The Public Montessori Elementary Teacher Research Project: Preliminary Findings

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Introduction

Interpretations of the Montessori method differ considerably in the US where there are numerous training organizations and no legal specifications for what constitutes Montessori education. While AMI and AMS have issued standards based on authentic Montessori principles, most programs are not accredited. Consequently, what is consistently described as the Montessori method in the literature is inconsistently found in actual Montessori classrooms.

Moreover, with the expansion of public charter schools in the US, more communities are considering Montessori education as a viable alternative to more traditional approaches. Today there are more than 325 public elementary Montessori programs. It is unclear, however, to what extent these programs adhere to authentic Montessori practices or what types of modifications are most common.

The purpose of this study was to survey head teachers at public Montessori elementary schools in the US to investigate their teaching practices, challenges and beliefs as they relate to traditional Montessori methods.

Research Questions

- 1. To what extent are public Montessori elementary teachers intentionally modifying the method?
- 2. If changes are being made, what practices are being modified and to what extent are these changes due to situational factors?
- 3. Do teachers in public Montessori elementary programs value practices typically associated with Montessori education?

Method

445 head teachers in public Montessori elementary schools in the US

- Mostly female (93%), Caucasian (90%), and statecredentialed (94%)
- Most held Montessori certificates (75%), some (13%) were in Montessori training
- Most (77%) were between 31 and 60 years of age
- · On average, worked at the same school for 7 years

What Teachers Reported about their Schools

- 41% of students on free or reduced lunch
- · Montessori program in operation for 13 years
- Montessori pre-school education offered (66%)
- Montessori-trained educational director or curriculum coordinator on site (37%)

Data Collection

Participants

- Data were collected during Spring 2010
- Recruitment efforts were made through mail and e-mail solicitations sent to schools, notices placed in Montessori newsletters, and literature passed out at two national Montessori conferences
- Participants filled out an anonymous online survey or a hard copy mailed back to the investigators
- Participants could choose to enter their name into a lottery to win Montessori educational materials

Instrument

A survey was developed to assess:

- Dimensions of practice related to public Montessori elementary teaching
- · Intentional modification of Montessori practices
- Situational circumstances potentially impacting implementation
- Agreement with practices associated with public elementary Montessori teaching
- Agreement with approached used for redirecting children in the classroom
- · Demographic information.

The survey was pilot tested with a small sample of 15 Montessori teachers who were not part of the main study.

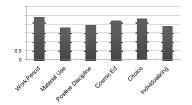
Results

Are Montessori Methods being intentionally modified?



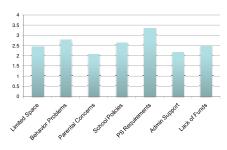
What Practices are being Modified?

Modified Practices



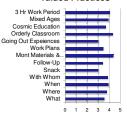
What Situational Factors are Attributed to Modification?

Situational Circumstances



How Strongly do Teachers Value Montessori Practices?

Valued Practices



Discussion

These results suggest some modification of Montessori practices in public elementary Montessori classrooms. Practices most modified included an adequate work period, providing children with choice, and implementing "cosmic education". Impacting enactment of the method most was public school requirements. Teachers also indicated that children with behavior problems or special needs were also affecting classroom practices.

Future Work

- Determining whether teachers can be classified into subgroups based on their implementation of practices associated with Montessori elementary education.
- 2.If identified, describing the characteristics defining each subgroup.
- 3.Determining to what extent modifications of practices are due to situational factors or to beliefs that differ from Montessori principles.

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