



AMS Research Committee White Paper: Challenges of Montessori Research

Angela K. Murray, PhD, AMS Research Coordinator

One of the goals of AMS is to support efforts that give Montessori education a voice in scholarly dialogue about educating children. The AMS Research Committee is publishing this white paper to provide guidance for researchers who wish to conduct studies which will further Montessori education's role in the broader education community.

Well-designed research requires careful consideration of the challenges of scholarly investigation created by the unique nature of Montessori education. These challenges present themselves at every stage of the research process from outlining research questions to designing and executing the study and, finally, to publishing and disseminating results.

Research Questions

When thinking about relevant research questions regarding Montessori education, people often seek studies that demonstrate "Montessori works." While additional research on Montessori's effectiveness is always valuable, a single study cannot prove Montessori education as unequivocally superior to other educational approaches. Academic researchers participate in the process of investigation to build a body of knowledge. A case can be made for Montessori education through assembling evidence from a variety of studies conducted over time. (The AMS Website contains resources for locating this evidence through the Research page.)

A more detailed discussion of the types of research questions appropriate for Montessori education is available in a separate AMS Research Committee White Paper, which outlines suggested topics for Montessori research. Research on these topics will contribute to building the body of knowledge regarding Montessori education in the areas of Montessori theory, Montessori practice and Montessori outcomes.

Study Design and Execution

Well-designed research requires precise definitions of the objects of study. This can be difficult with Montessori education in particular because the Montessori name is not legally protected. Any school can use the term in their name regardless of the degree to which they follow the principles of the Montessori philosophy. Researchers wishing to draw conclusions about any aspect of Montessori education must establish the authenticity of the environments they wish to study. Opportunities for describing the quality of Montessori environments include AMS school accreditation, AMI school recognition or teacher certification by recognized training organizations.

A crucial element in contrasting Montessori education with other approaches is the identification of a relevant basis for comparison. Because parents who seek a Montessori education may differ fundamentally from other parents, research design must take into account the potential confounding influence of parental selection on study findings. Selecting an appropriate "control group" can involve strategies such as comparing students in a Montessori magnet school to those enrolled in a magnet school with a different focus. Alternatively, students in a private Montessori school could be compared with students enrolled in a private school having a different orientation. A study by Angeline Lillard published in the journal *Science* in 2006 addressed this issue by comparing students entering a public Montessori program based on a lottery selection process to those students who were also in the lottery but were not selected to attend.

Publication and Dissemination

Montessori Life is a venue that is always eager to publish articles on Montessori research. However, AMS wishes to promote dissemination of Montessori research outside the Montessori community as well. As more research is being conducted on Montessori education, more journals outside the Montessori community are publishing articles on the topic. However, since Montessori education remains outside the mainstream of most university schools of education, identifying appropriate venues for publication can be a challenge.

Early childhood Montessori research has been published multiple times in *Early Childhood Education Journal* and *Young Children*. A list of publications which have published Montessori research in the past eight years is provided below.

Publications

American Journal of Education	International Journal of Children's Spirituality
Child Care Information Exchange	Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education
Childhood Education	Journal of Peace Education
Curriculum Inquiry	Journal of Research in Childhood Education
Early Childhood Education Journal	Learning and Individual Differences
Early Childhood Today	Perspectives in Education
Early Education and Development	Teachers' College Record
Education Next	Theory and Research in Social Education
Education Week	Theory into Practice
Educational Theory	Teaching PreK-8
Elementary School Journal	Young Children

Conferences represent another opportunity for disseminating research results. AMS hosts national conferences that often include research-related workshops and poster sessions. Again, however, sharing results outside the Montessori community can be challenging but is particularly important. In order to be accepted for these conferences, Montessori research must speak the language of mainstream academia and analyze Montessori education using methods familiar in these venues. National organizations which host such events are listed and linked below.

National Organizations

[American Educational Research Association \(AERA\)](#)

[Association for Childhood Education International \(ACEI\)](#)

[Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development \(ASCD\)](#)

[National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#)