

THE PUBLIC MONTESSORI JOURNEY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

by

Krystal Michelle Perkins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. Through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory, this study sought to answer the central research question: How do novice Montessori teachers describe their experience in public Montessori teaching practicums? Sub-questions sought to identify the expectations of novice Montessori teachers as they moved into the experience, as well as the supports available or unavailable and coping strategies employed as they moved through the experience. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research explored the central phenomenon of 10 novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. This study employed epochè, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and intuitive integration analysis and synthesis of three sources of data collection: journal prompts, individual interviews, and letter writing. Three themes emerged that the public Montessori practicum experience as *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. The essence of the public Montessori practicum experience was depicted as a journey of hurdles and growth toward a finish line that extends beyond the practicum and continues throughout the teacher's public Montessori career.

Keywords: public Montessori, novice teacher, teacher preparation, practicum support, transition theory

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation first and foremost to my Lord and Savior, whose plans for me are greater and better than any I could have ever designed for myself. In addition, I dedicate this work to my family, who sacrificed with me along the way. To my husband, forced to spend all those weekends playing video games and watching anime without my company; thank you for providing figure consultation and refueling me with nutritional, emotional, and comical sustenance. To my children, who grew accustomed to the laptop perpetually attached to me, even during vacations and movie nights, may you chase God's dreams for you while balancing His desire for you to rest.

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List of Abbreviations

American Montessori Society (AMS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Over the past hundred years, the Montessori teaching method has earned recognition in research as a popular and sustaining choice in alternative education (Debs et al., 2022; Lillard, 2021). Once reserved for the wealthy elite in America (Burbank et al., 2020), the number of public schools that implement the Montessori method continue to expand, with over 500 public Montessori campuses currently identified across the nation (Lillard, 2021). As the demand for the Montessori method has increased, the need for a more extensive supply of highly qualified Montessori educators has also risen (Jor'dan, 2018). However, recruiting and keeping new public Montessori teachers may be a struggle due to the high teacher attrition rates currently plaguing the public education sector, especially regarding new instructors (Trent, 2019). Therefore, it is essential to investigate strategies to increase new Montessori teacher retention rates. However, minimal research exists on how to better retain new public Montessori instructors through effective practicum supports that facilitate their transition into the role of public Montessori teacher. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. In addition, this study aims to reveal an understanding of the experiences of new public Montessori interns and to identify the most beneficial practicum supports provided by districts and Montessori training centers through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory framework (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). This chapter presents the historical, social, and theoretical background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions relevant to this study.

Background

The Montessori educational method was first developed and introduced in the early 1900s by Italian physician turned educator and social reformer, Dr. Maria Montessori (Standing & Havis, 1957/1998). Rooted in social justice from its inception, Montessori, in the public sector, has provided equitable educational access that extends beyond barriers of race, socioeconomic status, and perceived ability (Murray, Davis et al., 2021; Murray et al., 2020). However, success is dependent upon the fidelity of implementation, including proper teacher preparation as a facilitator of student-centered learning (Courtier et al., 2021; Gentaz & Richard, 2022; Gerker, 2023; Lillard, 2019, 2021; Lillard & McHugh, 2019). Through the Montessori teaching practicum, aspiring teaching professionals develop and transition into the role of public Montessori teacher.

Historical Context

Over the past hundred years, the Montessori method has evolved from a two-year educational experiment to a global pedagogy and has been implemented across 15,763 schools in the private and public sectors of at least 154 countries (Debs et al., 2022). Montessori was initially influenced by Froebel's self-directed play-based learning (Catherine et al., 2020; Froebel, 1887; Gentaz & Richard, 2022; Hatzigianni et al., 2020; Lillard, 2021; Shirakawa & Saracho, 2021; Tschurennev, 2021), Seguin's didactic learning materials and prepared environment (Catherine et al., 2020; Montessori, 1912; Seguin, 1866; Williams, 2022), and Itard's observational approach and critical periods of development (Catherine et al., 2020; Montessori, 1912; Żywicznyński & Waciewicz, 2022). In addition, Montessori's own work with children with disabilities as an assistant doctor at the Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Rome inspired her (Montessori, 1912). She sought to apply her successful techniques for

teaching reading and writing within the specialized setting to general education. With the establishment of her first Casa dei Bambini, or Children's House, on January 6, 1907, in the San Lorenzo Quarter in Rome, Montessori embarked on two years of scientific observation and experimentation. She crafted the Montessori method from the most effective techniques and materials she found to guide children to their full potential (Montessori, 1912; Murray, Davis et al., 2021).

After an initial interest in Montessori's new methodology in the 1910s, disparaging remarks from influential critics, such as William Heard Kirkpatrick, delayed the spread of the Montessori approach in the United States (Murray et al., 2020). However, a revival of the Montessori method began with the popularity of privately funded, tuition-based Montessori schools across the United States in the 1950s. Publicly funded, government-regulated Montessori campuses soon followed (Hiles, 2018). Employed by Head Start programs in the 1960s and magnet programs in the 1970s, public Montessori became a popular educational alternative to confront poverty and promote desegregation through equitable public access to the Montessori approach (Murray, Davis et al., 2021). Today, over 500 public Montessori schools, or approximately 1/10 of the total number of American Montessori campuses, exist (Lillard, 2021).

As the Montessori method continues to expand within the public educational system, it is essential to focus research efforts on insights that contribute to the continued development of effective public Montessori programming. Many previous studies on public Montessori reflect positive outcomes for students who participate in Montessori education but also suggest these results are contingent upon the fidelity of implementation (Courtier et al., 2021; Lillard, 2019, 2021; Lillard & McHugh, 2019). At times, public Montessori programs blend the Montessori curriculum with other models due to state regulations or inexperienced instructors (Lillard, 2019;

Lillard & McHugh, 2019). In the conventional public education sector, evidence regarding the struggles of novice teachers to apply pedagogy to practice is plentiful (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Yin, 2019). However, studies examining the specific transition of novice teachers learning to apply the Montessori method in public Montessori practicums are rare.

Social Context

Teaching practicums seek to prepare novice teachers for a successful transition into the classroom; however, the research regarding teacher preparation effectiveness of teaching practicums is inconclusive (Alamoudi, 2021; Aydın & Ok, 2020; Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; La Paro et al., 2020; Masoumpanah et al., 2019). Some prior studies have connected teaching practicum outcomes to increased instructional knowledge, professional identity formation, and career retention rates (Alamoudi, 2021; Durham et al., 2019; Makina, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Yet, teaching practicums have also been linked with struggles to construct a professional identity and career attrition (Shanks et al., 2020; Trent, 2019). Although various attrition and retention predictors have been identified, positive practicum experiences and supports correlate with increased career retention (Van den Borre et al., 2021; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Prior research on teacher practicums has focused primarily on traditional public-school settings with little understanding of Montessori practicums specifically. Additional research is necessary to determine how experiences and supports impact public Montessori interns throughout their practicum.

Montessori proposed that an integral component of her method's implementation relies upon the proper training of teachers, whom she commonly referred to as *guides* due to their facilitative role (Montessori, 1912). To ensure adequate teacher preparation, Montessori required all aspiring guides to receive training directly from her in the first few years of the method's

inception (Murray et al., 2020). Yet, various Montessori teacher education programs arose outside her direct supervision by the latter part of the century (Cossentino, 2009). All Montessori teacher education programs seek to mold educational transformers who effectively promote the Montessori method (Montessori, 1912). However, with the rise of a multitude of independent Montessori teacher education programs adapting to ever-evolving customer and regulatory-driven modifications, teacher preparation practices among training programs do not align (Lillard, 2021; Murray, Daoust et al., 2021). Studies have not yet examined the specific impact of Montessori practicum practices on new teacher retention or effective practicum practices to increase retention of new Montessori teachers in the public education sector.

Theoretical Context

Teaching practicums are grounded in adult development. Since Erikson's theory of psychosocial development first proposed the continuation of human development beyond adolescence in 1968, adult development theories have become prolific in number and variety (Allen & Wergin, 2009). Some theories on adult development explain differences contingent upon life stages or chronological age (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, 1978), but others describe changes as a response to such processes as meaning making or transition adaptation (Kegan, 1994; Schlossberg, 1981). Although divergent in justification, these theories share a standard assertion that, like childhood, adulthood is marked by a deepening complexity of thought, action, and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981; Traekjaer, 2019). The transition theory integrates components from various adult development theories, including Levinson's life structure, Neugarten's individual variability, Lowenthal's stress adaptation, and Brim and Kagan's life-course perspective (Schlossberg, 1981).

Recently, the transition theory has guided research in the fields of psychology, medicine, business, and education (Arafeh, 2020; Belle et al., 2022; Borgen et al., 2021; Cherrstrom & Alfred, 2020; Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Robertson & Eschenauer, 2020; Silver, Kalaivanan, et al., 2020; Silver, Lopez, et al., 2021; Soemantri et al., 2022; Unson et al., 2020; Varga et al., 2021; Yadusky et al., 2021). Implications of recent studies regarding transition theory and career shifts have included recommendations for human resource departments, career counselors, professional development divisions, and aspiring professionals (Borgen et al., 2021; Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Cherrstrom & Alfred, 2020; Robertson & Eschenauer, 2020; Soemantri et al., 2022). The current study seeks to influence Montessori teacher education centers and public-school districts, including to contribute to the literature on transition theory by broadening the understanding of how to support new teachers during their practicums as they transition into teaching roles within public Montessori programs.

Problem Statement

The problem is that new teachers leave the education field due to a lack of benefits, resources, and support (Deever et al., 2020). Attrition contributes to many burdens for the school, including financial, academic, and cultural (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Whalen et al., 2019). New teachers leave the profession at an alarming rate (Keese et al., 2022; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020; Virtanen & Laine, 2021; Whalen et al., 2019). Only 25-50% of new teachers in a study on urban school districts continued employment past their first five years (Papay et al., 2017). This retention rate compares to an overall 60-75% retention rate for all teachers over the same time period (Goldhaber & Theobald, 2022). New teachers discontinue employment at a disproportionately higher rate. High new teacher attrition increases recruitment, hiring, and

training costs, hinders student achievement, and disrupts the organizational coherence of instructional teams (Sorenson & Ladd, 2020).

For public Montessori schools, attrition issues are amplified by dual certification requirements, as well as the inherent structure of multi-age, self-contained classrooms (Atli et al., 2016; Barbieru, 2016). In addition to the state training and certification required to teach in public schools, Montessori teachers must also complete Montessori teacher education preparation and earn certification (Atli et al., 2016). Although the price of Montessori certification fluctuates depending on the training center and course level, overall certification costs can range between \$6,000-10,000 (E. Ohlhaber, personal communication, March 12, 2022). This amount can quickly compound for districts or campuses that offer tuition assistance benefits, depending on the number of teachers needed to hire.

Although recent research has focused on the problem of new teacher retention, no studies have concentrated explicitly on novice public Montessori teachers. Barriers to retention for new public-school teachers include a lack of understanding of the school culture and parameters of effective teaching, as well as inadequate mentor access, quality, and policy (Whalen et al., 2019). Pre-service teacher preparation has been found to build new teacher competencies in handling common challenges, and in-service support for unexpected problems has increased new teacher retention in public and charter schools in the United States (Keese et al., 2022). Though recent research offers potential insight into public school teacher preparation practices, it ignores the nuances of Montessori education. A 2017 study on teacher transformation inadvertently captured the public Montessori perspective of a novice teacher who coincidentally acquired a position at a Montessori charter school. However, the research focus did not intentionally target Montessori teacher preparation, and the singular Montessori participant did not receive formal

instruction from a Montessori teacher education program during the study (Sydnor, 2017). Therefore, a gap exists in the current knowledge of new teacher attrition, and this study contributed insight specific to public Montessori teacher preparation and support.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. In this research, the Montessori practicum experience was generally defined as the period of supervised or self-directed classroom instruction occurring for at least two semesters at an approved public Montessori site. A novice public Montessori teacher was generally defined as an individual who, within the past eighteen months, was enrolled at a Montessori teacher education training center accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), and who fulfilled their practicum requirement at a public school with no previous experience in the position of a certified Montessori teacher.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study sought to apply Schlossberg's transition theory to the transition of the novice Montessori intern into the role of public Montessori teacher through the completion of a public Montessori practicum. The transition theory offers an explanation of how individuals cope with changes as they move in, through, and out of transitional experiences (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). For Montessori teachers, the preparation of the adult through the Montessori teaching practicum seeks to facilitate the transition from the role of adult learner to the position of Montessori educator (Christensen, 2019). This study contributed to the research on which supports Montessori teacher education programs should implement during the practicum to aid teachers in coping with this transition.

Empirically, the current research added to the literature through the lens of public Montessori teacher preparation. New teachers who build competency in handling unexpected situations tend to remain in the profession but must be prepared for the reality of their classroom experience (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Keese et al., 2022; Yin, 2019). Although previous studies exist on the role of Montessori teacher education programs in preparation of the adult's philosophical and pedagogical knowledge (Christensen, 2019; Cossentino, 2009; Malm, 2004), this research contributed to the needs particular to the preparation of the public Montessori adult. Specifically, the current study sought to expand the body of literature on teacher practicums by incorporating public Montessori teacher preparation research.

Practically, this study was significant for Montessori teachers, students, district personnel, and teacher preparation programs, by identification of strategies for better training and retention of Montessori educators. The results of this study sought to benefit teacher educators by providing the means to close the gap between philosophical theory and classroom practice by executing better practicum supports aligned with the needs of public Montessori teachers (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Yin, 2019). In addition to attracting more district clientele for the teacher education program, this alignment of concept and practice should increase the fidelity and quality of education for students enrolled in public Montessori institutions (Lillard, 2021). Furthermore, teachers who perceive greater competence and preparation for the task should choose to stay in the profession (Keese et al., 2022). This retention alleviates the recruitment strains and costs incurred by district human resource departments.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this phenomenological study explored the phenomenon of public Montessori as experienced by Montessori teacher interns completing their practicum in public Montessori schools in the United States. Guided by the transition theory's theoretical framework, this study illuminated the transition process of the Montessori adult learner into the role of public Montessori teacher (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The central research question (CQ) sought to understand the experiences of novice Montessori teachers who completed their practicum in public Montessori schools while *moving through* their transition into the role of public Montessori teacher. The three sub-questions (SQ) sought to identify the expectations held by novice Montessori teachers while *moving into* the public Montessori practicum experience and the supports and coping strategies available and employed while *moving through* the public Montessori practicum experience.

Central Research Question

How do novice Montessori teachers describe their experience in public Montessori teaching practicums?

Sub-Question One

What expectations do novice Montessori teacher interns possess as they transition into public Montessori school practicums?

Sub-Question Two

What supports exist for novice Montessori teacher interns as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

Sub-Question Three

What coping strategies do novice Montessori teacher interns employ as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

Definitions

1. *Moving in* – the first phase of transition; specifically, the point an individual enters a new transition situation (Anderson et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, *moving in* was defined as the moment the adult learner signed the practicum site agreement with a public Montessori and the first reporting cycle of the practicum.
2. *Moving out* – the final phase of transition; precisely, the point at which an individual ends the transition situation (Anderson et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, *moving out* was defined as the moment the adult learner completed the practicum.
3. *Moving through* – the middle phase of transition; specifically, the point an individual learns how the new situation works (Anderson et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, *moving through* was defined as the final five reporting cycles of the practicum.
4. *Novice teacher intern* – any teacher within the first two years of the position currently enrolled in a teacher preparation course (McLean & Price, 2019). For the purpose of this study, a *novice teacher* was defined as a teacher who had not yet completed the practicum requirements for a Montessori teacher education center.
5. *Practicum* – practical pre-service teaching experience in an authentic classroom situation during a teacher preparation course (Moyo, 2020). For the purpose of this study, the *practicum* was defined as the period of classroom teaching experience served under site agreement with a public Montessori school while enrolled in a MACTE-approved Montessori teacher education center.

6. *Preparation of the adult* – the training of the Montessori guide, encompassing spirit, pedagogy, and methodology (Christensen, 2019). For the purpose of this study, the *preparation of the adult* included the practicum supports provided to the adult learner by the Montessori teacher education center and the practicum site during the practicum.
7. *Public Montessori* – an educational setting governed within the public sector that combines multiple grade levels per classroom and utilizes a curriculum of sequenced, didactic materials facilitated by a trained adult guide through individual and small group lessons during a daily uninterrupted multi-hour work cycle in a prepared environment characterized by freedom of choice and movement, independence, intrinsic motivation, and peace education (Golann et al., 2019).

Summary

High attrition rates for new teachers contribute to a plethora of burdens for the public education system in the United States. An investigation of teacher retention strategies employed during the transition into the role of teacher, such as the public Montessori practicum, may illuminate strategies to reduce new teacher attrition rates. This phenomenological study aimed to understand the public Montessori experience of new teachers during their teaching practicum. Previous research has identified that positive practicum experiences increase teacher retention because new teachers feel prepared for their classroom experiences (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Keese et al., 2022; Yin, 2019). However, little research has investigated the public Montessori practicum experience for new Montessori teachers as they transition into the role of Montessori teacher. The understanding gained in this study contributed to the current literature on adult development theories, the theoretical research on Schlossberg's transition framework, and the empirical research on public Montessori teacher preparation of the adult. In

addition, this study added to the practical implications of teacher retention for students, teachers, and district human resources.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature explores the current research on public Montessori and the impact of the public Montessori teaching practicum on the transition of a novice teacher into the role of a public Montessori teacher. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the theoretical framework and the topic of study. Due to the limited availability of literature explicitly targeting the development of novice Montessori teachers, the research base is expanded to include studies relevant to new teachers in general. The first section overviews public Montessori teacher development within the theoretical framework of the transition theory. A synthesis of recent literature related to the characteristics of the situation, self, supports, and coping strategies that occur during the transition into and through the teaching practicum follows. Topics include the public Montessori teaching practicum, novice Montessori teacher identity, relational and organizational supports, and coping strategies employed during the teaching practicum. The identified gap in the literature regarding public Montessori interns and the understanding of their transition into the teacher role addresses a viable need for the current study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the given information.

Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework section will examine how the passage of adult learners into the role of public Montessori teachers through the public Montessori teaching practicum connects to the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The transition theory explains how well adults adapt when moving in, moving through, and moving out of a situation where an individual either encounters an event or misses the opportunity to experience an event (Schlossberg, 1981). Whether occurring or failing to

occur, the event or non-event leads to a transformation of personal assumptions about the self and the world, which results in a change in behavior and relationships. *Moving in* indicates the moment an individual enters a new transition situation (Anderson et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, *moving in* will be defined as the moment the adult learner signs the practicum site agreement with a public Montessori through the first month of the practicum. *Moving through* includes the moment an individual learns how the new situation works. Throughout this research, *moving through* will be defined as the remainder of the practicum, as the novice teacher orients to the new teacher role. *Moving out* refers to the moment an individual ends the transition situation. In this study, *moving out* will be defined as the moment the adult learner completes the practicum.

According to the theory, transition events, whether positive or negative, ordinary or hardship, or anticipated, unanticipated or non-events, impact relationships, behaviors, and self-perceptions (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). An *anticipated transition* is expected to occur (Schlossberg, 2011), such as graduation, marriage, planned parenthood, or a chosen career change. Alternatively, an *unanticipated transition* is unexpected, such as a surprise job loss or promotion, unforeseen separation, or unplanned parenthood. A *non-event transition* refers to an expected event that does not occur, such as failure to earn credits for graduation, a broken marriage engagement, or a pregnancy miscarriage.

Drawing from adult development theorists, such as Lowenthal, who believed in a life-course perspective related to stress response (Schlossberg, 1981), the transition theory stipulates that successful transition adaptation is contingent upon characteristics of the situation, self, supports, and strategies, collectively referred to as the 4 Ss (Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Factors of the *situation* include the circumstances that trigger the transition, the

perceived level of personal control over the transition, and the perceived view of the transition as either positive or negative. Aspects of the *self* entail personal and demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status, as well as psychological attributes, such as ego, outlook, commitment, and values. *Supports* refer to interpersonal relationship networks of family and friends, as well as organized institutional systems, such as career, religion, politics, and community. *Strategies* comprise of coping responses that modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, or manage the stress of the transition.

Regarding Montessori teacher transition, Montessori proposed that "the real preparation for education is the study of oneself. The training of the teacher is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit" (Montessori & Claremont, 1969, p. 132). This preparation of the Montessori teacher's spirit, including thoughts and actions, is referred to as *preparation of the adult* (Christensen, 2019). Within the research, Montessori professional transition has found not only a change in philosophical and pedagogical knowledge and perspective (Christensen, 2019; Cossentino, 2009), but also a shift in attitudes, beliefs, and emotions regarding one's position in the classroom and the greater world beyond (Christensen, 2019). Such a significant transformation occurs that practitioners refer to the resultant identity as that of *Montessorian*.

Schlossberg's transition theory will guide the literature review, research questions, data analysis, and report findings of this study. Criticism of the transition theory claims a lack of sufficiently proven rationale, even though it has demonstrated effectiveness (Evans et al., 2010). By investigating the relationship between the transition theory and the experiences of new public Montessori teachers during their teaching practicum, this study provides an opportunity to validate the theory. Furthermore, this research will offer essential insights into the impact of

Montessori teacher practicum supports on the transition of the novice intern into the role of a public Montessori teacher. The results will contribute to this growing area of research by providing recommendations for Montessori teacher education programs on how to assist their adult learners more effectively through the transition of becoming a prepared public Montessorian.

Related Literature

A review of the current literature has revealed themes that promote further study of the transitional characteristics of the situation, self, supports, and strategies related to the experience of the public Montessori teaching practicum. The researched aspects of the transition situation have included the teaching practicum, the Montessori method, and public Montessori education. The relevant literature regarding the individual under transition has described the novice public school teacher intern, the novice Montessori intern, and the capacity challenges facing novice teachers. Examination of the transition supports has detailed emotional sustenance sought through personal and organizational relationships. In addition, the literature has highlighted problem-solving and stress management approaches for novice teachers associated with transition coping strategies. This section will present the current knowledge on the topic and the present gap in the literature related to the understanding of the role of the public Montessori teaching practicum in the transition of the public Montessori teacher.

Characteristics of the Practicum Situation

The first factor in the transition theory relates to the characteristics of the situation and identifies what is happening in the transition (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). For the purpose of this study, the situation under investigation includes the experience of the novice teacher in a public Montessori practicum. Recent research has

revealed the conditions, benefits, and challenges inherent within the teaching practicum for novice teachers, the Montessori method, and public Montessori education.

The Teaching Practicum

New teachers begin their transition into the classroom with a teaching practicum, also referred to as teaching practice, student teaching, or a school experience course (Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Considered an essential component of teacher preparation, the teaching practicum provides novice teachers the opportunity to engage in an authentic practice experience in the teacher role within a supervised setting (Alamoudi, 2021; Aydın & Ok, 2020; Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; La Paro et al., 2020; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Through practicum observation, planning, and instruction, intern teachers experiment with the application of pedagogical and content knowledge through lesson planning, classroom management, lesson delivery, and student assessment (Barney & Beddoes, 2022; Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; La Paro et al., 2020; Nel et al., 2021; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). In addition, the teaching practicum allows novice teachers to engage in professional communication, parent contact, and professional development while bridging theory with practice (Darwin & Barahona, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Nel et al., 2021). The practicum school experience also offers new teachers the chance to reflect on their understanding, connect pedagogy to application, and adjust for improvement (Alamoudi, 2021; Barney & Beddoes, 2022; Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; Makina, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Nel et al., 2021; Saiz-Linares & Susinos-Rada, 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019).

The recent literature has reported the benefits, as well as limitations, of the teaching practicum. Several studies have linked teaching internships with meeting the professional needs of interns by connecting theory and practice, citing these practicums as effective in increasing

perceptions of teacher preparation and the likelihood of a student teacher following through on becoming a teacher afterward (Alamoudi, 2021; Durham et al., 2019; Makina, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Furthermore, teaching practicums have sometimes resulted in improved self-confidence, motivation, skill, and empowerment of the new teacher (Durham et al., 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019). However, other results have found no increase in novice teacher confidence or skill and negative perceptions regarding the practicum experience, induction process, and administrators (Hine & Herbert, 2022). Additionally, specific initiatives within some teaching practicums, such as action research, have been associated with anxiety or confusion (Darwin & Barahona, 2019). It has been suggested that teaching practicums may also limit interns from experiencing a broad enough scope of instructional expertise to benefit novice teachers in their future careers (Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020).

Teaching practicums face structural, relational, and programmatic challenges that may skew outcomes for student teachers. Due to the limitations of site placement practices, novice teachers may receive a classroom assignment outside their desired subject or grade level, reducing the authenticity of their personal experience (Zhu et al., 2018). Additionally, the assigned campus may offer limited resources, materials, or instructional method variety (Masoumpanah et al., 2019). Several studies have identified that time management, lesson and assessment preparation and implementation, classroom management, workload, and technological difficulties increase frustration during the teaching practicum experience (Alamoudi, 2021; Bar-Tal et al., 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Tennant et al., 2019; Virtanen & Laine, 2021). Additional practicum challenges have arisen due to a shortage of supervision, lack of assistance toward meeting program requirements, or noncooperation among designated support personnel (Bar-Tal et al., 2020; Darwin & Barahona, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019).

The practicum can cultivate isolation, leaving the novice teacher with the perception of an outsider rather than a community member (Darwin & Barahona, 2019). Even under favorable working conditions, practicum expectations have been found to overwhelm or the experience not last long enough to satisfy the needs of the new teacher (Alamoudi, 2021; Darwin & Barahona, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019).

The Montessori Method

The Montessori method was developed between 1890 – 1952, a cumulation of over 62 years of scientific observations documented and analyzed by Dr. Maria Montessori (Lillard, 2019). She established the method by working with children and sought to prepare a student-centered educational environment responsive to their observed needs (Lillard, 2021). From its inception, the Montessori method differed from the prevalent educational approaches of the time. Through the identification of specific developmental phases called *planes of development*, the Montessori method bases academic opportunities and goals on the natural tendencies, characteristics, and sensitive periods particular to each developmental stage from infancy and childhood through adolescence and maturity (Lillard & McHugh, 2019).

According to Montessori's reflections, her method increased in popularity due to its successful results with *normalization*, or the exhibited replacement of negative characteristics typically observed in children with happiness and cooperation through exposure to purposeful work activities (Montessori & Claremont, 1969). More recently, studies have attributed the initial international attraction to the Montessori method to the nature of its self-guided sensorial education and the speed of academic progress for children (Murray et al., 2020; Tschurenev, 2021). Parents are still drawn to the Montessori concept of self-directed learning and the positive

student outcomes that benefit from independent learning, respect for the child, and a focus on intrinsic learning motivation (Hiles, 2018).

Rooted in the sensory-based, individualized approach of Itard and Seguin (Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021), the child-centered activity focus of Pestalozzi (Yonemura, 1990), and the play-based kindergarten of Froebel (Schroeter, 2022), several distinguishing characteristics form the framework of the Montessori method of instruction. The current literature has revealed a certain consensus regarding these identifying features. Although applauded for some successes, other inherent characteristics of the approach have been linked to adverse outcomes (Checchi & De Paola, 2018; Stockard et al., 2018). Common qualities of Montessori instruction have been categorized in relevancy to the child, the environment, and the teacher.

The Montessori Child. In the Montessori approach, the child is not a passive recipient but an active acquirer of knowledge and learning. The most commonly reported characteristics of the Montessori method concerning the child include freedom of choice, self-direction, independence, individualization, an active role in the learning process, repetition of the same learning activity to build mastery, and respect (Bone, 2019; Burbank et al., 2020; Catherine et al., 2020; Culclasure, et al., 2019; Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020; Gunderman, 2020; Lillard, 2019, 2021; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021; Nuti & Filippa, 2020; Rathunde, 2014; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020; Slovacek & Minova, 2021; Tschurennev, 2021). Through personalized learning plans crafted to adapt and respond to current strengths and areas of needed growth, the child chooses which concepts and skills to focus upon to meet individualized goals through interactive manipulation of concrete materials (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Catherine et al., 2020; Nuti & Filippa, 2020). Additionally, Montessori instruction builds deep concentration and inspires intrinsic motivation within the child (Burbank et al., 2020; Gunderman, 2020; Lillard,

2019; Rathunde, 2014). Although the Montessori method has been criticized for not providing enough pretend play, freedom of choice in activity and partner, gross motor engagement, and material discovery, manipulation, and experimentation inherent in the philosophy have been cited as evidence of playful opportunities (Lillard, 2021). In addition, the satisfaction experienced from completing goals and acquiring skills has been demonstrated to reinforce the desire to continue progressing toward more advanced goals.

Furthermore, the Montessori method's student-centered peer assistance and cooperative learning are inherent. Children mentor and support each other in mixed-age classrooms throughout the work cycle (Bennetts & Bone, 2020; Burbank et al., 2020; Culclasure, et al., 2019; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021). Even though criticized for negatively impacting literacy and mathematical achievement (Checchi & De Paola, 2018), multi-age classrooms have also been cited for easing the transition between the Montessori classroom and the traditional education setting, and vice versa (Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021). Additional components central to the Montessori pedagogy, respect for self, others, and the environment, are taught and practiced through lessons on grace, courtesy, and conflict resolution (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Burbank et al., 2020; Lillard, 2019; Livstrom, et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2020).

The Montessori Environment. Montessori classrooms are contingent upon a properly prepared environment (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Bone, 2019; Catherine et al., 2020; Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020; Lillard, 2019; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021; Rathunde, 2014; Tschurenev, 2021). The *prepared environment* is a simple, organized, aesthetically pleasing setting thoughtfully and purposefully arranged to meet individual student needs and to build independence (Catherine et al., 2020). This setting also entails the availability

and utilization of specially designed Montessori materials (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Culclasure, et al., 2019; Dubovicki & Topolovčan, 2020; Lillard, 2019; Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021).

Montessori materials include tools either developed by Montessori herself through scientific observation in her original classrooms or later created by others inspired by her reported findings (Basargekar & Lillard, 2021; Bennetts & Bone, 2020; Kiran et al., 2021; Nuti & Filippa, 2020).

These educational instruments, such as the knobbed cylinders, which include a tray of holes with specific dimensions that only precisely fit the particular cylinder intended for each designated cavity, are self-correcting (Aljabreen, 2020; AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Bone, 2019; Catherine et al., 2020; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Snyder et al., 2022). Through auto-didactic materials, students notice and react to errors independently without required interruption or redirection from the teacher.

The Montessori prepared environment also accentuates access to nature, the importance of order, and reliance upon sensory learning (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Bennetts & Bone, 2020; Bone, 2019; Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Catherine et al., 2020; Courtier et al., 2021; Culclasure, et al., 2019; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Misheva, 2020; Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021; Nuti & Filippa, 2020; Saracho & Evans, 2021; Tschurenev, 2021). Although the Montessori method has been criticized as too expensive due to the precise specifications of the required instruments, several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of financial mitigation (Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021). Strategies have included repurposed alternative material and appeals for monetary support from the local community.

The Montessori Teacher. So engrained within the Montessori pedagogy is the significance of the perfectly structured environment that the primary role of the Montessori teacher has been expressed as the organizer of the prepared environment (Aljabreen, 2020;

Bennetts & Bone, 2020; Bone, 2019; Catherine et al., 2020; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021; Rathunde, 2014; Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020; Tschurenev, 2021). Secondary roles include engaging the child in the setting and responding to observations of the child in the environment to improve student outcomes (Lillard & McHugh, 2019). The Montessori teacher is more accurately described as a guide rather than a transmitter of knowledge (Aljabreen, 2020; Christensen, 2019; Haifa, 2020; Lillard, 2019; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021; Malm, 2004; Slovacek & Minova, 2021).

Relinquishing the spotlight of centerstage in the educational process, Montessori guides must welcome their professional position as an assistant to the child (Bennetts & Bone, 2020). These instructional facilitators are responsible for sparking personal motivation, responding to individual needs, and accommodating distinct differences (Culclasure, et al., 2019; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Livstrom, et al., 2019; Macià-Gual & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2021; Malm, 2004). Through the thoughtfully arranged and personalized environment, the Montessori guide assists in the attainment of each child's unique, full potential (Golann et al., 2019). Through servant leadership, Montessori guides humbly entice children to strive for continual progress through their interactions with a properly prepared environment (Bennetts & Bone, 2020; Lillard & McHugh, 2019).

Rather than enforce delivery of whole group instruction, Montessori guides should minimize disruption to individual work concentration (Burbank, et al., 2020; Culclasure, et al., 2019; Lillard, 2019, 2021; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021). To promote the uninterrupted work cycle, Montessori instructors provide individual and small group lessons, called presentations (Aljabreen, 2020; Golann et al., 2019; Lillard & McHugh, 2019). These presentations should be timed and based on the scientifically

observed needs of individual students while incorporating appropriate interdisciplinary exploration opportunities (Aljabreen, 2020; Lillard, 2021; Lillard & Taggart, 2019; Livstrom et al., 2019; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021).

For the Montessori guide, instructional duty involves a commitment to a holistic educational approach not limited to cognitive advancement alone but expanded to encompass a focus on physical, social, emotional, as well as spiritual growth (Aljabreen, 2020; Basargekar & Lillard, 2021; Kiran, et al., 2021; Livstrom et al., 2019). Adhering to a philosophy of freedom, independence, and positive discipline at its core (Malm, 2004), the professional demeanor of the Montessori guide requires listening skills, professional appearance, patience, respect, warmth, sensitivity, unbiased feedback, understanding, support, and family partnership (Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021). Rather than offer rewards or punishments, those leading Montessori classrooms reinforce positive choices by modeling and acknowledging appropriate behavior while employing respectful communication at all times (Golann et al., 2019; Kocabas & Bavli, 2022).

Public Montessori Education

Public Montessori in the United States was first introduced at Hilltop School in Reading, Ohio, in 1967 (American Montessori Society, 2002). The first schoolwide public Montessori was established in Cincinnati in 1975 (Murray, Davis, et al., 2021). A total of 583 public Montessori campuses now exists in the United States, accounting for at least 10% of all Montessori schools in the country (National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector [NCMPS], 2021). Although recent evidence suggests an increase in the number of studies focused on Montessori in the public sector, the research has concentrated on the impact of Montessori on student outcomes rather than the development and transition of novice instructional guides. Numerous studies have attempted to explain the effects of Montessori education on marginalized populations of race,

socioeconomic status, and disability (AuCoin & Berger, 2021; Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Courtier et al., 2021; Snyder et al., 2022). In addition, other studies have focused on the legislative, stakeholder, and program challenges that face public Montessori campuses (Burbank et al., 2020; D’Cruz, 2022; Lillard, 2019; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021).

Student Outcomes. For public Montessori students, including diverse ethnic and socioeconomic populations worldwide, benefits to cognitive and social-emotional outcomes have been found. Yet, the data has demonstrated several inconsistencies. Compared to the academic performance of students enrolled in traditional public-school programs, superior longitudinal achievement and executive functioning were reported for public Montessori students in the United States (Lillard et al., 2017). Similarly, public Montessori students in Turkey exhibited greater growth in language arts than students receiving a traditional curriculum (Buldur & Gokkus, 2021). However, these reports were contradicted by a lack of difference in math and executive functioning performance for public Montessori students in France compared to students receiving conventional instruction (Courtier et al., 2021). Furthermore, mixed results were reported in the United States in math when the evidence revealed that Montessori eighth graders demonstrated higher math proficiency than those students enrolled in traditional coursework; however, Montessori third graders exhibited lower ability (Snyder et al., 2022).

Particular to outcomes for specific demographic populations, similar discrepancies have been reported. Although no significant difference was found in math achievement for Black Montessori students compared to students enrolled in conventional public schools in lower elementary, significantly higher scores for the same population were discovered in reading (Brown & Lewis, 2017). Conversely, Black children enrolled in Montessori instruction performed better on math tests than their traditionally schooled counterparts and demonstrated a

smaller achievement gap (Snyder et al., 2022). For economically disadvantaged students, the results are better aligned. Public Montessori student academic performance has been reported to equal or surpass traditionally schooled peers, particularly in reading (Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Burbank et al., 2020; Courtier et al., 2021). In addition, smaller or non-existent achievement gaps were reported for economically disadvantaged public Montessori students when compared to students enrolled in a traditional program in language arts and math (Snyder, et al., 2022).

Beyond academic performance, studies have highlighted social, emotional, and psychological outcomes for public Montessori students. Numerous studies have revealed increases in goal orientation, cooperation, and confidence in literacy and math (Bryan-Silva & Sanders-Smith, 2021; Burbank et al., 2020; Tympa et al., 2022). However, a consensus has failed to materialize regarding social skills. Although social understanding results were higher for public Montessori students than traditional public-school students (Lillard et al., 2017), other results reported no difference between the two samples (Courtier et al., 2021). As a possible explanation for the conflicting data, outcomes might depend on the school, the fidelity of implementation, and the group under comparison (Gentaz & Richard, 2022).

Program Challenges. Common barriers to public Montessori schools include legislation, equity, stakeholders, and programming. Public Montessori programs are simultaneously required to adhere to the Montessori curriculum and the state standards, which do not always align (Culclasure et al., 2019; D’Cruz, 2022). Compliance with state standards has necessitated accountability tracking through assessment mandates which, in turn, may be associated with the dilution of Montessori fidelity in public school programs (Burbank et al., 2020; D’Cruz, 2022; Gerker, 2023; Lillard, 2019; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021). Additionally, a lack of federal and

district support, funding, and equitable allocation of limited resources has further hindered the attempt of public Montessori campuses to meet these legal requirements (D’Cruz, 2022; Murray, Davis, et al., 2021).

Furthermore, research has identified stakeholder challenges for public Montessori programs. Studies have suggested that public Montessori schools suffer from racial isolation and disparate access for students of color (D’Cruz, 2022). Issues with family engagement and parent perception have also been cited (Burbank et al., 2020; Golann et al., 2019). A limited understanding of the philosophy has been found to compromise the degree of parent trust in the method (Burbank et al., 2020). Additionally, the provision of autonomy resulting from the practice of freedom of choice has led some parents to question the sufficiency of their child’s academic preparation (Golann et al., 2019). The absence of a common language can also negatively impact partnerships among the campus staff. Notably, the Montessori general education classroom teachers and the special education staff struggled to relate and communicate due to a difference in understood terminology (AuCoin & Berger, 2021). This miscommunication was reported even though the Montessori and special education teachers shared a common vision. Overall, the evidence seems to indicate that the situation of public Montessori produces challenging complications for aspiring teachers who choose to transition into the role of public Montessori teacher.

Characteristics of the Novice Teacher Self

The second factor in the transition theory relates to the characteristics of the person experiencing the change in roles (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). For the purpose of this study, the self under investigation includes the novice public Montessori teacher. Recent research has extrapolated the psychological traits of novice teachers,

the identity transformation of the novice Montessori guide, and the capacity challenges new public-school teachers face.

The Teacher Intern

The recent literature on novice teachers has demonstrated a swinging pendulum of positive and negative data regarding motivation, commitment, emotions, and values during the transition into the teaching career. The catalyst for becoming a teacher has been reported to stem from intrinsic or extrinsic motivations (Kim & Kim, 2021). Internal motives have been found to include love of children, pride in the profession, personal growth opportunities, and childhood aspirations (Kim & Kim, 2021; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Tennant et al., 2019). External reasons have been identified as flexible hours, long vacations, a summer salary, family approval, and job security. Of the identified motivations, childhood aspiration was the most common driving force in career choice (Tennant et al., 2019). Studies have indicated that initial career catalysts impact the teaching motivation of novice teachers. Higher motivation has correlated with higher job satisfaction and teacher efficacy (Kim & Kim, 2021; Virtanen & Laine, 2021). Additional factors that impact motivation in new teachers have been reported to include unrealistic personal perceptions, marginalized societal views of the profession, and low salaries (Al Seyabi, 2020; Virtanen & Laine, 2021). Conversely, research found that novice teachers view themselves as motivated and satisfied in their practicum (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020).

The findings regarding new teacher commitment have extracted equally imbalanced results. Commitment has been identified as a contributing factor in helping teacher interns overcome the challenges they face as they transition into the role of teacher (Dayan et al., 2018). To this end, novice teachers have viewed themselves as determined (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020). However, struggles have also been documented related to new teacher commitment and

responsibility (Al Seyabi, 2020). The results have suggested that lacking skills and disrespectful students can negatively impact novice teacher commitment (Khalid & Husnin, 2019).

Intern teachers have been found to carry their personal lives and emotions onto the rollercoaster of their new career identity and values (Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Prabjandee, 2019). They face eagerness and anxiety, shock and embarrassment, anger and puzzlement, and helplessness and loneliness as they move through their practicum (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020). Yet, they have self-reported overall optimism throughout the student teaching experience. Idealistic positivity has resonated in the research on new teachers (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020; McLean & Price, 2019; Tennant et al., 2019). Novice teachers entering the field of education have indicated aspirations to prepare students for successful integration into the world after school (Newburgh, 2019). Furthermore, this inspirational perspective has been found to solidify with time accrued in the classroom, even after personal values are tested through struggles to balance authority with caring, equity with the individual needs of students, and mentor support with independence in relationships (Zhu et al., 2018).

The achievement of balance has been suggested to correlate with the novice teacher's personality traits of adaptability, responsiveness, and willingness (Al Seyabi, 2020; Tennant et al., 2019). However, it is essential to note the possible validity limitations of studies on personal perception. Although novice teachers demonstrated an overall increase in reported teaching efficacy over their first year in the career field, their personal perspective regarding their effectiveness was significantly higher than the ratings from the viewpoints of their mentors (Akiri & Dori, 2022).

The Novice Montessorian

Aspiring Montessori teachers experience an intensive Montessori teacher education training course complete with pedagogical instruction, spiritual and moral transformation, scientific observation, and practical experience (Lillard & McHugh, 2019). Although general teacher education programs have also been reported to initiate a change of identity for aspiring teachers in general (Yuan & Mak, 2018), this transformation process bears particular significance for pre-service Montessori teachers. A complete self-transformation is required of the aspiring Montessori educator to internalize the process of removing the ego as a hindrance to the children (Bennetts & Bone, 2020). Montessori teacher education programs support these adult learners as they convert into their professionally and personally whole selves (Dugas, 2021).

During Montessori teacher education coursework, novice guides learn the academic components of becoming a Montessori teacher, receiving instruction on theory, history, materials, and instructional practices (Christensen, 2019). In addition, because the role of a Montessori teacher explicitly requires a heart of humility and service with an internally driven goal of self-perfection (Standing & Havis, 1957/1998), training does not confine itself to instructional pedagogy alone. Teachers must also learn how to form their identity as Montessorians. The spiritual components of becoming a Montessori guide have been identified as internal preparation of virtues, grace, thoughts, and actions (Christensen, 2019). The core principles of Montessori identity have been recognized as cognition, choice, interest, teacher ways, and child ways (Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020).

This identity preparation can sometimes involve preconceptions that conflict with the actual lived daily teaching experience. Montessori guides have been reported to encounter social dilemmas in the classroom that spark a struggle between their ideals and the reality of their role

(Christensen, 2019). Recommendations to ease the Montessori identity transformation include a concentration during training on holistic support of the entire self, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects. Advanced acknowledgment and discussion of possible and probable social challenges have also been recommended to enhance understanding, awareness, and appreciation of authentic Montessori implementation before novice Montessori guides enter the classroom.

Novice Teacher Challenges

Although the recent literature does not explicitly focus on the challenges specific to new public Montessori guides, a preponderance of research on the phenomenon of typical new teacher challenges exists. Some particular struggles with implementing child-centered approaches like the Montessori method have been cited (Durham et al., 2019). However, studies have generally broadened the focus to the overall limited capacity of new public school teachers in pedagogical content knowledge, classroom management skills, and relationships with colleagues, parents, and students (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Fletcher et al., 2021; Goh, 2019; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Kwok, 2021; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Soleas & Code, 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022; Yin, 2019). Student teachers have been reported to view themselves as capable (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020). Yet, a plethora of additional evidence has contested that novice teachers enter their career with a minimum reserve of prior instructional knowledge and skills (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Shanks et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Therefore, new teacher challenges related to instructional, managerial, and relational capacity.

Instructional Capacity. The current literature reveals a pattern of new teacher pedagogical content knowledge challenges spanning not only across disciplines but around the

world (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Fletcher et al., 2021; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Upon stepping into the classroom, the role of the instructor as a professional practitioner waver without a solid enough foundation of instructional stability (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Shanks et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Although exposed in pre-service training to the theory behind what to teach, new teachers struggle with the application of how to teach it because the actual classroom context does not match the ideal representation studied during teacher education courses (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Yin, 2019). In comparing teachers across a spectrum of career experience from pre-service to veteran, new teachers perceived themselves as less competent in teaching ability than either pre-service or experienced teachers (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020). Researchers have found that insufficiency arises from a limited understanding of the subject content and how to present effectively lessons that support individual needs (Fletcher et al., 2021; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Shin, 2021). New teachers in student-centered classrooms, such as those following the Montessori method, experience difficulty fulfilling their role as instructional facilitators (Silva et al., 2021).

Managerial Capacity. Furthermore, new teachers toil with classroom management (Al Seyabi, 2020; Çakmak et al., 2019; Flushman, et al., 2021; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Kwok, 2021; Masoumpah et al., 2019; Pandee et al., 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Whalen et al., 2019). Novice instructors perceive themselves as less competent in classroom management than pre-service or experienced teachers (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020). For new teachers, classroom management deficits have been associated with emotional instability (Çakmak et al., 2019). Novice teachers struggle to create structure, build a positive environment, and appropriately respond to behavioral situations as

they arise (Al Seyabi, 2020; Çakmak et al., 2019; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Shin, 2021; Tennant et al., 2019).

In addition, new teachers also tend to overly depend upon short-sighted immediate solutions to a single present circumstance rather than expending the effort and foresight necessary to generate long-term, sustainable classroom management routines and procedures (Kwok, 2021). Student-centered instruction requires teacher facilitators to extend freedom and autonomy to students (Silva et al., 2021). However, novice teachers, such as those entering Montessori classrooms for the first time, tend to revert to teacher-centered techniques to maintain control over the classroom environment. In Montessori spaces, classroom management requires additional skills in preparation for an orderly and organized environment, as well as student encouragement, work choice guidance, and non-judgmental rule implementation and redirection to emphasize self-correction (Burbank et al., 2020; Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021).

Relational Capacity. Teaching is not an individual sport. Research has confirmed that teachers must establish relationships with students, parents, and colleagues to build collaborative partnerships (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; La Paro et al., 2020; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Soleas & Code, 2020; Yu, 2019). This collaboration requires the willing and capable execution of professional vulnerability (Zhu et al., 2018). However, new teachers face several challenges in this endeavor. Although staff cooperation can be an area of higher competence than challenge for new teachers (Keller-Schneider et al., 2020), the overwhelming majority of related research has reported difficulties for new teachers in establishing relationships with colleagues (Fletcher et al., 2021; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Soleas & Code, 2020). Of those reporting it as a challenge, underlying impediments cited include perceptions of inadequacy, fear of judgmentalism, and an interpersonal inability to connect on

the part of the new teacher (Soleas & Code, 2020). Unfortunately, a lack of collegial relationships among teachers hinders their opportunity to receive vital assistance from others who may have helpful advice to share (Shin, 2021; Yu, 2019).

In addition, a lack of relationships between teachers stunts collaboration, missing the opportunity to ease the workload and improve student performance (Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021). Lack of cooperation can also contribute to perceptions of isolation and lack of belonging (Newburgh, 2019; Shanks et al., 2020; Soleas & Code, 2020; Tennant et al., 2019; Yu, 2019). During difficult, unavoidable times like the recent pandemic, colleague cooperation is necessary to counteract intensified struggles (Fletcher et al., 2021). Furthermore, within student-centered classrooms, a lack of teamwork among colleagues impedes individual instructional commitment to student autonomy in favor of more teacher-controlled structures (Silva et al., 2021).

In addition, positive, healthy relationships with community members, including students and parents, are vital to increasing novice teacher self-efficacy (Korte & Simonsen, 2018). However, new teachers report difficulties connecting and building student relationships (Al Seyabi, 2020; Durham et al., 2019; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Shin, 2021; Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020). Specifically, they describe struggles with establishing appropriate boundaries balanced with harmony, cooperation, and mutual respect (Al Seyabi, 2020; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020). For the new teacher, struggles with student relationships can restrict practical teaching wisdom and limit self-efficacy (Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020).

Parent collaboration is another area of relational conflict (Fletcher et al., 2021; Gisewhite et al., 2021). Barriers between teachers and parents include conflicting expectations and cultural values, technological limitations related to the available communication medium, and the inconvenience of contacting individual families (Gisewhite et al., 2021). In addition, limited

communication skills are reported as a deterrent to cooperation (Fletcher et al., 2021; Gisewhite et al., 2021). Whether with students, parents, or both, these conflicts can disrupt the new teacher's ability to recognize and adequately accommodate individual student needs.

Characteristics of Practicum Supports

The third factor in the transition theory relates to the characteristics of the supports and assistance available or unavailable to the person experiencing the shift in roles (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). For the purpose of this study, the supports under investigation include the relationships and organizational assistance available to the novice public Montessori teacher. Though limited recent literature specifically relates to Montessori practicums, the general findings align with the majority of current literature on supports for novice teachers in conventional classrooms. Recent literature has identified relational and organizational supports that benefit and hinder new teachers during their practicum.

Relational Supports

Novice teachers lean on moral support from significant personal and professional relationships, including family, friends, classmates, and colleagues (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Although the primary source of moral support, personal relationships outside work are not always available when help is needed (Korte & Simonsen, 2018). Relational support in school, rather than external relationship sources off campus, best predicts teacher self-efficacy (Korte & Simonsen, 2018), increasing commitment to the career field. Novice teachers lean on practicum classmates who understand their experience concurrently and firsthand (Jantarach & Soontornwipast, 2018). They also depend on colleagues to provide a congenial social environment, particularly those teachers within their department, and they seek acceptance from

their administrators (Çakmak et al., 2019; Tennant et al., 2019; Yu, 2019). Ultimately, novice teachers want to believe they are part of a school team to reduce their perceptions of isolation (Tennant et al., 2019).

Organizational Supports

In addition to emotional support, other formal institutional supports have been deemed essential for novice teachers (Maysa de Souza et al., 2021; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). These practices can increase job satisfaction during the transition to the teaching role (Yu, 2019). The most commonly cited supports in the literature include exercises in self-reflection, collaboration, and mentorship, some of which specifically reference institutional supports for novice Montessori teachers.

Reflective Practice. Although criticized for being time-consuming, tedious, and uncomfortable (Makina, 2019), formal self-reflection can benefit new teachers (Frazier et al., 2019; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Makina, 2019; Tammets et al., 2019). Self-reflections can assist a teacher in analyzing personal thoughts and actions to identify and resolve current and potential problems (Frazier et al., 2019). Written reflections such as portfolios and journals allow self-review and analysis of instructional practices such as content competency, lesson presentation, and classroom management (Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Makina, 2019; Tammets et al., 2019). This practice can help novice teachers improve procedures, motivation, and critical thinking within context (Kim & Kim, 2021; Makina, 2019).

Support for reflective practicum practices abounds, some specific to Montessori methods (Damore & Rieckhoff, 2021; Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021). However, most studies remain beyond the borders of the Montessori teaching experience (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020; Barney & Beddoes, 2022; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Kruse et al., 2022; Makina, 2019; Saiz-Linares &

Susinos-Rada, 2020; Shanks et al., 2020; Tammets et al., 2019; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Although not specific to novice teachers, reflective practices have been effectively reported by Montessori principals and guides to initiate campus improvement (Damore & Rieckhoff, 2021). In addition, a rubric framework has been developed specifically for novice lower elementary Montessori guides to assess the potential for classroom improvement (Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021). This tool for personal self-reflection seeks to help them improve their practice in classroom leadership, philosophical and methodological implementation, presentation organization and delivery, social-emotional classroom atmosphere, and professional conduct and demeanor.

Collaboration. Although reflection can successfully occur individually through self-analysis, it has been criticized as an isolated practice that can misinform teachers depending on their capabilities for effective implementation (Maysa de Souza et al., 2021). As an alternative or additional institutional support, recent research has highlighted the benefits of collaborative communities for novice teachers (Brown et al., 2020; Flushman et al., 2021; Kruse et al., 2022; Näykki et al., 2021; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021; Rawlins et al., 2020; Saiz-Linares & Susinos-Rada, 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Shanks et al., 2020; Tammets et al., 2019). These communities of collaborative reflection require a commitment to the provision of dedicated time, space, and commitment to building a culture of cooperation (Tammets et al., 2019; Yu, 2019). In some cases, implementing new teacher learning communities can assist in forming new teacher relationships focused on problem-solving strategies (Flushman et al., 2021; Saiz-Linares & Susinos-Rada, 2020). These communities create environments that blend trust with supportive accountability, allowing participants to share experiences and receive alternative perspectives (Saiz-Linares & Susinos-Rada, 2020).

Alternatively, a combined pre-service and practicum learning community can help develop teamwork skills and expand teaching methods (Näykki et al., 2021). Peer collaboration can benefit lesson planning, and collaborative lesson delivery rehearsals can enhance instructional practices (Kruse et al., 2022; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021). However, professional learning communities can also demand too much risk and vulnerability due to peer scrutiny (Rawlins et al., 2020). Specific to Montessori interns, teachers cite colleagues and campus administration as the most effective support system and depend on them for support, coaching, and group discussion (Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020).

Mentorship. The most prevalent form of collaboration outlined in the literature relates to the mentoring of novice teachers during their practicum (Gallchóir et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2019; La Paro et al., 2020; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Shanks et al., 2020; Tammets et al., 2019). When successfully executed, mentoring provides essential interpersonal interaction that contributes to personal, social, and professional growth (Akiri & Dori, 2022; Aman, 2019). The mentor relationship can also increase confidence, sense of belonging, self-efficacy, critical thinking, motivation, and pedagogical knowledge (Gray et al., 2019; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Suppa et al., 2020). Effective mentors, sometimes referred to as reflective partners, will support, guide, coach, model, encourage, and welcome their novice teachers (Aman, 2019; Aydın & Ok, 2020; Becker et al., 2019; Ellis et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2019; Kearney, 2021; Kruse et al., 2022; Maysa de Souza et al., 2021; Shanks et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). A successful pairing will match the novice teacher with a mentor whose goals and communication style align (La Paro et al., 2020).

Several techniques have demonstrated positive results regarding specific mentor practices beneficial to novice teachers. Formal meetings should be consistent and frequent (Mukeredzi &

Manwa, 2019; Suppa et al., 2020). Pre-lesson conferences can increase instructional quality (Becker et al., 2019; Liu & Siteo, 2020). Observations of the mentor can provide an example to follow, while observations from the mentor can provide feedback to improve practice (Bar-Tal et al., 2020; Liu & Siteo, 2020; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Suppa et al., 2020). Related to Montessori mentoring, cognitive coaching sessions can benefit inquiry-based field experiences like the Montessori practicum setting by enhancing knowledge and application of core practices, teacher-student interactions, personal reflective learning, and collaborative inquiry learning with peers (Linn & Jacobs, 2015). Montessori practicum mentorships can also benefit from implementing a research-based rubric to drive the development of the guide (Murray, Daoust, et al., 2021).

However, not all mentor relationships are positive, and results are contingent upon the quality of the mentor (Aydın & Ok, 2020; La Paro et al., 2020). When poorly executed, mentoring has been found ineffective, frustrating, stressful, intrusive, discouraging, disempowering, and even oppressive (Garte & Kronen, 2020; Gray et al., 2019; La Paro et al., 2020; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). In addition to the qualities of the mentor, environmental stressors on the novice teacher can also hurt the mentoring relationship (La Paro et al., 2020).

Characteristics of Novice Teacher Coping Strategies

The fourth factor in the transition theory regards the characteristics of the coping strategies employed by those moving through the teaching practicum to exert control over the stressors experienced (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Due to the limited availability of recent literature related explicitly to the coping strategies of novice Montessori teachers in public school practicums, those utilized by new teachers, in

general, will be included. Recent research on coping strategies used by novice teachers has investigated problem-solving techniques and stress management.

Problem-Solving

New teachers face a plethora of problems; therefore, problem-solving skills are an essential strategy, whether employed through self, peers, or technology (Çakmak et al., 2019; Flushman et al., 2021; Frazier et al., 2019; Khalid & Husnin, 2019; Pandee et al., 2020; Prabjandee, 2019; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021; Trent, 2019). Individually, an intern teacher can approach problem-solving by pausing to center on a personal view of the role of the teacher before taking action (Trent, 2019). Other personal techniques include following their instinct, utilizing their private collection of previously attempted techniques, responding to observations, reflecting on possibilities, or creating future plans based on the best solutions found for the root causes of prior problems experienced (Çakmak et al., 2019; Frazier et al., 2019). Community-based problem-solving endeavors include reflective critical spaces, brainstorming, collaboration on problems of practice, and resource sharing (Flushman et al., 2021; Pandee et al., 2020; Prabjandee, 2019; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021). Alternatively, novice teachers might research solutions on the Internet (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). However, sometimes the most effective strategy for novice teachers involves receiving acknowledgment from peers or supervisors that not every problem has a resolution (Çakmak et al., 2019; Flushman et al., 2021).

Stress Management

Sources of stress abound throughout the teaching practicum (Alonso-Belmonte, 2020; Bar-Tal et al., 2020; Çakmak et al., 2019; Danyluk et al., 2021; Flushman et al., 2021; Frazier et al., 2019; Gallchóir et al., 2019; Gray et al., 2019; La Paro et al., 2020; Pandee et al., 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Soleas & Code, 2020; Tennant et al., 2019; Virtanen & Laine, 2021;

Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Therefore, various stress management strategies may be employed to ease the transition. Individual techniques applied by novice teachers to reduce stress include mindfulness, emotional self-regulation, and affirmations (La Paro et al., 2020; Pandee et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). For novice teachers, these stress management techniques have been found to help maintain a positive perspective regarding the significance of the job (Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022).

In addition to individual strategies, social support for stress management can consist of psychological assistance from peers, family, and colleagues (Çakmak et al., 2019; Newburgh, 2019; Prabjandee, 2019; Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022; Yu, 2019). Support networks can relieve stress through sympathy, perspective, and advice that can reduce anxiety (Çakmak et al., 2019). Adjusting to the school culture can also promote well-being (Gray et al., 2019; Newburgh, 2019).

Summary

This chapter examined the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989) and the related research on the characteristics of the situation, self, supports, and strategies involved in the journey of developing into a teacher. As the novice Montessori teacher moves through the public teaching practicum and into the role of Montessorian, this transition involves both professional and personal transformation as guides not only learn how to teach but how to become a Montessorian (Christensen, 2019). In pairing the transition theory framework with traditional teacher development, researchers have connected the elements of the practicum situation, the attributes of the novice teacher self, the quality of the practicum supports, and the properties of the coping strategies of the teaching practicum experience. In addition to its influence on the

literature review, the theoretical framework of the transition theory will guide the research questions, data analysis, and findings report of the current study.

Current literature has revealed the challenges that manifest within the teaching practicum experience and the novice teacher's limited instructional, managerial, and relational capacity. Additionally, recent research has demonstrated that emotional supports sustain psychological well-being through personal networks and institutional practices of reflection, collaboration, and mentoring. Furthermore, current studies have highlighted novice teachers' problem-solving and stress-management strategies during the teaching practicum.

However, little remains known about how the specific experiences within public Montessori teaching practicums impact the situation, self, supports, and strategies for transitioning into a public Montessorian. This study will explore the essence of being a novice public Montessori intern for participants completing their training practicum in public schools. Theoretically, this study seeks to apply Schlossberg's transition theory to the transition of the teacher moving through the public Montessori teaching practicum to contribute to the research on which practices and supports Montessori teacher education programs should implement to assist this transition. Practically, this research seeks to identify recommendations that will improve the practicum supports for novice public Montessori teachers, increase the fidelity and quality of education for students enrolled in public Montessori institutions, and alleviate the recruitment strains and costs incurred by district human resource departments by increasing new teacher retention rates on public Montessori campuses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. The focus of chapter three is to communicate the design, procedures, methods, and analysis of the study. This chapter begins with an explanation of the chosen design model, followed by the research questions. Then, the setting, participants, and researcher role are detailed. Researcher positionality identifies the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions. Afterward, the data collection plan is outlined, including the procedures and analysis of the journal prompts, interviews, and letter-writing methods implemented to explore the phenomenon. The remainder of this chapter highlights the study's trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and chapter summary. In this study, all identifiable elements related to the setting, participants, and any other identifying information are changed to pseudonyms in order to preserve participant confidentiality.

Research Design

This research was a qualitative transcendental phenomenological study exploring the central phenomenon of novice teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools. A qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study because only qualitative research can discover the meaning within human experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study sought to reflect on the data of experiences, rather than measured statistics, in order to make sense of the shared practicum experience of public Montessori interns. Specifically, this research employed a phenomenological approach to explore the essence of the shared experience. Phenomenological studies seek to describe the over-arching essential understanding of lived experiences as reported

by participants through first-person accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Two main types of phenomenological studies exist: hermeneutic and transcendental (Neubauer et al., 2019). While all phenomenology seeks to discover the how and why of an experience, these two approaches contrast regarding the philosophy and methodology of meeting this goal. Hermeneutic phenomenology, rooted in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1962) and the methodology of Max van Manen (1997), situates the researcher as an interpreter of the lived experience of the participants. On the contrary, transcendental phenomenology, which relies heavily on the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1970) and the methodology of Clark Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994), establishes the researcher as a describer of the lived experience reported by the participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to engage with the present moment as if experiencing it for the first time, free from any presuppositions of prior knowledge, opinion, or persuasion (Moustakas, 1994).

The rationale for choosing the transcendental phenomenological approach for this qualitative research rested upon the desire to truly understand the experiences that both support and hinder new Montessori teachers in the public-school practicum setting. Ultimately, I sought to assist Montessori teacher education centers and district personnel in adapting practicum support methods in order to increase new teacher retention and maintain the value of continued district funding for Montessori training and certification. This goal required commitment to an unbiased focus on an accurate description of the phenomenon and intentional suspension of my personal perspective, rather than my own interpretation. In this way, I bracketed my personal views as a former Montessori intern, current public Montessori educator of over two decades, current public Montessori administrator of over ten years, current Montessori teacher educator of five years, and current public Montessori parent. Through reflective journaling, I reduced

researcher subjectivity and the impact of my biases and preconceptions during data collection and analysis (Neubauer et al., 2019). Instead, this research emphasized the multiple perspectives and perceptions of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this transcendental phenomenological study explored the essence of the phenomenon of public Montessori as experienced by public Montessori teacher interns completing their practicum in public Montessori schools. One central research question (CQ) sought to understand better the lived experience of public Montessori for public Montessori teacher interns completing their practicum in public Montessori schools. The three sub-questions (SQ) sought to understand better what expectations new Montessori teachers carry with them as they enter the public Montessori practicum and what supports and coping strategies novice Montessori interns carry with them through the public Montessori practicum.

Central Research Question

How do novice Montessori teachers describe their experience in public Montessori teaching practicums?

Sub-Question One

What expectations do novice Montessori teacher interns possess as they transition into public Montessori school practicums?

Sub-Question Two

What supports exist for novice Montessori teacher interns as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

Sub-Question Three

What coping strategies do novice Montessori teacher interns employ as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

Setting and Participants

Qualitative research requires the researcher to enter the field to collect data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this transcendental phenomenology study, fieldwork was conducted at Montessori teacher education centers with novice public Montessori teacher interns after their practicum. This section discloses the details of the sites and participants involved with the study.

Site

The research sites included Montessori teacher education centers accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education. All sites were located in the United States. Montessori teacher education centers are the most appropriate sites to help me study the current research problem because they meet Moustakas' essential criteria for participant selection in a transcendental phenomenological study. These sites provided experience with the phenomenon under investigation to individuals, both interested in the phenomenon, as well as willing to participate in the study (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, Montessori teacher education sites enroll adult learners who sign a practicum agreement to complete directed or self-directed internships with private or public Montessori schools that have chosen Montessori as their instructional approach (American Montessori Society, 2018). Each accredited Montessori teacher education center is led by a director and employs teacher educators as instructors and field consultants.

Participants

Since this study sought to explore the experience of public Montessori, as described by Montessori interns during the transition of the public Montessori practicum, participants had to

meet the criteria of phenomenon experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, participants included novice Montessori teachers who had completed a public Montessori teaching practicum with an accredited Montessori teacher education center within the past eighteen months. For the purpose of this study, novice Montessori teachers included those teachers with or in the process of earning Montessori teacher certification who had not been previously employed in the position of certified Montessori teacher prior to the start of their teaching practicum.

Researcher Positionality

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the research instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, I needed to recognize and divulge my experiences and presumptions about the phenomenon under study, bracketing them from my interpretation of the data collected and analyzed. These beliefs, including my social constructivist interpretive framework and ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions, are disclosed in this section to provide an understanding of my positionality.

Interpretive Framework

As a Montessori educator of over twenty years and Montessori teacher educator of five years, I value the role of the educator as a scientific observer of the environment (Barbieru, 2016) and the role of the individual as a constructor of knowledge (Elkind, 2003). Within the Montessori classroom, observation is the only way to truly grasp the potential that lies within the child (Barbieru, 2016). In essence, routine assessment of the child's current personal experience reveals their current reality and future potential. Thus, I am naturally inclined by my previous knowledge and experience to support the constructivist interpretive framework. This framework aligns well with phenomenological research because it suggests that multiple realities arise from lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I believe humans, individually and collectively,

experience multiple realities of truth molded and re-molded from their personal perspectives of life experiences. In my current research, as I explored the experiences of new Montessori teacher interns in the public Montessori setting, I sought to discover how similarities and differences of their lived experiences guide the reality constructed within participant perspectives and meaning-making of the transition to becoming a Montessori teacher.

Philosophical Assumptions

As a qualitative researcher, my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions molded my research approach, goals, and outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My ontological assumption rests upon my Christian belief in God as the singular reality. At the same time, my epistemological assumption is founded in phenomenology, whereby lived experience contributes to subjective knowledge. In addition, my axiological beliefs are rooted in the values I attribute to public Montessori derived during my previous experiences as a public Montessori teacher, administrator, and parent.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions relate to one's perspective on the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a Christian, I believe in the singular reality of God's infallible truth. Indeed, "above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (*New International Version*, 2011, 2 Peter 1:20-21). God's truth is the only reality. I fully believe and acknowledge the single universal truth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Isaiah 55:8 warns us that His thoughts are not our thoughts and that His ways are not our ways. His truth is greater than the personal realities we construct, and His ways are better than the personal resolutions we

attempt to implement. However, as a qualitative researcher, I also believe in multiple human interpretations of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although there is assuredly one truth, infinite human perspectives of truth exist for my dissection. My role as a qualitative researcher was to reveal, analyze, and report these multiple perspectives through my results. Therefore, I bracketed my belief in singular truth to make room for the various realities that arose in participant perspectives during this study.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological assumptions consider the nature and justification of knowledge and the relationship between the research and the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a qualitative researcher, I stepped into the fieldwork, worked closely with the participants, and melded into the context of their lived experiences. As a former private Montessori teacher who transitioned into public school, I know the challenges of teaching in public Montessori. Yet, I do not understand those challenges within the context of a new Montessori teacher in a public Montessori school because I earned my Montessori certification four years before my transition into public school. However, my experiences coaching new Montessori teachers as a teacher educator and an administrator in the public Montessori setting make me aware of the difficulties novice Montessori interns face, particularly when they consider themselves untrained or unsupported. For these reasons, I bracketed my previous interactions to authentically embrace the knowledge shared by participants as they recounted their own experiences.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumptions refer to the role of values in research, which I should clearly articulate in my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I first encountered and embraced the Montessori philosophy and pedagogy over two decades ago, while still in college. My entire career has

involved Montessori education, mainly in the public school sector. I have taught students and adults within the Montessori environment, and my children have attended a public Montessori program. I believe the Montessori approach prepares children for later life success and opens them up to their greatest individual potential, not only academically but holistically.

Additionally, I value the equitable availability of Montessori education to every child through public education. Each public Montessori teacher should receive adequate preparation and support for the task. In this study, some shared experiences aligned, and others conflicted with my encounters in the classroom as a teacher, administrator, or parent; therefore, it was essential to bracket my biases to allow accurate data analysis of participant experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Researcher's Role

My role as the human instrument in this study included interviewing and collecting, transcribing, analyzing, and reporting data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I connected to the phenomenon of public Montessori as a former public Montessori teacher, current public Montessori administrator, and current Montessori teacher educator of both public and private school teacher interns. I directly experienced the transition from private to public Montessori while pursuing state certification, and I have years of experience as a campus mentor to novice Montessori teachers completing their practicum in the public-school sector. Although I have a personal bias toward public Montessori as a current parent, former teacher, and current administrator, as well as toward Montessori teacher training as a former Montessori intern and current teacher educator, I carefully bracketed my encounters and opinions. This approach allowed me to accurately record the lived experiences as depicted by the participants engaged in this phenomenological study.

Procedures

In this section, the research steps will be articulated. These steps will include an explanation of the required Institutional Review Board (IRB), site approvals, and the participant recruitment plan. The data collection and analysis plan will be concisely described first by individual data collection methods and then as a synthesized, triangulated composite.

Permissions

After completing my proposal defense, I sought IRB approval with my chair and committee member (see Appendix A). This process required articulation of my awareness, plan, and evidence of how I would respect participants, welfare, and justice within my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I then pursued site permissions from the selected Montessori teacher education centers I intended to involve in the study (see Appendices B-E). Consent was confirmed before IRB application submission (see Appendices F-I), and no data was collected until after IRB approval.

Recruitment Plan

This study included 10 participants selected through criterion and snowball sampling from a sample pool of public Montessori interns at Montessori teacher education centers in the United States. A criterion sample, in which participant selection is contingent upon meeting specific requirements (Creswell & Poth, 2018), is appropriate for phenomenological studies. This sampling method narrowed participation to individuals possessing a shared experience with the phenomenon while capitalizing on the individual characteristics and circumstances that contributed to the composite essence of the experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Originally, I established parameters to restrict participation to novice teachers in Texas who completed full-time, self-directed public Montessori practicums within the past 12 months without any prior

teaching experience in the public education sector. However, these criteria limited the participant field too narrowly to complete the study. Therefore, I sought and obtained IRB approval to modify the participant criteria to expand the sample size without compromising the study purpose (see Appendices J-L). All participants in this study needed to meet the conditions of completion of a public Montessori practicum internship as a novice Montessori teacher enrolled in a Montessori certification course within the past 18 months. The participants must have completed initial Montessori training coursework before the start of the practicum and must have maintained enrollment in the training program throughout the internship. Additionally, snowball sampling allowed participants and Montessori acquaintances in the field to recommend additional participants who met the recruitment criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Snowball sampling was appropriate for this study in order to increase the sample size and increase depth and similarity of the experience under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015).

To recruit participants, I networked using personal acquaintances, as well as social media groups and Montessori teacher education centers. The recruitment letters (see Appendix M) and posts (see Appendix N) informed participants of the study purpose, eligibility criteria, participation tasks, and compensation. Initially, I did not offer compensation for participation, but, in an effort to increase participation interest, I pursued and acquired IRB approval to offer monetary compensation via a participation sweepstakes (see Appendices K and O). With assistance from organization administrators of approved sites and snowball referrals, I identified potential participants who met the eligibility criteria. I contacted interested recruits via a survey link or email to explain the study's purpose, screening them against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Originally, the participant screener was limited in scope with the sole purpose to determine eligibility in reference to participation criteria (see Appendix P). However, during

initial data collection, I discovered that unqualified participants submitted inaccurate responses to gain admittance into the study. With guidance from my dissertation chair and the IRB, I excluded the participants whose responses did not confirm actual participation in a public Montessori practicum in the United States. To protect the ethical integrity of this study, I requested and received IRB approval to modify the participant screener to include questions to confirm association with a public Montessori practicum as a Montessori intern (see Appendices L and Q). I eliminated any potential participants with inaccurate or missing responses.

Additionally, I addressed any questions about the study from interested recruits. Providing additional information to potential participants is a beneficial practice because it may increase participation rates (Kelly et al., 2017). Participation criteria were strictly enforced, and any individual who did not meet the requirements was immediately informed after the screening interview. All collected screening data remained secure. A follow-up call or email relayed study details, explained informed consent, and focused on building rapport with qualified and willing participants. Rapport development is essential, as one of qualitative field research's first and most important steps (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007).

Based on the results of the modified participant screener, a sample size of 10 participants was included in the study. Small sample sizes are appropriate for studies seeking to center participant voices and draw shared conclusions (Bartholomew et al., 2021). I employed purposeful sampling, striving for maximum variation and data saturation to properly and comprehensively represent the population under study.

Data Collection Plan

This study employed three sources of data collection: journal prompts, individual interviews, and letter writing. Three data collection methods were selected to triangulate the data.

Triangulation reveals deeper understanding, supports richer data collection, and increases the quality and credibility of study results (Patton, 1999). I began the study with journal prompts to allow participants to self-reflect upon their experience in the practicum (Harrison & Fopma-Loy, 2010). I followed up with individual interviews to sustain rapport while exploring more detailed elaboration upon their reflections (Palmer et al., 2010). As a culminating experience, letter writing provided participants the opportunity to reflect on the totality of their experience as public Montessori interns (Harris, 2002).

Journal Prompts

Participants responded to journal prompts to identify initial perceptions of the practicum experience. As a data collection tool, journal prompts ask participants to describe, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate their personal experiences (Harrison & Fopma-Loy, 2010). In this way, journal prompts allowed for directed self-reflection. While observations were considered for this study, journal prompts were a more appropriate data source to efficiently capture and identify meaning within the daily experiences of participants while mitigating the financial costs associated with observations (Lutz & Parette, 2019). Indeed, the very nature of reflective writing lent itself to phenomenological meaning-making through deep critical self-analysis (Fair et al., 2011). Each participant received four journal prompts to complete before the interview. Journal prompts directly aligned with the central research question and each sub-question. Responses were submitted via email and securely stored.

Journal Prompt Questions

1. What factors influenced your decision to complete your teaching practicum at a public Montessori? CRQ
2. What expectations did you have about your public Montessori practicum before you

began? SQ1

3. What supports benefitted you the most during your public Montessori practicum? SQ2

4. What coping strategies did you use during your public Montessori practicum? SQ3

Journal Prompts Data Analysis Plan

Journal prompt responses were uploaded to Microsoft Excel for analysis, and all information was stored on a password-protected computer. Before any interaction with participant responses, bracketing of researcher assumptions occurred through journaling. Epoché bracketing freed the researcher from personal views to describe the data from the participant's perspective alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the journal prompts in this study, transcendental phenomenological reduction and horizontalization occurred through repetitive line-by-line examination of each verbatim response to accurately capture the textural description of what participants experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenological reduction included multiple data reviews to extract and assemble the most relevant, significant, non-repetitive participant statements (Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2016). This analysis helped develop and validate themes that grounded the phenomenon within a composite textural description of the experience. The textural review cycle horizontalized the data, utilizing in vivo coding to capture the complete perspective through the eyes of the participant (Saldaña, 2016). In vivo coding honored the participant's voice by recognizing the actual words utilized by the participant in their responses and provided a textural view of what the participant expressed and what the researcher gleaned from the participant's perspective. This analysis was appropriate for this phenomenological study to provide a complete description of the participant's perspective of the experience.

In the second review, the Microsoft Excel software program aided in sorting and filing data and identifying structural themes within the journal prompt responses (Moustakas, 1994). Theme development relied on emotion and pattern coding to help categorize the data (Saldaña, 2016). Emotion coding labeled the experienced feelings of the participants to provide greater depth of insight into their perspectives and life conditions. This form of coding was appropriate for this study because it named the emotions identified initially through in vivo coding in the first cycle. In addition, emotion coding provided context for affective experiences. Additionally, pattern coding identified commonalities in the data. Pattern coding was beneficial to this study because it aided in thematic analysis. Theme validation occurred through an aligned comparison with the verbatim journal prompt responses to ensure an accurate depiction of participant experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Data analysis culminated in the intuitive integration of the overall essence of what and how participants experience public Montessori during their teaching practicum.

Individual Interviews

Through interviews, participants described their conscious experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This method captured comprehensive, vivid, and passionate personal accounts, allowing this researcher to understand better the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon. While focus groups were considered as a supplemental collection method, interviews were more appropriate because they focused on the articulation of the experience and limited the influence of social interaction on data collection (Palmer et al., 2010). Specifically, individual interviews allowed Montessori teacher interns to voice their personal experiences regarding their public Montessori practicums. Interviews were conducted with each participant utilizing a semi-structured questioning format. Semi-structured questions, the most common interview form,

allowed versatility and flexibility in interviewer and interviewee responses and follow-ups (Kallio et al., 2016). Online interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Member checks ensured the accuracy of the transcriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Individual Interview Questions

1. When you reflect on your teaching experience in a public Montessori practicum, what stands out to you? CRQ
2. Please share some typical responsibilities I would be assigned as a public Montessori intern at your school. CRQ
3. Describe the critical milestones in your Montessori internship, and tell me more about them. CRQ
4. Tell me about your experience with public Montessori and your opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one. SQ1
5. Recall the moment you first received the offer to complete your internship in a public Montessori. What hopes did you have? What concerns did you have? SQ1
6. What else would you like to tell me about your expectations of public Montessori prior to teaching in a public Montessori? SQ1
7. What were the most helpful supports to you during your practicum? What were the least helpful supports? SQ2
8. What additional supports do you feel could have benefitted you? SQ2
9. What else would you like to tell me about your experience with supports during your practicum? SQ2
10. Tell me about some of the stresses you experienced during your practicum. SQ3

11. How did you manage stress during your practicum? Which techniques were the most helpful? Which were the least helpful? SQ3

12. What else would you like to tell me about your coping strategies during your practicum?
SQ3

The first question served to elicit the general consciousness of participants (Thomas, 2021), meaning it opened the dialogue for me to see the experience through the eyes of the participant. Questions one through three contained a variety of Grand Tour questions that allowed participants to verbally describe the most significant features of their public Montessori internship experiences (Spradley, 1979). Questions five, seven, and eleven enlisted alternate perspectives through the employment of contrasting questions. Each research question aligned with two relevant interview questions to ensure balanced attention and value within the overall interview (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, questions six, nine, and twelve provided the participants the opportunity to elaborate on their related experiences, engaging in full disclosure of their overall perspectives.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Interviews were transcribed to Microsoft Word by the researcher and uploaded to Microsoft Excel for analysis, with all of the information being stored on a password-protected computer. Prior to any interviews, the researcher bracketed prior assumptions regarding the phenomenon through journaling. For the interviews in this study, transcendental phenomenological reduction and horizontalization occurred through repetitive line-by-line examination of each verbatim transcription (Moustakas, 1994). Two cycles of coding occurred (Saldaña, 2016). The first coding cycle employed in vivo and descriptive coding of the textural description: in vivo coding to honor the participant's voice and descriptive coding to expand the

level of analysis. This coding was appropriate for this phenomenological study because it elicited the expressive, as well as the receptive perspective of the participants' lived experience. The second imaginative variation review concentrated on the theme development of structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Theme development arose through emotion and pattern coding to categorize data (Saldaña, 2016). These coding techniques were appropriate for this research because emotion coding labeled the emotions identified through in vivo coding and provided context for the descriptive coding, while pattern coding contributed to the thematic analysis necessary to elicit the overall essence of the lived experience. Verbatim interview transcripts were referenced to validate themes (Moustakas, 1994). Intuitive integration of the textural and structural descriptions generated the overall essence of the experience.

Letter-Writing

As a culminating research task, participants engaged in letter-writing. A newer qualitative data collection method (Harris, 2002), letter-writing, allowed participants to self-reflect on the progression of their lived experiences. This method protected data collection from issues potentially skewed or limited by the self-consciousness and immediacy of a required response during interviews (Rautio, 2009). Instead, participants took adequate time to personally and thoughtfully consider their experiences, adding a careful construction of their replies. In this study, letter-writing was appropriate as a culminating reflection of the overall lived experience of the public Montessori internship. Thus, each participant wrote one letter after the end of the interview. The letter directly aligned with the critical research question, and participants constructed and submitted their responses via email at the conclusion of the interview. All letters were securely stored.

Letter-Writing Prompt

1. Based on your experience in a public Montessori practicum, write a letter to your younger self with advice or suggestions about becoming a public Montessori teacher.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

Letter writing was analyzed by uploading participant responses to Microsoft Excel, and all information was stored on a password-protected computer. Prior to collecting any letters, the researcher journaled to bracket personal assumptions about the phenomenon. For the letters written in this study, transcendental phenomenological reduction and horizontalization occurred through repetitive line-by-line examination of each verbatim response (Moustakas, 1994). The analysis included two cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2016). Focused on horizontalization, the first review cycle utilized in vivo coding to generate a textural description of the participants' experiences in Microsoft Excel. Straightforward, safe, and secure for beginning researchers, this technique contributed to a comprehensive level of analysis that was appropriate to describe the lived experience under study in this phenomenological research . In the second review, the use of the Microsoft Excel software program aided in the identification of structural descriptions and themes by categorizing data using emotion and pattern coding (Moustakas, 1994; Saldaña, 2016). Appropriate for phenomenological studies, both emotion and pattern coding aided in thematic analysis and supplemented the in vivo coding utilized in the first review cycle. Revisiting verbatim participant letter-writing responses provided theme validation (Moustakas, 1994). Intuitive integration analysis combined the textural and structural descriptions to identify the overall essence of the experience.

Data Synthesis

Analysis of each data collection method was comprehensively synthesized in order to describe the overall essence. Intuitive integration required fused analysis of all data collection

methods in order to unify *noema*, or what was experienced, with *noesis*, or how it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). This study employed Microsoft Excel to synthesize the data collected from journal prompts, individual interviews, and letter-writing prompts into unifying themes and textural-structural descriptions because data analysis connected to transcendental phenomenology requires a rigorous, systematic approach (Moerer-Urdahl, 2004). Moustakas proposed that knowledge is derived from the facilitation of four core processes: epoché, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and intuitive integration (1994). Through *epoché*, researchers suspend their own preconceptions by bracketing them out of the study in order to open their present consciousness to whatever the data may present. I did so by bracketing my prior experiences and assumptions developed as a public Montessori teacher, administrator, parent, and Montessori teacher educator. From an untainted perspective, I prepared to receive the true meaning ascribed by participants to the experience of public Montessori, as lived by public Montessori interns during their public Montessori practicum. During *transcendental-phenomenological reduction*, I *horizontalized*, or extracted and assembled the most relevant, significant, non-repetitive participant statements from the combined journal prompts, interviews, and letters. In doing so, I grounded the public Montessori internship phenomenon within a composite textural description of the experience. The *textural* component of the experience refers to what the participants experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018), so I highlighted what the public Montessori interns experienced during their public Montessori practicum. Similarly, in the *imaginative variation* phase, I investigated the structural description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The *structural* element includes the context of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I focused on how the public Montessori interns experienced their public Montessori practicum, as relayed in the journal

prompts, interviews, and letters. Finally, through *intuitive integration*, I synthesized the overall meaning, or essential, universal quality of the public Montessori internship phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The essence integrated the textural and structural descriptions, thus forming a composite depiction of what the experience was and how it came to be what it was.

Trustworthiness

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness refers to the degree to which research is considered noteworthy to the audience. Trustworthiness includes four standards: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each requirement, equivalent to a parallel quantitative concept, adds rigor to the study. This section details the steps taken to confirm the trustworthiness of the current research.

Credibility

Credibility is similar to internal validity in quantitative research. Specifically, credibility refers to the extent to which the results of the study accurately and realistically portray participants' perspectives of their lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Steps taken in this study to ensure credibility included triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking.

Triangulation

Triangulation allowed for comparison and corroboration of response consistency through multiple data collection methods (Patton, 2015). This study included journal prompts, interviews, and letter-writing to explore the lived experiences of Montessori teacher interns. The use of multiple data collection methods enhanced the individual benefits of each method while reducing the overall weaknesses of any individual shortcomings (Guba, 1981).

Peer Debriefing

Peer debriefing took place through feedback from fellow Montessori teacher educators unattached to this study, participants, or sites connected to this study. Peer debriefing entailed analysis of the research process by a knowledgeable person without direct interest in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process helped the researcher address unseen personal assumptions that may have skewed results (Shenton, 2004).

Member-Checking

Member-checking occurred through the opportunity for each participant to review, edit, and approve their journal prompt and letter-writing responses, as well as their interview transcript, for accuracy prior to inclusion in the study. In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) considered member-checking the single most important research technique to establish credibility. This practice confirmed participants' agreement that their words matched their intentions (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability, analogous to external validity in quantitative studies, indicates the level of generalizability of qualitative results across context or time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research achieved transferability through saturation of in-depth and quality data collection (Constantinou et al., 2017). Data descriptions included specific features regarding participants, setting, data collection, and data analysis procedures in order to accentuate the precise context attached to the findings (Moustakas, 1994).

Dependability

Dependability, equivalent to quantitative reliability, entails the degree of result replicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inclusion of detailed descriptions of all data collection and analysis procedures provided ease of replication for future researchers (Shenton, 2004). In

addition, an internal audit trail recorded the details of each step throughout the study to increase dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, this study increased dependability through an external inquiry audit by the Liberty dissertation committee, as well as the Qualitative Research Director (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability

Confirmability, which corresponds with quantitative objectivity, involves the degree of researcher neutrality in result generation and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition to the external audit provided by the Liberty dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director, this study included data triangulation and a reflexive internal audit trail. Data triangulation ensured the reliance on patterns that arose from multiple forms of data, rather than the researcher's interpretation of a single data source (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Reflexivity, otherwise described as progressive subjectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or reflective commentary (Shenton, 2004), allowed researcher bracketing. To this end, this researcher recorded personal reflections throughout the data collection process, including initial data impressions and developing trends, and relied on these patterns to guide data-driven analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations arise in every phase of research studies involving human subjects and must be addressed in order to increase ethical integrity (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At the beginning of this study, IRB approval was attained, followed by site approval at each participating site. Neither practicum sites for which this researcher holds current affiliation nor participants for which this researcher holds a current supervisory role were included. Participants were provided informed consent after receiving full disclosure of the purpose of the study and were permitted to withdraw their voluntary participation at any time. Originally, informed

consent did not include compensation (see Appendix R); however, the consent documents were updated to reflect IRB-approved modifications to eligibility and compensation criteria before any participants began data collection (see Appendix S). Anonymity through pseudonyms and redaction of identifying descriptors were employed for sites and participants. Reflexivity journaling bracketed researcher preconceptions and reduced researcher bias. All data obtained throughout the study was stored electronically, protected by password, and marked to destroy after three years. Finally, the findings of the study were shared with others in order to improve Montessori practicum practices.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. The research questions in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand better the lived experience of public Montessori for public Montessori teacher interns completing their practicum in public Montessori schools, including the expectations while moving into the experience, as well as the support and coping strategies employed while moving through the experience. The research sites included Montessori teacher education centers accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education. Participants in this study included 10 novice Montessori teachers who were enrolled in accredited Montessori teacher education centers and participated in public Montessori school practicums within the past 18 months. This section explained the researcher's positionality, required IRB and site approvals, participant recruitment, and the data collection and analysis plan. This study met all four standards of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as well as all appropriate ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. The focus of chapter four is the presentation of the study results. This chapter begins with a description of the participants. Then, the findings are detailed by theme in narrative and tabular form, including *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. In vivo quotes connect the participants' lived experiences with the research questions. The remainder of this chapter delivers concise responses to the research questions. In this study, all identifiable elements related to the setting, participants, and any other identifying information have been changed to pseudonyms in order to preserve participant confidentiality.

Participants

This study included 10 participants recruited from four different states through purposeful criterion and snowball sampling. Initially, I attempted to recruit participants through three Montessori training centers who signed site agreements. However, no qualifying teachers responded. Then, I posted a notice on public and private Facebook websites. Although I received massive interest from over 100 completed participant screeners, I discovered that unqualified participants attempted to enter the study without meeting the participation criterion. In response, I updated my participant screener to filter for qualified participants by adding specific questions about Montessori pedagogical knowledge, as well as practicum site details for which I could verify accuracy. In addition, I reached out to personal teacher-educator contacts to solicit their help via snowball sampling.

All participants completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course and did not have any experience

as a certified Montessori teacher prior to the start of their practicum. Five participants held previous teaching positions in traditional public schools, and five participants served in a variety of previous Montessori classroom support roles, including two parents, two substitutes, and one volunteer. All participants experienced at least one full school year in a public Montessori teaching practicum. Five participants taught in public Montessori school practicums in Texas, two in Nebraska, two in Ohio, and one in Tennessee. Five participants completed their practicum in Early Childhood classrooms for prekindergarten and kindergarten, four in Lower Elementary classrooms for first through third grade, and one in an Upper Elementary classroom for fourth through sixth grade. Table 1 identifies the practicum assignments and previous experience data of each participant.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Practicum State	Practicum Grade Level	Prior Montessori Experience	Prior Traditional Experience	Practicum Site Selection
Cameren	Nebraska	Early Childhood	Parent	None	Chosen
Miguel	Texas	Early Childhood	None	Teacher	Assigned
Kadence	Texas	Early Childhood	None	Teacher	Chosen
Dalia	Texas	Lower Elementary	Substitute	Teacher	Chosen
Brinlee	Texas	Lower Elementary	None	Teacher	Assigned
Beverly	Tennessee	Early Childhood	None	None	Assigned
Edna	Ohio	Lower Elementary	Substitute	None	Chosen
Ashe	Nebraska	Lower Elementary	None	None	Assigned
Ryan	Ohio	Upper Elementary	Volunteer	None	Chosen
Coleen	Texas	Early Childhood	Parent	Teacher	Chosen

Cameren

Cameren was a female Early Childhood teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Nebraska. She had previous experience with public Montessori as a parent to her own children but did not have any teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous experience as a Montessori parent positively impacted her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Cameren responded, “I was really biased in a good way.”

Miguel

Miguel was a male Early Childhood teacher assigned a public Montessori practicum in Texas. He had no previous experience with Montessori but had teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to his practicum. In a journal prompt, he shared that his previous experience with special program implementations in traditional public schools negatively impacted his perception of public Montessori as he entered his practicum. When asked what expectations he had about his public Montessori practicum before he began, Miguel responded, “I felt that this was just another program like the dozens I had seen within the district.”

Kadence

Kadence was a female Early Childhood teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Texas. She had no previous experience with Montessori but did have knowledge about private Montessori implementation, as well as teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous knowledge of Montessori pedagogy positively impacted her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Kadence responded, “From what I knew before, it was like they were just this mystical, mysterious

object.”

Dalia

Dalia was a female Lower Elementary teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Texas. She had previous experience with public Montessori as a substitute and also had teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous experience as a substitute in a public Montessori positively impacted her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Dalia responded, “The teachers are just so kind and gracious. It's part of Montessori, but I think the people who want to be a Montessori teacher have those characteristics to begin with.”

Brinlee

Brinlee was a female Lower Elementary teacher who was assigned a public Montessori practicum in Texas. She had no previous experience with Montessori but did have teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous teaching experience did not impact her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Brinlee responded, “I needed to find out.”

Beverly

Beverly was a female Early Childhood teacher assigned to a public Montessori practicum in Tennessee. She had no previous experience with public Montessori or teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her first impression of her colleagues positively impacted her perception of public Montessori when she first entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to

becoming one, Beverly had nothing to share, but about her first impression, she responded, “I was in awe.”

Edna

Edna was a female Lower Elementary teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Ohio. She had previous experience with private Montessori as a student and a substitute but did not have any teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous experience as a private Montessori substitute negatively impacted her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Edna responded, “I was really worried that the materials would be lost in the rush of district and state testing.”

Ashe

Ashe was a female Lower Elementary teacher assigned to a public Montessori practicum in Nebraska. She had no previous experience with Montessori, nor did she have any teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her lack of previous experience neutrally impacted her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Ashe responded, “I had no idea what Montessori was.”

Ryan

Ryan was a male Upper Elementary teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Ohio. He had previous experience with public Montessori as a classroom volunteer but did not have teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to his practicum. During his interview, he shared that his previous Montessori volunteer experience positively impacted his perception of public Montessori as he entered his practicum. When asked about his opinion of

public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Ryan responded, “I've always had this really great positive view of public Montessori teachers.”

Coleen

Coleen was a female Early Childhood teacher who chose a public Montessori practicum in Texas. She had previous experience with private Montessori as a parent to her own children and had teaching experience in a traditional public school prior to her practicum. During her interview, she shared that her previous experience as a private Montessori parent did not impact her perception of public Montessori as she entered her practicum. When asked about her opinion of public Montessori teachers prior to becoming one, Coleen responded, “I actually had no prior experience or understanding of public Montessori.”

Results

Data collected from journal prompts, individual interviews, and letter writing were analyzed to identify the essence of novice Montessori teachers' lived experiences in public Montessori school practicums in the United States. Individual interviews were conducted online, recorded, and automatically transcribed using Microsoft Teams. Journal prompts and letters were collected via email. Data analysis included the following processes: epoché, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and intuitive integration. After bracketing my biases, all verbatim responses were reviewed via repetitive line-by-line examination. Uploaded to Microsoft Excel, responses were then analyzed into 630 codes and synthesized into three themes and seven sub-themes. Table 2 reports the codes, themes, and sub-themes that contribute to the essence of the lived experience of the public practicum for novice Montessori teachers.

Table 2*Themes & Sub-Themes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Moving In - Preconceptions	Benefits	personal growth, personal impact, personal opportunity, philosophical impact
	Concerns	practicum conditions, public school demands, incapacity
Moving Through - Victories and Defeats	Indefinite	just another program, no expectations, what is this
	Hurdles	practicum barriers, district struggles, student behavior, self-capacity
	Supports	emotional, instructional, philosophical, collaborative, mentorship, reflective practice
Moving Out - The Journey Beyond	Strategies	problem-solving, self-care, emotional regulation, social network
	Continued Commitment	philosophical, career allegiance
	Continued Growth	instructional, philosophical, managerial

Moving In - Preconceptions

Most new Montessori teachers do not enter the public practicum as blank slates but bring with them a multitude of presumptions about the experience they anticipate. The first theme to develop during data analysis of the interviews, journal prompts, and letters describes the preconceptions of new Montessori teachers, as they embark upon the public Montessori practicum experience. As mentioned by every participant, preconceived notions of public Montessori arose across all three data sources, including 100% of interviews, 90% of journal

prompts, and 30% of letters. Before entering the practicum classroom for the first time, preconceptions set the tone for the perceived experience based on prior knowledge, involvement, or hearsay. While Kadence, Ashe, Beverly, and Dalia first learned about Montessori through college coursework, Cameren and Coleen first encountered Montessori as parents, Edna attended a private Montessori as a child, and Ryan heard about Montessori from an acquaintance. However, Miguel and Brinlee had no prior knowledge about Montessori before they entered their public Montessori practicum. Depending on the extent and nature of previous knowledge or experience, preconceptions follow along a continuum that ranges from positive beliefs regarding potential benefits to indefinite perceptions due to unfamiliarity and negative apprehensions affiliated with concerns about the public Montessori practicum.

Benefits

From every interview, nine journal prompts, and three letters, preconceived benefits of public Montessori and the public Montessori practicum developed. Analysis of the data codes demonstrated 116 instances of preconceived benefits, including *personal growth*, *personal impact*, *personal opportunity*, and *philosophical impact*. New Montessori teachers look forward to their personal learning and growth as Montessori educators during their public practicum. Kadence first learned about the Montessori philosophy in college but did not realize its implementation in the public education sector until applying to a job posting a few years later. In a journal prompt, she explained that “I was eager to become a compassionate and understanding guide for my young learners.” Furthermore, new Montessori interns anticipate that the public Montessori practicum will help them realize their personal dreams. Ryan stumbled into Montessori to appease his friend’s persistent invitation to volunteer in her classroom. He explained during his interview that his volunteer experience unexpectedly ignited his career

direction, and he “kept going back, ended up volunteering at that school for a year and a half, and then eventually decided, OK, I think I might want to do this.” Through the public Montessori practicum, new Montessori teachers also imagine the opportunity to leave their personal impact on the future. Cameren first encountered public Montessori as a parent when she enrolled her children in a local public Montessori school. Contemplating her initial thoughts about public Montessori teaching, she spoke about her desire to “be a really vital part of keeping the public Montessori program alive and well in our district, to help the district maintain the great reputation it has by having the Montessori program.” Furthermore, ideological hopes regarding the benefits of the Montessori philosophy also entice new Montessori interns as they enter their public Montessori practicums. Coleen first discovered Montessori as a parent when she enrolled her children in a private Montessori program. During her interview, she acknowledged her initial belief that “Montessori is actually reaching children in the way that they learn best.”

Concerns

However, not all initial presumptions about the public Montessori practicum imply positivity. In fact, every participant outlined preconceived concerns across all three data sources, including 100% of interviews, 60% of journal prompts, and 20% of letters. Codes included 78 occurrences of presumed concerns, including *practicum conditions*, *public school demands*, and *incapacity*. New Montessori teachers worry about the conditions they will face as Montessori educators during their public practicum, especially while balancing the workload between the campus and the training center. Assigned to a public Montessori for her undergraduate student teaching assignment, Ashe entered public Montessori without any previous Montessori experience. During her interview, she shared her worry about the workload after “seeing the assignments we were going to be doing and knowing the demands as a new teacher and not

knowing 100% everything about Montessori. Seeing the list of things I was going to have to do was pretty intimidating.” Additionally, new Montessori interns foresee the tension between public school demands and the Montessori philosophy, especially with regard to standards and testing. Edna first observed Montessori in the classroom as a substitute teacher at her university lab school. In a journal prompt, she reported her concern “that the beauty of the materials would be lost by the pace needed for testing across the state and district.” Entering the public Montessori practicum, new Montessori teachers also experience apprehension related to their personal incapacity to understand the Montessori philosophy and its application to the public educational sector. Brinlee, who had not experienced Montessori before accepting a teaching position at a public Montessori school, doubted “that I would actually grasp all of this.” Even with an extensive teaching background, new Montessori interns question their ability to understand and implement the Montessori philosophy. Although Dalia possessed several years of traditional teaching experience before she encountered public Montessori as a retired substitute teacher, she expressed anxiety with her perception of the tension between public school and the Montessori method. Asked for her initial thoughts about public Montessori teaching, she worried about “how to mesh the two philosophies and what is required of the public school system as opposed to our method of teaching.”

Indefinite

Not all teachers enter the public Montessori practicum with specific preconceptions, and the majority enter with limited presumptions due to insufficient or non-existent prior knowledge or exposure. Referenced in seven interviews and three journal prompts, 80% of participants mentioned indefinite preconceptions. The codes *limited expectations*, and *no expectations* were clustered to form the sub-theme of indefinite preconceptions and occurred 28 times across two

data sources. New Montessori teachers do not always have expectations and cannot picture what lies ahead in their public practicum. Beverly had never heard of Montessori before her placement at a public Montessori for her undergraduate student teaching. In her interview, she expressed that “I had no expectations. I just thought that it was a regular public school.” Even veteran teachers may not have been introduced to the philosophy during their careers. After years of teaching in a traditional public-school classroom, Miguel knew nothing about the Montessori philosophy before his campus adopted the method. He explained in a journal prompt, “I felt that this was just another program like the dozens I had seen within the district.”

Moving Through - Victories and Defeats

Once new Montessori teachers enter the public Montessori practicum, they experience a series of victories and defeats as they attempt to overcome hurdles with varying success through the employment of supports and strategies. The second theme to arise during data analysis reflects the successes and setbacks of new Montessori teachers as they proceed through the public Montessori practicum experience. As mentioned by every participant, victories and defeats of the public Montessori practicum arose across all three data sources, including 100% of interviews, journal prompts, and letters. After entering the practicum classroom for the first time, triumphs and downfalls characterize the experience. New Montessori interns encounter obstacles related to their ability and the conditions of their classrooms, campuses, districts, and training centers. Institutional supports, as well as personal and institutional coping strategies, will boost or block success for each barrier, depending on how effective the execution. Based on the degree and nature of obstacle navigation with support systems and coping strategies, new Montessori teachers encounter a combination of victories and defeats throughout the public Montessori practicum.

Hurdles

Every new Montessori teacher will face hurdles during the public Montessori practicum. Obstacles of the public Montessori practicum arose across all three data sources in 100% of interviews, 40% of journal prompts, and 70% of letters. Analysis of the coded data revealed 364 occurrences of hurdles, including *practicum barriers*, *district struggles*, *student behavior*, and *self-capacity*. New Montessori teachers must balance the practicum workload with work and life. In her letter, Cameren warned that the public Montessori practicum “is going to mean working full-time, being a mom full-time, and being a student with homework for what seems like full-time.” Additionally, new Montessori interns must simultaneously adhere to the public school requirements enforced by their districts and the Montessori expectations set forth by their training centers. Coleen referenced this conflict in her interview, stating,

There are high expectations for being able to take the Montessori curriculum and your traditional curriculum, mesh them together in this magical way that really isn't very aligned or explained, and then find a way to get these students where they need to be.

During the public Montessori practicum, new Montessori teachers also encounter difficult student behaviors. Ashe discussed, “constantly having to stop my teaching to address the behaviors and not being able to get anything done in my classroom because I was constantly managing those behaviors.” Furthermore, new Montessori interns struggle with their limited instructional, relational, managerial, and philosophical capacity, as they navigate the public Montessori practicum. Asked to discuss the experience, Dalia explained, “It's like you were put in a room and told, ‘do it.’ And you're wondering, ‘OK, and what does that mean?’”

Supports

As new public Montessori teachers traverse practicum hurdles, institutional supports

provided by the campus, training center, and philosophy serve to boost or block victory. Addressed by every participant, public Montessori practicum supports were presented in 100% of interviews and journals and 30% of letters. Data codes included 440 instances of supports, including *emotional, instructional, philosophical, collaborative, mentorship, and reflective practice*. Of the supports mentioned, participants identified 67% as beneficial enhancements to success and the remaining 37% as ineffective supports that increased defeat. New Montessori teachers rely on institutional supports in various forms. Sources of training center supports included field consultants, cohort members, and instruction. District support resources were comprised of administration and colleagues. Embedded within the Montessori method, philosophical supports involve standardized materials and the prepared environment. Table 3 reports the frequency in which participants mentioned each support as a positive boost or negative block to victory over hurdles.

Table 3

Supports

Support	% of Codes Reported as	% of Codes Reported as
	Boost	Block
Campus Admin	41%	59%
District Admin	22%	78%
Campus Colleague	87%	13%
Training Center Cohort	100%	0%
Training Center Mentor	81%	19%
Training Center Instruction	50%	50%
Montessori Philosophy	100%	0%

Training Center. Regarding training center supports, new Montessori teachers heavily

rely on their classmate cohort. Participants always referred to their cohort members as positive benefits, usually described their field consultants as helpful aids, and identified their instruction as effective half the time. Cohort members offer collaboration, reflective practice, encouragement, and understanding. In a journal prompt, Brinlee reported that “having other educators in a group setting, having the same questions, and bonding during the practicum was helpful.” Additionally, field consultants serve as formal Montessori mentors during the public Montessori practicum and provide feedback, encouragement, and advice; however, they are not readily available at any given moment due to their own classroom positions and responsibilities. Acknowledging her field consultant in a journal prompt, Kadence revealed, “Having experienced Montessori educators as mentors during the practicum was immensely beneficial. They provided guidance, shared their knowledge, and offered constructive feedback on teaching methods and classroom management.” Furthermore, instructional support from the training center involves lessons and assignments. New Montessori teachers appreciate the in-residency instructional component, constructive feedback, and encouragement; however, they request more frequent communication and opportunities for application within the public sector. During her interview, Coleen reported gaps in her Montessori philosophy course, particularly “not enough transition into the classroom. How do I bring this to life in my students? That's what I wanted to learn.”

Campus. At the campus level, new Montessori interns usually identify colleagues as a positive support and administration as a negative support. When available, colleagues provide collaboration and mentorship, especially those already Montessori-trained. Beverly discussed how she “heavily relied on those trained Montessorians to help me with the lessons that I needed to practice, or even the papers I needed to write. I would go to them, and they were such an important, helpful tool.” However, colleagues have their own classrooms to run and might not

always have the time, energy, or mental capacity to assist. In his interview, Ryan shared, “I could get support from my teaching staff, but they're the teachers. They have to deal with their own classroom.” Unfortunately, administration at the campus and district level usually block victory with unhelpful supports due to deficits in availability and philosophical understanding. Stretched thin with duties, campus administration lacks accessibility. Coleen lamented when “the district had her (principal) acting like an octopus, and she was all over everywhere, and she had no time for support.” Moreover, administrators untrained in the Montessori philosophy lack the perspective often necessary to assist. Reflecting on his campus administration, Ryan shared,

It was hard for me to go to them because they weren't Montessori trained, so they didn't really have that view or that mindset. I think you don't really know it until you do it and you study it and you see it and know what it is.

Philosophy. Philosophically, new Montessori teachers feel positively supported by the Montessori method. Every reference to the Montessori philosophy as a support reported an effective boost, such as illuminating articles to increase self-capacity and standardized materials to ease familiarity no matter the location across the globe. Sometimes, the philosophy simply speaks for itself. In his interview, Miguel mentioned his appreciation for the monthly article assignments that “felt handpicked for me and for what was happening at my campus at that time, so I would just go back to the article and use that to support what I was asking for.” In addition, global utilization of the same classroom materials and environmental components aids with acclimation and orientation. Edna shared in a journal prompt that “I was able to find my way around the room with ease because of the nature of Montessori and the prepared environment and materials that are commonly used.”

Strategies

Similar to supports, coping strategies assist or deter new public Montessori teachers from victory over public Montessori practicum hurdles. Mentioned by every participant across every data source, strategies employed during the public Montessori practicum supports presented in 100% of interviews, journals, and letters. Analysis of the data codes showed 390 instances of strategies, including *problem-solving*, *self-care*, *emotional regulation*, and *social network*. Participants reported 89% of coping strategies as effective in boosting success and the remaining 11% as ineffective in allowing defeat. New Montessori teachers rely on different types of coping strategies. Problem-solving strategies comprise reflection, response, and communication. Self-care refers to nutritional and physical health, as well as mental and spiritual well-being. Emotional regulation involves focused attention to feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Social networks include personal and professional connections. Table 4 reports the frequency in which participants mentioned each strategy as an effective boost or ineffective block to victory over hurdles.

Table 4

Strategies

Strategy	% of Codes Reported	% of Codes Reported as
	as Effective	Ineffective
Individual Problem-Solving	86%	14%
Interpersonal Problem-Solving	100%	0%
Physical Self-Care	30%	70%
Mental Self-Care	92%	8%
Emotional Regulation	73%	27%
Personal Social Network	100%	0%
Professional Social Network	100%	0%

Problem-Solving. New Montessori teachers face a series of problems throughout their public Montessori practicums and rely on individual and interpersonal techniques for reflection, response, and communication. Participants in the study usually referred to their individual problem-solving approaches as effective, implying that if new Montessori teachers choose to attempt resolution of difficulties, they will likely meet success. Individual problem-solving approaches solely rely on oneself to determine a solution. Effective individual strategies identified by participants include self-reflection, prioritization, research, and organization. According to the participants, self-reflection allows a new Montessori intern to analyze an incident after it occurs in order to improve the future response to a similar occurrence. In his letter, Ryan shared, “Many of the things that come with running a classroom are trial by fire, and as you do them more, they will become more refined and better with time.” Participants described prioritization as task segmentation in ranked order of attention required to address the matter by deadline or importance. Coleen noted in her letter, “You’ll have to choose your focus; you cannot wear all the ‘hats’ in the classroom.” Depicted by participants, the research includes the active pursuit of pedagogical or methodological guidance from an informational resource, such as articles or the Internet. Miguel, who often consulted Montessori publications to support his classroom need requests, suggested in his letter to “embrace the Montessori philosophy with total dedication; let it guide you.” Communicated by participants, organization encompasses purposeful planning, record-keeping, and maintaining a prepared classroom environment. Brinlee reported in her interview the need for “a lot of organization, a lot of preparation, because it's very easy to become overwhelmed with preparing for everything.” Alternatively, participants characterized setting unreasonable expectations and procrastination as ineffective individual problem-solving strategies. From the participant perspective, unreasonable expectations lead to

perceived defeat when the expectation is not met. During her interview, Kadence stated, “I had in my mind this idea... Unfortunately, that didn't work in my classroom, and I think that expectation really set me back.” As expressed by participants, procrastination also hinders success because problems remain unresolved. Ashe expressed during her interview “wanting just to shut down and not do anything.”

Additionally, interpersonal problem-solving methods depend on interaction with others to brainstorm solutions. Participants always referred to their interpersonal problem-solving approaches as effective, including collaboration, seeking help, and self-advocacy. According to participants, collaboration allows new Montessori interns to analyze a problem with the feedback of others to consider solutions. In her interview, Edna stated,

I think really being able to know that you have that support team... I could have no idea how to do a follow-up, and they'd be like, ‘Oh, you could use this or this.’ There wasn't a negative feeling around not knowing what to do next.”

As described by participants, seeking help involves a determination of the most appropriate person to approach for guidance when the resolution remains unclear. Dalia communicated in her letter, “There were times whenever I would approach someone in the SEL team to help me with the issues with the children, to help me feel like I was able to accomplish some goals by helping these children.” As outlined by participants, self-advocacy includes communication of personal needs, beliefs, and expectations, particularly when otherwise left unmet. Cameren recommended in her letter, “Don't be afraid to speak out about why you don't think it's the right thing to do: to say that you don't agree with it, even if you have to do it. Remind others what Montessori stands for.” Alternatively, participants did not reveal any ineffective interpersonal problem-solving strategies. When new Montessori teachers approach problems with the assistance of others, they

feel boosted over the hurdle in the way.

Self-Care. As new Montessori interns navigate public Montessori practicums, they execute a variety of physical, mental, and spiritual self-care strategies that range from effective to ineffective. According to participants, physical self-care entails nutrition, exercise, and rest. Participants in the study usually referred to their physical self-care approaches as ineffective, implying that new Montessori teachers do not take care of themselves during their practicums. Effective strategies identified by participants include exercise and rest. In her interview, Edna divulged, “I really tried to go on walks and get on a schedule.” However, the majority of self-care references indicated ineffective strategies related to diet, immobility, and exhaustion. Participants coupled ineffective dietary strategies, such as alcohol, coffee, and excessive unhealthy food, with neglected exercise and sleep routines. Cameren, who prioritized healthy habits prior to her practicum, stated in her interview “that all just took a backseat. And I didn't eat like I should. I didn't exercise like I should. I gained lots of weight. I stayed up late doing homework.”

Although new Montessori teachers often ignore their physical needs, they tend to nurture their mental and spiritual well-being. Study participants usually alluded to effective mental and spiritual self-care strategies, including affirmations, mindfulness, and therapy. As described by participants, affirmations refer to personal pep talks to remind oneself of ability, purpose, and hope. Ryan explained in his journal prompt, “I also kept reminding myself that it is a new challenge that will become refined with more experience as I get more hours in the classroom.” Participants explained mindfulness as purposeful concentration on stilling the mind through meditation, prayer, quiet, and solitude. Dalia shared in her interview, “I listen to music, just sit and try to be still and quiet for a minute before my little tornadoes come back in.” Additionally,

some participants mentioned professional therapy as a strategy. During his interview, Miguel reported, “Some of my colleagues that were also going through the program started therapy. They started seeing therapists.” Most participants sought effective mental and spiritual self-care strategies; however, some revealed mental exhaustion and over-extension. Cameren broadened her concern to the national level, stating in her interview, “Montessori always talked about this spiritual development of the teacher as well as the child, and we live in America. That's not a thing. It's just not valued to take care of yourself.”

Emotional Regulation. Emotions rose as new Montessori teachers encountered obstacles throughout the public Montessori practicum. According to participants in the study, emotional regulation strategies combine individual psychological mindsets with cognitive responses that seek calm within turbulence. Participants usually considered their emotional regulation approaches effective even when those strategies seemed to contradict across participants. Personality traits might impact the perspectives of new Montessori teachers as barriers arise but may fall neatly into a singular category to reach effectiveness. Described by participants as focusing on the positive, optimism involves one such example. Beverly acknowledged herself as “a glass-half-full kind of person. I believe everything happens for a reason.” Her predisposition for positivity may increase her emotional regulation ability. However, Dalia felt emotionally regulated without optimism. In fact, in her interview, she acknowledged her realistic personality, stating, “Other people say I'm negative. No, I'm just accepting what reality is. I don't like to sugarcoat things. I want to make it better, not just say it's gonna be better because we're gonna have a good attitude.” These seemingly contradictory personalities were both described as effective coping strategies for the individuals who felt comfortable with themselves. Participants did not report any psychological mindsets as ineffective strategies, which aligns with the

possibility that individuals find comfort in their personality, no matter the trait.

Although a range of personality traits may serve as effective supports, a pattern did arise with regard to cognitive responses and emotional regulation. Effective strategies indicated by participants included grace and calm. Participants explained grace as letting go of perfectionism and acknowledging personal effort. Kadence shared in her interview, “At heart whether we're Montessorians or any other educator, we're borderline perfectionists, but letting go of that and when a lesson happens, it is what it is, and you did the best you could.” Defined by participants, being calm involves the choice and action to maintain composure despite the circumstances. During her interview, Brinlee explained, “You may have a little chaos in the beginning until you calm down. The children feed off of you, so in everything just be calm.” Alternatively, participants identified worry and meltdowns as ineffective strategies. Communicated by participants, worry consists of a preponderance of negative doubts that, when left unaddressed, can overwhelm to the point of an emotional breakdown. According to Ryan in his interview,

That was the biggest thing, just worrying. Am I doing a good job, or am I communicating enough with parents? Are my lessons clear, or am I going too fast? Am I going too slow? So just sitting and ruminating on that.

Social Network. Regarding social networks, new Montessori teachers heavily rely on their personal and professional friendships throughout the public Montessori practicum. Participants always referred to their personal and professional networks as effective coping strategies. Personal relationships account for 26% of the social network references and included friends and family, some of whom possess Montessori training. New Montessori interns rely on their personal relationships for encouragement and venting emotions and concerns. In a letter, Beverly recommended, “Make sure you have people in your life who will listen to you vent, who

will let you cry, who will encourage you.” Additionally, professional relationships account for the remaining 74% of social network mentions and comprise cohort, colleagues, administration, and mentors. Through professional relationships, new Montessori teachers find emotional support through venting and encouragement from others with a personal understanding of the experience. Ashe revealed in her interview, “Being able to have other people to share those experiences with and going through practicum at the same time was also a way to cope and to talk about our frustrations with practicum or an assignment.” Furthermore, professional social networks provide connection. Coleen expressed in her letter, “Remember, you know others who will support you, you are not an island on your own.”

Moving Out – The Journey Beyond

Upon completion of all requirements, new Montessori teachers move out of the public Montessori practicum experience. Although the practicum concludes, the Montessori adventure continues. Mentioned by six participants across all three data sources, the lifelong journey beyond the public Montessori practicum emerged in 60% of interviews, 10% of journal prompts, and 60% of letters. Analysis of the data codes revealed 39 instances of the journey beyond the practicum, organized into the sub-themes of *commitment* and *growth*. Although not referenced by every participant, 60% of participants spontaneously expressed the term “journey” to describe the experience of public Montessori during and beyond the end of the practicum assignment, implying the lifelong process of commitment and growth that continues long past the transition out of the practicum.

Continued Commitment

Commitment to the Montessori philosophy and public Montessori does not cease at the conclusion of the practicum. As mentioned by six participants across two data sources, continued

commitment developed in 20% of interviews and 50% of letters. Codes included 11 instances of continued dedication, including *philosophical* and *career allegiance*. Even though Kadence resigned from her public Montessori teaching position after the completion of her practicum, she remained committed to the value of the philosophy, stating in her interview, “Even throughout the whole experience, I could really see that the Montessori method belongs in public education, and that is what probably would fix the American education system right now.” On the other hand, other participants professed career allegiance to public Montessori. Ashe reported in her letter, “You will LOVE Montessori and will never want to be a traditional teacher.”

Commitment Growth

Likewise, personal growth within the Montessori philosophy continues beyond the practicum experience. Mentioned by six participants across two data sources, continued growth surfaced in 60% of interviews and 10% of journals. Analysis of the data codes demonstrated 19 instances of continued learning, including *instructional*, *managerial*, and *philosophical*.

Although the practicum provides the opportunity to practice and reinforce lesson presentation, new Montessori teachers do not finish as instructional experts. In her interview, Beverly shared, “Now that I’ve been through training, it’s getting easier for me to present those lessons.” Comfort with the philosophy will continue to increase as well. Miguel expressed during his interview, “Before this next school year, which is really my second year in primary, I’m really excited, and I know what I can do; I know what the kids can do, so now it’s just bumping it up another level.” In fact, overall growth will continue to evolve after public Montessori teachers complete their teaching practicums.

Research Question Responses

This transcendental phenomenological study was guided by one central research question

and three sub-questions. The central research question sought to better understand the lived experience of public Montessori for new Montessori teachers completing their practicum in public Montessori schools. The three themes that emerged during data analysis include *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. This section will connect each research question to the relevant themes that emerged during data analysis.

Central Research Question

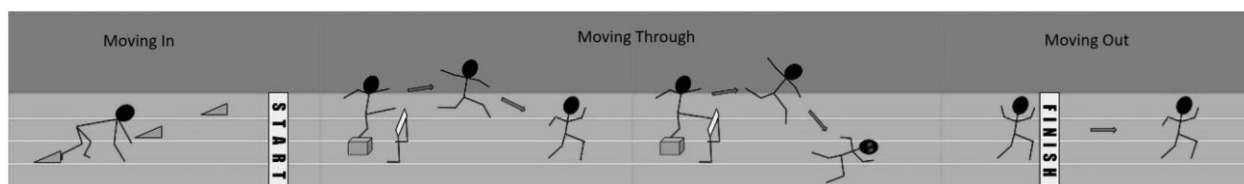
How do novice Montessori teachers describe their experience in public Montessori teaching practicums?

Participants described their experience with the public Montessori practicum as a journey of hurdles and growth toward a finish line that extends beyond the practicum and continues throughout the public Montessori career. All three primary themes, or essences, answered this research question, including *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. Before new Montessori teachers begin the public Montessori practicum, preconceptions of benefits and concerns stagger the individual starting block, depending on the degree and nature of prior positive and negative Montessori knowledge and experience. As new Montessori interns move through the public Montessori practicum, hurdles line the path with barriers to victories and defeats. New Montessori teachers navigate each obstacle by employing a range of supports provided by their training centers, campus, and the Montessori philosophy. Depending on the effectiveness of the support, some boost them closer to the hurdle, and others cause them to stumble. As new Montessori interns prepare to jump over each hurdle, problem-solving, self-care, and social network strategies elongate or shorten the leap, depending on the effectiveness of the coping technique. Even after

crossing the finish line at the end of the practicum, the journey continues. Coleen experienced the passage through preconceptions, hurdles, supports, strategies, victories, defeats, continued commitment, and continued growth during and beyond her public Montessori practicum. She explained, “Montessori is a lifelong journey. Your practicum will end; you will be a different person at the end than you were at the beginning. Every year, you will grow, change, and become better and different.” Figure 1 depicts the lived experience of the public Montessori practicum as conveyed by participants.

Figure 1

Public Montessori Practicum Journey



Sub-Question One

What expectations do novice Montessori teacher interns possess as they transition into public Montessori school practicums?

This sub-question seeks to understand what prior perceptions new Montessori teachers carry into the public Montessori practicum. Theme 1, *Moving In – Preconceptions* emerged during data analysis, supporting sub-question one, along with three sub-themes: *Benefits*, *Concerns*, and *Indefinite*. The new Montessori teachers in this study described previous knowledge and interactions with Montessori and public Montessori and the resulting preconceptions that were established regarding perceived benefits and concerns of the public Montessori practicum. Beverly began per practicum with positive and negative preconceptions about the benefits of Montessori and the concerns of public Montessori. Although she felt in awe

of the student independence emphasized by the philosophy, she also worried about parent receptivity to the Montessori method. In a journal prompt, she summarized her preconceptions, explaining, “I expected it to be very challenging but also very rewarding.” Table 5 reports the themes and sub-themes connected to sub-question one.

Table 5

Themes and Sub-Themes Connected to Sub-Question One

Themes	Sub-Themes
Moving In – Preconceptions	Benefits Concerns Indefinite

Sub-Question Two

What supports exist for novice Montessori teacher interns as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

This sub-question seeks to understand what supports new Montessori teachers have available as they navigate through the public Montessori practicum. Theme 2, *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats* and one sub-theme *Supports*, arose during data analysis, supporting sub-question two. The new Montessori interns in this study described emotional, instructional, philosophical, collaborative, mentorship, and reflective practice supports provided by the training center, campus, and philosophy. Supports varied in effectiveness, functioning as boosts that lowered obstacles, and stumbling blocks that increased barriers. Edna reported helpful colleague collaboration, field consultant mentorship, and philosophical environment support, but she also stumbled over insufficient training center assignments and district material funding support. In her interview, Edna shared,

I feel like in my practicum, I was very supported by the co-teacher and teaching staff that I was around. I think that I could have had a little more support. I was also the only person in my major, which wasn't helpful because I was having discussion with myself.

Table 6 reports the themes and sub-themes connected to sub-question two.

Table 6

Themes and Sub-Themes Connected to Sub-Question Two

Themes	Sub-Themes
Moving Through – Victories and Defeats	Supports

Sub-Question Three

What coping strategies do novice Montessori teacher interns employ as they transition through public Montessori school practicums?

This sub-question seeks to understand what coping strategies new Montessori teachers employ as they navigate hurdles through the public Montessori practicum. Theme 2, *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats* and one sub-theme *Strategies*, transpired during data analysis, supporting sub-question three. The new Montessori teachers in this study described problem-solving, self-care, and emotional regulation strategies attempted individually or in community collaboration, as well as personal and professional social networks. Strategies varied in effectiveness, serving as boosts into victory and stumbling blocks into defeat. Cameren described effective prioritization, affective response, and family and cohort social networks, but she also struggled with ineffective emotional breakdowns, physical self-care, and spiritual well-being. In her interview, Cameren expressed,

Basically, even with the amazing support of my husband, it was a lot of flying by the seat of my pants . . . so I can't say I coped very well. There were many breakdowns over the course of the year.

Table 7 reports the themes and sub-themes connected to sub-question three.

Table 7

Themes and Sub-Themes Connected to Sub-Question Three

Themes	Sub-Themes
Moving Through – Victories and Defeats	Strategies

Summary

Chapter Four reported the results of this phenomenological study to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. The findings identified the shared experience of 10 participants who completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course without any experience as a certified Montessori teacher prior to the start of their practicum. Organized into three themes and eight sub-themes, the results answered one central research question and three sub-questions through three data sources. The themes that emerged from the responses to interviews, journal prompts, and letters included *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. In vivo quotes connected the participants' lived experiences with the themes and research questions. The results indicated that the public Montessori practicum journey begins with preconceptions held prior to starting the practicum. The journey shifts into a cumulative succession of victories and defeats, resulting from employing supports and strategies that either boost or block success over the series of hurdles encountered. After the practicum, the lifelong

journey of commitment and personal growth continues, even if employment at a public Montessori school ceases.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. This chapter provides a critical discussion of the findings, the implications for policy and practice, empirical and theoretical implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with an overall summary of the study.

Discussion

This study explored the lived experiences of new Montessori interns who completed their practicum in public Montessori schools. Analysis of data from interviews, journal prompts, and letters revealed three themes. This section provides a summary and critical discussion of the thematic findings, including the benefits of increased practicum supports and reduced practicum barriers. Additionally, this discussion highlights suggestions for policy and practice and how the theoretical framework and prior empirical research support the findings. The limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research are also addressed.

Summary of Thematic Findings

In this study, three themes emerged from the triangulated data analysis: *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. The first theme describes the preconceptions of benefits and concerns new Montessori teachers carry into the public Montessori practicum, as well as any indefinite preconceptions due to prior unfamiliarity with the Montessori philosophy. New Montessori interns enter the public Montessori practicum with a range of presumptions about the positive value of Montessori accessibility in the public sector and personal impact on student growth. However, negative

worries regarding the ability to balance the assignment workload with the Montessori philosophy and demands of public education also enter the experience. The second theme explains the triumphs and struggles new Montessori teachers face as they move through the public Montessori practicum, and the supports and coping strategies employed along the way. During the practicum, new Montessori interns encounter struggles with instruction, management, relationships, and application of the philosophy. As novice Montessori teachers navigate these obstacles, they rely on institutional collaboration, guidance, and mentor supports, as well as problem-solving, stress management, and social network strategies. The third theme depicts the journey of continued commitment and growth new Montessori teachers experience after completion of the public Montessori practicum.

Critical Discussion

The findings of this study describe the essence of the public Montessori practicum experience as a transitional journey from preconceptions brought into the practicum, victories and defeats encountered through the practicum, and continued growth and commitment beyond the practicum for new Montessori teachers. Progression through the practicum reflects novice Montessori interns' encounters with a sequence of hurdles. As participants reported, positive collaborative supports at the campus, district, and training center levels serve to boost their success and remove hurdles along the way.

Interpersonal Collaboration Boosts Success

Collaborative opportunities create a more positive public Montessori practicum experience. All participants described partnerships in the form of interpersonal problem-solving strategies, training center cohort support, and personal and professional social networks as positive aids. Teamwork, discussion, feedback, advice, and assistance with practicum

assignments and classroom responsibilities effectively support new Montessori interns as they tackle obstacles. This finding corroborates prior research on the benefits of collaboration on instructional practices (Kruse et al., 2022; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021) and community-based problem solving through critical spaces for reflection, brainstorming, discussions about problems of practice, and sharing of resources for new teachers (Flushman et al., 2021; Pandee et al., 2020; Prabjandee, 2019; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021). In fact, the only negative references to collaboration involved limited availability for partnership due to time, distance, or workload. New Montessori teachers value cooperation and desire more opportunities for productive connection. Kadence shared that because she lived in a different city than her training center, she sometimes forgot about the resources available for collaboration and would have preferred more frequent communication. She also joked about her desire to store one of her instructors in her pocket for perpetual proximity and assistance throughout the year.

Whether offered as an institutional support or coping strategy, collaborative communication benefits the public Montessori practicum experience. However, the responsibility to facilitate collaboration does not rely solely upon the campus or training center for successful implementation. Veteran teachers also play an essential role on campus and should actively seek opportunities to partner with new Montessori teachers. This finding corroborates the previous research that Montessori interns depend on colleagues for support, coaching, and group discussion (Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020). Dalia recognized her responsibility beyond the completion of her practicum to contribute to the collaborative culture on her campus by supporting the new teachers who joined her team. New Montessori teachers benefit from campuses and Montessori training centers that prioritize opportunities for institutional collaboration throughout the public Montessori practicum.

Philosophical Collaboration Removes Obstacles

District struggles create hurdles for new Montessori interns during the public Montessori practicum. According to participants, public school demands conflict with the Montessori philosophy when the campus and district administration possess misunderstanding, ignorance, or misinterpretation of the guiding principles. This finding corroborates prior research that district mandates conflict with the Montessori pedagogy and campus administrators create additional obstacles for Montessori teachers due to prioritization of district requirements above the philosophical elements of the Montessori method (Gerker, 2023). Inadequate staffing decisions, insufficient instructional guidance, and ineffective coaching and appraisal feedback restrict assistance and add barriers under leadership without Montessori knowledge. Even well-intended institutional supports can fall short without clear alignment with the underlying foundation of Montessori elements. Cameren's district prioritized funding for Montessori materials but still refused other requested supports, which left her feeling "very dismissed, like a square peg in a round hole." Alternatively, Montessori-trained administration can spread encouraging insights and guidance that enable success for new Montessori teachers attempting to navigate the public Montessori practicum. Miguel acknowledged, "Having positive and Montessori-educated campus leadership helps create a conducive environment for learning and growth." Therefore, philosophical collaboration removes one of the most common obstacles of the public Montessori practicum. New Montessori teachers benefit from campus and district administration who create Montessori *holes* that fit Montessori *pegs*.

State Standard Understanding Reduces Barriers

Collaboration between the novice Montessori intern, district, and training center stretches three ways. Not only does campus and district collaboration with the Montessori philosophy

matter to the public Montessori practicum experience, but the Montessori training center partnership with the public sector carries significance as well. The majority of participants mentioned conflicts between Montessori and state standards. Although the Montessori philosophy may be the primary instructional focus for public Montessori teachers, another integral component of any public-school teaching position entails the obligation to build student mastery of state standards. This finding corroborates the previous research that public Montessori schools must simultaneously comply with the Montessori curriculum and the state standards (Culclasure et al., 2019; D’Cruz, 2022). The Montessori lesson objectives do not address every state standard. Therefore, responsibility for the alignment of state standards with the Montessori materials often rests upon Montessori teachers because Montessori training centers do not provide a pre-correlated resource. Struggling with the conflict of that reality, Ryan highlighted, “certain standards aren't covered in the Montessori curriculum, so what's missing? How do I fill these gaps? What can I supplement?” Therefore, Montessori training centers and districts that prioritize a two-way bridge between the Montessori philosophy and the state standards remove hurdles for new public Montessori interns. Yet, Montessori training center instructors do not necessarily possess experience in the public education sector nor knowledge of the state standards. This finding extends the previous research regarding the lack of support public Montessori teachers report from the district perspective to also include implications for increased assistance from Montessori training center personnel (Gerker, 2023). Recalling a conversation she had with one of her instructors, Coleen suggested, “I need you to read the state standards to understand what I need from you to be supportive.” Novice Montessori teachers benefit from Montessori training centers that seek to understand the state standards to which public school teachers adhere.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The implications for policy and practice are outlined in this section. In terms of policies, states and districts should address curriculum and professional development to benefit new Montessori teachers. Additionally, practices for districts, campuses, and training centers should aim to increase understanding of the Montessori philosophy and public school standards.

Implications for Policy

As the findings of this study illuminate, new Montessori teachers are inundated with instructional, philosophical, relational, and managerial hurdles during the public Montessori practicum. Policies should seek to reduce these hurdles. Half of the participants mentioned the demands of juggling and aligning the Montessori program with traditional curriculums prescribed by their districts. However, one district in Ohio removed this barrier by authorizing Montessori as a board-approved curriculum (White, 2023). No longer must public Montessori teachers in Cincinnati Public Schools supplement other sanctioned curricula with Montessori, but they are allowed to supplant traditional programs without philosophical misalignment concerns. Other districts should consider the implementation of similar curriculum adoption policies, and state-wide initiatives could be pursued to allow new Montessori teachers to prioritize high-fidelity instructional quality rather than contortion of the Montessori curriculum. Montessori curriculum adoption could build a bridge between previously remote destinations and prove the district's commitment to valuing public Montessori as a viable and desirable priority.

Additionally, districts should reconsider professional development programming to address the unique needs of public Montessori teachers, including new public Montessori interns. Two participants of this study expressed discontentment with required district professional development sessions irrelevant to Montessori teachers. Often, districts prescribe training catered

to the general educator audience (Gerker, 2023). However, effective professional development may be determined less by the components or design of the training and more by the outcomes of actual classroom application across diverse contexts (Patfield et al., 2023). Teachers should leave the professional development understanding how the targeted objectives will work for them in their instruction within their classroom. For Montessori teachers be required to attend non-Montessori professional development, this application may not be fully considered or appropriate. Districts should implement professional development policies that deliver Montessori-based training from experienced Montessori trainers in order to enhance the transfer and application of the learning objectives to the Montessori classroom. These policies may enhance capacity growth for new Montessori interns during the public Montessori practicum by removing unnecessary hurdles.

Implications for Practice

While the findings indicate that new Montessori interns feel misunderstood and unsupported by campus and district administration not trained in the Montessori philosophy or Montessori training center personnel not aware of state standards, it may be possible to increase philosophical and instructional capacity for both entities. Previous research has recommended to focus on expanding the pedagogical capacity of district personnel and the advocacy practices of Montessori training centers (Gerker, 2023). The findings of this study corroborate and extend those suggestions. For school and district administration without sufficient knowledge of the Montessori philosophy, trained campus staff and Montessori training centers could collaborate to introduce and expand philosophical awareness. Campuses and districts can request free newsletters targeted to public Montessori stakeholders from MontessoriPublic. In addition, campuses can routinely invite district administrators to observe successful veteran Montessori

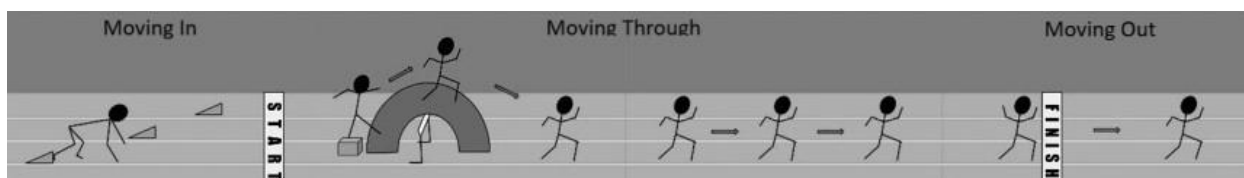
teachers with provided Montessori rubrics, such as the Essential Elements Implementation Rubric (NCMPS, 2023) and the Montessori Coaching Tool (Murray, Davis, et al., 2021) to increase understanding of high-fidelity Montessori implementation. Training centers can partner with campuses and districts to regularly provide Montessori information resources to public Montessori administrators or to create brochures that help translate the Montessori philosophy into educational terms commonly communicated in the public sector.

Regarding training center instructors and field consultants without adequate awareness of the state standards, campuses and districts could partner to extend knowledge. State standard mastery is a required expectation for Montessori programs in the public school system (Culclasure et al., 2019; D’Cruz, 2022). Similar to all teacher education institutions, Montessori training centers should provide new teachers with a firm foundation to transfer pedagogical knowledge into effective classroom application (Alamoudi, 2021; Barney & Beddoes, 2022; Fuentes-Abeledo et al., 2020; Makina, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019; Nel et al., 2021; Saiz-Linares & Susinos-Rada, 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). Campuses can share the state standards with training centers before registering teachers for the course, and training centers can require instructors and field consultants to review the standards before supporting public Montessori teachers. Districts can provide curriculum pacing guides to enlighten training centers on the required scope and sequence of instruction. Campuses can also invite field consultants to observe successful veteran Montessori teachers with provided district appraisal rubrics to increase understanding of instructional expectations of public-school teachers. These practices might promote awareness, discussion, and consideration of hurdles the districts and training centers can remove or changes to the quantity and quality of aligned support allotted to new Montessori teachers to increase victories and eliminate defeats throughout the public Montessori

practicum. An emphasis should be placed on aligned collaborative supports from Montessori-trained mentors certified in the public-school sector because novice teachers report positive experiences with mentors whose goals align (La Paro et al., 2020). Figure 2 depicts the potential lived experience of the public Montessori practicum with support bridges added and practicum hurdles removed as proposed by the implications for practice.

Figure 2

Implications for Public Montessori Practicum Journey Practices



Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This study examined the lived experience of the public Montessori practicum through the lens of the transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al. 1989) and previous research on teaching practicums and novice interns. The findings from this study corroborate the transition theory and contribute to the literature on public Montessori teaching practicums through confirmation, divergence, and extension. This section addresses the study's empirical and theoretical implications.

Empirical Implications

Contributing to the literature on public Montessori internships, this study confirmed, diverged, and extended previous research. Most research on Montessori internships excludes the public practicum experience, and the literature on novice public education teachers omits Montessori. Specifically, this study added to the empirical understanding of how hurdles, supports, and strategies impact the experience of the public Montessori practicum for new Montessori teachers.

Related to practicum hurdles, the findings confirm, diverge, and extend the literature. As conveyed by the sub-theme *Hurdles* under Theme 2 *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, new Montessori interns experienced situational obstacles with regard to the practicum and self. Public Montessori practicum barriers included time management, workload, classroom management, and technological difficulties (Alamoudi, 2021; Bar-Tal et al., 2020; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019; Tennant et al., 2019; Virtanen & Laine, 2021). Lack of cooperative support personnel also arose (Darwin & Barahona, 2019; Masoumpanah et al., 2019). Misalignment between the Montessori and state curriculum standards added greater difficulty to instructional capacity (Culclasure et al., 2019; D’Cruz, 2022). As an extension of the literature, novice Montessori teachers reported a communication hurdle with untrained administration attributable to a lack of common language similarly identified in previous research in relation to special education and general education Montessori teachers (AuCoin & Berger, 2021).

Additionally, public Montessori interns described personal obstructions relevant to emotions and self-capacity that mostly confirm the empirical literature. Conflicts manifested when preconceptions failed to align with the reality of the practicum experience (Christensen, 2019). Limited instructional, managerial, and relational capabilities also formed impediments. Inadequate pedagogical content knowledge restricted Montessori lesson presentation (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Fletcher et al., 2021; Goh, 2019; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Silva et al., 2021; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022; Yin, 2019). New Montessori teachers labored to apply the Montessori theory to classroom application (Cobb, 2022; Fischetti et al., 2022; Goh, 2019; Yin, 2019). Classroom management approaches lacked expertise in establishing a conducive environment responsive to individual student needs (Al Seyabi, 2020; Çakmak et al., 2019; Keller-Schneider et al., 2020; Khalid & Husnin, 2019;

Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Shin, 2021; Tennant et al., 2019). Conflicts with parental expectations and values also presented due to unfamiliarity with the Montessori philosophy (Gisewhite et al., 2021). However, in contrast with previous research, new Montessori interns did not describe difficulties with establishing positive relationships with colleagues (Fletcher et al., 2021; Shanks et al., 2020; Shin, 2021; Soleas & Code, 2020).

With regard to support, the findings mostly corroborate the literature. As reflected by the sub-theme *Supports* under Theme 2 *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, new Montessori interns experienced a range of beneficial and futile institutional supports. Helpful public Montessori practicum supports included cohort collaboration with classmates who shared similar training experiences (Jantarach & Soontornwipast, 2018) and colleague partnership with peers who shared similar campus experiences (Kruse et al., 2022; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021). Effective field consultant mentors guided, coached, modeled, and encouraged novice public Montessori teachers (Aman, 2019; Aydın & Ok, 2020; Becker et al., 2019; Ellis et al., 2020; Gray et al., 2019; Kearney, 2021; Kruse et al., 2022; Maysa de Souza et al., 2021; Shanks et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Ineffective field consultants, without adequate understanding of the state standards for public schools, discouraged (Garte & Kronen, 2020; Gray et al., 2019; La Paro et al., 2020; Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). However, in deviation from previous research, new Montessori teachers indicated colleagues and cohort members, rather than campus administration, as the most frequently reported effective support systems (Siswanto & Kuswandono, 2020).

In reference to strategies, the findings support the literature. As conveyed by the sub-theme *Strategies* under Theme 2 *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, new Montessori interns employed an array of effective and ineffective coping strategies for problem-solving,

stress management, and social networks. Problem-solving strategies included individual, community, and technological approaches. New public Montessori teachers sometimes employed formal and informal personal reflection and response (Çakmak et al., 2019; Frazier et al., 2019). Other times, novice public Montessori interns reflected, brainstormed, collaborated, or shared resources in the community (Flushman et al., 2021; Pandee et al., 2020; Prabjandee, 2019; Superfine & Pitvorec, 2021). The Internet also served as a resource for seeking solutions, such as viewing Montessori lesson presentation videos (Khalid & Husnin, 2019). Stress management techniques involved emotional self-regulation and affirmations (La Paro et al., 2020; Pandee et al., 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022). Personal and professional social networks also offered coping opportunities for venting and encouragement (Çakmak et al., 2019; Newburgh, 2019; Prabjandee, 2019; Stenberg & Maaranen, 2020; Westerlund & Eliasson, 2022; Yu, 2019). This study confirms and extends prior teacher preparation research as it applies to new public Montessori educators.

Theoretical Implications

Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1981, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989) provided the theoretical framework for this study. The findings directly support the transition theory regarding the process and characteristics of adaptation as applied to the phenomenon of the public Montessori practicum. In alignment with the transition theory, novice Montessori interns altered their personal assumptions about self and the Montessori philosophy during the move into, through, and out of the public Montessori practicum (Schlossberg, 1981). Additionally, adaptation to the public Montessori practicum involved theoretical factors of the *situation*, *self*, *supports*, and *strategies* (Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The Montessori practicum *situation* entailed perceptions about personal control and

choice over the transition, as well as the degree of positive or negative view of the transition. Theme 1 *Moving In – Preconceptions* highlighted the range of presumed benefits and concerns new Montessori teachers carried with them into the public Montessori practicum. Aspects of the public Montessori intern *self* included psychological attributes of outlook, commitment, and values. Theme 1 *Moving In – Preconceptions* addressed the educational commitment and philosophical values novice Montessori interns brought into the public Montessori practicum, and Theme 3 *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond* reported the transformed and continued philosophical commitment new Montessori teachers sustained out of the public Montessori practicum. Institutional *supports* during the public Montessori practicum, as outlined in Theme 2 *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, encompassed career and community systems provided through the campus, district, and training center. Public Montessori practicum *strategies*, also detailed in Theme 2 *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, comprised of institutional and personal problem-solving and stress management coping strategies employed individually or through community assistance. This study corroborates the application of the transition theory to the new Montessori teacher practicum experience.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations occurred within this study. Limitations acknowledge the weaknesses within the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Delimitations involve design decisions that establish boundaries for the study scope. This section identifies the main limitations and delimitations for this study.

Limitations

This study contained four methodological limitations related to participant gender, grade level, geographical location, and practicum length. Participants included eight females and only

two males, so the data reflect a higher representation of the female perspective. Also, all participants taught in elementary school, mostly at the early childhood level. Only one participant taught in upper elementary, and no participants taught at the secondary level. The inclusion of teachers of higher grade levels may have produced different results. In addition, participants taught in four different states, half in Texas. Therefore, the data more heavily represented the perspective of Texas teachers rather than the other three states and may not represent experiences in the remaining 46 states. A final limitation involved practicum extensions that lengthened the amount of time some participants spent in the practicum. Struggles to complete practicum requirements and COVID interruptions accounted for practicum extensions for two participants. One began her practicum in 2019 and another started in 2020, so the additional time within the practicum may have impacted their perspectives. Due to the limited number of participants who met the qualification criteria for this study, recruitment did not meet representation targets. However, the study findings still hold value by providing new insight into the public Montessori practicum experience not previously available.

Delimitations

Two main delimitations occurred in this study, including research design and participant criteria. Although hermeneutical phenomenology allows the researcher to frame interpretation of the data based on personal experience with the phenomenon, transcendental phenomenology requires the researched to describe the data devoid of any personal presupposition (Moustakas, 1994). I chose to bracket my previous public Montessori teaching involvement with transcendental phenomenology in order to remove any personal assumptions that might block my understanding of the complete participant experience. Additionally, I decided to restrict participant criteria to new Montessori teachers without previous experience as a certified

Montessori teacher. This constraint allowed the study to specifically target new Montessori interns transitioning into the role of public Montessori teacher.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings, limitations, and delimitations of this study, recommendations for future research include changes to topic, design, and populations. Participants in this study varied in terms of previous Montessori experience. A quantitative causal-comparative design could identify the impact of prior experience on new teachers' perceived practicum success, comparing new Montessori interns with only traditional public school teaching experience to new public school interns with only private Montessori teaching experience. Similarly, participants in this study varied in terms of practicum length. A quantitative causal-comparative design could seek the impact of practicum length on new Montessori teachers' perceived public practicum success, comparing Montessori interns who completed the practicum on time with Montessori interns who required a practicum extension. Additionally, findings in this study revealed the defeats faced due to hurdles created by district personnel lacking Montessori training or Montessori training center staff lacking public school training. A case study could examine the factors unique to districts with structured Montessori support, such as curriculum approval, Montessori district coaches and support personnel, and Montessori-trained district and campus administration. Likewise, a case study could investigate the elements unique to Montessori training centers with structured public-school support, such as standards-based curriculum supplements and certified public school instructors and field consultants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe novice Montessori teachers' practicum experiences in public Montessori schools in the United States. Schlossberg's transition

theory (1981) guided the literature review, research questions, data analysis, and findings. Through a qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design (Moustakas, 1994), this study explored a description of the shared experience of the public Montessori practicum for 10 new Montessori teachers with no prior experience as a certified Montessori teacher. Data collection included journal prompts, individual interviews, and letter-writing.

Three themes and eight sub-themes emerged from triangulated data analysis. The essences of the public Montessori practicum experience included *Moving In – Preconceptions*, *Moving Through – Victories and Defeats*, and *Moving Out – The Journey Beyond*. Participants reported the experience as a lifelong journey from prior preconceptions carried into the practicum, through victories and defeats during the practicum faced with the assistance or blockage of supports and strategies, and growth and commitment extending beyond the conclusion of public Montessori practicum. Implications for policy and practice include bridges over obstacles and reduction of hurdles through strategic and mutual collaboration between the Montessori and public-school sectors.

Limitations of this study related to participant gender, grade level, geographical location, and practicum length. Suggestions for future research include quantitative causal-comparative designs to compare participant populations and case studies to investigate the effectiveness of recommended policies and practices. The public Montessori practicum may mark the transition into a lifelong journey of rewarding and satisfying legacy made all the more feasible by bridging the gap between the Montessori and public sectors, and the research demonstrates the possibilities that await the adventure.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 2, 2023

Krystal Perkins
Meredith Park

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Dear Krystal Perkins, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Formal Site Permission Request 1

November 28, 2022

[REDACTED]
Site Administrator
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns, and the purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' public Montessori practicum experiences and the impact of the experiences on their retention in public Montessori schools in Texas.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your organization who have completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a journal prompt, participate in an individual interview, and write a letter. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C

Formal Site Permission Request 2

April 17, 2023

Interim Director of Montessori Education
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, and the purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' public Montessori practicum experiences and the impact of the experiences on their retention in public Montessori schools in the United States.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your organization who have completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a journal prompt, participate in an individual interview, and write a letter. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Formal Site Permission Request 3

April 21, 2023

[REDACTED]
Board Member and Conference Chair

[REDACTED]
Teaching Professor

Dear [REDACTED],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, and the purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' public Montessori practicum experiences and the impact of the experiences on their retention in public Montessori schools in the United States.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your organization who have completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a journal prompt, participate in an individual interview, and write a letter. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix E

Formal Site Permission Request 4

June 6, 2023

[REDACTED]
Site Administrator
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns, and the purpose of my research is to describe novice teachers' public Montessori practicum experiences and the impact of the experiences on their retention in public Montessori schools in the United States.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your organization who have completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete a journal prompt, participate in an individual interview, and write a letter. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to [REDACTED]. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix F

Site Permission Letter 1

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
[REDACTED]

Dear Krystal Perkins:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our members and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I grant permission for Krystal Perkins to contact organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in her research study.

I will not provide potential participant information to Krystal Perkins, but I agree to provide her study information to organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months on her behalf.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Site Administrator
[REDACTED]

Appendix G

Site Permission Letter 2

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Dear Krystal Perkins:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our members and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I grant permission for Krystal Perkins to contact organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in her research study.

I will not provide potential participant information to Krystal Perkins, but I agree to provide her study information to organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months on her behalf.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]
Interim Director of Montessori Education
[Redacted Title]

Appendix H

Site Permission Letter 3

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University
[REDACTED]

Dear Krystal Perkins:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our members and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I grant permission for Krystal Perkins to contact organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in her research study.

I will not provide potential participant information to Krystal Perkins, but I agree to provide her study information to organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months on her behalf.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Teaching Professor
[REDACTED]

Appendix I

Site Permission Letter 4

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Dear Krystal Perkins:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Discovering Public Montessori: A Phenomenological Study of the Transition Experiences of Public Montessori Teacher Interns*, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our members and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

I grant permission for Krystal Perkins to contact organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months to invite them to participate in her research study.

I will not provide potential participant information to Krystal Perkins, but I agree to provide her study information to organization members who completed or exited an accredited Montessori teacher education center and participated in a self-directed practicum as a full-time teacher in a public Montessori school within the past twelve months on her behalf.

Sincerely,


Site Administrator

Appendix J

IRB Modified Study Approval Letter 1

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 5, 2023

Krystal Perkins
Meredith Park

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Dear Krystal Perkins, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to expand your participant criteria to include individuals anywhere in the United States and contact potential participants by email has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix K

IRB Modified Study Approval Letter 2

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 26, 2023

Krystal Perkins
Meredith Park

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Dear Krystal Perkins, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to include participants who completed a Montessori teaching practicum within the past 18 months instead of 12 months, no longer require participants to have completed a practicum that was full-time and self-directed, and to compensate participants by entering them into a sweepstakes for a \$100 Visa gift card has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix L

IRB Modified Study Approval Letter 3

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 19, 2023

Krystal Perkins
Meredith Park

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Dear Krystal Perkins, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to make the following changes to your study has been approved:

1. Revise your participant criteria to focus on individuals who "completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course and may not have any experience teaching Montessori prior to the start of [their] practicum,"
2. Limit screening to in-person communication and an online screening survey, and
3. Provide the option for participants to sign the consent form electronically.

Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. **For a PDF of your modification letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Modification under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. If your modification required you to submit revised documents, they can be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix M

Recruitment Email

Dear Teacher:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the public practicum experiences of new Montessori teachers in the United States, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To participate, you must have completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course and may not have any experience teaching Montessori prior to the start of your practicum. Participants will answer journal prompts (10-15 minutes), be virtually interviewed and video-recorded (20-30 mins), and write a letter (10-15 minutes). Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please contact me at [REDACTED] or click the following link: [REDACTED]

A consent document will be emailed to you after your eligibility has been confirmed, and you will need to sign and return it to me. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me. Once I receive your signed consent form, I will send you the journal prompts and schedule an interview with you. All participants will be entered into a sweepstakes for a Visa Gift Card valued at \$100. The drawing will be conducted by the researcher within two weeks of the conclusion of data collection. The remaining participants will receive a Visa gift card valued at \$20. The chance of winning the \$100 prize is approximately 1 in 10. Each participant will be notified immediately by email in order to arrange delivery of the prize. Thank you for your interest in contributing to Montessori research!

Sincerely,

Krystal Perkins
Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]

Appendix N

Facebook Recruitment Post


ATTENTION PUBLIC MONTESSORI EDUCATORS:

Did you complete your Montessori practicum in a public school?

Was your Montessori practicum your first experience teaching Montessori?

Did you complete your Montessori practicum within the past 18 months?

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctor of education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to describe the public practicum experiences of new Montessori teachers in the United States. To participate, you must have completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course and must not have any experience teaching Montessori prior to the start of your practicum.

Participants will answer journal prompts (10-15 minutes), be virtually interviewed and video-recorded (20-30 minutes), and write a letter (10-15 minutes). Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please direct message me for more information or click the following link: 

A consent document will be emailed to you after your eligibility has been confirmed, and you will need to sign and return it to me. Once I receive your signed consent form, I will send you the journal prompts and schedule an interview with you. All participants will be entered into a sweepstakes for a Visa Gift Card valued at \$100. The drawing will be conducted by the researcher within two weeks of the conclusion of data collection. The remaining participants will receive a Visa gift card valued at \$20. The chance of winning the \$100 prize is approximately 1 in 10. Each participant will be notified immediately by email in order to arrange delivery of the prize. Thank you for your interest in contributing to Montessori research!

Appendix O

IRB Modified Study Approval Letter 4

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 7, 2023

Krystal Perkins
Meredith Park

Re: Modification - IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Dear Krystal Perkins, Meredith Park,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY22-23-805 DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request to make changes to your planned participant compensation has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised study documents for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

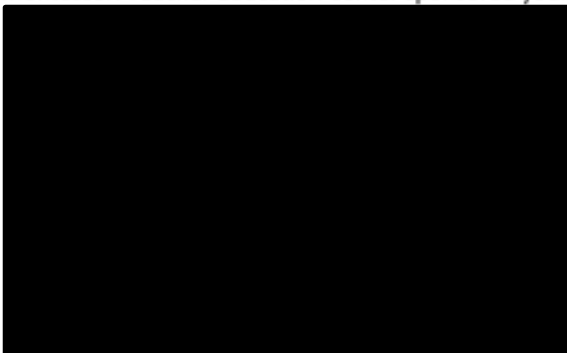
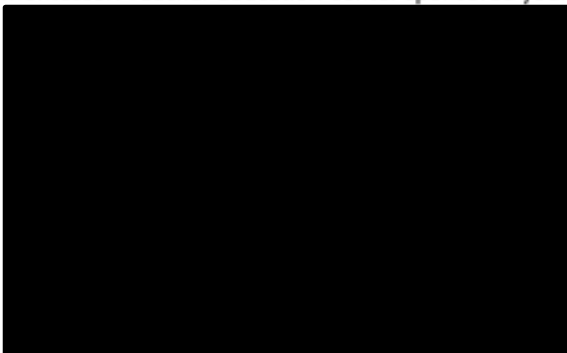
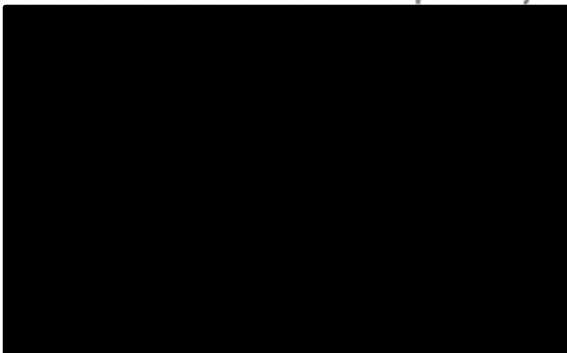
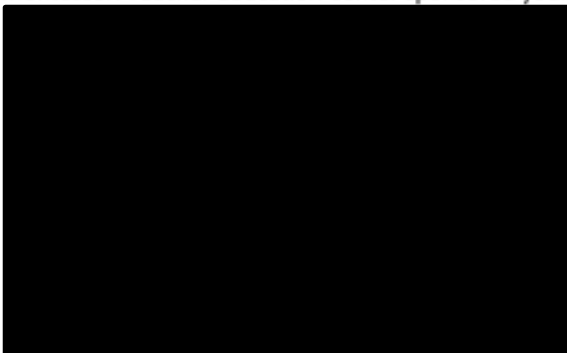
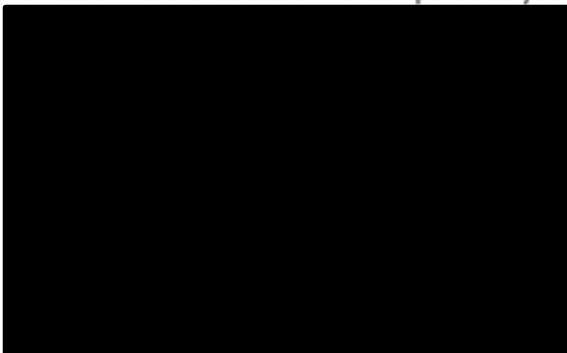
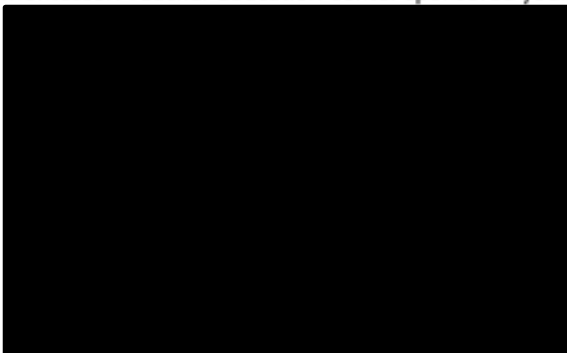
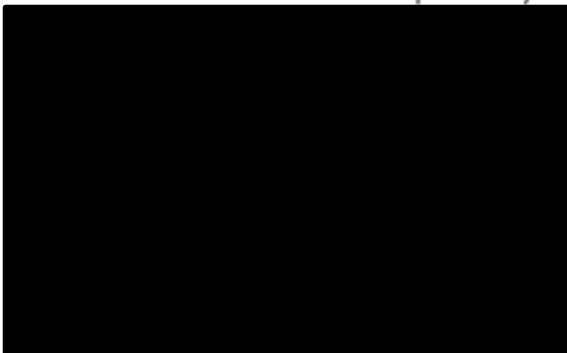
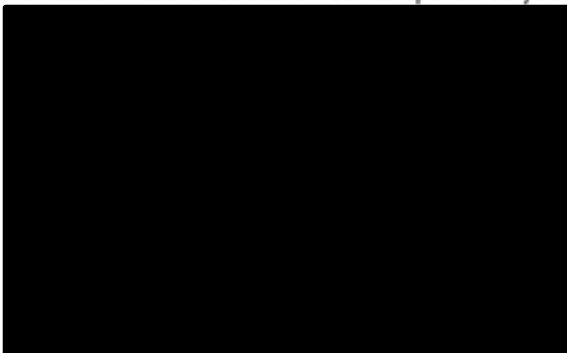
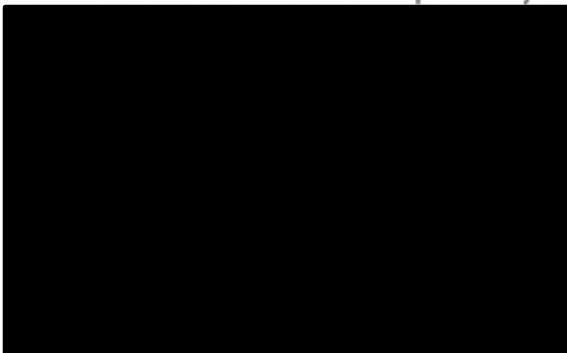
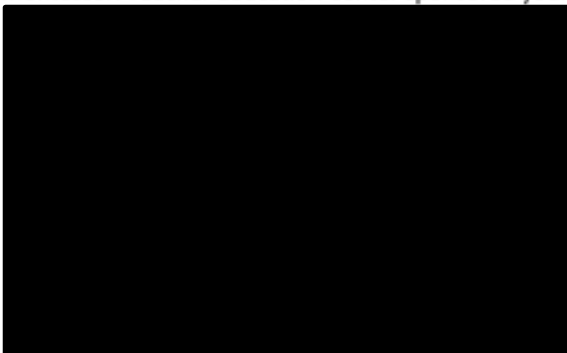
We wish you well as you continue with your research.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix P

Original Participant Screener

1. How many years have you taught in public school?
 - a. 0-2
 - b. More than 2
2. When did you complete your Montessori teaching practicum?
 - a. I have not yet completed my practicum
 - b. Within the past year
 - c. More than 1 year ago
3. Where was your Montessori teaching practicum site?
 - a. Private Montessori school
 - b. Public Montessori school
4. Which Montessori Teacher Education Center sponsored your teaching practicum?
 - a. 
 - b. 
 - c. 
 - d. 
 - e. 
 - f. 
 - g. 
 - h. 
 - i. 
 - j. 
 - k. Other- Please list full teacher education center name
5. Which type of practicum did you complete?
 - a. Supervised- under daily supervision of a certified Montessori teacher
 - b. Self-directed- with full classroom responsibility without daily guidance under a certified Montessori teacher
6. Were you under an employment contract with a public school district?
 - a. Yes- full-time position
 - b. Yes- part-time position
 - c. No- not a contract position
7. Are you currently certified to teach in public schools by the State Board of education?
 - a. Yes- standard certificate
 - b. Yes- initial certificate
 - c. No- but currently enrolled in Alternative Certification Program
 - d. No- and not currently pursuing certification
8. Are you currently certified to teach Montessori?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No- but currently enrolled in a Montessori teacher education program
 - c. No- and not currently pursuing certification

Appendix Q

Modified Participant Screener

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email address?
3. Which plane of development did you teach?
4. Which grade level did you teach?
5. When did you complete your Montessori teaching practicum?
 - a. I have not yet completed my practicum
 - b. Within the past 18 months
 - c. More than 18 months ago
6. What is the name of the campus that served as your Montessori practicum site?
7. What is the name of the principal of your Montessori practicum site?
8. What is the name of the Montessori Teacher Education Center that sponsored your teaching practicum?
9. What is the name of your Montessori training center field consultant?

Appendix R

Original Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Principal Investigator: Krystal Michelle Perkins, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a first or second-year teacher who completed a full-time, self-directed public Montessori practicum internship within the past 12 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the public Montessori practicum experiences of new teachers in Texas.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Respond to journal prompts that will take no more than 30 minutes.
2. Participate in an online, video-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
3. Write a letter that will take no more than 30 minutes.
4. Review your interview transcript to check for accuracy. This will take no more than 30 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased public knowledge on the topic of public Montessori teacher preparation and improvements to the teaching practicum experience, supports, and new teacher retention.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then will be deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as an assistant principal in [REDACTED]. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, this disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Public Montessori Educators of Texas. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Krystal Michelle Perkins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

██████████ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Meredith Park, at ██████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix S

Modified Participant Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: DISCOVERING PUBLIC MONTESSORI: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC MONTESSORI TEACHER INTERNS

Principal Investigator: Krystal Michelle Perkins, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must have completed a public Montessori practicum internship within the past 18 months while enrolled in a Montessori teacher education course and may not have any experience teaching Montessori prior to the start of your practicum. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the public practicum experiences of new Montessori teachers in the United States.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Respond to journal prompts that will take no more than 15 minutes.
2. Participate in an online, video-recorded interview that will take no more than 30 minutes.
3. Write a letter that will take no more than 15 minutes.
4. Review your interview transcript to check for accuracy. This will take no more than 10 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include increased public knowledge on the topic of public Montessori teacher preparation and improvements to the teaching practicum experience, supports, and new teacher retention.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then will be deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

All participants will be entered into a sweepstakes for a Visa Gift Card valued at \$100. The drawing will be conducted by the researcher within two weeks of the conclusion of data collection. The remaining participants will receive a Visa gift card valued at \$20. The chance of winning the \$100 prize is approximately 1 in 10. Each participant will be notified immediately by email in order to arrange delivery of the prize.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as an assistant principal in [REDACTED]. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, this disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your organization. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Krystal Michelle Perkins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

██████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Meredith Park, at ██████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date