

Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the era of School Choice

Readers Guide

Chapter 1

1. How does the author's background as a Montessori insider/outsider impact the design of the project? What steps did she take to learn about the Montessori community?
2. What does Debs argue is often missing in research that looks at how parents choose schools for their children?

Chapter 2

3. How is Maria Montessori's founding of the first Casa dei Bambini in San Lorenzo important for how the Montessori movement developed? To what extent did Maria Montessori prioritize access for poor children throughout her life?
4. What kinds of Montessori training and classroom practices have impacted the access to Black, Latinx and Indigenous students and educators? From the book & from your own knowledge, how are these practices changing? How might they change further?
5. How has the emphasis on fidelity been helpful to the Montessori movement? What have been ways that it has been harmful?

Chapter 3

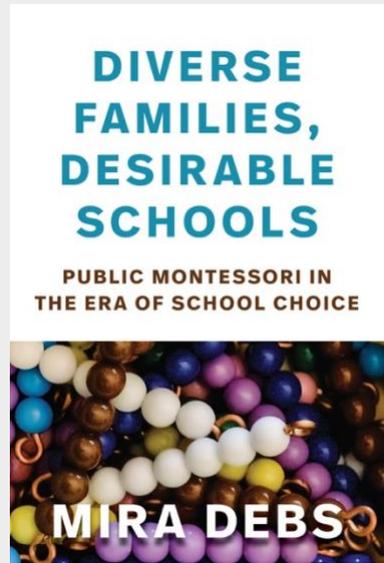
6. In Ch 3, Debs introduces the idea of Montessori hidden figures, Black, Latinx and Indigenous leaders who have been "hidden in plain sight." Pick one to discuss, and write about why their story resonated with you.
7. At various points, key Montessori figures like Nancy McCormick Rambusch and David Kahn both criticized public Montessori schools. Why has it been so challenging to implement Montessori in the public sector?
8. As City Garden Montessori founder Christie Huck explains, public schools that are desirable often become victims of their own success. Explain what she means by this, and discuss whether you have seen these patterns in your own communities.
9. Debs argues in chapter 3 that the Montessori movement has both stayed consistent *and changed* as it has been embraced by different groups of parents and educators. What are some of the cases she discusses, and what do you make of this argument?

Chapter 4

10. How does the context of school choice in Hartford impact the families who choose Birch and Vine schools?
11. Debs refers to a group of parents as true believers. What do they have in common? How does this match with your own educational experience?
12. If you have children, what factors were important to you as you considered schools? How important was a particular pedagogy?

Chapter 5

13. Who are the parents in Debs' study who are most likely to be conflicted or satisfied? Why does Debs argue that some parents in the context of Hartford school choice have this experience?



14. Debs argues that some language in communicating about Montessori assumes educational privilege. What are educator practices in talking about Montessori that may that may exclude certain families?
15. Gardening, homework and school nutrition emerged as contested spaces among parents and educators. Why was this the case? Have you observed any contested practices at your school?

Chapter 6

16. What happens in the parent communities at Birch and Vine during the time that Debs observes them? Who leads them and how does this change over time? What priorities do they choose?
17. Have you observed any similar patterns of conflicting parent priorities or conflicting ways of organizing at a school you have been connected to?
18. Extension: Listen to Episode 1 of the New York Times podcast Nice White Parents. What are similarities that you observe between the New York City school in the podcast and Birch and Vine?

Chapter 7

19. According to Debs what is the responsibility of public schools? What is the responsibility of public Montessori schools?
20. Can school choice create more equitable integrated schools? If so, how?
21. Go back to the introduction: What are the central research questions of the book? Can you answer them now that you have read the book?

Methodological appendix

...where an educational researcher reflects on their research practice, how they collected data and the challenges they faced along the way.

22. What were some of the decisions that Debs faced as she conducted research? What would you have done differently?

After reading

23. What did you learn from reading this book? How does it make you think differently about the educational spaces you are a part of?
24. What did you like about this book? What criticisms do you have?
25. How does this book make you reflect on your own educational goals and practices?