

ABSTRACT

An Examination of Implementation Practices in Montessori Early Childhood Education

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This study examined to what extent Montessori early childhood education programs in one geographical region of the United States could be classified into homogeneous clusters based on teachers' reported practices associated with Montessori education. Once identified, the characteristics defining each subgroup were described, and factors supporting or hindering the implementation of recommended practices were examined. Of particular interest was whether the teachers were intentionally or inadvertently making changes to the model, and if modifications were being made, whether these were due to situational factors or to viewpoints that differed from Montessori's perspectives. Teachers' beliefs about managing and motivating children were also assessed in relation to their interpretation of the Montessori method in order to examine what role, if any these beliefs played in shaping classroom practices.

Sixty-six early childhood Montessori teachers completed a semistructured telephone interview that investigated their implementation of five dimensions of Montessori practice, and factors influencing their enactments of the approach. Using

cluster analysis, four subgroups of Montessori educators were identified: a *traditional* subgroup that adhered to authentic Montessori practices; a *contemporary* cluster that enacted elements of authentic Montessori education, though not to the same extent as the *traditional* teachers; and two clusters, a *blended* group and an *explorative* group, that combined elements of the Montessori method with practices typically associated with other models of early childhood education. Post-typological analyses revealed significant differences between three of the four largest clusters on work period length and percentage of whole group presentations, and a difference approaching significance on the use of mixed-age grouping. Although no cluster differences were found on extent of modification, situational constraints, and motivation orientation, two of the three clusters differed from one another on their agreement with Montessori practices. The lack of group differences on modification suggests that some teachers were unaware that they were implementing practices that were inconsistent with the philosophical tenets of the approach.