far. Might not this goal be reached by changing the entire structure of education? Society must fully

recognize the social rights of the child and prepare for him and the adolescent a world capable of ensuring their spiritual development. (p. 31)

Additionally, what can be considered a dramatically different way of looking at the child is Montessori's (1989a) caution directed towards the adult: "Education depends on a belief in the power of the child and on a certainty that the child has within himself the capacity to develop into a being that is far superior to us. He will not only be capable of a better way of living but will be the only person who can show us this" (p. 101). Keeping in mind this truth that is shared by parents, grandparents, and teachers alike, people can better envision their role in supporting the efforts of the child to surpass limitations that may be in his way, in order to fulfill a destiny that is to help the human race "to reach a high level of development" (Montessori, 1972a, p. 41).

What is of particular interest for this literature review are Montessori's ideas focusing on the spiritual preparation of the teacher, in order for the teacher to be better prepared to cultivate the relationship between the teacher and the child, as central features of her approach to education. As I explained in Chapter One, Maria Montessori did not mention team teaching or the relationship between teachers in the classroom; however, these topics are of major importance to my research study. Therefore, I will extend my understanding of her ideas to the team relationship between teachers.

As an aside, Maria Montessori used "he" to refer to the child and to the teacher, as was the tradition at the time she was writing her books. However, in this literature review, I will be alternating between "he" and "she" when talking about the child and the teacher.

The Spiritual Preparation of the Teacher

The training of teachers became an essential aspect of Montessori's work, after the surprising changes that occurred with the children at her first school in San Lorenzo, Rome, in 1906, were publicized world-wide. She began to receive invitations to offer her international training courses that she herself had developed from her own discoveries and observations of the children. These courses were "attended by representatives of as many as thirty to forty different nationalities" (Standing, 1984, p. 74). It is estimated that Montessori personally trained four to five thousand teachers from around the world in her lifetime. Standing (1984) gave an all-inclusive review of the salient points of her training (p. 73-74). The courses had three main components and lasted for six months. In brief, there are:

- 1) Montessori's own lectures on a variety of subjects:
 - a. On the psychological principles that underlie her method, as revealed by the children in her schools.
 - b. The nature and purpose of the materials she developed with her colleagues and the children.
 - c. Practical guidance in managing a Montessori school.
 - d. Philosophy and sociology of the application of her principles in the home and in society, extending to "the cosmic mission of man on earth" and "education as the armament of peace" (Standing, 1984, p. 73). These lectures were given later in Montessori's life.
- 2) Comprehensive study and practice of the "didactic" materials.

- a. Montessori's assistants supervised this component of the training course.
- 3) Visits to recognized Montessori schools:
- a. Each student was required to observe in a Montessori classroom for at least fifty hours. Montessori's rationale for this requirement was that it was the children, more than her lectures and books, which lead one to truly understand what the method is in practice.

By the end of six months, each student was asked to complete a "Book on the Materials," that today is often referred to as albums for each avenue, and pass written and oral exams. Montessori then signed a diploma that allowed the student to open up a Montessori school. After two years of working successfully as a directress, the student's diploma was then endorsed to reflect this achievement. In Chapter One, I briefly mentioned my own training with Mrs. Madeleine Justus. In retrospect, I could see the influence of Maria Montessori on her course, since Mrs. Justus had adequately prepared me to open my own Montessori school after graduation, as she had learned in her own training in Europe at the time of Montessori's development of schools.

Standing (1984) emphasized that, regardless where Montessori gave her courses, the insights and inspirations that these students garnered from Montessori transformed them. They acknowledged that they had learned more than just the principles of teaching children. Standing (1984) attempted to put into language these subtle changes. He described the new teachers as acquiring, "faith, hope and charity; faith in the new vocation they had chosen, a new hope for humanity, and a deeper charity towards the child" (p. 76). As Montessori highlighted throughout her life's work the importance of the spiritual preparation of the teacher, these students

experienced a spiritual awakening about themselves and, in the process, were guided to open up new vistas in their own development. In essence, it was as though an aspect of Montessori herself was transferred to the students and their way of thinking about the child and themselves; consequently, they “were no longer as they were when they first came” (Standing, 1984, p. 76). In a sincere expression of gratitude, at the end of Montessori’s first course in England in 1919, a student, representing the group of those who had attended the training course, revealed a remarkable transformation of the spirit of each one present:

At the conclusion of our course under you, Dr. Montessori, we wish to offer you our heartfelt gratitude for the new hope, the new confidence you have inspired in us, that the teacher’s work is not only the noblest that man can do, but that it can be achieved with a success measured *not only in the true progress and happiness of the children, but of ourselves also.* (Standing, 1984, p. 76)

Interestingly, Standing (1984) pointed out that over time, each new course ended with an expansion in the consciousness of the students, “This consciousness of becoming more and more united in a great and noble cause became stronger as each training course drew to a close” (p. 77). Montessori herself expressed a moving sentiment in reply to the students’ appreciation in another course, “I voyage and you voyage and we unite ourselves together, almost as spiritual pilgrims, to work for the triumph of a principle which does not concern ourselves-but the child for whom we are working, and wish to work” (p. 77). She concluded her remarks in a very touching manner:

...you, young and old, of all nations, races, religions-some of you still seeking a place in the world, others already with honoured names-you all sit, side by side, together and without surprise. We have come together in this way because we have touched a point which is common to all cultures, nations, societies, religions-The Child. (p. 78)

The theme of the spiritual preparation of the Montessori teacher has been taken up by a number of specialists in the Montessori field. One of these was Aline Wolf (1996). She was a pioneer in the revival of Montessori schools in America in the 1960's, and wrote her classic book on nurturing the spirit of the child. She is a well-respected lecturer and writer, and has been instrumental in the transformation of the thinking of parents and teachers around the world towards the understanding of the child. Commenting on her encounters with Montessori teachers over the years, she noticed that she came in contact with teachers who had a peacefulness and inner strength about them. Though they came from a variety of religious backgrounds, their spiritual natures came through in the way in which they worked and communicated with the children. "They reflect humility, sensitivity, responsiveness and a deep respect for nature and for all people," she observed (Wolf, 1996, p.38). There are other qualities attributed to the domain of spirituality, from scholars in the field of education. Dwayne Huebner (1999), a philosopher of education and an authority in curriculum theory whose life's work has spanned over half of the twentieth century, was a mentor to many students who are now leaders in these very fields. He claimed that "openness" and "receptivity" lead a person to experience what is of a spiritual nature, and they are accompanied by other qualities such as "by hope, by patience and

forbearance, by sensitivity to the otherness of the world, and by love” (p. 345). This is because “the spirit dwells in us” (Huebner, 1999, p. 404). Palmer (1993), author of many well received publications in the field of teaching, has called teachers to walk the inner journey of self-knowing, in order to reconnect with the deepest aspects of themselves. He has described qualities such as “humility,” “faith,” and “love” (p.108) that the teacher can exhibit in his teaching. As can be seen by the list of these qualities, there is some overlap among the writers, and qualities that are unique to each one. Nevertheless, altogether, they provide a list of qualities to draw on when considering how spirituality can be observed among teachers.

Respect is another very important quality that Montessori teachers uphold in the classroom with children and adults alike. In the field of adult education, Vella (2000) signaled that respect is essential to learning. In Montessori classrooms, we maintain and teach that everyone needs to respect the other from the moment that one meets her. In the vignette, I tried to demonstrate that my assistant and I were consciously working on cultivating what we called virtues that reflected a respect for all.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, in her teacher training courses and writings, Maria Montessori stressed that Montessori teachers need to learn more than the theoretical use of the Montessori materials (Montessori, 1972b, 1995). Instead, she stated that part of the teacher’s development is the spiritual preparation, where the teacher must study and prepare her inner self. Paula Polk Lillard (1972) is an internationally known authority on Montessori theory and practice and has contributed to the Montessori field for fifty years. In her writings, she elaborated on the importance of a teacher being open to the “process of becoming herself (p. 51), and

“involved in ever striving toward his or her own potential” (p. 78). Like Montessori, Polk Lillard placed great emphasis on the teacher’s development of self-knowledge.

Additionally, Montessori has also advised the teacher to look inside herself and see what others see of her, without having a false image of herself. That is, she must work on her faults and weaknesses that would negatively affect her relations with the children. Standing (1984) placed a great deal of emphasis on this preparation stating that without taking this step, all the other aspects of the training would not be effective. Parker Palmer (1998b) took up this idea when he asked teachers to contemplate who the self is that teaches, and how that selfhood affects how they relate to students and colleagues. Today Montessori training programs often encourage student teachers to become better acquainted with their inner life. Spiritual preparation can support a teacher in dealing with challenging triggers that come up with children, such as described by Seigel and Hartzell (2003). In a collaborative work that creatively combined findings in neurobiology and attachment research, the authors highlighted the importance of fully understanding and learning from one’s childhood experiences. Drawing on these new understandings, they provided a practical approach to help in raising children to have compassion and kindness. Their understandings are very helpful to teachers as well. For example, during and after their training course, the teachers can reflect on how their inner life plays a role when interacting with their team. They may be motivated to change their ways and choose to develop more of those qualities mentioned above in order to work harmoniously together. In the meantime, it takes vigilance for the teacher to work on the two most important weaknesses identified by Montessori: anger and pride. I will examine each one in turn.

First, Montessori (1972b) mentioned that teachers might have a weakness of anger. In its subtlest form, anger can be seen as irritation at what a child does. In its strongest form, it can become tyranny at the child's efforts at expressing himself. Montessori noted that a teacher would usually refrain from expressing anger at another adult, because of social norms. However, he may vent his anger at a child, who does not have the wherewithal to defend himself from such a confrontation. The child may wind up blaming himself and develop feelings of guilt, or may mirror the anger back to the teacher in the form of a tantrum. Montessori (1972b) declared that the antidote for anger for the teacher is patience. Montessori would find an advocate for her concern about anger and other weaknesses in teachers that impede a positive, loving relationship with the child, in the research and writings of David Smith (2014). Focusing extensively on the relationship between the adult and the child in his studies, Smith continued to examine teaching in contemporary times, and received recognition for his inspiring work in the field of curriculum studies and teacher education. In bringing the topic of anger to teachers, David Smith (2014) advised against holding on to grudges or anger for long periods of time. He believed, instead, that it is possible for a teacher to develop a way of caring that is "attuned to a deeper truth of things" (p. 20). In the process, the healing of the roots of this anger could occur. Smith (2014) cautioned the teachers, "To heal the world I must engage in the work of healing myself. To the degree that I heal myself, so will my action in the world be of a healing nature" (p. 28).

To return to the vignette I offered at the outset of this chapter, I would like to point out how the healing balm influenced my assistant and myself to make the commitment to speak to the children with patience. We devised strategies to support each other such as monitoring

changes in our body when we would begin to feel irritated with a child, and immediately seeking out the help of the other teacher to take over a situation with a child, in order to regain a center of peace. We were taking an approach to learning that included the body, the spiritual aspect of ourselves, and the emotions, that Merriam and Kim (2008) referred to as facets of non-Western learning and knowing. In another scholarly work, Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) elaborated on how our Western heritage often focuses on learning through mental processes only, and disregards the whole person “made up of mind, body and spirit” (p. 189). Freiler (2008) explained this kind of learning as embodiment: where the body is being “made more visible as a source of knowledge” (p.44). Through time and practice, we found that it was an effective approach to take.

Another weakness of the teacher is pride (Montessori, 1972b). A teacher may think that she is the one responsible for everything that relates to the child: the child’s intelligence, the child’s good behavior, and the child’s mastery of the environment. However, Montessori cautioned teachers that this would be a form of pride, with the teacher thinking that she has the authority over the child. Instead, Montessori indicated, “True spirituality realizes that even to help can be a source of pride” (Montessori, 1995, p.280). The teacher needs to know when she must intervene to meet the child’s needs and when she must simply let the child work out his challenges alone. Because of the importance of this skill, Chattin-McNichols (1998) challenged teachers to reflect on when to intervene by providing a list of classroom scenarios that they could discuss with their colleagues. These discussions could lead to a diminishing of pride and an increase of the quality of humility in the teacher.

Montessori had some advice to give to a teacher who was determined to eliminate the weaknesses of anger and pride. Specifically, she believed that the more that the teacher has experiences with the children, the better he is situated to improve himself (Montessori, 1972b). However, the teacher needs assistance to make these changes. Siegel and Hartzell (2003) pointed out that this is true for adults in general who desire a deeper understanding of their thoughts and feelings. It is helpful to contemplate Dwayne Huebner's (1999) earnest enquiry: "How can one be supported while one gives up one's old self to become a new self?" (p. 410). Montessori had reflected upon this eventuality and believed that the teacher could benefit immensely from receiving feedback from the teacher trainers, and from the teachers he is working with, concerning his weaknesses. Lillard (2007) was also interested in this topic. Attending a Montessori school herself, between the ages of three and six years old, she knew first hand from her mother, Paula Polk Lillard (1972) cited earlier in Chapter Two, and her own school experiences, the importance of teacher self-knowledge. A world-renowned speaker, researcher and author in the field of developmental psychology and the Montessori Method, Lillard (2007) suggested that the teacher trainers would have been expected to go through the same process of feedback from peers and supervisors, as the teachers they supervise and work with. One approach that these supportive teachers can take is "mirroring" (Palmer, 1998b, p.155) where one can reflect back to the teacher things he may have said or done but may not be aware of. However, a teacher may, at first, have the tendency to deny that he has a particular weakness, and struggle against improving himself. In time, he will come to see that he needs the help of others to overcome this internal battle. In fact, Montessori (1972b) pointed out that teachers with

the same weaknesses would eventually support each other by “finding strength in their union” (p.150). Montessori’s approach to bettering oneself is crucial to team work. The more the team relies on each other for support, the more the teachers will connect and be authentic with each other. I can say that my assistant and I did find strength and comfort in being transparent with each other.

Lastly, there are certain qualities that stem from Montessori’s description of the role of the teacher. One involves allowing the child to exercise his freedom of choice. The child can then learn from the material and acquire increasing independence. For this to happen, it requires on the part of the teacher, a certain aptitude for observation as well as knowledge of the child. In taking this responsibility, the teacher needs to be humble. To be humble, the teacher would position herself in such a way that she was meeting the needs of the child, without preconceived notions that could get in the way of what is best for the child at a particular moment. David Smith (2014) took up this notion of humility in a unique manner. Stressing that teachers can always be practicing reaching the goal of perfection, he asserted that “teaching and the teacher only matter if education is about something much more profound, which is the cultivation and embodiment of sagacity and discernment which in turn produce genuine humility” (p. 26). In the vignette, we practiced humility by observing the child before deciding when to intervene. We did not assume that we had the authority over the child, realizing instead that the child was developing from the inside out. We extended this quality of humility to each other, and as other teacher teams also do, we discussed how we could abandon the reflex of wanting to go it alone,

and instead reach out to other teachers who had greater expertise and strengths in particular domains.

In sum, Montessori encouraged teachers to spiritually prepare themselves to teach children according to her discoveries and understanding of the true nature of the child. Specifically, she alerted teachers to how detrimental to the child it would be for the teacher to act out in anger and in pride. The teacher needs a support system to make the changes that are necessary for her betterment. She can find it in her team members and in her supervisors. I will now turn my attention to the teacher-child relationship which Maria Montessori stated was of a spiritual nature.

The Teacher-Child Relationship

When a teacher demonstrates the qualities of humility and patience in her interactions with the child, she develops a unique relationship with the child. She serves the child. However, this does not mean that she does things for the child; the child is encouraged to acquire independence. That is, the teacher 1) supports the child in developing an independent will by using her freedom of choice; 2) assists the child in developing independent thought by letting her have long periods of non-interrupted work; and 3) is guided in her behavior towards the child by the knowledge of the child's stages of development. Hence, the teacher helps the child "to act, will and think for himself" (Montessori, 1995, p.281). Montessori referred to this approach as "the art of serving the spirit" (p.281). She elaborated on this important statement, later in her work, "What we mean, is that in the child there is a divine part of creation, and that we should serve that part" (Montessori, 1989a, p. 31).

In contemporary Montessori circles, the spirit of the child is sometimes understood as the “essence of the child” (G. Lofquist, personal conversation, June 17, 2015). Another interpretation of the spirit of the child is that it is the soul of the child, with soul “being defined as the child's unique personality and gifts, and how that personality and those gifts express themselves in learning and living in the world” (J. Wolff, personal conversation, June 10, 2015). Montessori went on to say that the acquisition of this art comes with the experience of working with children. With time, the teacher sees the true child as the “father of the man” (Montessori, 1995, p. 282). Returning to the vignette, we teachers were striving to see the child in the future, as he will become as an adult, thus recognizing that our daily work was of utmost importance.

Wolf (1966) ascertained that throughout her writings, Montessori was not very specific about how a teacher would cultivate the spirit of the child, providing a lot more detail for the teaching of the materials. Montessori nevertheless spoke eloquently about how the teacher could learn from the child. “Actually, he will learn from the child himself the ways and means to his own education, that is, he will learn from the child how to perfect himself as a teacher” (Montessori, 1967, p.8). The teacher is encouraged to teach the child from this perspective. By observing him and coming to understand his true nature, the teacher will know how to teach the child and what to teach him. He will notice what the child is choosing to do in the classroom, and how the child is expressing himself that reveals his needs and natural traits. The teacher is a humble learner in his relationship with the child. As Palmer (1998b) declared, learning together is for us all, including teachers. Groen and Kawalilak (2014), scholars in the field of adult education who have published on a variety of topics concerning the adult educator, the teacher,

and the “educated heart” that will be taken up in Chapter Five, suggested that teachers who learn together overcome obstacles to building a sense of community. I contend that this community starts with the team members and goes outward to the children.

The teacher is also a learner from “the inner teacher” of the child (Montessori, 1989b, p.72). By observing children at different ages, Montessori postulated that the child has an inner teacher that is guiding the child in her learning. It is a spiritual force within the child that the teacher can either facilitate or quash. This inner teacher will direct the child to do such activities as walk at a certain time, talk, develop the pincer grip, and read. Montessori (1972b) reminded us that “It must be remembered that in the small child of three years the inner teacher is still at work guiding him unerringly, and when we speak of a free child, we mean one following the guidance of that nature which is powerful within him” (p. 42).

Mary Ellen Maunz (2012) is one of only a few Montessorians who have taken up the concept of the inner teacher in a profound manner. Having over forty years of experience in the Montessori classroom, as teacher, school administrator, and teacher educator, she spent twenty-two years working closely with Dr. Elizabeth Caspari. Dr. Caspari met Maria Montessori in India as she was embarking on an expedition to Tibet. On her return, she took Maria Montessori’s training course in 1941 and 1942, in India. Afterwards they worked together for four years, and jointly opened a Montessori school in the Casparis’ home. Eventually the Casparis moved to America, where Dr. Caspari continued to train teachers and teacher educators, known as “master teachers.” Trained by Caspari as a “master teacher,” Maunz learned about the standards of Maria Montessori’s training firsthand from Dr. Elizabeth Caspari. Maunz (2012)

elaborated on the inner teacher of the child: the child “selects from the environment what the child needs for each stage of development, revealing a self-directed individual who unfolds and blossoms in accordance with hidden directives” (p.29). Furthermore, she elucidated that when the child concentrates, that action ties the child with his inner teacher, which in turn connects the inner life with the outer. The teacher’s role then is to support the efforts of the child’s inner teacher so that she will facilitate the child’s development.

Since Montessori believed that the child is born with an inner teacher, I also conclude that the teacher has an inner teacher within her. For example, in a webinar called *Honoring the Inner Teacher*, Maunz and Williams (2014) maintained that the teacher learns to connect with her own inner teacher through her heart, and in doing so, stills what is going on inside of herself, in order to respect the inner teacher of the child. They would find comfort in the statement of organizational learning pioneers and experts, Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005), as they met together for over a year and a half to explore how transformational change occurs in businesses, education and government. After extensive discussions, one of them, Jaworski, related a turning point that occurred in a meeting that he and Scharmer were in with managers discussing the development of new leadership in a company. After four months of work, the design for the process was still not developed. A breakthrough ensued with the courageous and humble request of a senior manager for help from the two experts, Jaworski and Scharmer (Senge et al, 2005). In order to respect the integrity of the space the group had just entered, Jaworski replied to the group: “You know I think what has been missing is our willingness to speak and listen from the heart” (p.95). To him, it seemed to be an action that facilitated deep

knowing. The importance of the heart is paramount to understanding my findings, and I refer to it in the last two chapters of this thesis. To continue, when the inner teacher of the teacher is working harmoniously and respectfully with the inner teacher of the child, she can better understand the child as she develops according to her own unique stages. Both the teacher and the child will be at peace within. To extend this idea to the teacher team, it can be readily seen that when teachers are interacting at the level of their inner teachers, there will be greater respect and acceptance among them. Returning to the vignette, I tried to demonstrate that we as teachers were trying to stay in contact with our inner teachers as we served the inner teacher of the child.

Lastly, the following statement points out how the Montessori teacher approaches the child in a unique manner: “The Montessori teacher is constantly looking for a child who is not yet there. The teacher, when she begins work in our schools, must have a kind of faith that the child will reveal himself through work” (Montessori, 1995, p. 276). This means that the teacher sees in her mind’s eye a vision of what the child can become. For example, if a child is just beginning to learn the sounds of the letters, while the teacher is working with him, she will see him as a reader and will hold the vision that one day he will be able to read. She will not get discouraged when she sees him at the beginning stages. In contemporary times, David Smith (2014) came to the same conclusion about the teacher. He said, “A true teacher is one who honours not just the child who is ‘present’. But also the human being who is yet-to-come” (p.54). When the teacher cultivates this ability to keep the vision of the child, she may also transfer this skill to her team members who may need support in overcoming a particular weakness.

In summary, Montessori spoke of the teacher serving the child as a way to know and understand the child as she goes through the stages of development. In so doing, the teacher becomes a learner, with the teacher being the child. By remaining in an intention to learn, the teacher comes to respect and work with the inner teacher of the child, as he himself stays connected with his own inner teacher. These ideas are extended to the Montessori teacher team. I will now turn to the Montessori principles that become visible in the classroom within the teacher-child relationship.

The Montessori Classroom

In reflecting on how the Montessori classroom works, I have been inspired by the principles that come up frequently in Maria Montessori's writings (Montessori, 1972b, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c). I will examine four of these principles as they are represented in the vignette, and then I will discuss how spirituality may play a role in the teacher team relationships as regards these principles. Finally, I will also explore how the teacher team relationship can influence the child and these principles.

Normalization.

In my vignette, I describe the functioning of a normalized classroom, an important concept within a Montessori education. Maria Montessori stated that, "Normalization is the single most important result of our work" (Montessori 1995, p. 204). One can enter a classroom and say that it is normalized when one sees the children joyfully at work, concentrating on an activity that they have chosen themselves. After this deep concentration, the children appear to be refreshed and content. Over time, through their concentration, the children develop

independence, self-confidence, and self-discipline. They finish what they have begun. Moreover, they develop sociability. As an example, sociability takes place when there is only one of each material and the child must learn to wait for the other child to finish working with it before having a turn. This engenders respect for the other child's work (Standing, 1984). Findings in child development (Ruff & Rothbart, 1996) seemed to corroborate what Maria Montessori observed. They found that there is a close connection between children putting attention on external activities and self-regulation. When the children are better at self-regulating, they also demonstrate more positive behavior. Other research (Lillard, 2007) is consistent with Montessori's descriptions given above.

After observing children in many parts of the world, Montessori ascertained that with normalization, all that remained was one type of child which had the following characteristics "spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others" (Montessori, 1995, p.207). Giving the children the freedom to choose what material they want to work on leads to spontaneous activity, which then leads to concentration. In turn, concentration leads to normalization.

I contend that normalization occurs when teachers on the team are harmonious with and respectful towards each other. Though the literature on normalization focuses on what the child is doing, my experience tells me that the relationships between the teachers create a cradle in which normalization can take place. In classrooms where teachers talked about grievances as soon as they surfaced, and were role modeling how the children could talk to each other under different circumstances, there was a greater sense of peace and comfort among the children. The

children were also able to concentrate more deeply on their work and were more normalized. Lillard (2007) likened this kind of concentration to Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) term of "flow," which was highlighted in Chapter One.

Absorbent mind.

One of the important principles of the Montessori approach to learning is the absorbent mind that a child has between the ages of 0 to 6. In the vignette, the children range from 2 ½ to 6 years old: all are in the absorbent mind stage. I allow each child to work independently as much as possible so that the child can learn from the materials. Maria Montessori emphasized that, "The child has a mind that is able to absorb knowledge. He has the power to teach himself" (Montessori, 1995, p.6). One just needs to look at how a child learns language. No one teaches the child the grammar rules for nouns, verbs or adjectives. Just by living within an environment rich in language, the child learns how to speak, and this occurs at about the same age all around the world. Helfrich (2011) examined recent brain research to inform our understanding on how the neurological aspects of the brain lead to the phenomenon of language acquisition. Like contemporary findings in neuroscience (Helfrich, 2011), Montessori distinguished the child's mind from the adult mind. She maintained that the impressions that enter the child's mind form it (Montessori, 1989b, 1995). Everything around him is taken in: habits, customs, and culture, and they are fixed in his mind. Hence, no one can do the growing for a child. He must do it all by himself with loving adults around him helping.

Since the child absorbs everything from the environment, it means that the child is also absorbing how to behave under different circumstances by watching the teachers. In the vignette,

I modeled a behavior that is respectful of the child's interests. Montessorians believe that the more the teacher respects the child, the more the child will trust his own ability to make positive choices for his own development. In turn, these behaviors will lead a child to behave constructively with the teacher and with the other children. I believe this dynamic can be extended to teachers. The more respect they have for each other, the more they will develop positive relationships with each other.

Sensitive periods.

Another Montessori principle is the sensitive periods. Specifically, these periods are times in the child's life where she has a particular inclination to choose to do certain things in her environment that facilitate her development. During this time, the child comes in contact with the external world in a way where everything is attractive for a certain task. The child has joy in what she is doing. Fatigue only sets in when the goal has been obtained. When the sensitive period is passed, the child shows a certain mastery of the task (Montessori, 1995), and the sensitivity disappears. Sensitive periods can be in movement, language, math, and sensory activities, to name a few (Seldin, 2006). Returning to the vignette, upon close observation, I noticed that the child with the knobless cylinders was in a sensitive period for learning grading, placing the cylinders in order from thin to thick over and over again.

Researchers in developmental psychology also used the term "sensitive period" (Bornstein, 1989); however, it differed from what Montessori meant. They underscored the importance of environmental input, while Montessori described it as an impulse that comes from within. For example, the researchers in developmental psychology said that if a child were not

provided with the necessary visual input at a particular time, she would not develop normal vision. Montessori described sensitive periods as a time when the child is spurred on by a specific interest in certain objects.

In a Montessori classroom, the child is able to use the materials for her own growth. I learned from Montessori's writings, (Montessori, 1972b, 1995) that the child holds the key within herself to her own development. Montessori also pointed out if there is an internal timetable within the child for sensitive periods that can be observed by the teacher, the teacher needs to be very respectful of these sensitive periods. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to observe the child in her environment. As an example, a teacher once saw a child struggling with buttoning up her coat and rushed to do it for her. The child burst into tears because she was trying to master this task and the teacher had created a block to that sensitive period. Leaving the child to try again stopped the tears and brought happiness to the child.

Part of this discussion above can be extended to teacher teams. Though the sensitive periods exist only in the young child, one can say that the more that Montessori teachers have experiences relating to each other in positive ways, the more these relationships can emulate how the teacher supports the child during the sensitive periods. For example, when teachers share with each other what their strengths and weaknesses are, they are in a better position to support each other's learning in the classroom.

Prepared environment.

The prepared environment refers to the Montessori classroom that has been set up to maximize a child's development and exploration of the materials (Montessori, 1995). Helfrich

(2011) stipulated that Montessori believed that an understanding of what motivates a child, what the natural patterns of development are, and the child's ability to learn were all part of how she created the prepared environment. Another point that is not often mentioned is that Montessori contended "it is essential to prepare the environment for children, and to give them that freedom wherein the soul can expand its powers" (Montessori, 1989b, p.56). It seems that there is a spiritual reason to prepare the environment in the way that Montessori discovered. Another innovation that Montessori brought to the classroom was the size of the furniture. Standing (1984) explained that Montessori designed all the furnishings to be at child level to facilitate the children's sense of control and their ability to make choices. In the vignette, the materials were divided into different avenues and arranged on shelves from the simple to the complex.

To elaborate, in one part of the classroom, you can see a four-year-old composing words with the movable alphabet, a wooden material that has all the letters of the alphabet, so that the child can hold them individually with his hands. In the middle of the classroom, a five-year-old is working on a mat with the golden beads and is doing subtraction. The golden beads teach the decimal system and come in units, tens, hundreds and thousands. In the calm, peaceful classroom, each child is working with material of his own choice, at his own pace, with the teacher presenting new lessons when a child has mastered a particular material. As Lillard (2007) stated, within the Montessori classroom, there is order in how to use the materials as well as order in the physical space of the classroom. The children experience freedom and develop mastery within this prepared environment.

Returning to the vignette, we as teachers acknowledged that we are part of the prepared environment. Teachers are the link between the materials and the child. For this reason, their role is very important. Together, they will assist each child's development in each of the avenues of the classroom. Therefore, it is of vital importance that the teachers develop a self-understanding so that they do not misinterpret the child's needs (Lillard, 2007), as well as the needs of the other teachers.

In summarizing this section on the Montessori classroom, I would like to underline the significance of the Montessori principles in the functioning of the classroom. Though there are many principles that have been identified in the literature, I focused on four prominent ones: normalization, the absorbent mind, sensitive periods, and the prepared environment. With each one, I extended the implications to the teacher-teacher relationship. This relationship may be so influential that it can facilitate or impede the development of the child.

The Montessori Method, Spirituality and Adult Education

Maria Montessori alluded to spirituality in several different ways in her writings. In particular, in the first section of this literature review, I examined how she approached the spiritual preparation of the teacher and the spiritual nature of the relationship between the teacher and the child. However, because the theme of spirituality and Montessori team teaching is not developed in Montessori's writings, I will now look to the literature of adult education and spirituality. In this section I will explore the spirituality of Montessori team teaching and how some of Montessori's ideas dovetail with the understanding of spirituality portrayed in adult education.

In Chapter One, I introduced some well-known dimensions of spirituality that are discussed in the field of adult education. Among the dimensions I would like to discuss further here are: a connection with a higher power, the connectedness of all life, a search for meaning and purpose, and justice (English, 2012; Groen, 2012; Tisdell, 2008). I will take up each one and explain how Maria Montessori's views correspond closely to those of the scholars in adult education.

First, writers in the field, such as Fenwick and Lange (1998), Tisdell (2003, 2008), Groen (2012), and English (2012) described a dimension of spirituality as a search for a connection with a higher power. In order to elucidate with the participants of a study on spirituality what higher power could refer to, Tisdell (2003, 2008) found that they used several different terms, such as God, Buddha, Spirit, Lifeforce or Great Mystery. For some people, this connection with a higher power is the end goal and for some it is the beginning of their spiritual growth (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2003). If it is the start of their journey, they may turn their attention to the fulfillment of goals that range from making the world a better place, to attaining enlightenment. In studying Maria Montessori's works (1989a, 1989b, 1989c), I have the impression that Maria Montessori also thought that spirituality consisted of being connected to a higher power. For example, during a lecture (Montessori, 1972a), Montessori explained that a human being starting from childhood is a lot like a radio that receives long and short waves: "he can receive the emanations of the Godhead" (p.35) she declared. It appears from this statement that Montessori believed that human beings are connected with a higher power, and that this connection is part of

their spiritual development. Extending this idea to the team relationship may increase our understanding of team relationships.

Connectedness with all of life is another dimension that is often mentioned by scholars in the field of adult education (English, 2012; Groen, 2004b; Groen, 2012; Tisdell, 2003). They frequently associated the dimension of a higher power with connectedness, linking the two and making it appear as though the former facilitates the latter. In reading Montessori's writings, one can see that she too referred to the connectedness of all things. She believed "All things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity" (Montessori, 1989d, p.6). We can extend the idea that everyone is connected to each other on the Montessori teacher team, where a teacher could then relate to the other team members knowing that what one does influences the others.

Meaning and purpose is another dimension that appears frequently in the literature on spirituality and adult education (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Gilley (2005) stated that people may not express it outwardly, however, they desire meaning and purpose to feel connected to something that is greater than themselves. There are "big questions" (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011, p.1) that people ask themselves that demonstrate that they are on such a spiritual search: "Do I have a mission or purpose in life?" "What kind of person do I want to become?" "What sort of world do I want to create?" (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011, p.1). Palmer (1998a) proposed other spiritual questions such as: "Does my life have meaning and purpose? "Do I have gifts that the world wants and needs?" (p. 6).

It seemed that for Montessori (1989d) every child, and for that matter every human being, seeks to fulfill a divine purpose or “mission” from birth (Montessori, 1989a, p.31). Coming from a different background than most educators, Montessori, who had studied science and medicine, was inclined to perceive that every living thing had a function to play and that they were all part of a divine mysterious purpose (Montessori, 1989b). Human beings long to receive the support required for the emerging of what is unique in them, in order to contribute to a world in a way that is meaningful and purposeful. When team teachers are following a path of meaning and purpose, they may move away from the purely intellectual and logical as Gilley suggested (2005), embracing a more meaningful relationship with each other. They may, indeed, see themselves as Montessori envisioned teachers, as participants in the universe working in tandem with a higher power to accomplish some great mission (Miller, 2002).

A number of the authors in the adult education field talked about social justice (English, 2012; Groen, 2012) as being part of spirituality. For example, Groen (2004a) maintained that one needs to take into consideration the inequities in the world and challenge them as one embraces a spiritual life. Montessori also spoke of justice; however, for her, it was of a different nature. She contended that justice “tries to ensure that every child shall make the best of himself” (Montessori, 1995, p.285). She expanded upon this idea by stating that justice exists when every human being is given the kind of help he needs to reach his fullest spiritual potential, and when those energies within the person that can bring about this growth, are nourished. When society will be based on this concept of justice, Montessori claimed that the economic problems and other societal woes would begin to solve themselves (Montessori, 1989d). Montessori teachers

can bring this sense of justice to their teaching and apply it to the relationship with each other, by contemplating how they can facilitate the spiritual growth of each other. I believe that this perspective would lead to openness to learn from each other.

So far in this section, I have been discussing how dimensions of spirituality in adult education have commonality with what Montessori expounded upon in her work. I would like to conclude this section by mentioning how the spirituality of the teachers can influence communication within the team, since communication is essential in building and supporting a team. Fleming and Courtenay (2006) presented a model of communication that is distinct from the usual linear model of sender and receiver. They posited that the model used by a spiritually influenced person is more “of a triangle with a connection to a Higher Power located between the two” (p.129). This idea is thought-provoking for it proposes an explanation of what may be at work when an adult brings his whole self to interact with the whole self of another adult (English, Fenwick & Parsons, 2005). To extend this situation to the Montessori teacher team, they may be drawn to discuss the deepest questions of their teaching lives in a way that honors each teacher, as well as respects the differences in which they approach these questions (Palmer, 1998a). The team teachers can then be prepared to ask themselves a more courageous question which is: “How does the quality of my selfhood form-or deform-the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world?” (Palmer, 1998b, p. 4). Discussions that would stem from these questions could aid the teachers to reflect upon their own spiritual journey together in the workplace.

Summary

In this section I presented several dimensions of spirituality as discussed in the field of adult education. These included a connection with a higher power, the connectedness with all things, meaning and purpose, and social justice. For each one, I elaborated upon how each dimension is taken up in the literature, and how the writings of Maria Montessori correspond with these dimensions. Lastly, I considered how communication, an important topic in team development, could have implications for spirituality in teamwork. Having examined the link between the Montessori Method, spirituality, and adult education, I will now turn my attention to how the theory of relational learning informs my research study.

Relational Learning

In the previous sections, I stressed the importance of spirituality and the relationships that Montessori teachers have with each other when they teach in teams. It can be noted here that teachers are often seen as learners and are in relationship with each other (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Therefore, relational learning can shed light on our understanding of the learning that can occur in these relationships. More specifically, according to Rossiter (2005), who has reflected deeply on this topic, the learning that happens can be: with one's self, with fellow learners, with teachers, with ideas, and with the community. For the purposes of this research study, I will consider the learning that occurs when teachers are teaching in the team. At the same time, I embrace the concept of relational learning which states that human beings are relational and social, and that they develop a sense of self in these relationships (Rossiter, 2005). Therefore, one cannot see oneself as separate from the web of life that includes relationships that one has

with other people. This implies that one of the key ways that teachers define themselves as teachers and as team members is within the relationships they have with each other.

One kind of learning within relationships that takes place amongst students, teachers and ideas is a “skill in perspective taking” (Rossiter, 2005, p.549). Specifically, teachers teaching in teams receive feedback from each other that leads to the formation of perceptions and opinions. This is an important idea for Montessori teachers, because when a teacher can see a situation from another’s point of view, he will be more open to learning about the other teacher

Another kind of learning finds its roots in Martin Buber’s relational philosophy (Rossiter, 2005). Martin Buber (1970) was a prominent twentieth century philosopher whose philosophy is best known through his famous book *I and Thou*, published in 1923. Since its publication it has inspired generations of people in all fields of endeavor, including the field of education, to reflect on their way of relating to others, whether it is a person, a painting, or a tree. Buber (1970) distinguished between two ways of relating with the world, the I-It relationship and the I-Thou relationship (also referred to as the I-You relationship). With these two word pairs, Buber emphasized that there is no “I” that stands by itself. “I” is always in relation to the other, whether it is viewing the other person, knowledge or world as object, or whether it is to move wholly into a relationship with the other. In the I-It relationship the person remains separate from what she is interacting with. It is a one-sided way of knowing. One sees the other through one’s perceptions, and not as the person really is.

In contrast, the I-Thou relationship implies that one enters into a direct relationship with the other as a distinctively whole person (Buber, 1970). There is an openness to be authentic and

to accept the authentic self of the other person. For example, in the teacher-student relationship the teacher teaches to the “best self, the potential of the student” (Rossiter, 2005, p.549). This idea can also be applied to the teacher team relationship, where the teachers interact with the potential of the other teacher in mind and not necessarily the self that is presenting himself at that point in time. In other words, the teachers participate in genuine listening and dialogue. Buber held the conviction that everyone can experience the I-Thou relationship. Therefore, all can have moments where we accept each other’s uniqueness in our interactions, which is necessary for becoming a whole person (Kramer & Gawlick, 2003).

If they are not already doing so, Montessori teacher teams can learn how to experience the I-Thou relationship. When the interactions of the teachers are open to each other and they are whole person to whole person, as Buber (1970) stipulated, they will enter into the I-Thou relationship more readily. Consequently, they will feel more connected. Groen and Kawalilak (2014b) pointed out that the quality of interconnection between people is part of spirituality and adult learning, and that leading a “rich and satisfying life is only possible through I-You relationships” (p.171). Evidently, the I-Thou (or I-You) relationships can contribute to increasing the level of satisfaction that a team can have with its functioning.

To further the discussion on relational learning, I would like to accentuate Rossiter’s (2005) contention that relational learning includes learning that leads to a skill in “empathic response” (p.549). This concept is part of Nel Noddings’ (1984) relational pedagogy of the ethic of care. An educational writer who based her work on Martin Buber’s philosophy, Noddings maintained that there is a particular meaning of empathy that she ascribed to the one-caring. It

involves feeling with the other and receiving the other into oneself. That is, one's eyes join with the other person's eyes to look at the situation that the other has illustrated. This kind of empathy would be very helpful if it existed in the relationship between team teachers. When a problem would come up, the teacher who is the one-caring would first receive, then communicate with, and lastly work with the teacher who is the one cared-for.

Additionally, they would enter into a relationship that Noddings (1984) specified would occur when the one-caring receives the one cared-for, and therefore, the former is totally with the latter. She likened this relationship to Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship. Being in a receptive mode, the one-caring is open to the one-cared for and there is reciprocity between the two. In the case of teacher-student relationships, Noddings (1984) suggested that an understanding of Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship also comes into play. She said that the teacher would be totally present with the student during the period of time when they are together. I would like to extend the understanding of the teacher-student relationship to the teacher-teacher relationship in teams, and suggest that the teachers would also approach each other in the same manner. The teachers would take turns being the one-caring and the one cared-for. Staying present with each other, they would form a vision of themselves of what it is like to care. This vision would lead them to a closer relationship that they could rely on throughout the day.

Palmer (1993) portrayed another vision of relational learning that Montessori teachers could ponder. He expressed the idea that a person can only be a person if she is in community. In order to continue to grow, she must "consciously participate in the emerging community of our lives" (p.57). Elsewhere, Palmer (1998b) elaborated on teachers learning in community as the

only way in which they can grow in their practice. By learning in community, he meant that they could receive the guidance that comes from a discourse among colleagues, the support that such a community can offer, as well as the wisdom that comes from the experience of teaching. I think that it is important that Montessori teachers teaching in teams see their team as a community in the way that Palmer described it. The learning that would take place in such a community would be invaluable to their sense of identity as a teacher, as well as their identity as a team. Consequently, the teachers would feel courageous enough to take risks in the way they communicated with other.

Lastly, Montessori teachers can learn from each other through connected knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Connected learning fits within relational learning and refers to a learner entering the other person's thinking to ascertain what the basis of her point of view is, in order to connect with her. The meaning of connected learning also includes the premise that the only way the learner can understand the other learner's idea is by trying to share the experience that the latter had to arrive at for that particular idea. Additionally, what is very important for teachers in teams is that the connected knower begins with an approach of trust; she believes that the other person has something that is important to say. As we shall see in the next section on teams, trust is the foundation of team building, and of feeling connected with the other. Belenky et al. (1986) also claimed that the aim of a connected knower is to understand rather than to judge. As I mentioned in the above paragraph on perspective taking, when a teacher is open to learning about the other teacher, she will increase the possibility of connecting with that teacher in positive ways. Finally, Belenky et al. (1986)

maintained that connected knowing is not gender specific, with both women and men speaking in this voice.

Summary

In summary, in relational learning, teachers construct their identity as they relate to each other. There are several approaches that elucidate the learning that takes place in these relationships. Teachers can learn the skills of perspective taking and being open to entering into an I-Thou relationship with the other teacher. Additionally, teachers can develop an empathic response to each other and alternate the role of the one-caring and the one-cared-for. Eventually, the team can cultivate a sense of community that would support their endeavors and provide guidance for their efforts as a teacher. Finally, connected learning can help the teachers connect with each other by trying to understand the bases of their points of view. I will now turn to a consideration of teams as they progress towards becoming more effective.

Teams and Spirituality

In this research study my focus was on spirituality and Montessori teacher teams. In the other sections I have elucidated how Montessori approached spirituality in the development of the child, in the teacher-child relationship, and in the preparation of the teacher. I extended her ideas to the Montessori teacher team relationship. In this section I will discuss different approaches to teams and how spirituality applies to the Montessori teacher team. In my attempts to find resources on Montessori teams, I conducted an extensive library research and had conversations with Montessori experts in North America that led to the uncovering of the actuality that there are no available studies on Montessori teacher teams. Therefore, I brought

into this literature review resources on teams from other areas, such as early childhood, business, and organizations, to shed light on various aspects of teams. Since it was important to have an understanding of what was transpiring in the Montessori teacher teams when I conducted my study, I introduce facets of team development. More specifically, since the literature on teams usually examines how a group can become a high performance team, and what characteristics are present in a high performance team, I also took this approach to examining the Montessori team. Before investigating these topics, I will present definitions of what a team is from the point of view of organizations, early childhood contexts and the Montessori classroom.

To begin with, I turn to Katzenbach and Smith (2003) who developed their definition of team after many years of working with teams in a variety of organizations. Their definition is helpful for this research study because it fills a gap in the discussion of Montessori teacher teams, and because it helps to focus on the salient aspects of those teams. Embedded in Katzenbach & Smith's (2003) definition of team are the six basics that they claimed are essential to a successful team: "A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p.45).

In turning to the first basic, that a team needs to be small, one sees this easily illustrated today in Montessori teacher teams. Though Maria Montessori did not speak about this characteristic, Montessori teacher teams are usually two to six members. In most areas, the number is determined by regulations regarding how many children per teacher can be in the classroom. This ratio varies according to the ages of the children.

Secondly, Montessori teachers are often hired to complement each other with their training. One may be an assistant and the other may be fully certified in her training. However, Katzenbach and Smith (2003) specified that there are three kinds of skills required to be present among the members: technical, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. Montessori teachers are often not trained as extensively in the latter two areas of skills. However, the presence or absence of these skills will impact how the teachers relate to each other. This can be seen in the examples provided by Katzenbach and Smith (2003) where the existence of these skills among the team members was one of the reasons why the teams became high performance teams. Montessori (1972b) herself counseled teachers to think beyond having just the technical knowledge of being able to teach the children how to use the materials. She was emphatic that the teachers needed to prepare themselves “interiorly” (p. 149) and to develop the qualities necessary to observe and understand how to work with the child’s true nature. In turn, it can be said that the teachers would most probably bring those same qualities to the teacher-teacher relationship.

The third basic is to have a common purpose. If for example a Montessori team would agree on their purpose as offering the children the best opportunities to reach their individual potential, the teachers would then translate that into actionable goals such as having a normalized classroom (Montessori, 1995), the single most important result of Montessori education. Their commitment to their purpose and to each other would lead the team to be more spiritually minded, since in section one at the beginning of this chapter, it was shown that in order for normalization to occur (Lillard, 2007), the teachers need to demonstrate spiritual qualities such

as respect and harmony with each other. Moreover, from this purpose would flow other goals that reflect Montessori's ideas that have the underpinnings of spirituality, as demonstrated in the section on the Montessori Method, Spirituality and Adult Education. Among the goals could be for the children to become self-disciplined, which is the children listening to their inner teacher and the outer teacher, and for the children to love their work for work's sake. The team can also have goals that directly impact their relationships.

The next basic is a common approach, which is agreeing on how to work with each other. This seems to be crucial for the Montessori team to accomplish its purpose. In the section on relational learning, I pointed out that when teachers are open to each other, and are authentic and empathetic, they could enter into an I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1970). The quality of the connection that is established with each other in this relationship is related to spirituality (Groen & Kawalilak, 2014). Furthermore, when teachers feel that they can be open and vulnerable with each other, they would be more inclined to hold each other accountable for achieving their goals, the last basic in Katzenbach and Smith's (2003) definition. A commitment to doing so would lead the team closer to high performance. Adhering to Montessori's (1972b) advice for teachers to rely on each other for feedback on how they conduct themselves in the classroom, would also lead to greater accountability, and thus, to higher performance.

In order to deepen my understanding about teams, I turn to Villa, Thousand and Nevin's (2004) description of what team teaching can be like in the public school arena. They claimed that it is when "two or more people do what the traditional teacher has always done-plan, teach, assess and assume responsibility for all of the students in the classroom. Team teachers share the

leadership and the responsibilities” (p.9). In this definition, there are features that apply to the Montessori team as well. First, the Montessori teachers are responsible for the development of all the children. Each teacher must plan what presentations she will give, and teach them to the children when they are ready. Moreover, while there are no assessments of children in the Montessori classroom as exists in the public school system, the teachers may often share leadership responsibilities and/or distribute responsibilities according to strengths and training. In dividing up responsibilities in this manner, they may be more likely to connect with each other through spiritual qualities pointed out by Wolf (1996), such as being sensitive to each other, and being respectful. Additionally, in order to truly share responsibilities, the teachers would need to communicate in ways that would strengthen their teamwork. Pentland (2012) recently discovered that patterns of communication were the single most important thing to measure in understanding how effective a team was. In his research on teams, he found that the number of face-to-face exchanges and the degree to which team members all talk to each other are essential to the success of the team. To extend these findings to the Montessori teacher team, one can say that the teachers need to fully engage with one another to continuously learn from each other and to better themselves as a team. In relying on each other for feedback on how they are doing, as Montessori (1972b) suggested, the teachers would practice humility, a quality identified by a number of scholars (Huebner, 1999; Palmer, 1993; Wolf, 1996) as fundamental to the teacher role.

Lastly in an Age of Montessori webinar entitled *Building Your Classroom Team* (2014), the presenters, as did Katzenbach and Smith (2003), emphasized the importance of setting goals

that all teachers could agree on and understand in the same way. This corroborates with Wheelan's (2016) contention, stemming from decades of working with teams in the public and private sector, that "the most important characteristic of a high performance team is that its members are clear about the team's goals" (p. 38). For example, team members may use the same words and yet have completely different meanings attached to those words. Confusion would arise when they tried to accomplish those goals. It is therefore important to spend time talking about what they each mean by the goals they set together. To return to the Age of Montessori webinar, the presenters also provided tips on how to develop a vision that would unify the team. In doing so, the presenters introduced a component of team building that differs from the other resources: they emphasized the importance of establishing agreement on what the team's core values are. Some examples that were given were: compassion, kindness, patience and respect. In the earlier part of this research proposal these were referred to as spiritual qualities. Hence, I can say that though the presenters did not use that terminology, they were in fact alluding to the significance of the spiritual dimension of team building. Furthermore, the presenters contended that teachers need to feel safe and have a sense of belongingness, when they come to work. Evidently, having a cohesive team that interacts from the vantage point of their inner teachers (Montessori, 1989b) would facilitate the development of these feelings.

Turning now to team development (Laiken, 1994; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2004; Wheelan, 2013), there appears to be some commonality among experts in the field as to what needs to happen in teams. Building trust is of great importance and setting goals facilitates the development of trust. Team members also need to be able to express their views and to share in

the leadership of the team. Being able to deal with conflict enables the team to grow successfully. Moreover, the members of the team need to learn how they will make decisions and work together. Commitment to the team then increases. Eventually, over many months, the team can reach its highest cohesiveness, its highest productivity and its highest effectiveness.

According to Wheelan's (2013) experience only about one person in four has been a member of a high performing team. It appears that some of the characteristics in common with these authors may be important for the well-functioning of the Montessori teams. As depicted in my research questions, I did not plan to inquire directly about these characteristics with the teachers, preferring instead to wait and see if they came up spontaneously in the interviews. In my experience with Montessori teams, trust, once it was cultivated as the foundation of all our discussions, was the quality that we came back to when differences arose and when we were trying to improve our effectiveness in working together.

Having trust as the first requirement of a team was also present in Patrick Lencioni's (2002) well-known team model of the five dysfunctions of a team: 1) absence of trust; 2) fear of conflict; 3) lack of commitment; 4) avoidance of accountability; and 5) inattention to results. He believed that members of great teams need to be able to be vulnerable about their weaknesses, fears and mistakes. Once trust is established, the team members are not afraid to disagree with, challenge and question each other about issues important to the organization. This leads to the team members putting deeply held ideas on the table for discussion, with the members eventually having real buy-in around important decisions. At that point, the members will be willing to hold each other accountable for those decisions and standards. Lastly, they will put what is best for

the team before individual agendas. In his model, Lencioni (2002) presented ideas, that in the positive, are closely related to the characteristics of effective teams discussed earlier (Laiken, 1994; Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2004; Wheelan, 2013).

Commitment and accountability are two characteristics that particularly speak to me as a Montessori teacher. From my experience, being committed to developing the skills necessary for the cultivation of a spiritual relationship with the child helps Montessori teachers bring those same skills to the relationship between the teachers. Moreover, holding each other accountable for goals raises the standards in teaching and teamwork, stimulates learning among the teachers and children alike, and fosters the development of spiritual qualities. Even Fitzgerald and Theilheimer's (2012) study of three Head Start centers had findings that corroborated with what has been examined so far. They found that teachers who truly worked as a team trusted one another's work with children. Moreover, they shared the same perspective on children and had a common plan for their work. What I am curious about is whether any aspect of Lencioni's (2002) model or Fitzgerald and Theilheimer's (2012) findings exists in Montessori teams when they pay attention to spirituality. It would seem that with an emphasis on embodying the spiritual qualities mentioned in the first section of this literature review, the teachers would choose to behave in ways that strengthened relationships.

To end this section on teams, I would like to comment on the concept of the servant-leader (Greenleaf, 1991), because this inspiring approach to leadership has the potential of being applied to the Montessori team. At the beginning of this literature review, I explained how Maria Montessori encouraged the teacher to engage in "the art of serving the spirit" of the child

(Montessori, 1995, p.281). If a teacher becomes committed to this approach, she may also cultivate the art of serving her team first. In being the servant-first, she would “make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (Greenleaf, 1991, p.7). One way to know whether their needs were being served is to ask whether “they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1991, p.7). It is my contention that serving first stems from a teacher being humble. As discussed in the first section of this literature review, humility was one of the qualities that Montessori believed a teacher needed to develop. Other qualities could be those that are suggested by Sipe and Frick (2009) on servant leadership. Finally, it is possible that a teacher can become a servant-leader very much in the way that the characters did in *Teacher as servant* (Greenleaf, 1979) where they were seeking “fulfillment, wholeness and a sense of belonging” (p.33) in service to others.

Summary

In this literature review I presented a vignette to give the reader an understanding of what goes on in a Montessori classroom with the teachers and the children. I wove aspects of the vignette throughout the first section to illustrate the elements of the spiritual preparation of the teacher, the teacher-child relationship, and the Montessori classroom. It is from these topics that I extended what Montessori taught, to the Montessori teacher team. I drew from the adult education literature to situate spirituality in the discussion of the Montessori teacher team. The section on relational learning provided a structure on which to explore an array of approaches to understanding the interactions of the teachers. I pointed out that trust is considered fundamental

to team building. Lastly, in serving the spirit of the child, the teachers can also serve each other on the team.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology: Listening through the Heart

In this research study, I examined the understandings and perceptions of Montessori teacher teams as they pertained to spirituality. Specifically, I inquired into how and whether spirituality plays a role in their interactions and communications. In Chapter One I introduced the experienced knowledge that I brought to the study. At the beginning of my research study, it was my intention to augment that knowledge and understanding with this inquiry and to make it available afterwards for teachers to reflect on their teamwork. Since there is little literature on Montessori teams in general and Montessori teams and spirituality specifically, I approached the study with “an openness to surprise” (Hunt, 1992, p. 120), transcending a tendency to validate my beliefs I had about Montessori teamwork. Hence, I designed the study to explore questions that were new to Montessori teachers, illuminating the field of teacher teams. My overarching guiding research purpose was to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers brought to their interactions in classroom teams. In turn, the following questions guided my research study on spirituality and Montessori teacher teams:

- 1) What understandings and perceptions, with a particular emphasis on spirituality, inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 2) Does a spiritual foundation actually inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 3) If a spiritual foundation does inform their practice, how do their perceptions of the spiritual nature of their role influence the verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?

4) If spirituality doesn't inform their perceptions, what is it that informs their perceptions of verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?

In this chapter, I begin with a presentation of my assumptions as a qualitative researcher. Next, I explore what qualitative research is, focusing particularly on the basic interpretive qualitative study, which is the methodology of my research. In the research design section, I include information about the participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. I conclude with ethical considerations for my study.

Ontology and Epistemology

The practice of qualitative research is influenced by ontology and epistemology. When researchers make claims about “what knowledge is” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012, p. 28), about “beliefs about the nature of being/reality” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 5) and what is “the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p.183) they are referring to ontology. According to Waring (2012) one can position oneself along an ontological continuum, between realism on the left and constructivism on the right. The continuum reflects how individuals view reality and what their perceptions are of it. Patton (2015) recommended that the researcher take a constructivist approach whenever the research study is intending to learn about the perceptions and beliefs of participants. I took a constructivist stance and maintain that teachers in teams are constructing their own realities and that learning is about meaning making (Merriam et al., 2007). The teachers cannot see the world without their place in it. For them, being the knower and knowing cannot be disconnected from what is known. This means that each knower or teacher has a particular point of view. Hence, I anticipated that each teacher

in my study would have her own unique way of making sense of the world and that her way was worthwhile listening to and to be respected (Crotty, 1998).

Turning to the subject of Maria Montessori, Loffler (1992) contended that she was a constructivist because Montessori believed that the child's important task is to construct the adult, and in the process, also constructs the knowledge to do so. Starting even before birth, Montessori concluded that the child possesses within himself all that he needs for his unique "psychic" unfolding that facilitates the child's self-construction. Sometimes this is referred to as the divine blueprint (Maunz, 2012), purpose, or mission in life. Montessori (1972a) referred to this inborn aspect of the child as the "spiritual embryo":

The child should not be regarded as a feeble and helpless creature whose only need is to be protected and helped, but as a spiritual embryo, possessed of an active psychic life from the day that he is born and guided by subtle instincts enabling him to actively build up the human personality. And since it is the child who becomes the adult man, we must consider him as the true builder of mankind and recognize him as our father (p. 41).

Additionally, as explored in Chapter Two, Montessori contended that the child is born with an inner teacher that guides her to make choices within her environment. In observing the children as they concentrated on material they had freely chosen, Montessori (1989a) emphasized, "It is an interesting fact that after this phenomenon of concentration the children are really "new" children. They are capable of a behavior and an activity, which is not usually seen in children. It is as though a connection has been made with an inner power or with the subconscious and this brings about the construction of the personality" (p. 21).

The child's growth, then, is guided by internal forces that are not visible externally to the adult. However, "he does not inherit already established models of behavior which guarantee his success" (Polk Lillard, 1972, p. 32). The uniqueness of each child with her own interests becomes better known through her process of development. Therefore, the child is dependent on the environment, both the people and the things in it, and develops an integral relationship with them, as he interacts with them. More specifically, Montessori (1989c) explained:

It will be said that the teacher forms part of the environment, and in fact he intervenes by helping this natural process, yet the fact remains that the child cannot, as is generally believed, learn only through the efforts of the teacher who explains things, be he the most excellent and perfect of teachers. Also in learning the child follows inner laws of mental formation. There is a direct interchange between the child and his environment while the teacher with his offerings of motives of interest and his initiations constitutes primarily a link, a *trait d'union* between them (p. 39).

This is why the prepared environment with its four avenues filled with learning materials that Montessori experimented with to facilitate the child's spontaneous learning, is so essential to the child's development. Montessori (1972b) emphasized that "our educational system esteems a child's environment so highly that it makes it the center of instruction" (p. 60). The child can construct herself only with what is available in her environment. She needs freedom to move around the classroom to choose exactly what she needs, when she needs it. Montessori (1972a) clarified why freedom is so essential in the Montessori classroom:

The child must be able to act freely in such an environment. There he must find motives for constructive activity that corresponds to his developmental needs. He must have contact with an adult who is familiar with the laws governing his life and who does not get in the way by overprotecting him, by dictating his activities, or by forcing him to act without taking his needs into account (p. 91).

Lillard (2007) pointed out that Montessori realized that children learn mainly by doing; therefore, their learning is “situated in the context of actions and objects” (p. 32). These materials are placed on shelves in an order from the simple to the complex. Examples in the early childhood classroom that involve movement would include children building the pink tower, washing tables, tracing sandpaper letters with their hands, and putting together puzzle pieces of the map of the world. There are sensorial materials, which the child can touch, that are specifically for the education of the senses, such as rough and smooth boards, color tablets, sound cylinders, and for the boric sense, wooden tablets that have different weights. As the child chooses the materials, Montessori (1972a) was careful to indicate, “What motivates the child is not the goal set for him by the adult, but his own drive for self-perfection. The child perfects himself through contact with reality, through activity that absorbs all his attention” (p. 94).

Montessori, therefore, held that the prepared environment is of crucial importance for this construction process to take place for the complete development of the child. This is where social constructivism can lead one to understand the Montessori classroom because it posits that the experiences of people are socially constructed and can best be understood in context (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Children are social in nature, where they construct a sense of community among

themselves, within a classroom that has a three-year age span, from 3 to 6 years old. The younger children can learn from the older ones, while the older ones can also be challenged within their peer groups. Montessori believed that “independence must come before interdependence and that the child must construct cooperation and interdependence through the child’s own experiences—these cannot be taught or imposed from without” (Loeffler, 1992, p. 105). Teachers, too, have experiences within their team that are socially constructed, and can be understood within the context of the Montessori classroom.

In addition, Merriam et al. (2007) made the point that knowledge is constructed in the kinds of activities that people engage in, such as teachers in their teams, communication and shared tasks, and this results in multiple realities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). To further extend this understanding to the Montessori teacher, one can say that she constructs her reality of being in a team in a progressive way, and that the environment with the other team members facilitates her construction of knowledge.

Having presented my view on ontology, I turn to how my ontological assumptions naturally lead to my epistemological assumptions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Epistemology is “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p.3). My epistemological view is best expressed by Hammersley (2013) where he stated that with interpretivism, people interpret their world, try to make sense of it, and then act upon these interpretations. As a researcher, I took this approach to try to understand why the teachers conducted themselves in certain ways in the different teams. While my practice as a Montessori teacher and a team member was informed by spirituality, I sought to understand and interpret

how other teachers do what they do. I maintained with Butler-Kisber (2010) that there are multiple ways of knowing the world and that they are contextually independent, or interdependent. For example, in this study I was interested in how teachers made sense of the Montessori Method and used it to inform their interactions with other teachers. The ontology and epistemology described above underpinned my research study on spirituality and Montessori teacher teams.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative researchers “want to know *how* people do things, and what meaning they give to their lives” (Merriam, 2002a, p.19). A qualitative study aims to learn from the views of the participants (Creswell, 2015), and in so doing, tries to understand the subjective world of the participants as they experience it. Therefore, the researcher takes an exploratory approach that is inductive in nature and suspends any judgment of the attitudes and behaviors of the participants, preferring instead to uncover the logic behind them (Hammersley, 2013).

This doctoral research study took the form of a basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002a, 2009). In such a study, the researcher is particularly interested in the meaning that an experience has for the people involved in it. Meaning does not exist permanently in an object or situation for someone to find it. Instead “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p.43). Studies such as examining the understandings that shape people’s interactions with others in their society (Merriam & Muhamad, 2002), seeking to understand the link between spirituality and social action (Tisdell, 2002), and trying to understand the preservice teacher mentoring experience as professional

development (Law, 2013) are primarily basic interpretive studies. They learned how the participants interacted with and experienced the world and what meaning they derived from doing so. In the same vein, this research study took an interpretive approach, as I was interested in how the Montessori teachers made sense of spirituality and how that meaning was connected to their participation and experiences in teams.

Research Design

The theoretical framework composed of the Montessori Method, spirituality in adult learning, relational learning and teamwork all informed the research design. In the following section of this chapter there will be a description of how participants were selected, the methods used to collect data, how the data was analyzed, and the ethical considerations.

Participant selection.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role that spirituality plays in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers bring to their interactions in classroom teams. In order to be consistent with the purpose of this study, I determined several criteria for the recruitment of the participants. These criteria demonstrated an approach to the participant selection process referred to as purposeful sampling. Patton (2015) emphasized that purposeful sampling “focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p.264). This study focused on Montessori teachers who were members of a teaching team in a Montessori classroom. Therefore, the first criterion for the selection of the participants was that they be teaching in a Montessori school in Western Canada. The second criterion limited the eligibility of the teachers to those who were teaching in an early childhood

classroom with children from two and a half to five years old. This is similar to the age group with whom Maria Montessori first elaborated much of what we now know as the Montessori Method. The third criterion was that the teachers had completed some formal Montessori training to teach the designated age group of children. Since, during training, the teachers usually learn about the role of the Montessori teacher and how to prepare for this role, it was important that the participants in this study have that foundation to discuss the themes about teamwork that were embedded in the interview questions. Lastly, teachers who were willing to share their perceptions and understandings of spirituality and their experiences on a Montessori team were invited to participate. Taken together, these criteria helped me “select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2002a, p.12).

The number of participants for a qualitative study depends upon a number of elements including what the purpose of the study is, how the findings will be used, and the resources for the study (Patton, 2015). Since this study was examining an unexplored topic in the area of Montessori teacher teams with a particular link to spirituality, I went into depth with a sample of five teachers. The teachers were recruited after receiving ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary.

The recruitment of the five participants took place from January to April 2016. In order to recruit my participants, I first contacted the head of a private Montessori school and asked her to send out the recruitment letter to her teaching staff. Four teachers responded, indicating their willingness to participate in my study. In order to find one more teacher, I approached two other Montessori schools and did not receive any positive responses from the teachers. The heads of

the schools postulated that it might have been because the teachers were too busy at that time of the year with school responsibilities. Finally, as I was conducting interviews with the four participants, Jane, Clara, Martha, and Mary, one other teacher, Sierra, from the same school agreed to participate, making a total of five participants.

Data collection.

I drew upon several data collection strategies that commenced in January 2016 and that ended with the member checks that occurred in January and February of 2017. First, after obtaining consent from the teachers who were willing to participate in the research study, I sent each one a questionnaire to fill out (Appendix A). The goal of the questionnaire was to acquire basic background information about the teacher before the interview. In particular, I was interested in her training, teaching experience, and team experiences. I brought the filled-out questionnaire to the first interview and asked clarifying questions about points that required elaboration.

A second data collection strategy I used before the first interview was to conduct a 30-minute observation of the participant in the classroom teaching with her team during work time. Work time was the three-hour block of time when the children were working independently and choosing their own work in the classroom. The purpose for the observation was to better understand the context in which the participant was interacting with the other teachers on her team. My focus was entirely on the participant and not on the children or the other two teachers. Each of the participants invited me to observe her in the afternoon during work time starting at about half an hour after the children arrived. I asked the participant to lead me to a place to sit

where I could be as unobtrusive as possible. My intent was to observe only the participant and take field notes of her interactions and communications with the other two teachers.

Having the experience of being in the classroom with the participant allowed me to be “open and discovery oriented and inductive” (Patton, 2015, p.333). I observed events that related most directly to what my study was focused on: the interactions and communications with the other teachers. While I was cognizant that I had selective perceptions, I reflected on them and recorded my perceptions in a journal that I kept throughout the duration of the study. During the observations of teachers in the classroom, I took abbreviated notes of the communications between the participant and the other two teachers. I wrote out the field notes in full shortly after the observation took place, following the recommendation of Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011). Using “inductive coding” which Patton (2015) defines as codes that “emerge progressively during data collection” (p. 81), in analyzing the field notes, I soon realized that the participants spent very little or no time at all in communicating verbally with their team during the time that I was there. Hence, for the second interview, I formulated questions about what the participant was thinking about her team at certain times during the observation, such as when she finished a presentation and made a decision about what to do next, when she looked at another teacher using non-verbal cues, or when she verbally communicated. Consequently, during the second interviews I devoted an important amount of time exploring verbal and non-verbal communication and the role of spirituality, with each participant. I integrated the specific questions about the observation at the end of the interview.

A third data collection strategy involved a reflexive activity on the part of the participants. Specifically, each participant was asked to reflect on what her participation in the team meant to her, and whether spirituality played a role, by choosing an artifact that best represented this meaning (Appendix B). She was asked to bring the artifact to the first interview. During the interview, the participant talked about the artifact, why she chose it, how she chose it, and what it meant in relation to how she saw herself as a member of her classroom team.

In the next step of the data collection, I conducted a 60 to 90 minute semi-structured interview with each participant in her classroom, after school, except for Clara whom I met at a cafe. The interview guide (Appendix C) offered a list of questions that I wanted to explore in the course of the interview with all of the participants. At the beginning of the interview, it was important to ascertain the teacher's understanding of the Montessori Method. This led to questions on the Montessori Method and spirituality, the role of spirituality and teacher interactions, and spirituality and verbal and non-verbal communication, to mention a few of them. I sent the participants a copy of the interview guide before the interview so that they could ask clarifying questions, if they chose to do so. Since this research study was the first of its kind to explore spirituality and Montessori teams, I cast my net widely to include as many aspects of Montessori teamwork as possible. There was flexibility embedded in the interview guide that allowed me to explore, probe, and go into more depth with the questions to illuminate a particular topic (Patton, 2015). This flexibility left room for other topics to emerge during the interview that the participants deemed important to communicate. Some of the probes I used were based on Patton's (2015, p. 466) examples: "Would you elaborate on that?" "I would

appreciate a bit more detail.” “What do you mean by...?” I used recording equipment to record each interview in order to obtain the participant’s perspective as fully and as fairly as possible. A professional transcribing company transcribed the interviews within one to two days after the interview.

After beginning the analysis of the transcripts of the first interviews, I ascertained that there were gaps in the data. Some responses were not clear or complete. As I reviewed the participants’ responses I prepared new and follow-up questions. I also became curious to see whether any of the key concepts from the literature review in Chapter Two were reflected in the data. Merriam (2009) suggested reviewing the literature that one turned to when developing the research study, at this stage, and I decided to undertake that activity. There were links between the data and the literature in several areas. I decided to add two crucial questions to the interview guide for the second interview: whether there was a connection between the Montessori Method, spirituality and teachers, for participants who did not mention that point in their first interview, and whether trust played a role in their teamwork. Otherwise, the second interview guide was uniquely tailored to each of the four participants, based upon their responses, and the completeness of their answers during the first interview. The duration of the second interviews varied from 15 to 30 minutes. I had not yet recruited the fifth participant at this time. When I interviewed the fifth participant in May, I integrated the main questions from the second interview guide and was able to cover all of the key points within one 90-minute interview. As mentioned previously, I had the interviews transcribed shortly after they took place to facilitate my data analysis.

The participants were given two weeks to review each transcript and make any changes that they deemed necessary, in order for me to have an accurate picture of what they wanted me to know. In the first part of my findings in Chapter Four, I wrote a profile of each participant and also sent the profile to each participant, requesting her to send me changes within two weeks.

As part of the data collection, I studied the one document that all the teams used at the school. It consisted of a division of duties for each teacher that rotated every week for three weeks. The duties included preparing art supplies, greeting the children at the door at the beginning of school, preparing and doing circle time, cleaning the shelves and materials, and taking attendance. At the fourth week, the teacher had the same duties that she had four weeks before. The rotation of duties continued throughout the whole school year.

Lastly, in January and February of 2017, I met with four of the five participants for member checks and feedback on some of the preliminary findings that were emerging out of the data. To elaborate, I presented to each participant a diagram of the three spheres that I included in Chapter Four, which highlighted my understanding of the teacher's spiritual self, the teacher-child relationship, and the teacher-teacher relationship. All of the participants agreed with the description of the three spheres and my portrayal of their statements. All of them added new information that furthered my understanding of their perceptions of teamwork and spirituality. I recorded their interviews of the member checks, which averaged around 30 minutes, and listened to them afterwards, taking notes on their key statements.

Data analysis.

According to Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), data analysis is more effective when it occurs concomitantly with data collection. One of the main reasons why they advocate such an approach is that the researcher can then think about the collected data and prepare new strategies for new and perhaps better data. As previously described, it was an approach that I adopted during my data collection. Firstly, as soon as I received the questionnaire from each participant, I took note of their responses and formulated new questions to ask during the first interview, in order to have clarification about their training and Montessori teaching experience. In all cases, the additional information that the participants provided oriented how I progressed through the initial portion of the interview. I was able to learn aspects of the participant's training and teaching career that created a foundation for the questions about spirituality and teamwork. I included this information in the descriptions of each of the participants presented in Chapter Four.

Keeping in mind Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011) cautionary remark regarding the tension in data analysis "between maintaining a sense of the holism of the interview and the tendency for analysis to atomize and fragment the data (p. 427)," I listened to audios of all the interviews twice and re-read the transcripts many times throughout the iterative data analysis process (Cohen et al, 2011). Relying on four main approaches to data analysis, Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014), Merriam (2009). and Patton (2015), I continued the analysis keeping in mind that "qualitative research is all about discovery" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 135). Desiring to understand each participant's perceptions of

spirituality and teamwork, I decided to “honor the participant’s voice” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 74) by extracting key words and phrases from her interview. Miles et al. (2014) referred to this process as “In Vivo coding,” and this approach led me to see certain patterns within each participant’s transcript that pointed towards her understanding of the Montessori Method and her work within it. Moreover, this approach allowed me to be flexible and “open to the unexpected” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 138). I had, in effect, constructed a “case study” of each participant, that was “unique” and “holistic” (Patton, 2015, p. 538), that led me into new directions for my data analysis.

I then conducted a preliminary cross-analysis and found that there were certain themes that were similar to many of the participants, which I eventually placed under the various sections of the findings in Chapter Four. Motivated by this discovery, I placed as many segments of the data for each participant as possible under each research question. This activity proved to be fruitful and I established certain categories that formed the foundation for my ongoing data analysis. I realized that I had gathered extensive data around question one, pertaining to the understandings and perceptions of the teachers regarding teamwork and spirituality. Question two was answered in various ways, illustrating how a spiritual foundation informed their teamwork. Question three led me to explore their verbal and non-verbal communication in more detail. Finally, I kept question four to the end of my data analysis to comprehend fully what the teachers were really saying about the role of spirituality in their work.

However, I realized at the end of this process that I was left with a certain amount of data that did not fit under any of the research questions. In order to make sense of this data, I took the

pathway described by Miles et al. (2014) and Patton (2015), and began a deductive analysis, using researcher-generated codes stemming from the literature review. Tying these codes to those emerging from the participants' own words, I uncovered the importance of the spiritual self of the teacher, as described by each participant. Additionally, the teacher-child relationship gained more relevance in my understanding of teamwork, and eventually, a central discovery of the congruence between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship formed the bridge between the two kinds of relationships that I was exploring. All of the above were perceived by the participants through the lens of the Montessori Method. By the end of this iterative process, I had analyzed most of what each participant had shared with me, and coded it under the different categories mentioned in this last section.

Throughout the data analysis stage, the identification of the findings, and the elaboration of the interpretations, I continuously followed the recommendations of the researchers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Merriam 2009; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015) to record notes about my thinking. For example, Miles et al. (2014) advised the undertaking of jottings. Like the term implies, I wrote down reflections and comments that emerged as I was doing the data analysis. This action deepened analysis and pointed to some significant issues that required additional attention. This led to analytic memoing. Analytic memos pieced together data that pointed to a general concept and were essentially tools that helped me to make sense of various aspects of the study. They also took the form of a journal. Patton (2015) encouraged researchers to be reflexive about what was shaping their perspective when they interacted with their data.

Therefore, I frequently went back to my understanding of the Montessori Method and tried to see the participants' view through their eyes, recording any differences along the way.

Producing assertions and propositions that were statements that point to certain findings of the study (Miles, et al. 2014) was the next step in the data analysis. More specifically, an assertion was a statement that synthesized and was supported by evidence from the data. When there was disconfirming data that was collected the assertion was modified. A proposition on the other hand was a statement that approached a prediction and took the form of an “if-then or why-because proposal” (Miles et al., 2014, p.100). These two kinds of statements presented patterns, themes and other findings in the research study.

Ethical Issues

During all steps of my research study, I carefully attended to the ethical dimensions and relational aspects (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Therefore, I worked on cultivating a trustworthy relationship with the teachers throughout all stages of the study and began with the important ethical issue of informed consent. This meant that the individuals had the right to weigh the risks and benefits of participating in the research, and decide on their own whether to participate after being informed about the facts of the research (Cohen et al., 2011). I also informed the participants about anonymity and confidentiality. All the participants decided to ask me to use a pseudonym when referring to them in the reporting and disseminating of the data; hence, I indicated that I would keep their names confidential at all times.

I demonstrated how much I valued their viewpoint, throughout the research process. Allowing them to elaborate as much as they wanted on each of the questions of the interviews, I

gave them the opportunity at the end of the interview to add any other question or issue they deemed essential. Signaling that I desired their input all throughout the unfolding of the research study, I invited feedback on the transcripts of the two interviews and on the description of the participant. The member check provided them ample opportunity to agree with, refute, take away, or add information to what I presented. Each participant seriously contemplated my findings and ascertained that I was on the right track. The member checks resulted in new data being offered.

Trustworthiness.

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of an inquiry is based upon the extent to which its “persuasiveness” is demonstrated by a “coherent and transparent research process and illustrating an adherence to researcher reflexivity and reflection” (Butler-Kisber, 2012, p. 14). I have indicated that I spent enough time with the participants to establish that they were being as authentic as possible with me in their comments, giving me feedback during the entire verification process, so that I would keep their perspectives uppermost in my mind during data analysis and interpretation. In the findings, in Chapter Four, I embedded the voices of the participants throughout, to support my assertions. I revealed discrepant cases, and presented the tensions that came up when faced with disconfirming data.

Credibility.

The credibility of a research study refers to whether the findings are “accurate and credible from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, and the reader” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 125). Merriam (2009) highlighted several strategies that a researcher can use to

increase credibility. First, my research demonstrated triangulation because I used multiple sources of data: a questionnaire, observation, two interviews, an artifact selection, document analysis and member checks. Secondly, during the member checks, the participants were invited to give me feedback on my interpretations of their experiences in their teams, and to suggest any “fine-tuning” (p. 215) of my understanding of their perspectives. Thirdly, earlier in this chapter, I revealed how I engaged deeply in the data, looking for alternative explanations that eventually uncovered new explanations for my focus of this study. Lastly, I was transparent in Chapter One about my assumptions and background, specifying the worldview that I brought to my research study.

Dependability.

Merriam (2009) pointed out that an additional important question about qualitative research is whether the “*results are consistent with the data collected*” (p. 221). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) expanded on this idea stating that the researcher will encounter inconsistencies in the data. What is necessary is that she denote when they occur by documenting them in her procedures. In order to meet this criterion, I collected data at each stage that was consistent and dependable, and that reflected the reality of each participant in the way she perceived and understood spirituality and teamwork. Moreover, as I journeyed through the transforming and illuminating study, I kept track of my queries, my reflections, the false starts, the decisions I made, and the issues I encountered.

Generalizability.

Generalizability refers to the extent to which the study of spirituality and Montessori teacher teams can be transferred to other contexts. Using the term “particularizability,” instead, Butler-Kisber (2010, p. 15), explained that it is about how a study resonates with the reader in other situations, so that the reader can confirm his experiences or acquire new understandings about these experiences. Adding to this understanding about generalizability, the term that Merriam (2009) used, she encouraged the researcher to provide thick description “to contextualize” the study so that the reader could determine whether they had experiences that matched those of the participants in the study, and “whether findings can be transferred” (p. 229). Therefore, it is the reader or user of the research that, in Merriam’s (2009) view, decides whether the findings apply to her particular situation. In this chapter and the following chapters, I provide ample and detailed description of all the steps I followed to arrive at the unexpected and sometimes profound findings that expanded my awareness of teaching and teamwork, that the reader may apply to her own circumstances. I take up this topic again in the last chapter on the implications of this research study.

I was cognizant of my role as researcher as I conducted my research study. Merriam (2002b) stressed that the researcher is “*the primary instrument* for data collection and data analysis” (p.5). Therefore, the researcher needs to be aware of and monitor her biases, and not try to eliminate them. Hunt (1992) emphasized that the researcher must take into account her intentions, perceptions, and beliefs, and convey an attitude to the participants that she is open to learning from them. From the beginning of the research study until its completion, I indicated to

the participants that I valued their comments and input, and that I was authentic in my interest to learn as much as possible about their perceptions and understandings of teamwork. They knew at the recruitment stage, from the head of the school and from a former colleague of mine who taught at the school, that I was a Montessori teacher. This knowledge appeared to put them at ease with me at the beginning of the study. At the same time, I did not disclose what I thought about spirituality and teamwork, nor about any of the other topics that came up during the interviews. I explained that I was more interested in what they thought, and that there were no right or wrong answers. I monitored my body language during the interviews, as well as my tone of voice, to indicate that I was open to what they were saying, and hence, remained in a position of integrity to ask follow-up questions. The participants apparently trusted my intention to learn, and in the second interviews and member checks, revealed further insights into their way of thinking about the topic of my research.

Approaching my research study as an opportunity to expand my experienced knowledge, I remained aware of the beliefs that I brought to the study throughout the various stages. At the same time, I continuously strived to think as the participants were thinking, and to put myself in their place, with their experiences and knowledge. Keeping a journal and memoing facilitated this process. I was then able to move towards the confirmation or disconfirmation of my beliefs in my data collection. In order to remain open to what may be, I constructed the interview guide to allow for unexpected results. I also encouraged the participants to express views that were different from mine. During the analysis, I kept in mind alternative interpretations of the data.

Limitations of the Study

Being aware of the limitations of my study was also part of my determination to maintain an ethical stance throughout the research study. A well-known limitation of qualitative research is researcher bias. Having spent time in the Montessori classroom as a teacher and, eventually, as a lead teacher, is one of the limitations of this study. In turn, the knowledge the participants had about my background and experience may have influenced their responses by responding in ways they thought I wanted them to answer. They may also have been careful about disclosing too much. Another limitation may have been that the teachers were reluctant to share much of their true perceptions and understandings. Moreover, they may not have thought of spirituality and its role in their interactions and communication with other teachers on the team. The purpose of the research would still be fulfilled, as I would learn about the teachers' thinking about this topic.

Understanding these limitations in advance, I took the time to develop a trustworthy relationship with the teachers in order for them to feel comfortable with me. I demonstrated an empathetic and unpretentious approach to my communication with them. I gave them ample opportunity to reflect on my questions during the interviews, accepted false starts to their responses, and gave them space to admit that they may not have thought about some of the topics beforehand. My previous experience in research and interviewing was helpful in creating an open and accepting atmosphere. Restricting myself from engaging in a dialogue with them during the interviews, and after the observations, about my experienced knowledge, allowed me to spread the net widely to gather in as much of their perceptions and understandings as possible.

Finally, there were only five participants in my study, and they were all from the same school. Though they were on three different teams, there was similarity in how they perceived spirituality, teamwork, and the Montessori Method. My experienced knowledge pointed to the existence of teams in other schools who were not as cohesive as these. However, the intention of this study was not to generalize to other groups or teams; it was to see whether the knowledge I gained could be “assessed for its applicability and applied appropriately in other contexts” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 127).

Summary

In this chapter I presented my ontology, constructivism and social constructivism, and my epistemology, interpretivism. The assumptions underlying them guided my research study. This research took the form of a basic interpretive study where I was interested in the meaning of the experiences that the teachers had in a team, and in particular the role of spirituality. The research design included participant selection, data collection and data analysis. I included some of the main issues facing qualitative research. These were: trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, and generalizability. This study unfolded with those topics in mind.

Chapter 4 Findings: Speaking from the Heart

Introduction

As I approached the phase of presenting the findings in my research study, I kept uppermost in my mind the purpose of my research. It was to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers bring to their interactions in classroom teams. As I examined the data collected from the participants, I remained open to what significant themes were emerging. Consequently, as I followed the inductive, analytic direction that my study took me in, I encountered unexpected findings. I will elaborate on these surprises and other emerging themes in the following sections.

The findings arose from the data collected from five Montessori teachers who all taught at the same Montessori school in western Canada. The five teachers were from three different teacher teams, in different classrooms. Two teachers were from the first team of three teachers, Jane and Magda. The next two teachers were from a second team of three teachers, Mary and Sierra. The fifth teacher was from the third team, Martha. They taught children who were ages two and a half to six years old. The following are the details of my findings.

To begin with, as I allowed the data to speak to me, I uncovered my primary and foundational finding. It was that the spiritual self of the teacher was a significant contributing aspect to the teachers' interactions on the team. The importance of this finding came as a surprise to me, because in developing my research study, I had placed more emphasis on the team interactions rather than on the role of the teacher's individual spiritual self in the interactions. However, the more I studied the data, the more I realized that all the participants held

perceptions of themselves as individuals with spiritual qualities, who were constantly changing and growing, within the context of their classrooms. Moreover, the connection that the teacher had with her spiritual self appears to have enabled the teacher to cultivate a caring teacher-child relationship, which is the most important relationship in the classroom. This is consistent with the emphasis Maria Montessori placed on the teacher-child relationship when she trained Montessori teachers, as mentioned in Chapters One and Two. The participants in my study explained that the teachers develop positive relationships with the children, and also build relationships among themselves on the team, in order to support the children reaching their full potential. As I began to see the teacher-child relationship and the teacher relationships in the teams through the eyes of the participants, I coalesced my thinking on a diagram that evolved over many weeks. I now present this diagram of concentric spheres, in order to expand on the findings in the sections below, and to display the ideas I just articulated.

In the center of the three spheres is the teacher and her spiritual self. In turn, the teacher brings her spiritual self to the teacher-child relationship, represented by the second sphere. The third sphere denotes the teachers' relationships in the team. Though the spheres may appear to be mutually exclusive, I learned from the participants that there was a constant interchange among all three kinds of relationships depicted by the spheres.

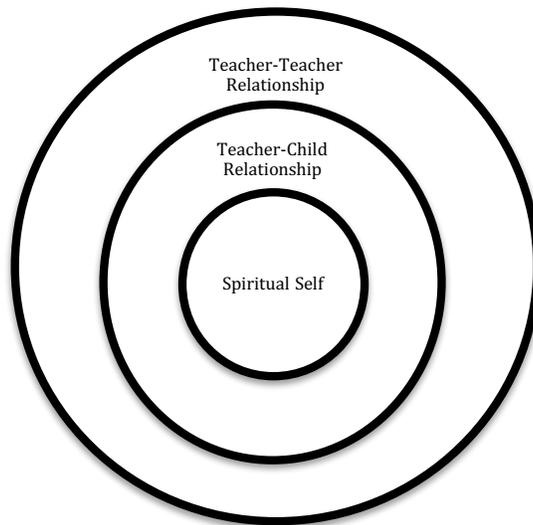


Figure 1. Teacher relationships

Using the idea of the interconnectedness of the teacher’s spiritual self, the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship, I will now present the findings that fall under these three categories. In order to provide a context in which I conducted my research study, I begin with a description of the Montessori school where my participants taught. I gathered this information from the school public website, from participant statements during the interviews, and from observations I made when I was at the school.

The Context of the Montessori School

I recruited the participants from a private Montessori school located in a friendly neighborhood. It provides two separate half-day Casa programs, lasting three hours each: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Casa, meaning “house” in Italian, is taken from “Casa dei Bambini,” Maria Montessori’s name of her first school. It means “children’s house.” Today Montessori schools use the term Casa to refer to a multi-aged Montessori program offered to

children starting at two and half or three years old to six years old. This school offers such programs. They run from September to June. Consistent with Montessori's work, the school encourages the parents to commit to placing their child in the school for three years, starting when the child is two and half or three years old until the child turns six and goes to grade one. As I arrived at the school to conduct the interviews and the teacher observations, I often found myself surrounded by cheerful parents picking up or dropping off their children, depending on the time of day. The children seemed eager to go to school and at the end of their day were excited to relate to their parents what they had learned that day. The teachers always had smiles for everyone, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. When I occasionally saw the head of the school mingling with the parents, I noticed that she would readily respond to any question or comment in a helpful, encouraging manner.

Each classroom I entered was beautifully maintained and orderly. During the observations, I noted that each classroom had an atmosphere of peace surrounding the children, as they worked quietly on the material they had freely chosen. The three classrooms were all normalized, the single most important result of Montessori education. Maria Montessori used the term normalization to describe a process where children who have the freedom to choose materials that interest them, flourish over time. Normalization has the following characteristics. As the children work with the material, they develop a deep concentration, and when they finish working they appear to be refreshed and happy. Over time, as they continue to concentrate on their work, the children develop self-discipline and a sense of peace. Since I started my data collection in February, the children had had enough experience with their teachers and peers in

the prepared environment, since September, to develop the characteristics of normalized children. As I will explore later, the teachers played an active role in the normalization of their classrooms.

In each classroom, there were about 28 children and a team of three directresses. Maria Montessori created the term “directress” for the Montessori teacher to differentiate her role of supporting the developmental efforts of the child’s inner life from the teaching role of the traditional teacher. Today many Montessori schools continue to use the term “directress” for their staff. The head of the school where I conducted my study determined that on each team the directresses would all share equally in the responsibilities of planning, giving presentations, and managing the classroom. As Martha described it, the three teachers “play the same role,” and Clara clarified that, “It’s more of a team decision making.” All the participants in my study indicated that they were very satisfied with this particular way of working together as a team. As an example, Mary described how this arrangement works in practice: “I like the fact that I'm not better than anyone. I'm not less than anyone. We're all on equal standing.”

The participants in the study mentioned three other areas where the head of the school has an influence on how the teachers work together. One of these areas is the communication among the teachers on a team. She has requested that the teachers talk together at lunchtime about any issues that come up concerning the children’s behavior and learning, as well as any matters affecting the team. She explained to them that if the teachers converse about concerns as they come up, they will avert the tendency of holding onto grievances. All of the participants in the study agreed that resolving any problems immediately leads to maintaining peace in the

classroom. Moreover, what came as another surprise to me was the following: the time the teachers spent together talking before school, at lunch and after school had an important influence on their teamwork. I will explore this finding in more depth in the section on communication.

Another area where the head of the school has an impact on the team is documentation. After each presentation that the teachers give, they write about what has happened in the child's progress book. This allows other teachers to read about the child's progress, as well as any other issues pertaining to the child that they all need to know about.

A third area where the head of the school plays a role is facilitating cooperation among the teachers in the organization of a monthly professional development day. The staff from all the classrooms meet to learn together and to do team building. These professional development days create a trusting atmosphere where the teachers feel safe to raise any topic that is important to them. In turn, they take this atmosphere of support and acceptance from the head of the school back to their classrooms as teams.

I now turn to the next section where I offer a portrayal of each participant as she presented herself in the questionnaire, in the observation, in choosing the artifact, in the interviews, and in the member check. I will focus on three specific areas. These are: 1) the participant's Montessori training and Montessori teaching experience, 2) her understanding of the Montessori Method, and 3) a description of the artifact that she brought to the first interview. The artifact (Appendix B) represented what being in a Montessori teacher team meant to the participant and the role that spirituality played, if it played a role at all. The final version of the

descriptions of the participants evolved over a long period of time. It stemmed from a basic selection of some of the data, to eventually encompass a significant amount of the participants' comments, with an intensive scrutiny of the interviews, and other data collection instruments. I therefore present an interconnected, holistic, portrayal of each participant, using Montessori principles presented in Chapter Two as my guide. After the descriptions of the five participants, I will present the thematic analysis of the three spheres mentioned earlier.

Descriptions of the Participants

Jane.

Training and teaching experience.

Jane has been a Montessori teacher for seven years. She took her Montessori early childhood training in her home country, India, to teach children from 3 to 6 years old. When I enquired about her training, she gave a glowing tribute of her instructor. Many Montessori teacher students see their training instructors as role models. This was the case for Jane and she affirmed that her instructor made a lasting impression on her: "She is an amazing teacher. She inspired me greatly and I learned a great deal from her."

Jane remarked that she did not learn how to teach in a team during her training. In looking back on her training, she posited: "It's always about a child and a teacher. It's never about a team of Montessori teachers." Yet, all of her teaching experiences have been in teams. She learned about how to work in a team by "seeing others" work together. After teaching in India for three years, Jane moved to Canada where she worked at another Montessori school for one and a half years. Two and a half years ago, she moved to the school where she is currently

teaching. She remarked with some disappointment that she had different team experiences in her home country from those she has had in Canada. The main reason was because in her home country all the teachers on her team received their training from the same institute. In contrast, in Canada, the teachers on her teams have all had different training experiences. In some instances, the differences in training have led teachers to tell the others on the team, “I learnt this way. I am right.” This situation has resulted in lively discussions within her current team about various aspects of the Montessori Method where they did not all have the same understanding.

Montessori method.

I was interested in exploring with the participants their understanding of the Montessori Method. In particular, I wanted to see whether they would bring up any of Montessori’s ideas about the spiritual nature of the teacher-child relationship, or of the teacher’s spiritual preparation. Though Jane did not mention these points directly, she did touch upon Montessori concepts that Montessori suggested do pertain to the child’s spiritual development. These included “independence, freedom for children” and “helping the child to be groomed by himself.” Jane also emphasized the importance of the teacher “not dictating what to do.” Instead, she explained that the teacher follows the child’s interests. Her acceptance of the knowledge and understanding that she had acquired during her training clearly influenced her way of working in the classroom. In contrast, Jane spoke of other Montessori teachers that she has known who were not implementing the Montessori Method the way they had been taught. She urged them instead to believe in what they had learned:

You have done your Montessori training. You learned your philosophy. You believe in it. Believe in it. Have some beliefs and trust in what you learned and put it in your daily classes...Montessori doesn't work just like that. You need to have a patience to see the good in the child. You need to have a patience to see good in the environment. It takes time.

After exploring the Montessori Method with Jane, I wanted to see if there was a connection between Jane's perspective on the Montessori Method and her view of spirituality. In commencing her reply, Jane first stated that, for her, spirituality meant that a school would teach religion as part of its curriculum. Furthermore, she referred to what her Montessori training instructor had said about religion and "culture." Her instructor had spoken about them synonymously. Therefore, Jane asserted, as her instructor had done, that one should not bring one's religion into the classroom: "You can have a talk with the children what kinds of religions you have, but don't bring the culture to the environment." In other words, a Montessori teacher should not "preach" to the children about her religion.

Secondly, Jane went on to interpret spirituality in another way, as it applied to her team. She said that it also meant "everybody in the same page or your philosophy in the same page." Jane expressed a firm belief about the importance of all teachers on the same team having a similar knowledge and understanding of the Montessori Method. As with her ideas about spirituality and religion, this standpoint came from her training course: "They do say in the environment all teachers need to be on the same page." Intrigued by her reply, I enquired into what that would look like in practice. Jane gave an example of Montessori teachers who refute

the importance of teaching “academics” to young children, believing that these should be taught when a child is in grade one and two. However, according to the understanding that she had garnered during her training, Jane clarified that it’s not “academics” if the teacher is teaching what the child is interested in. Lastly, although she did not specify a direct connection between peace and spirituality, Jane indicated that she wanted peace in the classroom, above all else. The concept of peace is taken up again in the next section on Jane’s artifact.

Artifact.

As part of the exploration of teacher perceptions and understandings, I asked each participant to bring an artifact to the interview to represent what being in a Montessori teacher team meant to her. I was charmed to find out that Jane had chosen a white candle that a child had given her as a gift. It was still wrapped delicately in its see-through wrapping. She explained that she chose this artifact because it represented peace. She explained that peace “is extremely important in our daily life.” For her, peace meant the same as love. Furthermore, maintaining that we all create peace in our own unique way, she emphasized that it is very important for the Montessori teacher to be a role model of peace for the children. Interestingly, this concept of peace came directly from what Jane had learned about Montessori’s work. Jane clarified, “In Montessori environment peace is the major rule. This is what Maria Montessori wanted to be in the classroom, the peace.”

Martha.

Training and teaching experience.

Martha has been a Montessori teacher for five years. She obtained her first Montessori early childhood diploma from an online training course. Since she did not have access to Montessori materials to practice with during the training, Martha found that it had its limitations. Additionally, she did not learn how to work in a team during the training. Nevertheless, a Montessori preschool hired Martha as she was completing her training, where she worked on a team for two and a half years. After being hired in her current position two years ago, Martha decided last fall to take a more comprehensive face-to-face one-year Montessori early childhood diploma course. This was the same course that Clara and Mary were taking, two other participants in this research study. Martha brought her new knowledge from her studies to her current teaching and team. Once during this training, she declared that there was a panel presentation on how to work in teams. However, she found that it did not cover much helpful content about teamwork. On the other hand, Martha has embraced the Montessori philosophy as “a lifestyle,” and mentioned that when she has children, she will introduce Montessori principles into her home. Martha also acknowledged that the Montessori Method has influenced other parts of her life; for example, she has become more organized and a better planner as a result.

Montessori method.

Martha’s understanding of the Montessori Method was multi-faceted. For her, it consists of “allowing the children to use the abilities that they have.” The teachers therefore provide opportunities for the children to develop their abilities by having them practice in the classroom.

She also accentuated the principle of “believing in the child.” Although teachers do not know what a child will become, they nevertheless need to “let them try” to show the teachers what their “capabilities” are. Furthermore, in the process, the children become “independent” and “discover themselves,” as the teachers give them the “tools” to do so.

As in Jane’s case, I wanted to know whether Martha’s understanding of the Montessori Method included a possible connection with spirituality. While Jane had focused on the teachers in her reply, Martha concentrated on the child. She affirmed that the Montessori Method and spirituality were linked: “To me they are definitely connected. I think it goes back to the inner self. I believe that the spirituality comes from the inside.” As a Montessori teacher, she is allowing the child “to believe in himself” which, to her, is an aspect of spirituality. Acknowledging that the child does not know yet what he is capable of “until he tries,” Martha stated that, “It comes from me to believe in him so he can believe in himself.” According to Martha, this is also related to spirituality. Recognizing that each child has a potential, the teachers keep a vision of what she is to become.

Wondering where Martha had learned about her understanding of the connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality, I queried her about its source. Interestingly, she indicated that it came from “personal growth books” not related to the Montessori Method. Yet, as she read them, it began to make sense to her that “spirituality plays a role not only in children, not only in the...Montessori classroom, but in the world, in the environment.”

Artifact.

Martha's artifact was a shining, polished deep crimson geode. I am as fascinated by rocks as is Martha, so when I saw the geode I was curious to find out how it represented the meaning of being on a team. To start with, Martha declared that she was thinking "about the energies that we all bring to the team...I would say that this is a whole geode where everybody puts their energy into, and it keeps it but it radiates it too." She continued by saying that her choice of the geode was related to spirituality. According to Martha, spirituality "is the inner self of an individual." In this sense, she distinguished spirituality from religion. She stated, "It's the knowing of yourself. It's the understanding of yourself, and the acceptance of yourself...It's just what I give from me to other people." Returning to the geode, Martha elaborated on how "it radiates from inside to outside." As the combined energies of the team, it radiates energy to the children, and also sends out "wisdom." For example, she pointed out that a decision she would make today would be different from a decision she made three years ago. She had grown in wisdom since then and "only spirituality will allow you to do that."

Martha expanded upon her thoughts about wisdom: "I think wisdom is having the knowledge of something and knowing how to use it, and if you are not clear about things, accepting that you don't know it." The quality of "humbleness" accompanies wisdom. Consequently, a wise person would say, "I don't know all the answers to everything...they are always open to learning." As I will demonstrate later in the section on how the teachers relate to each other on the team, being open to learning is a topic that came up frequently in the interviews.

Martha offered several other spiritual qualities relating to her interactions with others. She replied, “You can grow in having more comprehensive understanding of other people, or being more accepting of others...patience could grow...and having a control over yourself.” An example of having control over yourself, that Martha described, was being in a situation that could elicit anger and frustration from you. Instead of reacting right away with those emotions, one would “pause for a second, and think about it, and then react.” Since taking the time to think before reacting in the classroom is an important quality for teachers to develop, I wondered how she managed to do so. Her response indicated that she had explored mindfulness in the past, “I am being mindful of what I am doing consciously.” While she couldn’t quite recall the specific titles, Martha asserted that her understanding of being mindful came from books she had read. Thereafter, she began to practice mindfulness in various areas of her life.

The development of spirituality in her life occurred over a period of time: “I think I applied it first to the world around me. To my friends, or to my family and to the people I see every day, whom I work with every day.” Then as she was attending the Montessori training course at the time of the interview, she learned “about spirituality being a part of the Montessori environment.” When a guest lecturer talked about spirituality, “It wasn’t a foreign concept to me...It gives me more ideas,” she declared.

Clara.

Training and teaching experience.

Clara has been a Montessori teacher for three years. She obtained her face-to-face Montessori assistant certificate in Canada, and then worked for one year as an assistant on a

large team in another Montessori school. Her experience at that school taught her a lot about how to work in a team. Two years ago, she started working at this school. Last year she decided to take the same face-to-face one-year training course at the same time as Martha and Mary. Her reason for taking the course was to become more fully trained as a directress.

Clara spoke in detail about what the training course had contributed to her understanding of spirituality. At one point during the course, according to Clara, they talked about Maria Montessori's perspective on the spiritual preparation of the teacher. Clara expounded on some of the same elements of spirituality that Martha had mentioned. These included the idea that spirituality is inside the person, and that this inner life is unique. Nonetheless, Clara doesn't believe that the inner life should remain hidden: "it's only me but I kind of want to share it with others." As well, she made these additional points about spirituality:

It is about awareness. It's about recognizing ourselves. It's about recognizing our character, improving ourselves and our beliefs and everything that is connected with us and what we want to see in our work. For me spirituality is what I believe in, what I want to see in my work, what I want to share with my co-workers and what I want to share with children...my values.

Montessori method.

Clara spoke about her understanding of the Montessori philosophy in a manner similar to Jane and Martha. She briefly listed a few Montessori principles pertaining to the child. This list by no means exhausts the principles that Clara follows in her classroom, since Jane, and the third teacher on Clara's team have all contributed their own set of Montessori principles on how to

best work together with the child. Clara mentioned these specific aspects of the Montessori Method: “a whole child,” a child who is “independent,” and “who is open to the world.” Clara also emphasized the freedom accorded to the child in the Montessori classroom: “Montessori is the environment when a child is free.” The child “learns whatever he wants and his interest is being followed.”

When asked whether she saw a connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality, Clara responded that she did see one. She began to speak about the Montessori teacher rather than the child, just as Jane had done. Furthermore, maintaining that children cannot by themselves know what is right and what is wrong, Clara contended that it is the role of the teacher to teach them values. However, she added that if a teacher does not have “good values,” she couldn’t teach them to the children. The examples of teachable values Clara mentioned were kindness and respect, which she sees as being “connected with spirituality.”

Clara stated that she learned about the connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality from the Montessori training course she was taking. The students had “a whole topic on the spirituality.” Every week, they shared ideas about “how they could improve themselves,” what they could do “to help our spirituality” and “how to understand ourselves.” She revealed that before taking the course, for her, “spirituality was connected with the religion.”

When asked what she was thinking during those sessions on spirituality, she answered, “What I can do to improve myself.” Clara divulged that “being judgmental” of children was her primary weakness. To counteract this tendency, she tries “to think of the child...in front of me and be of help no matter what kind of issue the child has.” In this way she hopes to replace, not

only her judgment of the child but her related habit of blaming the parents for the child's behavior, with a more open-minded view.

On a personal note, she disclosed that the discussions during the course motivated her to start a journal in order "to think about things that I've done in a day and if I like them or if I don't like them and what can I do next time in a situation like this to improve." The decision to start a journal seems to stem from her self-reflection, as an aspect of spirituality. The self-examination that Clara started in her journal included reviewing what she had said to her team during the day, and realizing that at times she had not taken into consideration their perspective. The day after such a realization, she would go into work with the intention of learning more about her colleagues' thinking. In the end, what was important to Clara was that there be peace among the three teachers. This sentiment was echoed by all the participants.

Artifact.

Clara's artifact was a delightful white figurine of an angel. Being drawn to angels myself, I was intrigued with her choice of how to represent the meaning of being on a Montessori teacher team. She emphasized that her artifact was not tied to her religion; for her, angels were simply beings who "keep us strong and guard us." Therefore, the angel "is the sign of giving support, giving strength." To demonstrate that she would like to be "their guardian angel to help them get through their own personal things," Clara gave each of her colleagues at school an angel for Christmas.

The support symbolized by the angel is not reserved exclusively for her colleagues: Clara also sees it as a symbol of her support for the children. In addition to support, the angel also

symbolizes, for Clara, being non-judgmental, so she, in turn, is also trying to be non-judgmental. Another characteristic of angels that Clara raised with me was that they have “good energy.” Therefore, she is trying to “have a good energy,” something that she strives for. In sum, her goal is “trying to be like that teeny tiny angel for everybody that I work with.”

Mary.

Training and teaching experience.

Mary’s mother had been a Montessori teacher for thirty years in her home country of India. Therefore, Mary always had in the back of her mind that she too one day would become a Montessori teacher. When she came to Canada she realized that there were more opportunities for Montessori training than in her home country. Therefore, when her daughter was one year old, she took an online Montessori infant/toddler certification course. After being hired by a Montessori school as an assistant, she was able to take the Montessori assistant’s course. One year later she joined staff at the school where I conducted my research study. Altogether, Mary has four years of Montessori teaching experience.

Having had the goal of obtaining a diploma in early childhood for some years, she seized the opportunity to take the same course that Martha and Clara were taking. She spoke happily about learning “intricate details” about the materials that she did not know before, such as “the why and the purpose of it and why we do this a certain way.” Every week after attending the course she would return to her team, which included Sierra, the final participant in this study, and share what she had learned. They would discuss any differences in their way of presenting a

particular material and come to an agreement about whether to adopt her new way or keep the status quo.

Montessori method.

For Mary, the “cornerstones” of the Montessori Method are “independence,” “following the child,” and “the freedom of choice, the choice within limits.” Mary considered the freedom that the child has in the Montessori classroom to be the most important aspect. Her elaboration of the “cornerstones” reflected her commitment to the Montessori Method. She summed up her comments by saying: “I think all these underlying threads within the philosophy all work really well together.” In essence, Mary believed that they would result in a trusting relationship between the teacher and the child.

I asked Mary whether she saw a connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality. Somewhat surprised by my question, she admitted that she had never thought about a possible connection between the two, at least as it might apply to the child. She could, however, readily see the connection between spirituality and the team. It was only upon further consideration that she could imagine the relevance of spirituality to the child in the Montessori classroom. For Mary, the connection had to do with the child’s self-awareness. Mary reflected, “true independence, through the freedom of choice, through the freedom within limits, you get to know yourself. You get to know what you can do and what you can’t.” Mary contended that as the child increases his self-awareness, he is developing more of his spirituality.

As it regards the team, Mary drew the connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality from “the course that I am taking right now.” Before taking the course, like Clara, she

used to associate spirituality with religion. Mary avowed that she had never heard of that connection previously. Now she was striving to understand the connection, as it applied to her work “the fact that spirituality is woven into the fabric of Montessori, I’m just starting to get the hang of it now.” She was “working so hard to see if I’m understanding it and if I’m able to incorporate it into my work life.” Specifically, Mary stated that they were learning about “being aware, of growing, of being open to learning.” As Mary has become more open over time, she has developed a calmness that allows her to interact with other people “who might be diametrically opposite in personality to me.” She admitted that it took a lot of effort to train her mind to not “lose it” when talking to them. Mary attributes these victories to “my own desire to get to know myself and my own effort to...train myself to be aware of where I am and who I am all the time.”

Since Mary was the third of three participants in this study who were taking the same training course together, I could see similarities in how the three of them approached their understanding of spirituality. I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, how this understanding influenced their teamwork.

Finally, Mary made one more statement that was very thought provoking to me. She wondered if Montessori teachers have a predisposition to embrace this particular profession. In Mary’s mind, they do. She claimed: “it takes a different kind of a person to become a Montessori teacher. I think they need to have enormous self-awareness and self-control.”

Artifact.

Mary chose a lovely, pink, silk bouquet of flowers as her artifact to represent teamwork and spirituality. It was in a dainty vase on the snack table in her classroom for the children to enjoy while they ate snack. According to Mary, each individual stem with a bloom on it represented a teacher on the team. As is the case with the flower, the teacher “is a member of a team and has to be nourished and take care of its own flower before it can come together and make this beautiful arrangement.” Mary further elaborated on aspects of spirituality that both Martha and Clara had broached. She stated, it means “to be in tune with myself, being aware of where I am, who I am, what I can do and what I cannot do.” Furthermore, Mary emphasized “It’s very important that each person in that team is in tune with their feelings, with their emotions, with their abilities.” Just as she has many “parts” of her life that she needs to keep in balance, so do “the petals of a flower where each one is equally important. I cannot neglect one in favor of the other.” Finally, she concluded saying of each teacher on her team, “if we’re not healthy on our own, then it’s not going to work when we come together.”

Sierra.

Training and teaching experience.

As I was exploring Sierra’s Montessori training and teaching experience, I discovered that she was hired for her first teaching position because of her successful work with children and youth in other capacities. The owner of a school invited her to visit her classroom and Sierra “fell in love with the materials and with the philosophy.” During her first year as a Montessori teacher she completed an online Montessori training course to obtain her early childhood

diploma. During Sierra's practicum, the owner sat with her every day and gave her one on one lessons that advanced her knowledge and understanding. Just as Martha had critiqued her online training course as being too limited, so too did Sierra raise the limitations of her online course, "I don't know how these people do it with just the online training and not working in the class. Because it doesn't work. You have to have some hands-on training."

Sierra worked at this first school for four years and discovered her passion for Montessori teaching. Four years ago, Sierra was one of the first employees at the school where she is presently teaching. Altogether, with nine years of Montessori teaching experience, she is the participant in this study with the most experience. Sierra explained that the reason why she is still teaching is because "I love what I do." It's more than a job for her. It's her "passion."

Montessori method.

Sierra spoke extensively about various aspects of the Montessori Method. Beginning with an overview of Maria Montessori's work with children with disabilities, she expounded upon the areas in the Montessori classroom that fascinated her. Sierra touched on the "three-period lesson," "uninterrupted class, where they could self-initiate anything they wanted in the classroom," "multi-ages," "sense of freedom," and "sense of respect." She also emphasized Montessori's interest in wanting "to have a deeper understanding of the whole child." Relating her love of the Montessori Method with Maria Montessori's work, Sierra stated that Montessori "wanted to teach to the child and that's what I love about Montessori, is we can adapt our programs, to suit them, to teach them." Sierra expressed her deep commitment to the Montessori Method, where she could continually expand her capabilities with the children and her team.

At first, Sierra did not see a connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality. For her, spirituality meant the same as religion. Then she stressed that spirituality was the same as peace: “I think it as peace. That’s really, that’s about it. I think it is just peace.” Recalling that Jane had also focused on peace in her remarks about the classroom, I enquired how Sierra understood peace. Sierra exclaimed: “I see a big connection in peace. Because we bring the peace out in the children. We try to find it in them.” Sierra elaborated by stating, that during her career “there’s not been one child that we haven’t found peace within.”

Interestingly enough, Sierra’s concept of peace originated from her first observation of a Montessori classroom, where she was eventually hired. In observing the children at work with their teachers, her initial response was “It’s so calm. It’s a loving environment. There’s respect.” As she continued to observe, she comprehended that, “I saw peace in the classroom.”

Artifact.

Sierra informed me that she had not chosen an artifact. The reason she gave was “I don’t feel that there is one specific artifact that would show my spirituality in the whole class. I find that the children are what bring me comfort. Not really spirituality but a comfort...the children bring me ...peace.” Returning to the original request to bring an artifact that reflected their understanding of being on a team, I reframed the question within the team context. She repeated the idea of finding “comfort” in her team and that, “someone is always there. Someone is always helping you out. Someone backs you up. Someone has confidence in you. Someone knows that you are always there for them.”

Summary

The participants revealed some noteworthy information about themselves as Montessori teachers. Firstly, their Montessori teaching experience ranged from three years to nine years. They all obtained or were in the process of obtaining the training necessary for teaching the early childhood age group of 2 ½ to six years old. Additionally, each participant indicated, in her own unique way, that she was committed to implementing the Montessori Method. Though none of them overtly and directly mentioned the spiritual nature of the teacher-child relationship, using Maria Montessori's terms, I nevertheless concluded that the participants were working together on their teams to establish a shared understanding of the Montessori Method that had spiritual undertones. In reflecting on the link between the Montessori Method and their understanding of spirituality, Clara and Mary spoke about how their training course had influenced their meaning of this term. Martha, who was taking the same course, explained that she had already had a basis for her understanding of spirituality. The training added to her grasp of the topic. Jane, the only participant who had completed her Montessori training outside of Canada, spoke of the influence her training instructor had on her perception of the Montessori Method and spirituality. Finally, Sierra did not refer to any connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality stemming from her training. However, she did associate spirituality with peace through her experiences in the classroom.

I will now turn to the thematic analysis of the three principal themes laid out at the beginning of this chapter as three concentric spheres: the teacher's spiritual self, the teacher-child relationship, and the teacher-teacher relationship.

Thematic Analysis

The relationships between teachers on a team can be studied to some extent without referring to outside influences. However, I found in my research study that I could only comprehend the participants' understandings and perceptions of their teamwork by first taking into consideration their spiritual self, as well as the teacher-child relationship, as they revealed them to me. As the findings in the proceeding sections demonstrate, I allowed the participants' voices to permeate and expand my own beliefs and perspectives about teamwork, and in turn, to re-direct me into a new direction concerning the importance of spirituality and the Montessori teacher-child relationship.

At the same time, my research questions continued to be guideposts for my reflections. As presented below, the research questions all incorporate a possible connection to spirituality. For this reason, I continuously referred back to spirituality with the participants. This process enabled me to integrate their understandings of the role of spirituality at every level of the findings. As a reminder, these are the research questions:

- 1) What understandings and perceptions, with a particular emphasis on spirituality, inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 2) Does a spiritual foundation actually inform the teamwork of Montessori teachers?
- 3) If a spiritual foundation does inform their practice, how do their perceptions of the spiritual nature of their role influence the verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?
- 4) If spirituality doesn't inform their perceptions, what is it that informs their perceptions of verbal and nonverbal communication with each other?

The research questions are situated along a continuum that continuously spirals back to what was presented in the descriptions of the participants at the beginning of this chapter. The first research question led me to uncover the influence that the participants' training had on how they viewed the Montessori Method and spirituality. As I mentioned in each of the descriptions of four participants, Jane, Martha, Clara, and Mary, with the exception of Sierra, I learned from them that their training influenced the way they perceived themselves as teachers, and that their teacher identity had increasingly developed through a spiritual lens. At the same time, for all of the participants, the meaning they ascribed to spirituality seemed to guide their behaviors in the classroom. An indication of this meaning was reflected in how four of the five participants chose artifacts for the interview that mirrored their spiritual understanding of teamwork. Understanding this situation, I next delved into the teacher-child relationship before contemplating teamwork as set out in the three other research questions. To start off, in the next section, I will explore the teacher's spiritual self.

The Teacher's Spiritual Self

"We were talking about spirituality, the spiritual preparation of the teacher, Montessori teacher and it is about self awareness. It's about recognizing ourselves. It's about recognizing our character, improving ourselves and our beliefs and everything that is connected with us and what we want to see in our work." Clara

For a Montessori teacher, it is essential to understand the teacher-child relationship as Maria Montessori revealed it to us. Gradually, she sees herself fulfilling that role. However, as I explored more fully in Chapter Two, Maria Montessori maintained that the first step in becoming

a Montessori teacher is to focus on her spiritual preparation; in particular, to become acquainted with her strengths and her weaknesses, and to develop spiritual qualities vital for the teacher-child relationship. Some of these weaknesses, such as pride and anger would be detrimental to building love and trust in the teacher-child relationship. Moreover, as seen in the section on teams in Chapter Two, they would also impede the relationships among the teachers on the team. Montessori believed then that the inner work that the Montessori teacher must do involves continuous self-improvement, as well as the development of certain spiritual qualities that are needed to bring the teacher-child relationship to fruition. For this reason, the spiritual development of many Montessori teachers commences in earnest during their Montessori training and endures purposefully throughout their teaching career. All of the participants in my study alluded to this mindset. They specified certain qualities they considered essential in developing and maintaining a positive relationship with the children. These will be presented in a later section on the teacher-child relationship. Moreover, since they detailed what spirituality meant to them, as depicted in the descriptions of each teacher at the beginning of this chapter, I noticed that they reflected on what that meaning implied for their behavior in the classroom. Although Sierra did not directly specify that her training was what influenced her continuous striving to maintain peace in the classroom, as the other participants did, she did describe how her intentions directed her to this goal. In the description of Sierra earlier in this chapter, I mention how she strives to “bring out the peace in the children.” Additionally, all of the participants in my study had the quality of peace and calm around them. Taken together, the participants’ statements led me to focus on their spiritual self.

For a number of weeks, as I was analyzing the interview data, I was striving to understand the meaning behind what Jane told me about her desire to implement the Montessori Method, as closely as possible to what she had learned in her training. Recognizing her profound aspiration to do so, I eventually moved beyond her outer words to discover her deep passion on the inner for children and their learning. I acknowledged that I saw a multilayered commitment to the Montessori Method. It appeared that having a deep commitment to the Montessori Method seems to govern how a teacher orients herself in the classroom. Since the Montessori Method revolves around the spiritual nature of the child, this commitment would lead a teacher to support the development of this aspect of the child's nature. In order for the child to take on the characteristics that the participants' mentioned in their understanding of the Montessori Method at the beginning of this chapter, such as becoming independent, having the freedom to choose and following his own interests, the teacher needs to, in turn, embody those qualities that will enable the child to do so. Therefore, my attention to the spiritual self of the teacher was galvanized when I realized that each of the teachers held a sincere commitment to implementing the Montessori Method in the best way she knew how. Jane firmly articulated this commitment "What I learnt in my Montessori training, I wanted to follow it. I wanted to do it." Martha went even further. She stated that her beliefs about the Montessori philosophy are with her "all the times, 24/7." Mary emphasized, "I think it is so important that to me, there are some cornerstones in the Montessori philosophy" that the teacher needs to be able to "promote" at all times. In turn, Sierra described her approach to being a Montessori teacher as a "passion" and pointed out it is "because Montessori works and I love what I do." Finally, Clara's commitment led her to notice

that children are open to learning whatever the world has to offer them; consequently, she has a profound desire to give her all to “offer” the “world” to them.

The participants’ strong commitment to the Montessori Method also motivated them to be dedicated to continuous self-improvement. The participants were not content to rest on their achievements of the past. Jane expressed this constant vigilance of herself for the best interests of children, “You need to work in it every single day.” Martha contended that, over time, one grows in a number of ways through spirituality, such as in the understanding of others. She described this transformation as being on a continuum where her past is linked to what she is doing in the present. In turn, Clara indicated that being a Montessori teacher “makes you reflect on what you’re doing.” Therefore, improving herself became an integral part of her work. As I read the interview transcripts, I, too became more dedicated to my own self-improvement in life, as I continued to strive to understand the nuances of the findings. Therefore, I resonated with Mary when she referred to herself as making a “conscious effort” to be aware at all times of her thoughts and feelings. Being observant of herself guided her to develop the kind of relationships she desired to have with the children. In turn, like Sierra who, “within the Montessori philosophy,” strove to “find your own peace” during the day as her *modus operandi*, I too wondered how I could achieve a more peaceful existence within my doctoral journey. Positioning herself within “love” in her job, Sierra revealed a deep desire to maintain a sense of peace in the classroom, and I also determined at this point of the exploration of the findings to bring more love into my every action.

Mary underlined a prerequisite for positive relations in the team. She stressed the importance of each person working on her spirituality to be “in tune with their feelings, with their emotions, with their abilities.” She felt that when she is “in tune” with herself, she is calm and “in control.” This has led her to understand and be more empathetic towards the other teachers. Martha also affirmed that “being at peace with yourself” is contained in her meaning of spirituality and must occur first before interactions with the teachers. Becoming introspective about what peace meant to her, she defined it as: “to understand yourself, and accept who you are, and see your good qualities and see your flaws too...Not focus on the negative.”

The participants also indicated that they practiced a number of spiritual qualities, such as self-discipline. Hence, when Jane talked about the importance of the teacher leaving her personal problems outside the classroom in the morning, I had another glimpse into her spiritual self. She admitted that in the morning, a teacher can have “lots of thoughts going on in your head;” yet, she advised: “Forget outside and be with the children.” Mary also spoke about the potential of the teacher’s personal life impinging upon her work and acknowledged that it is difficult to “switch all that off” and “focus only on the children.” Consequently, when she comes in to work in the morning, Mary spends five to ten minutes “to get myself together” to be ready for the day. Musing about the implications of this determination in the hearts of the participants, I understood more deeply how the participants were connecting to the spirit of Montessori as I presented in Chapter Two in the section on her training courses.

Patience is another important spiritual quality for Montessori teachers because it replaces the tendency to get angry. The participants were evidently putting effort into developing a sense

of calmness within them because they believe that children need to learn how to interact with their peers, as well as the teachers, in a tranquil manner. Jane expressed it in this manner: “We didn’t face the anger in the environment.” Martha also monitored the level of calmness within the teachers on her team. She was able to see in a teacher’s face when her patience “is running out” with a child and so she quickly goes to assist because she doesn’t want the teacher to lose her temper. Clara provided an example of patience in her classroom, similar to Martha’s. She explained that, at times, the teachers on her team each know when they are no longer able to “handle” a child with equanimity and they approach Clara to “take over the situation.” Clara then puts into practice her self-mastery in this area. The participants introduced other qualities in their comments. However, I will elaborate on them in subsequent sections in this chapter because the participants linked these qualities to specific aspects within the relationships they were cultivating in the classroom. These qualities come under the ensuing themes.

Teacher-Child relationship

“Well, I don't think of this as a job. A lot of people go to their jobs. I do this because I love doing it. I don't think if you have that passion, you can't find it in the children. If you think of this as a job, okay, I am going to come and do the number rods today and the knobless cylinders...with them today. It's a job. Well, I don't come and do that. I try to find the passion in the child... I try to let them self-direct”. Sierra

As I learned from my studies of Montessori’s work and my own Montessori teaching experiences, in order to understand how the teachers relate to each other, I need to understand how they relate to the child. In my study, all the participants emphasized the importance of

developing an uplifting relationship with the child. However, I comprehended it as more than just a general kind of constructive relationship. It was deeply embedded within the Montessori Method, as I discovered within myself, as I looked back on my own teaching. Therefore, it informed this section where I will focus on the second sphere presented in the beginning of this chapter, which is the teacher-child relationship. I will look at two different aspects of this relationship: the teacher as a role model, and the qualities that the teachers bring to the teacher-child relationship. As I reflected on the teachers' discourse with me, I became aware of certain qualities that they ascribed to their relationship with the children. These qualities emerged as the participants were contemplating how the teacher communicated with the child. In recognizing the connection that the teachers made between their relationship with the child and their own budding spiritual development, as described in this context of spiritual qualities, I once again puzzled over the significance of what I was learning. I eventually brought all these spiritual qualities together under the following section, to explore the way in which they build the foundation for the teacher-teacher relationship.

To begin with, as I had also been taught, all the participants emphasized that the relationship with the child was the most significant part of their work. The overarching theme of the teacher-child relationship appeared to be that the teacher is a role model for the child at all times. When I had referred to my gradually embodying the Montessori principles in all aspects of my life, in Chapter One, it was this exact idea that I had going through my mind that propelled me to realize that I was a role model in the manner Montessori described in her training. When Jane expressed a profound truth that a teacher must be continuously observant of what she says

and does in the classroom, I was pondering whether Montessori teachers, as a whole, believe in this self-disciplined way of life. Jane gave the following advice: “Be a good role model. Use always good communication with children because they learn everything from you.” Jane explained that this determined attitude is key because, “Every little thing it’s related to a child and a child is very much related to you.” In short, Jane believes that if the teacher is a good role model, she can clearly positively impact the child’s development. At the same time, she recognizes that being self-observant at all times requires a lot of effort because it is “hard to be like that.” Sierra also believes that what the teacher does is inextricably linked to what the child learns. Therefore, in order to bring out a passion for learning in the children, she takes a passionate approach to teaching them: “It’s because I love what I do...if the children feel that passion within the teacher, they will find the passion in their learning.” I take up this concept of love and dedication to the child more deeply, in Chapter Five, since it was at this point that I made a giant leap in my findings towards understanding that love underlies the very existence of relationships in the Montessori classroom. Moreover, to Sierra, the calming influence a teacher can have extends even to her voice, movements, and interactions with the other teachers: “My voice, if they hear it in my voice, they can hear it. They can see the way I walk in the classroom, how I interact with the other teachers.” Martha also concluded that the way a teacher speaks in the classroom “is a part of role-modeling.”

Montessori eloquently maintained that the child is a source of love towards whom adults feel a gentleness and kindness. It was understandable, then, that for Sierra, the foundational quality a teacher needs to bring to the teacher-child relationship is love: “You have to let them

know that someone cares. You have to reach out to them in different ways...I guess it's our job to teach them what love and care and peace is." Clara also identified love as a principal quality that the teacher needs to bring to the teacher-child relationship. She explained that this relationship could be more authentic than with teachers: "I feel like the relationship between me and children is more real than it is between me and the adults and my coworkers. It's more lovable with children." Moreover, when a child is misbehaving, Clara stated that the teacher would demonstrate an inspirational approach to love by attempting to stay "non-judgmental," focusing instead on understanding the reason behind the behavior. Once again, my thinking shifted at this point, as I realized the freedom a teacher can have without the burden of being judged or judging others, as exemplified in the teacher-child relationship, within the eventual blossoming of a positive team relationship. Jane further qualified what the teacher's love for the child should look like. She believed that there is an acceptable way in which the Montessori teacher can express love to the children. "It should be an inner affection... interested in the child, motivating him." It should not be a relationship based on hugs and kisses, Jane asserted.

Sierra introduced another important element in the teacher-child relationship, that of trust. In my reading of various articles on the establishment of affirming relationships in the workplace, I discovered that trust appeared to be the determining factor of whether or not the relationships progressed to a higher level of consciousness. Therefore, I became very attentive to what unfolded in my findings after this point. She affirmed, "To have any sort of teacher-child relationship, you had to build a sense of trust." Mary echoed a similar viewpoint. She explained that the teacher creates an environment where the child will trust the teacher. Furthermore, Mary

asserted that the independence that the children have makes them feel safe and therefore, they are more trusting:

It's a very humbling experience to know that this little child feels safe enough and trusts me enough to come to me and say whatever it is that's on their mind. I think that it's because of the independence that we give them; it's because of the trust that we place in them...

Humility appeared to be another building block of the relationship between the teacher and the child. Mary recommended that the teacher put her ego aside. By fulfilling the role of “directress,” Mary explained that she is supporting the children in their learning by directing them towards the material that they are ready to learn, guiding them through it, and then allowing them to discover the material more on their own. All this takes humility she said:

There has to be humility. I think there is no place for ego at all in the Montessori classroom. It's right in the title that is given to us. We are directresses. We are not teachers. We are not teaching the children. We are directing them towards the material that we feel they're ready for. We are guiding them through it. Then we're stepping back, and letting them discover things on their own.

The quality of humility that Montessori underlined in her writings echoed through my heart, as I re-read Mary’s words, and I knew that Mary had uncovered another key finding that I held on to closely for the rest of my reflections on my findings. Mary further explained that when a teacher maintains this sense of humility throughout the day, she believes that she strengthens the relationship with the child by allowing the child to choose what interests her and this, in turn,

gives her joy. This occurs, Mary stated, since “spirituality plays a big role in that when it comes to the way the children choose their work, I’ve noticed that they go towards those materials that give them joy.” Joy appeared to be an important indicator in the environment as the participants used it to gauge their success in the classroom. As Mary noted, “The joy that we see on their faces, that just shows us the quality of the work that we have done.”

Martha pointed out another method to developing the relationship with the child: teaching the child qualities such as empathy. As Martha talked about empathy in her relationship with the children, I sat riveted in my seat, journeying back to my research at the Master of Education level. In my ethnographic study, I had observed a gradual, significant change in teachers’ behavior the more they taught the children empathy skills. Therefore, I listened attentively to what Martha was saying. For example, she stated that showing the child, in a concrete way, how to respond kindly to another child, gives that child options to choose from, when she encounters a frustrating incident. Martha described a situation that had happened in class. Instead of allowing a child to cover her ears when a new child cried for his mother, Martha suggested to her some alternative responses, such as offering the new child a tissue to console him. I understood at this moment that Martha was embodying the quality of empathy that she could in turn, demonstrate to the children.

Respect is a key quality that permeates the teacher-child relationship. Clara postulated that the Montessori Method “is about respect” where the teacher creates a caring, respectful environment for the children. She contended, “The philosophy, the teachers, the children, and the environment are all interconnected. Within this, there is a spirituality of everybody.” Continuing

along the same lines of thinking, Sierra underlined that respect is not only important for the teacher-child relationship. It's also for the children, "That's what we teach them as well, how they respect one another."

Jane brought up truthfulness as an additional quality that embellishes the relationship between the teacher and the child. Offering a reason why this is so important, Jane returned to the Montessori concept of the absorbent mind when the child needs to learn what reality is. At this time, the child is also building vocabulary gained from the interactions with the teacher. Therefore, Jane stated that whatever is said by the teacher should be "reality based," "truthful," and "give them the right reason" for whatever they may be enquiring about.

Finally, Martha expanded upon the idea of believing in the child as fundamental to the teacher-child relationship. She maintained that a child "can perceive...if someone believes in him or her." Realizing that adults also need to have someone to believe in them, to be whole, I was poised to integrate the remainder of the participants' comments into the understanding of the team interactions, presented in later sections in this chapter. An example she gave was of a child hesitant in putting on his shoes for the first time. It was only when he began to realize that she really believed that he could put on his shoes that he started to believe in his ability to do so and succeeded. Martha accentuated the significance of this quality for the teacher-child relationship, because a child can spend three years with the school and during that time, relies on the teacher to continually support his development.

Having established a foundation within the teacher-child relationship that is constructed on a number of key qualities identified by the participants, I now turn to an interesting finding

that bridges the connection between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship. This finding uncovers a mirroring effect between the teachers and the children. I refer to it as the congruence between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship.

Congruence between the Teacher-Child Relationship and the Teacher-Teacher Relationship

“I think the children are a part of it because they feed off of what we feel. If we are having a bad day, they can feel it right. We try to give some good vibes to each other and we are always interacting very positively with each other. I think that’s why the children in our classroom interact positively to each other is because they know that they can come to one of the teachers and they have seen us go to each other and ask questions. I feel very comfortable going to other teachers and asking them a question...The kids do that too. They go to each other and ask as well for advice and questions and just someone to talk to.” Sierra

Regardless of where the participants took their Montessori early childhood training, they all affirmed that their understanding of how to cultivate the teacher-child relationship had an impact on how they related to the other teachers on the team. In other words, there appeared to be congruence between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship. To explain this startling finding, I will first examine the concept of peace that was mentioned by four of the participants. Coming from a deep part of herself, indicating a genuine understanding of her topic, Sierra expressed how peace could be intertwined within the interactions between the teachers to have a decisive effect on the children: “If the teachers have an interaction of peace,

and they can talk, I find that to be peace. The children feed off of that as well. They see it. They hear it.” In turn, the children will become peaceful. Having peace between the teachers is of great importance, Sierra further elaborated, because it leads to the normalization of the classroom, the ultimate goal of the teacher’s work: “If I don't have the connection with the teacher, then I am never going to have it with a child.” Clara expressed a similar idea. Specifically, peace starts with good communication between the teachers; therefore, she stated, “If there's a peace in between us, there will be peace in the classroom.” Jane mentioned the same viewpoint. In speaking about the necessity to “talk it out,” she stressed the importance of the teachers not harboring grudges against each other. It “affects the environment,” she affirmed and if “you don’t interact to each other very well in the classroom...the peace is gone.”

Sierra expounded on two other similarities between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship. She contended, “If I don’t understand the teacher, I am never going to understand the child and vice versa.” Understanding the children leads Sierra to “have a thorough understanding for their needs.” This helps her to know their abilities and to better support their learning. Furthermore, in both kinds of relationships, she underlined the necessity of being a good listener to build strong relationships.

Respect was a quality that I included under the teacher-child relationship. It also comes up under this theme, in a multifaceted manner. All the participants claimed that respect is inherent in all communications in the classroom. Furthermore, Martha insisted that respect is a certain way of talking to the child that is the same as with the teachers. When a teacher is respectful, she maintains a “professional” attitude; that is to say, she keeps her personal activities

and conversations outside the classroom. Moreover, she stated that the teachers do not engage in “negative or bad words.” Clara made a point that dovetailed with what Martha said. She asked rhetorically, “If I don't respect my colleagues at work, how can I teach respect to the children?” Jane echoed some of the same perspectives as Martha and Clara. She specified, “The same how do I interact with the child, I do interact with my teacher too. I will be pleasant. I will be respecting the other teacher in the classroom.” Sierra confirmed what the other participants said about respect, saying that she needs to have “a very high sense of respect” for the teachers and the children.

Another point made by Mary was that because the teachers are calm, comfortable and respectful with each other, the children, in turn, “mimic” those behaviors with each other. Sierra, who is on the same team as Mary, highlighted the following observation, “It’s just not the teachers as well that are mindful of each other. I find that the students are very mindful of what the teachers are doing as well.” For example, the children will help the teachers with cleaning up and with a child who needs assistance.

While the four participants dwelt on a number of ways in which the teacher-child relationship was congruent with the teacher-teacher relationship, Clara was the only participant who provided examples of ways in which they were different. Firstly, she stated that the relationship with the teacher is “more difficult” than with children because, “even though we are aware that we may not have the same opinion, sometimes it's hard to let go of your own opinion and come to the same point.” With the children, she is more “caring,” more “real” and “I allow them to make mistakes.” She is more apt to express her true feelings with the children. On the

other hand, she expects more from the teachers on her team, and feels that with them “you’re not that open and you’re not... all yourself.” In other words, there is a point of vulnerability within Clara that feels afraid that they will “judge” her if she expresses her feelings the way she would with the children.

Finally, although Maria Montessori did not mention anything about team teaching or the relationship between teachers in the classroom, these topics are of major importance to my research study. Some Montessorians have suggested that it was because Montessori made the decision during her lifetime, to devote all of her energies towards the understanding of the nature of the child and the “new” adult, as described in many of her writings. This adult-child relationship differed dramatically from what had been accepted by societies around the world up to that point in history, as I elaborated in Chapter Two. I will now extend my understanding of her ideas to the team relationships, as reflected by the participants.

The Teacher-Teacher Relationship

“We’re getting to know each other’s personalities. We’re getting to understand the workings of how these three individuals work, like I said before, what our strengths are and so we play to that. Because we are always in communication. The six weeks in the beginning of the school year, the six weeks of normalization, we are relentless in that. We are, the three of us, this September to middle of October, the three of us sat down and we had a plan, which all three of us came up with together and agreed upon and we stuck to it and we stuck to it and we stuck to it. Our class I feel normalized very well in the six-week period.” Mary

The third sphere in the diagram I presented at the beginning of this chapter is the teacher-teacher relationship. The spiritual self of each teacher and the teacher-child relationship informs this relationship. Though it appears on the outermost layer of the diagram, the teacher-teacher relationship, in fact, plays a fundamental role in influencing the development of the teacher's spiritual self as well as the teacher-child relationship. The three spheres constantly interact with each other. As I now consider the teacher-teacher relationship, I focus first on the verbal and the non-verbal communication between the teachers, and then I present what is embedded in the teachers' interactions with each other.

Verbal and non-verbal communication between the teachers.

All the participants affirmed that the positive relationships they had with each other stemmed from having ample opportunities to talk together before school, at lunchtime, and after school. The participants provided many accounts of the verbal and non-verbal communication they had with each other. I will start with their comments about verbal communication and follow that with a discussion about their non-verbal communication during work time.

Verbal communication.

"I think understanding each other, and understanding where we all ...have different backgrounds, different perspectives of the world, we are all have different ages not so much, but yeah. Understanding that what one teacher thinks is not same as I think, and it doesn't necessarily mean that my thinking is the right one. Sometimes we have to meet halfway or sometimes we have to try what the other teacher ... Try the other teacher's idea first, and if it doesn't work we try the other one. I think going back to spirituality,

understanding each other, understanding that what is driving one teacher might be different from what's driving me to do things.” Martha

Verbal communication is highly valued by all the participants. They gave me the understanding that the more they practiced their verbal communication, the more they knew they could improve their skills. I discovered two main viewpoints about verbal communication: 1) the participants tended to persevere in their discussions until they reached an agreement, and 2) all the participants perceived a role that spirituality played in their verbal communication.

Firstly, the participants provided a lot of description concerning how they communicate. All of them openly admitted that, in their teams, it was difficult at times to communicate about certain topics; nevertheless, they persisted. To stay connected with each other, they meet during lunch breaks to review what happened during the morning class. Clara’s team has adopted a constructive approach to their discussions, focusing on “what could we improve, what can we do to make our classroom life better?” She confirmed that those occasions helped the team “to get through the day,” in a more cheerful manner. Moreover, these talks assisted them in finding timely solutions. For example, if a teacher did not treat a child “the proper way,” Clara portrayed the conviction that they all needed to sit down and discuss it as soon as possible. Showing how important it was to clear the air in a timely manner, Mary’s team had developed a strategy to use under those circumstances. The first thing they do is “to take the time to understand where each one’s point of view is coming from.” Secondly, they try to find common ground among the three of them. Very often as they brainstorm, they come up with a fourth “fantastic viewpoint” that solves whatever situation they are dealing with. They stay “on top of things.” Moreover, she

acknowledged that she has never seen the three of them “let anything stew in our mind...we just talk about it right there before it can get going further.”

If a child was having difficulties, all the teams met in their classrooms to strategize on what was the best plan to implement. Jane, who is on the same team as Clara, admitted they have learned to stay “calm” and work it through. Furthermore, Jane and her team have learned not to “judge” someone else’s idea. They have the attitude of “let’s give it a try and then see how it works.”

Martha further enhanced my comprehension of verbal communication by indicating that another motive behind their communication on her team is to ask for help. For instance, if she hasn’t been able to find a way to work with a child who is reluctant to work with her, she asks other teachers to advise her, and if necessary, to try to do so themselves. Sierra provided a similar example about a child who was in the library and not interested in working. The teachers quietly discussed the matter and came up with a workable solution that she implemented. The teachers continued to support her as she worked with the child.

As I persisted in trying to comprehend more fully how the participants perceived their communication with each other, I ascertained that they believed that communication involves listening as well as speaking. For example, Clara alluded to this two-way communication by disclosing that she felt she still had a lot to learn about communication. She indicated that communication is “something that you bring...to the team, you share it with your team but you also take from the team.” In elaborating about listening, Clara explained, “a good team member listens and knows how to take different perspectives.” It doesn’t mean that it is an easy task, she

conceded. Compromise is not the goal. Instead, the goal is “to come up with ideas that will benefit all of us and the children.” Referring to a professional day (PD) on communication that took place between the two interviews for this research study, Clara stated that her team was able to come together afterwards and resolve some sensitive matters between them that they had been avoiding. I was able to determine from Jane, who is on the same team as Clara, that she too felt definite progress in their communication after the PD workshop.

Besides cultivating listening skills, Martha declared that the teachers show consistency with each other in front of the children. For example, if a situation arose with a child who was being disrespectful and Martha asked that child not to go back to the library, she communicates that agreement with the child to the other teachers. She could rely on them to keep the same agreement with the child. Jane made a strong case that in her team the teachers do likewise. They have “unity in the group,” she explained, which appeared to be a critical aspect of their teamwork. The third team with Mary and Sierra acted in similar ways. Mary described this consistency as “a united front at all times.”

Another complex topic regarding communication that surfaced with all the participants was the ability of the teachers to confide in their team members about personal matters. As an example, Mary was comfortable enough to tell the teachers on her team that she was a little worried about an issue happening in her family. She requested them to come and tell her to “take a minute,” if they noticed that she was getting anxious and distracted during the day. Mary confided: “The fact that I can depend on my co-teachers to keep me aware and to help me, I think we’ll put in a better team effort.” Martha, in like manner, disclosed that the communication

in her team is “safe” and reliable.” “It is something I can rely on,” she said, and the communication is “very open to what the other person has to say.” Clara confirmed a similar situation was happening in her team. She was going through some personal difficulties that she shared with her team. Feeling a sense of safety in being able to disclose the details of what it was, Clara expressed gratitude for their support. Sierra affirmed the same sentiment about her team, “I don’t feel that there’s nothing that we can’t discuss.”

Returning to the thread of spirituality that I had interwoven within each research question, I remained steadfast in trying to understand how each participant viewed the role of spirituality in each theme that arose in our discussions. Hence, since I had asked each participant at some point in the interview to consider whether spirituality played a role in verbal communication, I was able to gather that most of them believed that it did. Mary presented her ideas thoughtfully and at first avowed “to be honest, our communication is so good that whether spirituality is playing a role in it or not is not something that I’ve even thought about. We are so well in tune.” As she reflected further about spirituality and her team’s communication, she added that all three teachers are able to work together in the manner described earlier because they were respectful of each other and of each other’s opinions. Jane also mentioned similar ideas. Mary, as well as Martha and Sierra, further explained that though they come from “different backgrounds, different trainings, different years of experience” no one makes herself look better than anyone else. They are always in communication; hence, as Mary postulated, they are continuously putting effort into working with each other in more effective ways. An example of their success was how they succeeded in their plan for the normalization of the classroom at

the beginning of the year. Mary concluded that “maybe spirituality is in there somewhere, but it’s not something that I have consciously thought about.”

Jane was quite clear that coming to “one conclusion and that way we can all teach the same thing,” enabled the children to see that the teachers are “united” and “on the same page,” elements that Jane connected with spirituality. Clara thought that spirituality played a role in their exchanges by becoming “aware of ourselves.” Martha added a new dimension to the role of spirituality, believing that spirituality comes into play because of the understanding they acquire of each other. Lastly, for Sierra, the teachers expressed spirituality in their verbal communication through the notion of “peace.” The teachers “have an interaction of peace” she explained. She had determined that, as teachers, “We are connected. We can feel each other.” Being single-minded in their endeavors, they interact with each other supportively. If a teacher has done something that they didn’t like, they talk “to find that peace, so we can come back tomorrow and everything is fine.” Sierra acknowledged that it takes a while to get to that point of ease of communication; however, she, her new teammate Mary, and a third teacher have persisted throughout the year.

I now turn to non-verbal communication, which is a unique and essential part of communication in the Montessori classroom.

Non-verbal communication.

“Well, non-verbally, we kind of just give cues to each other. We just know if we are having a good day or a bad day. The other teachers and we get along. I’ve worked with one of the teachers for...three years now, in the classroom for two. The other teacher is

new to our class. I am still getting to know her a little bit, the new teacher. But I've known her for a couple of years, the first year teaching with her. I am just starting to get to know her. I feel that we are on the same page.” Sierra

When I was teaching I noticed that the more transparent my assistant and I were with each other, the more we used effective non-verbal communication during work time. Therefore, when I was conducting my research study, I was interested in seeing whether the participants also relied on non-verbal communication to communicate. I noted during the thirty minutes that I observed each participant that they did in fact rely on non-verbal communication to keep peace and harmony in the classroom. In fact, there was little verbal communication. Intrigued with what I had observed, I explored with each participant their use of non-verbal communication within their team and its link to spirituality.

Interestingly, all the participants had fostered the development of non-verbal communication as part of their comprehensive practices as a Montessori teacher. They expressed a genuine air of satisfaction for being able to communicate in this way. Going into detail about how they communicated non-verbally, where this aptitude stemmed from, and what the benefits were for the team, they described several non-verbal cues with each other, such as eye contact, smiles, waves, and laughter.

Starting with laughter, the antidote for many discomforts in communication, Martha and Sierra declared that they laugh a lot with each other in their teams, particularly when things become challenging, because they maintain there is no point taking it so seriously. Martha and Clara also added that one can be working with a child and be so happy that she is learning

something new, that they look at the other teachers and smile knowingly at them. The others, in turn, understand immediately that something good has happened with the child and that they will share it after class. Sierra elaborated further that with the teacher that she has been working with for two years, “we kind of can read each other.” Clara also declared that after teaching for the third year with one of the teachers on her team, their non-verbal communication was “on a very high level.”

As a result of the development of non-verbal communication skills, the participants expressed a high level of awareness of what was going on in their classroom. In reflecting on my vignette at the beginning of Chapter Two, I was reminded how my assistants and I had developed this very same kind of awareness, through self-observation and self-control. This self-awareness enabled me, in turn, to listen with depth as the participants spoke to me. For example, Clara, Mary, and Sierra all emphasized that, based on what the head of the school had recommended, the teachers positioned themselves in a triangular shape in different parts of the classroom during work time. Therefore, if the children were becoming loud, if something fell, or if a child were running, they would just look at each other and as Clara denoted “somehow we know which one is going to go and deal with the problem.” For Sierra, this knowing is very explicit. When she is giving a presentation, her undivided attention is on the child. At the same time, she is aware what the other teachers are doing, and where they are in their presentations. Consequently, if a child needs help in another part of the classroom, and she is in the middle of her presentation she will not go to help. Instead she looks at the other teachers and they know which one should deal with the situation. As the other participants affirmed, Sierra stated, “You

get that feeling of just knowing what's going to happen and who's doing what in the classroom.” Furthermore, Clara elucidated, “each of us knows how to deal with different children.” In her team, the groundwork for the ability in non-communication begins before school starts in September. Her team sits together and determines which behaviors they don't want in the classroom. Consequently, when something happens, they look at each other and know, “This is not behavior we want.” Moreover, Clara asserted that it starts outside the classroom, “We talk about things first so then when we are inside the classroom, we can communicate without words.”

Most of the participants believed that spirituality played a role in non-verbal communication. Some of them, such as Sierra and Clara, kept their comments brief. Throughout all the ways of communicating non-verbally that she expounded upon, Sierra maintained that the team kept the goal of peace in their minds, a goal that she had mentioned earlier as connected to spirituality. Clara referred back to what she had said originally about spirituality and self-awareness: “I think it's more about becoming aware of ourselves, of children, of their needs, of our needs and values as well.”

Martha went deeper than the two above into how spirituality played a role in non-verbal communication between the teachers. She integrated spirituality into much of what she discussed about non-verbal communication. Martha thought that it begins with being at peace with herself. Since she is “not worried” about herself, she can understand the other teachers, what they are doing, and what they mean when they smile at her. Martha stated that spirituality plays a role in such situations: she could keep what's happening to herself, however she doesn't want to

“because there’s no joy” in keeping one’s victories to oneself. Another instance where spirituality plays a role is when Martha sees a teacher struggling with a child and is beginning to lose patience. Martha offers assistance before the teacher asks, because she wants to “genuinely help her.” She unassumingly stated that she has been in that situation herself and knows how it feels.

Mary also thought that spirituality played a role in non-verbal communication. An example to illustrate this belief was when the teachers on her team can look at each other and know what’s being communicated non-verbally such as “Yeah, at lunch time, we need to get together and talk about this.” Or it may be a little thing such as a teacher having a difficult day and Mary smiling and asking if she is all right. Mary ascertained, like the other participants, that the team is able to use this unique skill with a high degree of mastery. She postulated that it is because they have taken the time to know each other very well. Therefore, when they see something “that’s a little uncharacteristic” they just look at each other and know “she’s noticed that too.” Mary elaborated on how this ability develops: “I think the biggest thing is respect.” The teachers set aside their “egos” and their “judgments” and remain “open to understanding what this person is like.

Relationships between the teachers on the teams.

The participants brought up many interesting aspects of the teacher-teacher relationship that helped me to understand their perceptions and understandings of teamwork. Fostering self-care, recognizing each other’s strengths, trust in the team, learning from each other, classroom management and team duties were the principal areas they raised.

Fostering self-care.

“They talk to me, they try to comfort me, just by saying, “You know what? Don't think about it. Everything will be fine. Wait til your next appointment. If you need a moment, just leave the classroom. If you need a day off, take a day off, we'll be fine.” This kind of help. Just talking or just listening to me, just listening to me helps. If you want to take everything out and talk about it ... Same with them. If they have a problem ... One of them had some problems in the morning with a family. She comes and we can see she's angry and say, “Talk about it. Say it” you know? Then we see in the classroom, okay, she needs to go out. She needs a moment. So we say, “Calm down. Go have a quick drink of water or something. Cool yourself off, come back when you're ready.” Clara

An essential aspect of effective teamwork was to take time for self-care. Basing herself on what she was learning about spirituality in her Montessori training course, Mary expressed amazement at how taking just ten minutes to relax and enjoy a cup of tea by herself during the week was rejuvenating. In turn, each of the participants described a common school-wide strategy that they all used with each other during work time, if someone was having a “bad day.” The participants emphasized that since the teachers on their teams had gotten to know each other well, they could easily see on someone’s face, or hear in her tone of voice that she needed to take a break. Clara made the point that sometimes when she was angry she thought it didn’t show in her body language, and yet it did. That’s when she would appreciate a teacher coming to her to suggest that she take a break. Clara stressed that the teachers “treat it as help.” Sierra accentuated the fact that on her team, they also help each other out in the same way: “We can say that to each

other and not be offended.” Jane described what happens next: the teacher would then step outside the classroom for a few minutes to relax and regroup before coming back. Upon her return, the others would ask her if she wanted to talk after class about what was going on. Additionally, if a teacher was carrying a heavy burden of some kind, the others would encourage her to “Take your day easy...we will help you,” as Clara proposed. All the participants felt that this kind of support was a fundamental part of teamwork. Moreover, their motivation behind the self-care, and support for self-care in each other, was that it was for the benefit of maintaining a peaceful environment for the children. As noted throughout my thesis, many of the actions taken by the teachers in their teams rested on the determination to support the children’s development in the best way possible.

Recognizing each other’s strengths.

“It’s a very symbiotic relationship we have in the classroom. We all know our strengths. We all know our weaknesses and we try to bring up our weaknesses so that it’s not a weakness anymore. We definitely play on our strengths and we use the strengths that we each have to make sure that the team, the classroom, the school functions really well.”

Mary

The importance of the teachers on a team knowing each other’s strengths came up with all the participants. For example, Mary, who had joined her new team last September, declared that she had made “a conscious effort” to get to know the two other teachers. She quickly became acquainted with the teachers’ strengths and weaknesses and disclosed to them what hers were. She believed that spirituality played an important role in what she did. Returning to her

definition of spirituality as being self-awareness, Mary detailed her plan. First, she was “open to understanding where they were coming from.” Next, she was willing to listen to what they were saying, and understand why they were saying those things. Being aware of her own abilities and frailties, she was better situated to say to her colleagues “Oh, this is something I’m not very comfortable with.” Interestingly enough, the reason why she put so much effort in getting to know the teachers was because she did not want the children’s progress to be hampered by her arrival on the team.

Mary, like the other participants, exhibited an awareness of her strengths. She listed a number of them. Firstly, she had a “very specific work ethic” that she follows. She believed in being “responsible for my actions” and to have “accountability to students and directresses.” Therefore, she brought her best to her work. She was also open to new ideas. Moreover, she would always get to the bottom of why she was unhappy so that it did not affect her work. Her abilities to be organized and analytical helped the team because, as she asserted, “we’re on track with what we’re doing.” Finally, Mary was able to think on her feet and at times would take the lead in dealing with an unexpected situation.

Clara, in turn, stated that recognizing each other’s strengths and respecting them played a spiritual role. In her team, the teachers have learned how to rely on each other’s strengths. For example, Jane has the most experience in teaching the Montessori Method. Consequently, the other two teachers go to her when they need help. As they have indicated, the other teacher on their team, who was not in the study, is calm and if the teachers are frustrated or angry they go to her to regain their composure. Clara affirmed that she herself offers the team patience and the

others recognize that she has a capability of handling difficult situations with children. She stated, “They trust me and they recognize my abilities to step in and help them.”

Martha was also cognizant of the strengths she brought to her team. “Humbleness” and a “willingness to learn” were the two strengths that readily came to her mind. I remembered, as I read Martha’s words later, that I had to go through the difficult journey of letting go of my fear of disclosing to teachers that I worked with, that I did not know how to present a particular material in the Montessori Method. I had to gradually embrace a fuller expression of myself as a Montessori teacher, with my colleagues, and when I finally reached that level of trust, I felt freer to be myself. When Martha joined the team, the two other teachers were more experienced than her; therefore, she approached them whenever she was not sure on how to present a certain material. Other strengths that Martha added were:

I bring lots of positiveness. I am a very happy person, I bring lots of happiness, and lots of understanding, positive energy. I bring lots of kindness... basically understanding. I am a good listener. I am very open to any ideas. I am very flexible too.

Martha’s caring nature also became apparent in her example of spirituality and a team member.

On the day of the interview, one of the teachers on her team had just come back from taking several days off because of an accident. Martha had a “desire to help her.” During the day, she kept asking her colleague how she could help and cautioned her about taking on too much.

Martha did it because “I knew that if I was in that situation I would want my other friends to help me, to support me.” Drawing the connection between what she had said earlier about

understanding and spirituality, she posited “The goal is I think having that understanding like being in that person’s shoes. How would you want the other people to be with you?”

Jane acknowledged that she brought a lot of happiness to her team and to the classroom. Jane kept the goal of team unity, a spiritual concept for her, uppermost in her mind and personified this by being open to trying out the ideas of the other teachers. Because she had a strong understanding of the Montessori Method, she was able to help the other two teachers who have less training. Jane explained that an incomplete understanding of the Montessori Method could lead to challenges in teaching. As an example, Jane mentioned that there is a sequence to follow in presenting the material, starting from the simple to the complex. Without this background knowledge, the teacher will not be able to meet the developing needs of the child in a comprehensive way. She described this situation:

Some of them follow the philosophy, who has the proper training... They know what is actual philosophy and they do follow it. Some of them, like who just do simple trainings and they don't get a lot of philosophy in them. It's hard for them to understand to do it like it's supposed. In Montessori curriculum, we have to go in order, so if they don't know the philosophy, they don't know why they're doing it. It's really difficult for them to follow it and understand it.

Jane indicated that she was committed to helping her team develop a more complete understanding of the Montessori Method so that they could better meet the needs of the children. Sierra focused on describing her strong listening skills with the teachers. She humbly divulged that teachers readily confide in her because of her trustworthiness. Additionally, she maintained

that she brings peace to the team, since she puts a lot of effort into bringing peace to the children. Furthermore, Sierra pointed out that her sense of humor adds a positive quality to the classroom. Laughter seemed to enliven the team in times of joy and in times of challenge. As the participants elaborated on the strengths of their team members, I could detect a sense of safety, comfort, and belongingness that appeared to be linked to their perceptions of their team, because of this valuable knowledge of each other.

Trust in the team.

“I trust them. I trust their knowledge and I trust their ideas. I trust that they know what they are doing, because we are coworkers, so, I have to trust. I guess the trust builds up. So, in the beginning, you don't know, but then with time, you see, this teacher works like this, this other teacher works differently, but there is a trust.” Martha

As I was analyzing the data, I reviewed the information about teams in my literature review, and realized that trust is the foundation for teamwork. However, since trust did not come up on its own in the first interview, I broached the topic with four of the participants in the follow-up interview and with Sierra in her one interview.

Martha ascertained that trust existed in her team. It had been built up over time by working together. She trusted the teachers' knowledge and ideas about how to work with the children. In fact, most of her comments about trust revolved around best practices in teaching and learning. Martha concluded her remarks by saying that if she didn't trust the teachers she would feel compelled to do everything on her own, and that would not be feasible.

In discussing how trust played a role in their teamwork, Clara took a different approach. She emphasized that she can confide in her team about matters that are personal and that, in turn, the teachers support her as she goes through life's testing. "I tell them everything," she declared, and when they see that she is preoccupied by her concerns during work time, they "come and help me out." When I heard her say this, I celebrated inside of myself how happy she must be to be able to say such a statement about her team members. This feeling of trust and comfort is indispensable for the work they must do together for the sake of the children.

As Mary contemplated the trust that existed among the teachers in her team, she deduced that the more they worked together, the more trust, security and sense of safety there was. "I think it shows in the classroom," she reasoned, because when there is trust, it shows in the teacher's body language and work. Since the teachers "have each other's back all the time," they trust each other so that if one of them is talking to a parent and is having difficulty, another teacher will join her and back her up. They "are a united team." Trust was also present when she needed someone "to lean on." Mary pointed out that she could not do that if she did not feel safe in her team. Being on the same team, Sierra reinforced what Mary said about trust. They have built that trust over time, and are able to tell each other about confidential matters. According to Sierra, another side of trust is working together for the benefit of the children. For example, she relied on her team to review presentations with her that she may have forgotten.

Jane talked about trust in a unique way. She saw it as pertaining to the implementation of the Montessori Method at the highest level possible. She believed that Montessori teachers needed to believe in what they had learned, and to rely on this knowledge and understanding

during the day as they worked with the children. Jane supported her team in bringing out the best of the Montessori Method in their classroom.

Learning from each other.

“Seeing their ideas. Sometimes what I learnt is different from back home. When I see some ideas, I feel motivated. Oh, I will do this way, I will do that way...I’m motivated when they’re very calm...I can get discouraged or something and then I will be mad...and if I see other teacher she’s doing good, maybe I have to do like this or something like that. I learn. Well this teacher is good; her small groups are so good so I learn some techniques from teachers. I will try to put that when I do next time. Sometimes I’m not good at large group activities, so other teacher is really good at doing the units...or this idea is good. I try to take from other teachers. That way I learn from other teachers.” Jane

A theme that kept flowing through the interviews was the key concept in the field of adult learning that the teacher is a learner. This belief about themselves appeared to predispose the participants to a certain curiosity and dignity as they approached each other in their teams. Being captivated for many years with the intriguing subject of the learner, and the learning that occurs at different phases of one’s life, I delved further into this topic with the participants, in order to fully understand their comments. Mary reflected on herself as a learner since it was a topic that came up in her Montessori training. She admitted that as she got older she found herself becoming more “resistant to learning and changing.” Discussing this subject at the course helped her understand that “we’re learning all the time” and that the teacher needs to foster this

willingness to learn in the classroom. Mary connected being open to learning with spirituality. In everything that she did “It’s always a learning process,” she concluded. Hence, it takes humility “to let go of your ego” and realize that someone else’s idea is better than yours. Learning is also about “letting go of any bias that we have.”

Jane brought up the idea that she was a learner with her colleagues at all times. One way she was learning was to take each teacher’s point of view on an issue and try it out. If it made sense, she followed it; if it did not make sense to her, she did not adopt it. Jane was putting a lot of effort into this approach in order to create and maintain congruent relationships in the classroom.

Martha and Clara, who both had less training than the other teachers on their teams, were open to learning from them. They discussed how they developed strategies with their teams on how to work with children and how to present advanced material. It was an unpretentious disposition they were bringing to their teamwork. Interestingly, although Sierra has been teaching for nine years, she shared this same viewpoint. She confirmed that the nature of her teamwork was such that, if she had a question, she could always go to the other teachers to learn from them. In turn, they would come to her with a question about a child, their work or even their personal life.

Classroom management.

“I try to see what the other two teachers are doing before I sit down to present to gauge that should something come up, will I be okay to continue my presentation or will it be me who has to get up and take care of whatever’s happening because the other two are in

a longer presentation or in a different kind of work. When I do my little sweep of the classroom, I'm also looking at where the teachers are and seeing that, oh, okay, so she's almost at the end of her presentation, so I can spend a little more time presenting and sitting with my child over here because if something should happen, she will be ready to take care of it." Mary

Several participants described articulately how the teachers supported each other when they were giving presentations. Giving presentations figures as one of the most important ways that the teachers contribute to the children's learning. Clara explained that all the teachers participate in classroom management. As I listened to Clara's comments on classroom management, I was once again brought back to my research at the master's level where I had focused extensively on classroom management. I discovered positive changes that the teachers had embodied gradually in their classroom management, as they taught new social skills to the children. I thoughtfully attended to Clara's remarks, therefore, knowing that she would illuminate me further on this topic. When two of the other teachers were presenting, she would try to choose a short presentation or just walk around the classroom to see if any of the children needed her help. During the thirty-minute observation of Clara, I noticed that towards the end of a presentation she was looking around the classroom. She later explained that she was looking around to make sure that everybody was safe and that if a child needed her help, she or another teacher would go to assist the child. She told me that the head of the school had encouraged teachers to lift their heads when presenting to look around to see what was happening.

In discussing my observation with Sierra, she elucidated this collaborative approach to classroom management in more detail. She noted that she always kept in mind what the other teachers were presenting. If a child came over to speak to a teacher who was presenting, she would go over to the child and re-direct him. She would ask him how she could help him, explaining that the other teacher was busy. Sierra knew that the other teachers would do the same for her when she was presenting. Mary, who is on the same team as Sierra, added to my understanding of classroom management in her team. She tried to see what the other teachers were presenting before she sat down to present, deciding whether she would be the one to get up and take care of a situation in the classroom, or whether it would be one of them.

Martha shed a compelling light on her description of classroom management. In a fascinating example, she made the point that when she was working with a child that she may not often work with, the other teachers would “try to protect that space.” If another child came over to her to ask for a presentation, another teacher would come over to re-direct that child. Martha emphasized that because of their good communication, she didn’t have to ask for the teachers’ help in that way. They knew what to do. Therefore, Martha considered that spirituality played a role in this example since it was “the understanding and respecting the moment of teaching.” Finally, Mary shared an important observation: though the teachers spend most of their time working with the children, the quality of the teachers’ interactions encircled the whole classroom to bring harmony to everyone therein. This reflection was prevalent with all the participants.

Team duties.

“We have responsibilities in the cleaning. After if I'm doing a circle I have to do something if somebody is in craft they need to. Everything is sorted very nicely so everybody is balanced and we don't have much to argue or something like that.” Jane

Finally, at the beginning of the study, I was interested in knowing what kinds of documents the teachers used to guide and/or enhance their teamwork. I found out from each of the participants that each team worked with only one document that was used throughout the whole school. It provided a list of daily responsibilities or “duties” for each of the three teachers on the team, which rotated on a weekly basis. For example, one week a teacher prepared circle time, while another teacher greeted and dismissed the children. The third teacher prepared the craft and coloring sheets. For the next two weeks, the duties would rotate and on the third week the same duties would come back to the first teacher. Each teacher also has cleaning duties that rotated with the above responsibilities. Since this rotation continued throughout the entire school year, the participants articulated a sense of satisfaction with knowing in advance what was expected of them and of each other. Having a workable plan seemed to bring harmony to the team. It was in these discussions with the participants that I realized how important classroom organization was for the well-functioning of the team.

Summary

In the descriptions of the participants, I indicated how, for four out of the five participants, the meaning that they attached to spirituality arose out of their Montessori training. The heartfelt discussions on spirituality in their course led Clara and Mary to significantly

change their understanding of spirituality from religion to a more inner journey. The third participant in the course, Martha, deepened her reflection on spirituality and how it was interwoven throughout her life. Jane took a different training; yet, she also specified that her instructor's statements impacted her understanding of spirituality and religion. Sierra, on the other hand, completed her training online and it appeared that the course did not broach the topic of spirituality. In the descriptions of the participants, I also explored the participants' connection between the Montessori Method and spirituality. All five participants indicated that they saw a connection, each in her own unique way.

Turning to the teacher-child relationship, I found that the overarching theme was that the teacher is a role model for the child. As she conducted herself with that sense of purpose, she brought certain spiritual qualities to the relationship. They consisted of love, trust, humility, respect, truthfulness and believing in the child. Leaving her personal concerns outside the classroom helped the teacher to better focus her attention on the teacher-child relationship.

The next finding consisted of the congruence between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship. The participants described similarities between the two kinds of relationships. Peace dominated as an important element. Understanding and respecting each other and the children also figured as salient characteristics of these relationships. Clara alone added comments about the differences she perceived between the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship.

I discovered that the three teachers taking the Montessori training course at the time of the research study all entertained the possibility that spirituality played a role in verbal

communication. So did the other two, Jane and Sierra. The participants highlighted the fact that they immediately talked about an issue in their team as soon as it came up, to maintain peace among themselves. They also all stated that it was safe to talk in their teams about sensitive topics that involved their personal affairs. Finally, the teachers remained united at all times in front of the children.

Non-verbal communication was a skill that was highly developed in all the participants. They used it as a regular tool in communicating during work time. However, it did not occur by chance. Outside of work time, the teachers planned ahead what behaviors to accept and what not to accept from the children. They knew each other well enough so that they could understand the non-verbal cues that they gave each other. Most of the participants believed that spirituality played a role. Lastly, sharing the joy of children's victories during work time was something that drew the teams together.

I commenced the section on how the teachers related to each other by describing the importance of self-care. The participants elaborated on strategies they used to support each other when they needed to regroup during work time. Knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses greatly enhanced teamwork. All the participants were able to specify what contributions they brought to their team. Moreover, trust was accentuated as the foundation for teamwork. This trust enabled them to feel safe to learn from each other when they were in a vulnerable situation. It also played a role in how the teachers were able to assist each other in classroom management. Additionally, when the teachers performed their duties throughout the day, they could rely on

this trust to hold each other accountable. In conclusion, the participants indicated that spirituality played various roles at different levels of their communications, relationships, and interactions.

Chapter 5 Interpretations: Acting from the Heart

Introduction

As I embarked upon the stage of the interpretation of the findings, I became cognizant that I had endeavored to understand the role of spirituality in Montessori teacher teams, from the perspective of the participants, instead of my own. In the process, I amalgamated their statements “into a creative whole,” and integrated all aspects of myself “to understand what is happening.” Having enhanced my knowledge and understanding of the topic of my study, I moved towards “creative insights” (Patton, 2015, p. 385-386) originating from within the data. As an example, shortly after beginning the interviews, I found the participants revealing profound facets of themselves that brought to life Montessori’s concepts about the spiritual preparation of the teacher, and the teacher-child relationship, as described in Chapter two. Mary explained what it was like to be a new teacher on her team and the efforts she took to become integrated as quickly as possible into her team. Clara described how she wrestled with judging children and teachers, and her fear of being judged herself. It was these kinds of poignant statements that led me to extend the two concepts mentioned above, to team interactions. I then entered a spherical way of thinking about the team interactions, from the inside out, that Patton (2015) aptly described: “Insight emerges from being close to, even sometimes on the inside of, the phenomena being studied” (p. 59). Therefore, in this chapter, I present my key discoveries of the participants’ perceptions and understandings of spirituality and teamwork. In order to do so, I bring to the fore my expanded awareness of the teacher-child relationship as it emerged from my study. I then link my understanding of this relationship to the dynamics of the teams’ interactions. My starting

point is the exploration of the innermost aspect of the participants: their understanding of love, how their love is illumined by the epistemology of love, how they develop their hearts, and finally the role their inner teacher plays in their actions.

The Understanding of Love

Inspired by Montessori's (1995) profound reflection on love and the child that she embodied throughout all the years of her life in education, I realized that it permeated every part of the participants' work. To elaborate, Montessori explained that love comes to us from the cosmos, which Wolf (1996) defined as "an orderly and harmonious system," in which "all nature and all people are a part of its unfolding" (p. 90). Behind this cosmos is a "higher power" (Tolliver & Tisdell, 2006) or "higher being" (English, 2012), whose majestic love we integrate into our hearts. Montessori described this love that we feel emanating from the universe:

In man's mind it has been exalted by fantasy, but in us it is no other than one aspect of a very complex universal force, which—denoted by the words "attraction" and "affinity"—rules the world, keeps the stars in their courses, causes the conjunction of atoms to form new substances, holds things down on earth's surface. It is the force which regulates and orders the organic and the inorganic, and which becomes incorporated in the essence of everything and of all things...It is generally unconscious, but in life it sometimes assumes consciousness, and, when felt in man's heart, he calls it "love" (Montessori, 1995, p. 293).

It can be understood then, that when the teacher opens her heart to receive this love and directs it towards the children and the teachers, she expresses what some refer to as "caritas." For

example, maintaining that the first step of a teacher's training is her spiritual preparation, Montessori clarified the quality of the heart that is required: "She must study how to purify her heart and render it burning with charity towards the child" (Standing, 1957, p. 298). Several participants alluded to this kind of love towards the children and how it was intertwined throughout their interactions: Sierra considered it the foundation of all her relationships with the child; Jane defined love in the way she followed the interests of the child; and Clara expressed her love by trying to remain non-judgmental with children in all situations. The participants seemed to be developing the same capacity of love that led Maria Montessori to make her discoveries about the child. Surprised by what she saw in the children in her first school in San Lorenzo, Rome, Montessori exclaimed: "It almost seemed as if a road had opened up within their souls that led to all their latent powers, revealing the better part of themselves" (as cited in Maunz, 2012, p. 216).

Maunz (2012) has been contributing her talents extensively to the Montessori field, as I pointed out in Chapter Two. Her collaboration with Dr. Elizabeth Caspari, a student and personal friend of Maria Montessori, guided Maunz in deepening her understanding of Montessori's work. Maunz (2012) shed light on Montessori's ability to observe and understand the child: she "saw with the eyes of the heart" (p. 26), and invited teachers to see the child as she did, a child who represented the future of humanity. Hence, as Montessori teachers teach, Montessori claimed that they are gradually transformed by love for the child, and learn how to observe and reflect the way she taught. They, in turn, would connect to love at a deeper level, and as Montessori (1995) asserted "I have already said that prophets and poets speak often of love as if

it were an idea; but it is not just an idea, it is, has always been, and will ever be, a reality” (p. 290).

This foundation of love in the participants’ teaching and interactions in their teams appeared to be congruent with Palmer and Zajonc’s (2010) “epistemology of love.” Palmer, renowned author in the field of education, and Zajonc, professor of physics with an interest in contemplative methods, advocated a holistic approach to teaching and learning. I realized, as I prepared myself to embark on the interpretations of my findings with supplemental reading and new reflections, that Palmer and Zajonc (2010) were speaking directly to what I observed in my findings: a love that was intricately intertwined with wisdom. This epistemology of love helped me to understand how the teachers arrived at the place that Palmer and Zajonc (2010) described as, “how we know what we know” (p. 94), where “knowing and loving significantly overlap each other” (p. 29). In the next section, I go into detail into how this epistemology fits with my findings, as “connected ideas” (David Kahn, as cited in Wolf, 1996, p. 92).

The Epistemology of Love

Starting from the premise that when we love, we come to know best those whom we love, I distinguish how the seven stages of the epistemology of love (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 94-96) illuminate us on how the participants in my study approached the child and each other with love. The seven stages are: respect, gentleness, intimacy, vulnerability, participation, transformation, and imaginative insight. First, through “*respect*,” the participants indicated that they took a genuine interest in those around them and upheld the honor of each one. The term “respect” is a byword of Montessori teachers; in this instance, they strived daily to embody it.

Not only did they respect each other, they were role modeling this quality with the children.

Secondly, with *gentleness*, the teachers displayed a soft, kind demeanor towards the children and in turn, incorporated this gentleness in their interactions with their team. They moved gracefully in the classroom and spoke caringly.

The third stage, *intimacy*, found the teachers interacting with the child with consideration and understanding. They were interested in discovering the real child, as the child would reveal herself to them. Moreover, they sustained this same kind of motivation for their team. For example, they approached the child within the I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1970), as explored in Chapter Two, and from my observations of the teacher interactions during work time, I realized that they too entered into a relationship with each other that was sensitive and individualized. Remaining within a place of *vulnerability* throughout the day, the teachers acknowledged that they could trust each other with their deepest fears and doubts, with their feelings of helplessness over a child's behavior, or with their disagreements with one another. The teachers adopted this style because they knew that it would benefit the children's development, and therefore, would bring them closer to their goals of peace and joy in the classroom.

The next stage, *participation*, was evident in how the teachers "experientially centered in the other" (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 95) and not in themselves. That is, as described in the profiles of the teachers, as well as in the exploration on their ways of communication in the findings in Chapter Four, the teachers made every effort to put aside their preoccupations from home, in order to be fully present with those with whom they were interacting. The sixth stage of the epistemology of love, *transformation*, illuminates so clearly what was happening within the

minds and hearts of the teachers: “what was outside us is now internalized” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 95). Palmer and Zajonc (2010) made clear that as people become more vulnerable and participate in the views of the others, they are transformed. This transformation was evident in what the participants disclosed about themselves. For example, during the member checks, both Jane and Clara admitted they knew that every day they would learn something different from the children, from the environment, and from their team. They would not be the same as the day before. Moreover, they anticipated this happening to them, on a continuous basis, as they gained experience with the children and their team. The seventh and last stage of the epistemology of love is *imaginative insight*. This is a particular kind of knowing. It is “experienced as a kind of seeing, beholding, or direct apprehension, rather than as an intellectual reasoning to a logical conclusion” (p. 96). The hallmark of the Montessori teacher is her ability to observe the child; a capacity, in my study, that seemed to be transferred to the understanding of the teachers on the teams. For example, the teachers were always very aware of what the other teachers were doing. With their growing mastery of non-verbal and verbal communication, they often took steps to help another teacher, without that teacher soliciting assistance from her. Additionally, they had insights into what to do in their team in unexpected situations with children or with each other. Taken together, these seven stages led the teachers to develop “the educated heart” (Kawalilak & Groen, 2014).

Developing the Heart

As Montessori explained, “The study of love and its utilization will lead us to the source from which it springs, The Child” (Montessori, 1995, p. 296). Therefore, it can be construed that

when teachers put the child first, they develop within their hearts a love that the children “were able to awaken” (Montessori, 1995, p. 282), because “the children take us to a higher plane of the spirit” (p. 286). Teachers know that when they see a child focusing intently on her work, she is developing the foundation for her adulthood. That means that, although her tasks may seem simple, the child is in the process of accomplishing a significant activity of the integration of the “heart, head and hand.” With the encouragement of the teachers, the child’s “desire to do the lesson (heart), the mental activity required (head) and the physical action to complete the activity (hand)” (Maunz, 2012, p. 40), lead the child to master more complex learning, as she progresses through early childhood into the elementary school years. The teachers, then, interact with the child with integrity, a quality that arises from understanding and serving her needs.

Interestingly, what can be considered a parallel to the Montessori concept of the integration of the heart, head and hand in the child, Scharmer (2007) took up a similar idea and applied it to the adult. In his Theory U, Scharmer (2016) traced the journey of the current self interacting more and more with the emerging future self, within the adult. In the process of this happening, Scharmer (2007) cautioned: “We must discover a more profound and practical integration of the head, heart, and hand—of the intelligences of the open mind, the open heart, and open will—at both an individual and a collective level” (p. 20). In this last point, after participating in many innovation and change projects around the world, Scharmer (2016) expounded upon what the integration of the three aspects mentioned above, can lead to in the adult. Advocating an alternative to the current “leadership technology,” Scharmer (2016) instead recommended the cultivation of these three abilities. First, he spoke about the open mind of an

individual as seeing “with fresh eyes” (p. 40) and being able “to suspend judgment and to inquire” (p. 408) when facing new information together with others in an organization. The participants in my research study often referred to this kind of capacity that they strived to develop in their team, when discussing diverse viewpoints on what option to take for the betterment of a child or the team. Secondly, the open heart was related to the ability “to empathize with others” (p. 41) and do exactly what Maunz (2012) also said of Montessori: “seeing with the heart” (Scharmer, 2016, p. 408). The open heart allowed one to place oneself in someone else’s shoes, an important facet of emotional intelligence. In this instance, I also learned that the participants in my study developed empathy for each other, by listening to their personal problems and challenges, and by supporting each other in times of difficulty. Thirdly, the open will helped one to “let go of one’s identities and intentions and tune into the future that is seeking to emerge through me or us” (p. 408) by connecting to “our authentic purpose and self” (p. 41). Once again, I noted this ability in the participants, in their openness to try something new in order to grow and change into a more effective teacher and team member. In order to cultivate the three capacities mentioned here, Scharmer (2016) emphasized the importance of decreasing the influence of the ego, and to turn instead towards the authentic Self, the Self that is seeking to emerge. In my study, Mary was clear about the ego having no part to play in the role of the Montessori teacher. In order to elaborate on the topic of the authentic Self, mentioned by Scharmer (2016), I turn to Cranton and Carusetta (2004) who have studied the concept of authenticity in some detail. I reflect on how their research connects to the development of the heart.

Authenticity has been a hallmark of Cranton and Carusetta's (2004) research. The researchers generated five dimensions of authenticity-self, other, relationship, context and critical reflection-and indicated that self-awareness is key to teaching and to building relationships with students (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004). Turning to my study, the participants portrayed the sense of self that they brought to the classroom, to support the children's learning and each other. Creating a safe, peaceful environment, the teachers worked together to establish a sense of community. Their comments reflected a belief that every child could reach his potential in the Montessori environment. Moreover, the participants exercised critical reflection, questioning themselves and each other on the team about their effectiveness in teaching and learning. Finally, several of the participants alluded to the importance of self-awareness, and considered it a dimension of spirituality. Self-awareness was behind their gentleness, their calmness, and their peacefulness in the classroom. Not only did they put effort into being aware of self during the day, they also role modeled their awareness of self for the children. For example, if Jane realized that she was becoming impatient with a child, she relied on Clara to help her to regain her composure and resolve the situation in a more patient manner.

Maria Montessori (1972b) also gave us other ideas about how to develop the heart and become more authentic. For instance, she suggested that the teacher move towards the development of those qualities that were conducive to building positive relationships with the child. That is, Montessori (1972b) was adamant that the teacher must first "rid his heart of pride and anger" (p. 153) and replace them with humility and patience. Palmer's (1998b) recommendation to teachers to better serve their students and each other was also quite specific;

he encouraged them to “reclaim our hearts” (p. 19), for it is the heart “that is the source of all good work” (p. 21). In a similar vein, Jaworski declared, “When all is said and done, the only change that will make a difference is the transformation of the human heart” (Senge et al., 2005, p. 26).

The participants in my study appeared to be relying on their heart as “the most valuable resource” (Kawalilak & Groen, 2014, p. 33) in their interactions. Placing considerable effort in quelling any impulse to give expression to anger during work time, they were reducing the power of their inner tyrant as described by Montessori (1972b). She stated that the tyrant within the teacher leads her to believe that she has complete authority over the child and his needs, and furthermore, is responsible for all that pertains to the child’s development. The antidote, according to Montessori (1972b), is to “be humble and root out the prejudices lurking in our hearts” (p. 153) about the child. Since all the participants in my study specified that they were following the child and observing him, in order to plan how to teach him, they were displaying humility in their role as teacher.

I would now like to introduce a term that psychologists often use to refer to the soul and its characteristics, the “inner child,” to illustrate how the whole person is perceived by psychologists such as Margaret Paul (1992). In Chapter One, I mentioned that I took a holistic approach to thinking about the Montessori teaching team. The concept of the inner child informs our understanding of what interactions take place within ourselves in our hearts. Paul (1992) spent her life studying the role of the “inner child” in relation to the inner loving adult, the ego that she calls the wounded self, and one’s higher self. Staying open to loving one’s self opens

one's heart to loving others; consequently, one's intention becomes one of giving love to themselves and others, rather than using controlling behavior to get love from others (Chopich & Paul, 1990, p. 120). Chopich and Paul (1990) went further than most psychologists by defining the consequences of "living from the ego" (p. 9), a tendency that Scharmer (2016) declared to be an obstacle to connecting with one's authentic Self. Among the characteristics of identifying with the ego that Chopich and Paul (1990) listed were: fears, depression, divided self, anxiety, and emptiness.

Wolf (1996) referred to this side of ourselves as the shadow, a term that Carl Jung created to explain that part of ourselves that we do not want to face, that we do not want other people to see, and yet, that we project unto others (p. 35). To hide our shadow from others, we wear "an invisible mask" that "is not our true self but is the way we want others to see us" (p. 35). On the other hand, when the inner child is loved, Chopich and Paul (1990) pointed out that one feels a sense of aliveness, a sense of wonder, passion, and curiosity (p. 9-10). The inner child of the teachers may have been revealed in the way in which they demonstrated a deep passion for their work and for their team. Acknowledging their feelings, through self-awareness and self-care, the participants in my study also communicated these to their team. Additionally, they indicated that they made better decisions by sharing their discomforts and uncertainties with one other. Interestingly, in reviewing research about the heart, Sipe and Frick (2009) found that when people remain open to their heart's intelligence, they make more heartfelt decisions.

Kawalilak and Groen (2014) would agree with Chopich and Paul's (1990) contention about loving oneself. Stating that "our willingness and openness to embrace self-love"

(Kawalilak & Groen, 2014, p. 41) is foundational to living a harmonious and congruent life, they strengthened their reason for cultivating the educated heart. Moreover, Miller (2010) also emphasized the importance of self-love, stating that “Love needs to start with ourselves,” and that people often have “a negative view of themselves, a lack of self-worth” (p. 83). In my study, Sierra elaborated at length how self-love was key to her success with children and with her team. Mary and Martha also touched on the importance of self-love that led to their deepening self-awareness. For Chopich and Paul (1990), the inner child “contains our ability for deep emotional and spiritual connection within ourselves and with others” (p. 10). It would be important, then, that teachers become acquainted with this aspect of themselves and this approach to wholeness (Chopich & Paul, 1993), because it corroborates what Montessori said about the spiritual preparation of the teacher: knowing oneself and the qualities one brings to the relationships in the classroom. Wolf (1996) pointed out that Montessori’s emphasis on self-knowledge was reflected long ago in the famous phrase “Know thyself,” inscribed on the wall of a Greek temple. The participants in my study all appeared to be devoting time and energy into cultivating self-knowledge and self-love.

The healing and wholeness that can come about through the bonding with the higher self and the inner child in the heart, brings us to Senge’s (2006) concept of personal mastery. Peter Senge is considered one of the world’s most innovative experts in the field of leadership and management. In his classic book on how to adopt the strategies of learning organizations, Senge (2006) stated that it is essential that we continuously define for ourselves “what is important to us” and what our “current reality” (p. 131-132) really is, instead of placing our energies on

problems that distract us from our true path in life. I contend, with leaders in the field of psychology, education and spirituality, that a person has a higher self and an inner child, and is connected to a higher power. Hence, defining our “current reality” within our hearts is the work of the ages.

In order to think, feel and act from the heart, one sometimes comes in contact with an internal resistance embedded in our thoughts. Jane articulated this inner labor, clarifying several times throughout her interviews that “it is hard;” yet, she made the great effort to overcome this resistance and remain open to others. Senge and his colleagues (2005) undertook the study of this universal striving to be loving to all, regardless of their position in life. Referring to the work of Francisco Varela, a renowned cognitive scientist, Senge et al. (2005) determined that, in order to see things in a new way, one must discontinue one’s “habitual ways of thinking and perceiving” (p. 29). Varela referred to this ability as “suspension,” where we become aware of our thoughts, and in the process, become less influenced by them. As a result, suspension leads us to “see our seeing” (p. 29).

The idea of suspension also exists in the Montessori field. In referring to the need to observe before making a decision about what a child may be doing, Maunz (2012) claimed: “observation takes time and effort. You often have to suspend judgment while you wait to see what is really happening,” because a deceptively modest task may be the child’s “special moment of victory” (p. 214). The participants in my study revealed, as they did with a child, that they endeavored to suspend their judgment about other teachers’ behaviors, until they had a chance to understand the motive behind what they did.

However, as I saw in my research study, observing our thoughts can be a challenge. Bringing back the three abilities that Scharmer (2016) described in his work, open mind, open heart, and open will, I explore further how our thoughts can become obstacles to peace. Informed by Michael Ray's work on creativity, I understood more profoundly how the chatter in the mind could reflect the "Voice of Judgment" (Senge et al., 2005, p. 30), that is filled with fear and judgment. Scharmer (2016) labeled this voice as resistance to the open mind. The participants in my study were sometimes prone to judging or feeling judged by others. Clara disclosed her fear of being judged by her colleagues and sometimes felt safer with children. Martha also admitted, at times, she preferred to read a teacher's body language, rather than face the possibility of the teacher telling her about her disapproval of a decision she may have made. The second "enemy" that can block inner work, particularly the open heart, is the "Voice of Cynicism" (Scharmer, 2016, p. 43). Scharmer (2016) explained that to have an open heart is to be vulnerable. However, the distancing that occurs with cynicism impedes this vulnerability. Time and time again the participants in my study revealed how they took the risk to remain open and vulnerable to each other in order to build safe and trusting relationships in the team, for the sake of the children. Thirdly, the "Voice of Fear" obstructs the open will and "seeks to prevent us from letting go of what we have and who we are" (p. 44). One common fear in a group is being afraid of being ridiculed. Palmer (1998b) talked about these feelings that are present in most people and pointed out that honoring inner truth and inner reality will inevitably lead to an individual awakening (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010). I maintain that the participants in my study were attempting to honor

this truth in each other and in the children, in order to discover the inner life of the child, where purpose and divine love co-existed.

In my study, the participants often had to overcome fear by standing on principle for what they believed would be the best for the children. While I do not know what steps the participants took to overcome this fear, Margaret Paul mentioned in her writings and webinars that she began to connect with her inner child and with her higher self, when she began to feel nurtured by a friend's love. The idea of being "nurtured" was mentioned by Kawalilak and Groen (2014, p. 39) as significant to their experiences of being graduate students. When the teachers in my study voiced reassurance that their team had their back at all times, and were there to support them in difficult times, they were perhaps alluding to this feeling of being nurtured by their team. Having this feeling in a team is crucial for the team. Palmer (2004) instructed us that "whatever we do to care for the true self is, in the long run, a gift to the world" (p. 39).

Connection with the Inner Teacher

Maria Montessori made a thought-provoking statement in one of her speeches, in the latter part of her life. She highlighted that education is meant to serve "the divine in man" (Montessori, 1989, p. 99). One aspect of this divine or spiritual in us, is what Montessori referred to as the "inner teacher" (Montessori, 1989b, p. 46). This inner teacher guides a baby to coo, a child to sort objects, and eventually to do mathematics and to write. Maunz (2012) indicated that concentration on a material that a child has freely chosen, engages him to connect with his inner teacher and then, to the outer world. The presenters of a webinar on the inner teacher (Maunz & Williams, 2014) shed light on the role of the teacher's inner teacher. Connecting with her inner

teacher through her heart, the teacher, in turn, supports and respects the promptings of the child's inner teacher. When this occurs, there is "peace, serenity and cooperation" between them (Maunz & Williams, 2014).

Wolf (1996), a Montessori teacher instructor, used the term "true center" to describe what could have been the inner teacher at work. She stated that we must act from, "a center steeped in humility and awe as we recognize and reverence the wonders of the universe, the patterns of nature and the gift of life" (p. 36). Though the concept of the inner teacher may appear to be unique to the Montessori field, it does also emerge in the work of other scholars. For example, Palmer (1998b) used the term "the teacher within" (p. 30) in a similar manner as Montessori's inner teacher, as well as the term "inner teacher" (Palmer, 2004, p. 69). Expanding this notion to include not only the idea of the voice of conscience, which Montessorians often use to explain the inner teacher, Palmer (1998b) also incorporated the idea of the identity and integrity of the teacher. Harkening back to Scharmer's (2016) "authentic Self" and the necessity of knowing what one's current reality really is, it is evident that "the teacher within," for Palmer (1998b), is what is "real" and "true" (p. 31) for the teacher. As with the inner teacher, Palmer was clear that the teacher must be connected with "the teacher within," in order to interact with that of the students. Moreover, he underlined, "When we are rooted in true self, we act in ways that are life-giving for us and all whose lives we touch" (p. 39). Zajonc (2009), in turn, described the "silent self" (p. 29) within us, which is at a higher place beyond our ego. Like the concept of the inner teacher, he clarified that this self is already a part of us and when we are in contact with it, we speak from a higher spiritual source that seeks to have love and understanding. However, as the

participants in my study realized, they could not constantly remain in a state of peace, an indication of being connected with their inner teacher. They needed the support of their team. Palmer (2004) helped us understand why this is necessary: “finding our way” is difficult and requires “the kind of discernment that can happen only in dialogue” (p. 26) in community.

Wolf (1996) described the way of being in the world of many Montessori teachers she had met throughout the years, who were working from their “true center.” The qualities of “peacefulness and personal strength” (p. 38) seemed to permeate every aspect of their being. Though none of the participants in my study mentioned the term inner teacher, it was obvious that they had a close relationship with their inner teacher. Their commitment to implementing the Montessori Method to the best of their abilities prodded them onward to continuously seek self-improvement. They tried to stay present with the children and with the teachers, so that they could easily plan what their next decision would be. Perceiving themselves as role models for the children, they strived to talk peacefully, walk peacefully and interact peacefully. Their team was built around the concept of peace at all times. As mentioned earlier, peace was a demonstration of connection with the inner teacher (Maunz & Williams, 2014).

To end this section, I would like to add that Montessorians do not necessarily believe that Montessori teachers must belong or not belong to a particular religion. However, as Wolf (1996) specified, it is important that the teacher have “a sense of the transcendent—a sense that there is something more to life than what they perceive with their senses” (p. 37); or as noted by another educator, the teacher needs to believe “that there is a unifying force to creation and acts in the world based on that sense of unity” (p. 38). Moreover, Wolf also believed that the teachers need

to honor the “big questions of the universe” (p. 37), a point similar to what Astin, Astin and Lindholm (2011) uncovered in their research. The participants in my study did not mention much about a higher power or religion, and I did not raise the topic directly. However, they did affirm the role that spirituality played in their interactions with their team.

In the first part of this chapter, I focused on love, through the appearance of love in action, through Palmer and Zajonc’s (2010) epistemology on love, through the developing of the heart, and through the guidance of the inner teacher. The participants in my study demonstrated various aspects of these topics, that led me to understand more deeply how their teams functioned. In other words, taking what the participants revealed about the development of their hearts in action, during their everyday interactions, I began to see congruence with the manner in which they interacted as a team.

In order to elucidate what I perceived, I turn to the next section on how love, in its many forms was portrayed by the participants. That is, I will examine servant leadership, harmony in communication, and the power of teams to illustrate how they transferred their feelings of love for their work and for the children to their team.

Servant Leadership

Sipe and Frick (2009) shed light on a profound approach to leadership that Greenleaf (1991) originated many years ago. Their work led them to develop seven pillars of servant leadership that intrigued me. In reflecting upon the words of the participants in my study, I realized that I was witnessing an interesting congruence between the teacher-child relationship

and the teacher-teacher relationship, within the area of servant-leadership expanded upon by Sipe and Frick (2009).

Before delving into the work of Sipe and Frick, I will put forward the key elements of serving the child in the Montessori Method. Firstly, Montessori explained that there was a unique relationship between the teacher and the child. She described it as “the art of serving the spirit” of the child (Montessori, 1995, p. 281). The greatest manifestation of love for the child would be for the teacher to help him think and act for himself, to become independent. After taking this approach, a teacher can say, as Montessori so aptly stated: “I have served the spirits of those children, and they have fulfilled their development, and I kept them company in their experiences” (Montessori, 1995, p. 284).

I posited that the teachers would, in turn, begin to serve each other, as they embodied the servant leadership way of thinking with the children. Therefore, I looked for what Greenleaf (1991) queried about how one may know if people’s needs were being served: do they “*while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (p. 7). In returning to Sipe and Frick’s (2009) framework of the “core leadership traits or competencies” (p. 5), I saw immediately that the first pillar “person of character” (p. 15) included traits that were reflected in the participants’ comments. For example, they described themselves and each other as being trustworthy, humble, led by what was best for the children, rather than what their ego wanted, and were committed to a goal beyond themselves: normalization. In adult education, this last point would be referred to as a higher purpose (Tisdell, 2008; English, 2012).

To elaborate further on Sipe and Frick's (2009) work, I was struck by their focus on integrity, the foundation of leadership. They concentrated on the importance of knowing oneself and others, and being authentic. In Chapter Four, I detailed the participants' knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and their ability to draw on their strengths in moments of challenge. They tried to be honest about their thoughts and feelings with each other, and took the time when alone to reflect on their behavior, its impact on others, and what they needed to change. These actions demonstrated integrity.

Another competency of the servant-leader is humility, a quality that has come up frequently in this research study. Sipe and Frick (2009) dwelt on humility and its link to patience and wisdom. For them, wisdom was the same as "metanoia" (p. 28), a Greek word describing a waiting for "second thoughts" that would transform one's thinking and being. In other words, a humble person is open to a "higher layer of wisdom" (p. 28) that leads her to positive change. Vella (2000) also took up the concept of metanoia" and stated that every educational event moves one towards "metanoia," "the passage of spirit from alienation into a deeper awareness of oneself." The humility that the participants in my study cultivated in their interactions resulted in an ever-expanding awareness of self and others.

In the second pillar of leadership offered by Sipe and Frick (2009), putting people first by having a "servant's heart" (p. 34) is another competency that was reflected in my findings. For many of the participants in my study, teaching was a "calling" (p. 36), and they placed others before their own self-interests. They mentored each other through their strengths and demonstrated care and concern when someone needed to take a break, or when someone was

having difficulty with personal, family, or health issues. A number of competencies under the other pillars of servant leadership are located under the theme of communication, which I explore in the next section.

Harmony in Communication

The teachers in my study, who perceived themselves as continual learners, denoted that they had relatively high levels of trust and respect in their teams. Bentley (2016) signaled the importance of these two factors for learning, so that people would see each other “as sources of learning rather than as threats to their learning” (p. 37). Additionally, Senge (2006) illuminated us about the relevance of learning: “To be a true teacher, you must be a learner first” (p. 332). The participants in my study communicated with each other for the purposes of learning about the children, about each other, and about themselves, as they interacted with others. Were they being open to learning? Were they thoughtfully considering each other’s viewpoints? Were they living their values in an “undivided life,” (Palmer, 2004; Groen, 2012), where they were “finding their own authentic way to an undivided life where meaning and purpose are tightly interwoven with intellect and action, where compassion and care are infused with insight and knowledge” (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 56). Their statements showed that they were indeed striving to do so.

Therefore, I wondered what kind of communication they could be having with each other, when they talked before school, during lunch and after school. First, I took note that they all expressed a desire to interact in positive ways with each other on the team. Research in the field of positive psychology has shown that displaying positive emotions will contribute to one’s well-being, as well as influence one’s behavior in ways different to exhibiting negative emotions

(Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). Positive psychology focuses on “desirable aspects of behavior” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006, p. 3), that used to be commonly called “virtues.” More importantly for these researchers, the presence of positive emotions broadens the range of possible actions that one can take, as well as builds “enduring personal resources” (Fredrickson, 2006, p. 88). It would seem that this was true for the participants in my study. They related how they deliberately approached disagreements with a positive attitude, in order to come up with creative solutions. This approach appeared to deepen their ties with each other.

Secondly, all the participants perceived spirituality playing a role in their communication. Starting from the viewpoint that they wanted their team to meet the needs of the children, they monitored their own communication to reflect a sense of connectedness (Emmons, 2006), which enfolded the children and themselves in a spiritual web. Expressing the “spiritual emotion” of gratitude (Emmons, 2006, p. 71) when one of them felt supported and strengthened by the others in a difficult situation, the participants also appeared to forgive each other for their weaknesses, which lowered their negative emotions such as anger and resentment.

In the process, they could have been constructing what Scharmer (2016) referred to as the *social field*, which is “*the structure of relationship* among individuals that—when changed—gives rise to different collective behavior patterns” (p. 228). What is of particular interest to this study, is Scharmer’s concept of “holding spaces” in groups where “profound shifts...tend to happen when the courage of risk taking is supported by a holding space of deep listening with unconditional love” (p. 246). Commenting on the kinds of conversations that can occur within such a social field, Palmer (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) acknowledged that a group could “achieve

unexpected insights” (p. 12), much in the way that Mary, in my study, described in her team. Often the three of them on her team would come up with a fourth “fantastic viewpoint” that they did not anticipate.

Being a skilled communicator as a servant leader, Sipe and Frick (2009) emphasized that empathy is the foundation for building relationships of trust and care. Empathy was mentioned earlier in the section on the development of the heart, under “open heart” (Scharmer 2016). In relational learning, Rossiter (2005) proclaimed this skill as essential for the development of the sense of self in relationships. Moreover, Noddings (1984) explained when one is able to see a situation through the eyes of the other person, she may enter into the I-Thou relationship that Buber (1970) spoke of. She would be totally present with the other person.

In the descriptions that the teachers in my research study provided to me, I conjectured that they at times entered into the I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1970). Their communication demonstrated that they were being present with the other teachers when they met. They did not speak for another on the team, nor did they impose their own interpretations on the others. In fact, they would try, on their own, to interpret what the others may have said, and return to them for clarification on an issue that might have led to a misunderstanding.

Deep listening accompanies the I-Thou relationship. Gordon (2011) discussed Buber’s (1970) perspective on listening, a cornerstone of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991), and how it manifests in a relationship. Talking as whole person to whole person, the communicators encourage each other “to create his or her own meanings” (Gordon, 2011, p. 207), which may differ from each other. Furthermore, they bring to their exchange an attitude of “care and

acceptance,” (p. 210) rather than one of superiority and dominance. Several of the participants in my study described how they exercised effort to truly listen and hear what the others were saying, so that each teacher could speak her own words. Additionally, the teachers spoke their truth, not holding back their thoughts or doubts.

It would appear, then, that they were authentic with each other (Gordon, 2011) and this, in turn, created safe space (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Scharmer, 2016) between them where they could be influenced by each other. This latter point, persuasion, according to Sipe and Frick (2009) is the “*preferred* mode of using power” (p. 73), demonstrating openness to immerse oneself in the process of communication, rather than “manipulation or coercion” (p. 50). Advocating “reflective openness,” that leads one to go within to become more aware of one’s biases and self-limitations in one’s thinking and conversations, Senge (2006) posited that deep listening stems from this openness to be vulnerable about one’s assumptions and feelings. It is the beginning of learning.

Additionally, following in the same line of thinking as Palmer (1998b) on community, I viewed the teams much like a community, where they were able to discuss their teaching practices, receive support, and share the wisdom that came from their teaching and team experiences. Receiving corroboration in the interviews that the teachers worked with each other much in the way as medium to high performing teams do (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003; Wheelan, 2016), I saw that they supported each other in learning technical skills, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills. In the next section, I delve into the details of sharing power, as authority, in their teams and the effects of doing so.

The Power of the Team

Though my research questions did not explore the level of performance of the teams that the participants were part of, they, nevertheless, provided me with some inklings of how they worked together as team. For example, collaboration is part of servant leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2009) and a necessity for accomplishing complex tasks (Wheelan, 2016). I surmised from the interviews that the teams operated within a culture of collaboration. That is, individually, each teacher forsook the need to seek personal glory and instead, strengthened the team's shared vision (Senge, 2006) by believing that together they could "shape their future" (p. 215). Moreover, since the teachers unanimously considered being peaceful among each other in the classroom as essential, they remained calm in the midst of seeking solutions, and held the belief that they could expect a successful outcome. Evidently, the participants, intuitively or through training, adhered to guidelines that fit with the servant leadership competency of managing disagreements with cooperation, respect and dignity (Sipe & Frick, 2009), and holding each other to high standards.

The participants felt involved and committed to their teams; therefore, they were able to help each other reach their goals. Believing that becoming a high performance team is fundamental to building an interesting and challenging workplace, Wheelan (2016) studied how members could actively participate in their future as an effective team. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, the teachers on the teams in my study all had equal responsibilities. For this reason, Wheelan's (2016) approach is constructive. She enumerated characteristics of four stages of team development that illuminated my reflections on the participants' descriptions of their

teamwork. As Clara described, their team had gone through stage two of agreeing on a set of unified goals and values to follow during work time during the year, before the school year had begun. Mary, being new to her team, described the steps of stage one and stage two, as she determinedly remained transparent with her motives and values throughout the fall of the school year.

Wheelan's (2016) stage three involved trust building, commitment to the team, and "open and task oriented" communication (p. 27). It was evident from the participants' statements that they were trusting of each other, even to the point of personal disclosure, and were task oriented, meeting as soon as possible to resolve disagreements in any area of work. I could even see characteristics of stage four, the stage of "intense team productivity and effectiveness" (p. 28), such as clarity around their goals, spending enough time problem-solving, giving and receiving feedback, and using decision-making approaches that were inclusive of everybody. Another characteristic of high performing teams is their ability to resolve conflict swiftly and effectively. Each participant in my study was quick to admit that the team did not always agree; yet they attempted to find common ground and were open to another's idea, even if it was novel to them. In other words, they were courageous, a servant leadership competency of foresight (Sipe and Frick, 2009).

Developing foresight with children, as an aspect of being a Montessori teacher, appeared to lead the participants into similar byroads with each other. The teachers articulated a clear trust in each other and a vision that they all shared for the classroom community. The teachers brought to their team an understanding of lessons from the past, a defined reality as "a medium

for creating their visions” (Senge, 2006, p. 331), and reflection on future consequences of their decisions, all which are aspects of foresight (Sipe & Frick, 2009). What was a surprise to me was the participants’ exuberance around joyful learning. They all celebrated the children’s victories in learning, thus affecting the “social field” (Scharmer, 2016) of the classroom. Though it was quiet, communicated mostly non-verbally to the child and to the other teachers, the sense of victory reverberated throughout the whole classroom as it touched everyone. Finally, I return to the essence of this chapter, acting from the heart. When foresight, a shared vision, a creative approach to decision-making, and principled action are integrated within the teacher, these competencies facilitate the formation of an identity within the teacher of a servant leader that leads her to live and work with others in mind.

The Montessori classroom is a complex context to work in. The teachers in my study acknowledged the complexity of their work and, at the same time, recognized that they worked within a web of relationships that was filled with learning and discovery. They worked comfortably with questions that were unanswered, trusting that they could travel together towards the future as it emerged (Scharmer, 2016), and find those answers becoming known in the course of their discussions. Adaptability was their *modus operandi*. Being humble, knowing that not one of them held all the answers to their difficulties and challenges, they knew that every team member could contribute to their team’s effectiveness in considering the “greater good” (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 151) of the children and of each other.

Interestingly, the teachers in my study described situations where they had learned to function within the seventh pillar of servant leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2009), leading with moral

authority. First, they shared power, considering each teacher on her team as an important contributor to the goals of the classroom. Each took responsibility for their actions and created a culture within their teams of accountability. Deriving deep satisfaction from perceiving growth in themselves and others in the team, they confided in each other, comforted each other, and covered for each other at any time. They, in Greenleaf's words, in a private letter to a friend (as cited in Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 177), were sustained by the spirit: "Spirit directs the leader when the going is rough, or uncertain or hazardous, and gives strength and assurance... Spirit is an aspect of inner strength," much in the way Montessori described the relationship between the teacher and the child (Montessori, 1972b), that seemed to be translated into teamwork.

Summary

Revealing that love was the foundation for all that they did in the classroom, the participants clarified for me the importance of the understanding of love in the formation of their identity as teachers, as servant leaders, as learners, and as team members. The love that the teachers showed the children, a love that transcended any tendency for favoritism or possessiveness, translated into ways of being together in a team that were supportive, caring, and compassionate.

Because there appeared to be congruence between the participants' perceptions of their role as a teacher, and their role as a team member, I offer the following observation: though they seem to be opposites, the teacher-child relationship and the teacher-teacher relationship were complementary and interdependent. That is, the participants were clear that they were developing specific spiritual qualities to form the foundation of their interactions with the children, that were

both consistent with their values and with their understanding of the Montessori philosophy. In turn, they brought these same qualities to their team.

I discovered that, in order for both types of relationships to thrive, the participants endowed every word and action with love. Since love seemed to be the foundational element in the participants' interactions with the children, I examined Palmer and Zajonc's (2010) epistemology of love and how it sheds light on the teachers' mindset behind the balanced actions that they took, which in turn, was conveyed to the team relations.

Moreover, the love that the participants communicated led me to understand that their unique approach to the child, originating from within the Montessori Method, transformed them into a team that focused first on the development of the heart. For example, the integration of the heart, head, and hand is a significant concept in the Montessori Method. This integration occurs within the child while he is concentrating on material he has freely chosen. The child can then progress gradually through all the different stages of development. Intriguingly, Scharmer (2016), in his innovative approach to learning and leadership called Theory U, also dwelt on the importance of the integration of the head, heart, and hand. However, in this case, he related it to the adult. I elaborated on this connection, as part of the development of the heart, and tied it to authenticity, a quality that pervades much of Theory U, and is also explored within adult learning. Lastly, in the same section, I talked about an interesting concept known as the "inner child" (Paul, 1992) that psychologists often refer to, in the place of the term "soul," to describe our feelings and their effect on our entire being.

Subsequently, since the participants indicated that they were steadfast in bettering themselves, this commitment of theirs gave me the impression that they were then able to connect to their “inner teacher,” a Montessori concept that is sometimes known as one’s higher self. One indication of this connection appeared in the manner in which the participants were able to maintain within themselves and foster within the classroom, an ever-increasing sense of peace. Hence, I took up the concept of the inner teacher, and linked it to terms that other scholars proposed to describe a similar spiritual connection within oneself.

In examining the teams’ interactions, I realized that servant leadership played an important role. Servant leadership is a concept that pervades the field of leadership since Robert Greenleaf’s (1991) influential work on that topic. It is also a subject that is intricately interwoven in the role of the Montessori teacher (Montessori, 1995). Therefore, when I saw the participants in my study serving the needs of the children as their principal goal, I realized that they had integrated this perspective into their communications and interactions with their team. This discovery, then, led me to understand their teamwork in a deeper way. Consequently, I incorporated aspects of servant leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2009) in the sections on harmony in communication, as well as on the power of teams. In my study, communication was a fundamental avenue to bringing the team together and it was multi-faceted. Therefore, I introduced several ideas about what could be behind the rich, caring interchanges that the teachers had with each other including trust, learning, the social field, and community.

Finally, I expanded upon the power of the team, as expressed by the participants. For them, the team was a means to implementing the Montessori Method the best way they knew

how. It also served the purpose of comforting, nurturing, and supporting each other for their mutual growth and wholeness.

Chapter 6 Conclusions: The Essence of the Heart

As I contemplate the transformational journey that I experienced in conducting my study, I became very aware that I had changed as a researcher. The study sought to examine the role that spirituality played in the perceptions and understandings that Montessori teachers brought to their interactions in classroom teams. Feeling grateful towards the participants who impacted my thinking along the way, by sharing their thoughts and feelings about spirituality and teamwork, I re-integrated my own experiences to find greater meaning and purpose (Dominice, 2000) in my own work. In particular, the participants guided me to greater levels of understanding of the relationships they formed with the child and with each other, that informed my perspective of the Montessori Method and its applicability to other teams in schools. Realizing that these relationships in the classroom were developed “*to help life*” (Montessori, 1989b, p. 16), I resonated with Jaworski’s (2011) assertion that there is really only one option for the person who serves: “that the fundamental choice that enables true leadership in all situations...is the *choice to serve life*” (p. 2).

Taking this concept into the realm of the Montessori classroom, I realized that the humility of the teacher that Montessori referred to numerous times in her training and presentations was present in my participants, and translated into a belief that the child would, “sooner or later, each will demonstrate his or her true nature” (Standing, 1984, p. 302). The teachers, then, trusted “this power of choice” (Standing, 1984, p. 301) of the child in choosing materials that were best for her, in order to “unite to form inseparable parts of a single

educational whole, which is a dynamic and continuous development for both of them” (Standing, 1984, p. 297).

Seeing through the eyes of the participants, I realized that the teacher must be connected to her inner teacher, in order to observe and truly follow the interests of the child, which are guided by the child’s own inner teacher. Since this connection with the inner teacher occurs within the deep recesses of the heart of the teacher, she must develop those qualities that bring her closer to the inner teacher of the child. In turn, when the team acknowledges this spiritual aspect of the child, and of themselves, together, they can pursue ways of interacting that demonstrate the qualities of empathy and listening of the servant leader. Hence, they may relate to each other according to the three-way spiritual model of communication proposed by Fleming and Courtenay (2006), where two persons interact through contact with their higher self, or a higher power.

Recognizing that the inner teachers of the participants were at work in their communication, I also noticed that the participants demonstrated authenticity and trust in the process of the research study. They led me every step of the way through my exploration of their understandings and perceptions of the Montessori Method, where I attained a higher appreciation of the child, and their contribution to love and peace in the world. I was able then to reflect on Montessori’s work towards greater peace, through the transformation of education “from the ground up” (Lillard, 2007, p. 16). Along the way, I discovered that the teachers were attempting to see the child and each other, “with the eyes of the heart” (Maunz, 2012, p. 26) as Montessori

displayed, and were in essence, embodying the principles of Montessori, by nurturing their own inner life, in order “to nurture the inner life” (Maunz, 2012, p. 205) of the child.

Consequently, as I thought about my findings, I realized that fostering peace was the message that consistently came up in the data. Peace is an elusive topic; yet, it is what undergirded most of Montessori’s (1972b) considerations about the child, “If we are among the men of good will who yearn for peace, we must lay the foundation for peace ourselves, by working for the social world of the child” (p. 85). By keeping peace in her heart, Montessori maintained, that a teacher could develop her heart, and her personal mastery (Senge, 2006), to create community in her classroom. What does this mean for the child, when she discerns that the teachers in her classroom embody the consciousness of peace for her best interests? Will she build the foundation necessary to take her place in the world as a complex individual (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), realizing her purpose in life? Will she become a peaceful adult (Montessori, 1972b) through the loving presence of teachers who encourage her to act upon her inner promptings to fulfill her developing needs? Will she live an undivided life (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010)? The participants in my study reassured me that their efforts in their teams were to offer the best to the children, by continuously striving to reach higher standards in their relationships with teaching and learning.

Recommendations for Practice

In order to have peace, there must be love. Love was the dominant quality of the teachers in my study that influenced their way of being in the world. Montessori (1972b) claimed, “The goal we have therefore set ourselves is to help the adult world know, love, and serve the child

better. Thereby helping all mankind reach a higher stage of development” (p. 41). In developing the heart (Kawalilak & Groen, 2014), the teachers helped me understand the importance of this endeavor for the child’s development, and for the development of the team. What then does my research study mean for Montessori teachers, for Montessori teams, for Montessori schools, and for Montessori parents?

Implications for Montessori teachers.

This study indicates that connecting with her inner teacher, through being mindful and peaceful, brings greater self-awareness and self-knowledge to the teacher. She, then, is fulfilling Montessori’s recommendation to place her spiritual preparation above the technical preparation, in order to build a lasting, loving relationship with the child. This means that Montessori teachers need to intentionally acquire self-improvement strategies, in order to grow continuously and consistently towards the development of the heart.

Implications for the Montessori team.

The findings of this study indicate that when each teacher places effort in bettering herself on a daily basis, she remains vigilant within her team in how to maintain positive relationships that lead to higher levels of performance. The team then takes more effective actions on behalf of the children. With time, the team co-creates with the children a loving community based on love and freedom. All of this determination results in normalization, the single most important result of Montessori education.

Implications for the Montessori school.

While I did not include the head of the school in my recruitment for this research study, a number of participants spoke about her support in their daily work. She had an open door policy, where any teacher at any time could go to her for help to mediate a situation, or to obtain advice on a child. The teachers trusted her to be there when they needed her encouragement and assistance. Moreover, by organizing monthly Professional Development days, the head of the school demonstrated a commitment to their growth and transformation, both as individuals and as teams, as well as to the implementation of the Montessori Method at the deepest level possible. It appears then that what the head of the school does to construct a culture in the school that is consistent with the Montessori Method has an important role in the well-being of the teacher teams.

Implications for parents.

The discussion around the connection with the inner teacher is significant for parents, who are the child's first teachers. Knowing that they can collaborate with the school for the development of their children, they too may consider how their own self-understanding (Seigel & Hartzell, 2003), and self-love (Paul, 1992) can influence their approach to their children's development. Practicing self-knowledge strategies, hand-in hand with the children's teachers, could embolden the parents to integrate more Montessori principles in the home (Montessori, 1970; Polk Lillard, 1972).

Recommendations for Future Research

Research in the Montessori field.

This research study opened my eyes, in a much more profound manner, to the responsibility that Montessori teachers have, teaching children 2 ½ to 6 years old. The participants taught me that, while the children are in the absorbent mind, teachers need to develop a deep commitment to being role models of peaceful adults. In Jaworski's (2011) words, "This is a commitment of being, not a commitment of doing" (p. 12). I also realized that the embodying of the Montessori Method, on the part of the teachers, transformed them into sensitive, caring, respectful team members. They, in essence, exemplified how team members could maintain steadfastness towards the children's development, and at the same time, solidify their own constructive relationships with each other (Wheelan, 2016).

Therefore, I recommend further studies with a larger sample of Montessori teachers, using the same criteria for recruitment, to understand more in depth what teachers think about, when they meet to support each other in meeting their goals for the children. In this study, I did not observe team meetings, nor did I explore directly with the participants, what they did and said during those meetings. How did they set aside their own biases and viewpoints to embrace the ideas of the others? How did they suspend judgment about what another was proposing, when it diverged from their line of thinking? How did they make decisions? How did they follow-up on their decisions and plans? How did they see the whole picture in making plans with the team?

In this study, the participants were part of teams that appeared to function well enough to meet the basic goals of a Montessori classroom. In the future, it would be interesting to undertake studies of well-functioning teams and compare them with teams who may be at the beginning or middle stages of team development. What new understandings would be uncovered about the role of the spiritual self and the team? What would be the importance of a school-wide culture that reflects the principles of the Montessori Method?

Research in other areas.

Since the teachers in my study had achieved peace in the classroom with each other and with the children, I began to reflect on what the implications are for other kinds of organizations in the world. Could they also build a culture that was life-giving (Palmer, 2004), that had meaning and purpose (Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), that encompassed wholeness and mindfulness (Senge et al., 2005), and that at its foundation, was loving and compassionate (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010)? How could what I learned from the participants inform other teams who were not in the Montessori classroom, yet who placed children first as our “primary concern” (Montessori, 1972a, p. 55). Would they, in turn, develop some of the characteristics I saw in the teachers in my study? Would they cultivate other qualities that Montessori teachers could learn from?

Believing as Montessori does, that the way to peace in the world is through respecting the inner spiritual forces of the child, I would also like to focus my attention on teams that would consider “broadening Greenleaf’s original insight” to serving life (Jaworski, 2011, p. 2), and in the process, learn how “to allow life to unfold through me” (p. 2). I think this approach would be

transformational, as well as enlightening for adults, for “the more fully we see the greater must be our peace of heart in order to carry what is lived” (Zajonc, 2009, p. 11).

Reflecting on the Heart

As I pause to look back on my doctoral journey that I undertook with the participants in my study, I realize that I deepened my own awe of Maria Montessori’s contribution to children around the world, and in turn, to all adults. Not only did she construct a path for children to follow, with caring adults, in order to reach their potential and take their place in the world that would become more and more peaceful; she also led us inward to perceive what is loving and kind about ourselves, in the development of our hearts, for the sake of children. I now have a greater understanding of the role that children play in our society, as peacemakers and as sources of love. I also realize that the dedication to high standards for self and others, on the part of teachers, benefits all who come in contact with these teachers, and consequently, with their teams.

At the beginning of my study, it was my intention to make known the work of Montessori teachers in their contributions to the understandings of teamwork. I am now at that point where I would like to climb the spiral staircase leading to greater levels of awareness of people’s interconnectedness, and their contribution to the world. In essence, I am embarking on a trail that has been marked out in some ways, by dedicated scholars who have gone before me. Now I am interested in contributing to the understanding of an organization’s culture, that is based on love and support for the child, in order to help teams direct their efforts towards preparing the way for children to take their place in the world, as peaceful adults. In ending this study, I would like to

present a compelling statement of Maria Montessori (1972a): " if we ponder the influence that education can have on the attainment of world peace, it becomes clear that we must make the child and his education our primary concern" (p. 55).

References

- Astin, A. W., Astin, H. S., & Lindholm, J. A. (2011). *Cultivating the spirit how college can enhance students' inner lives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice and mind*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Bentley, P. S. (2016). *An investigation of learning processes and contexts of a curriculum program for the formation of spiritual directors* (Unpublished thesis). Australian Catholic University, Fitzroy Victoria, Australia.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Bornstein, M. H. (1989). Sensitive periods in development: structural characteristics and causal interpretations. *Psychological Bulletin*, 105 (2), 179-197.
- Brailsford, V. & Crosiar, A. (2014, October 24). Building your classroom team [Webinar]. In *Age of Montessori Videos Webinar Replays*. Retrieved from <http://ageofmontessori.org/building-your-classroom-team/>
- Buber, M. (1970). *I and Thou*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Butler-Kisber, L. (2010). *Qualitative inquiry*. London, UK: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Chattin-McNichols, J. (1998). *The Montessori controversy*. Albany, New York, NY: Delmar.
- Chopich, E. J. & Paul, M. (1990). *Healing your aloneness*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cranton, P. & Carusetta, E. (2004). Perspectives on authenticity in teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 55, 5-22.
- Creswell, J. (2015). *Educational research planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2003). *Good business*. New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2006). Introduction. In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *A life worth living* (pp. 3-14). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Csikszentmihalyi, I. S. (Eds.) (2006). *A life worth living*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dominice, P. (2000). *Learning from our lives*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Emmons, R. A. (2006). In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *A life worth living* (pp. 62-81). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- English, L. (2000). The development of the aesthetic/moral self in the professional education of teachers. *The Clearing House*, 73 (3), 165-167.

- English, L. (2012). For whose purposes? Examining the spirituality agenda in adult education. In J. Groen, D. Coholic, & J.R. Graham (Eds.), *Spirituality in social work and education* (pp.17-31). Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- English, L. M., Fenwick, T. J. & Parsons, J. (2003). *Spirituality of adult education and training*. Malabar, FL: Kreiger Publishing Co.
- English, L. M., Fenwick, T. J., & Parsons, J. (2005). Interrogating our practices of integrating spirituality into workplace education. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 45 (1), 7- 28.
- Fenwick, T. J., & Lange, E. (1998). Spirituality in the workplace: The new frontier of HRD. *Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 12 (1), 63-87.
- Fitzgerald, M. M., & Theilheimer, R. (2013). Moving toward teamwork through professional development activities. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41, 103-113.
- Fleming, J., & Courtenay, B. (2006). The role of spirituality in the practice of adult education leaders. *Adult Education Research Conference proceedings* (pp.124-129). Retrieved from <http://www.adulterc.org/Proceedings/2006/Proceedings/Flemingcourtenay.pdf>
- Formankova, I. (2007). *Montessori: A spiritual paradigm for the new age*. (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Simon Fraser University, Canada. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/docview/304723964?pq-origsite=summon>
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2006). The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. In M. Csikszentmihalyi & I. S. Csikszentmihalyi (Eds.), *A life worth living* (pp. 85-103). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

- Freiler, T. J. (2008). Learning through the body. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 119*, 37-47.
- Gilley, D.V. (2005). Whose spirituality? Cautionary notes about the role of spirituality in higher education. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 104*, 93-99.
- Gordon, M. (2011). Listening as embracing the other: Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue. *Educational Theory, 61* (2), 207-219.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1979). *The teacher as servant*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1991). *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis, IN: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center.
- Griffin, V. R. (2001). Holistic Learning. In T. Barer-Stein & M. Kompf (Eds.), *The craft of teaching adults* (3rd ed.) (pp. 107-136). Toronto, ON: Culture Concepts.
- Groen, J. (2004a). The creation of soulful spaces and the organizational context. *Organizational Development Journal, 22* (4), 19-30.
- Groen, J. (2004b). The experience and practice of adult educators in addressing the spiritual dimensions of the workplace. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education, 18* (1), 72-92.
- Groen, J. (2012). Kindred spirits? Challenges and opportunities for the faculties of education and social work in the emerging teaching focus on spirituality. In J. Groen, D. Coholic, & J.R. Graham (Eds.), *Spirituality in social work and education* (pp.77-94). Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

- Groen, J., & Kawalilak, C. (2014). *Pathways of adult learning*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Kawalilak, C., & Groen, J. (2014). An 'educated heart' and teaching practice. *Journal of Educational Thought (JET)*, 47(1&2), pp. 33-47.
- Hammersley, M. (2013). *What is qualitative research?* London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Helfrich, S. (2011). *Montessori learning in the 21st century*. Troutdale, OR: New Sage Press.
- Heron, J. (2002). *The complete facilitator's handbook*. London, UK: Kogan Page Limited.
- History of Montessori in Canada. (2012). Retrieved from http://www.ccma.ca/files/History_of_Montessori_in_Canada_Posters.pdf
- Huebner, D. (1999). Education and spirituality. In V. Hillis (Ed.), *The lure of the transcendent* (pp. 401-416). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Huebner, D. (1999). Spirituality and knowing. In V. Hillis (Ed.), *The lure of the transcendent* (pp. 340-352). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
- Hunt, D. E. (1992). *The renewal of personal energy*. Toronto, ON: The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Jaworski, J. (2011). *Synchronicity the inner path of leadership*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2007). *American educational history*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (2003). *The wisdom of teams*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

- Kramer, K. P., & Gawlick, M. (2003). *Martin Buber's I and Thou*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Laiken, M. (1994). *The autonomy of high performing teams*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press Inc.
- Law, J. K-W. (2013). *Preservice teacher mentoring as development for teacher instructional leadership* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Calgary, Canada. Retrieved from <http://theses.ucalgary.ca//handle/11023/1234>
- Lillard, A.S. (2007). *Montessori the science behind the genius*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lillard Polk, P. (1972). *Montessori a modern approach*. New York, NY: Schocken Books Inc.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Loeffler, M.H. (1992). Montessori and constructivism. In M.H. Loeffler (Ed.), *Montessori in contemporary American culture* (pp. 101-113). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc.
- Madeleine Joan Justus (2016, June 5), *Seattle Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/seattletimes/obituary.aspx?pid=180227732>
- Maunz, M. E. (2012). *Nurturing your child's inner life*. Bozeman, MT: Age of Montessori.
- Maunz, M.E. & Williams, J. (2014, October) Honoring the inner teacher [Webinar]. In *Age of Montessori Professional Development Webinar On-Demand*.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002a). Assessing and evaluating qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam, & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 18-33). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Merriam, S. B. (2002b). Introduction to qualitative research. In S. B. Merriam, & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 3-17). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S., & Baumgartner, L. M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Kim, Y. S. (2008). Non-western perspectives on learning and knowing. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, 17-81.
- Merriam, S. B., & Muhamad, M. (2002). How cultural values shape learning in older adulthood. In S. B. Merriam, & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice* (pp. 40-61). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis a methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Miller, J. P. (2005). Introduction: Holistic learning. In J. P. Miller, S. Karsten, D. Denton, D. Orr, & I. C. Kates (Eds.), *Holistic learning and spirituality in education* (pp.1-6). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Miller, J. P. (2007). *The holistic curriculum*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press Inc.
- Miller, J. (2010). *Whole child education*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.
- Miller, J. P., Irwin, M., and Nigh, N. (Eds.). (2014). *Teaching from the thinking heart*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Miller, R. (2002). Nourishing the spiritual embryo: The educational vision of Maria Montessori. In J P. Miller, & Y. Nakagawa (Eds.), *Nurturing our wholeness: Perspectives on*

- spirituality* (pp.227-240). Rutland, VT: The Foundation for Educational Renewal.
- Montessori Australia Foundation Limited, (n.d.). Timeline of Dr. Maria Montessori's life.
- Retrieved from <https://montessori.org.au/timeline-dr-maria-montessoris-life>
- Montessori, M. (1967). *The discovery of the child*. New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group.
- Montessori, M. (1972a). *Education and peace*. Chicago, Illinois: Henry Regnery Company.
- Montessori, M. (1972b). *The secret of childhood*. New York: Random House Publishing Group.
- Montessori, M. (1989a). *The child, society and the world*. Oxford, England: The Clio Press.
- Montessori, M. (1989b). *Education for a new world*. Oxford, England: The Clio Press.
- Montessori, M. (1989c). *The formation of man*. Oxford, England: The Clio Press.
- Montessori, M. (1989d). *To educate the human potential*. Oxford, England: The Clio Press.
- Montessori, M. (1995). *The absorbent mind*. New York, NY: Holt Paperbacks.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Palmer, P. J. (1993). *To know as we are known*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998a). Evoking the spirit. *Educational leadership*, 56 (4), 6-11.
- Palmer, P.J. (1998b). *The courage to teach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. J. & Zajonc, A. (2010). *The heart of higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Paul, M. (1992). *Inner bonding*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Paul, M. (2017). *Loving yourself can heal fear*. Retrieved from
<http://www.innerbonding.com/show-article/4169/loving-yourself-can-heal-fear.html>
- Pentland, A. S. (2012). *The new science of building great teams*. Retrieved from
<https://hbr.org/2012/04/the-new-science-of-building-great-teams>
- Rossiter, M. (2005). Relational learning. In L.M. English (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of Adult Education* (pp. 548-554). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ruff, H. A., & Rothbart, M. K. (2001). *Attention in early development: Themes and variations*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. DOI:
10.1093/acprof:oso/978019513326.001.0001
- Sawyer, K. (2007). *Group genius: The creative power of collaboration*. Retrieved from
<http://proquest.safaribooksonline.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/9780465008247?uicode=ucalgary>
- Scharmer, O. C. (2009). *Theory U leading from the future as it emerges*. Cambridge, MA: The Society for organizational Learning, Inc.
- Scharmer, O. C. (2016). *Theory U leading from the future as it emerges*. (2nd ed.). Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Seldin, T. (2006). *How to raise an amazing child the Montessori way*. New York, NY: DK Publishing.
- Senge, P. (2006). *The fifth discipline*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

- Senge, P., Scharmer, C. O., Jaworski, J., & Flowers, B. S. (2005). *Presence exploring profound change in people, organizations, and society*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Siegel, D. J., & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Sipe, J. W., & Frick, D. M. (2009). *Seven pillars of servant leadership*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Smith, D. G. (2014). *Teaching as the practice of wisdom*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Standing, E. M. (1984). *Maria Montessori her life and work*. New York, NY: New American Library.
- The American revival. (2017). Retrieved from <https://amshq.org/Montessori-Education/History-of-Montessori-Education/AMS-and-the-Montessori-Movement>
- Tisdell, E. J. (2002). Spirituality and emancipatory adult education in women adult educators for social change. In S. H. Merriam, & Associates (Eds.), *Qualitative research in practice* (pp.62-88). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Tisdell, E. J. (2008). Spirituality and adult learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 119*, 27-36.
- Tolliver, D. & Tisdell, E. (2006). Engaging spirituality in the transformative higher education classroom. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 109*, 37-47.

- Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., & Nevin, A.I. (2004). *A guide to co-teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Vella, J. (2000). A spirited epistemology: Honouring the adult learner. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 85(2), 7-16.
- Vogel, L. J. (2000). Reckoning with the spiritual lives of adult educators. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 85, 17-27.
- Waring, M. (2012). Finding your theoretical position. In J. Arthur, M. Waring, R. Coe, & L.V. Hedges (Eds.), *Research methods and methodologies in education*, (pp. 15-19). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- What is MACTE? (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.macte.org>
- Wheelan, S.A. (2013). *Creating effective teams* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Wheelan, S. A. (2016). *Creating effective teams* (5th ed.). Thousand, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Wolf, A. (1996). *Nurturing the spirit*. Hollidaysburg, PA: Parent Child Press.
- Zajonc, A. (2009). *When knowing becomes love meditation as contemplative inquiry*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books.

Appendix A: Questionnaire of the Background of the Teacher

The questions in this questionnaire will provide some information that will help me to understand what experiences you bring to the team that you are teaching with. I may ask you to elaborate on some of your answers during the interview for clarification purposes.

1. How many years have you been teaching as a Montessori teacher?
2. Which cities and countries have you been teaching in?
3. Where did you obtain your Montessori training?
4. What Montessori training do you have?
5. For how long have you been teaching in a Montessori teacher team?
6. How long have you been with this organization?

Appendix B: Request to Bring an Artifact to the Interview

I would like you to think about what being in a Montessori teacher team means to you and what role spirituality plays, if any at all. Once you have an idea of this role I would like you to select an object in your home or somewhere in your environment that best represents what this meaning is and bring it to the interview. I will ask you to talk about the artifact that you have chosen during the interview.

Appendix C: Sample Guide to the Semi-structured Interview

Spirituality means different things to different people. During this interview I would like to explore with you what spirituality means and what role it plays, if any, in how you interact with your team members. There are no right or wrong answers. I am here to learn from you and your colleagues.

I. Questions to clarify any ambiguity in the questionnaire questions:

Could you elaborate more on what you meant by....

II. Discussion of the artifact:

Could you please talk about what this artifact is and what it represents for you as a member of the Montessori teacher team.

III. Questions around spirituality and the Montessori teacher team:

- What is your understanding of the Montessori philosophy?
- Could you tell me what spirituality means to you.
- How do you think that spirituality and the Montessori philosophy are connected, if they are connected at all?

- Where did you learn about the spiritual aspects of the Montessori philosophy, if it is something that you learned?
- What role do you think spirituality plays in the interactions between Montessori teachers in a team, if you think it plays a role? Can you offer an example of this?
- How does spirituality influence the verbal and non-verbal communication between your colleagues? Can you offer an example of this? If you do not think it plays a role what do you think would play a role in your communication? Can you offer an example of this?
- Where did you learn about how to become an effective member of a Montessori teacher team? Describe what that was like, some of the critical things you learned, and how that has informed your practice as a team teacher.

IV. Questions about the observation in the classroom:

I saw the following interaction between you and your team members.....

What do you think about what went on this morning when....

How do you think that what went on between you and the other teachers fits with your understanding of spirituality and teamwork?