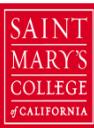


# Assessment & Instructional Decision-Making In Montessori ECE Classrooms

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★ Awarded AMS 2009 Outstanding Thesis



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## Introduction

The Montessori Method espouses observing students and making instructional decisions based on those observations. Relevant literature establishes observation of children's daily experiences as the most appropriate means of assessment. This study followed a quantitative research design in order to examine assessment and instructional decision-making in Montessori early childhood classrooms. Participants consisted of Montessori early childhood educators in the San Francisco Bay Area of California.

Further study may reveal in greater detail what observation, assessment, and decision-making actually look like in Montessori classrooms and could provide additional ideas about how to improve the process.

## Research Questions

1. With what frequency are teachers using the methods available to collect information about their students?
2. What information do teachers focus on if and when they make recorded observations?
3. What systems are in place in Montessori ECE classrooms for recording and maintaining observations and other student data?
4. How frequently are teachers using recorded observations and other student data to inform their instructional decisions?
5. What processes are teachers using to link recorded observations and other student data with assessment and instructional decision-making?
6. What do teachers perceive are their greatest obstacles in engaging the assessment process?

## Method

### Participants

- 44 lead teachers in Montessori ECE classrooms in the Bay Area
- All female (100%): Caucasian (48%), Asian (16%), Latino (11%), African American (2%), Other ethnicity (16%), Declined to State (7%)
- Majority certified Montessori Teachers (93%)
- Majority held advanced degree (95%)
- Average ECE experience of 16.9 years

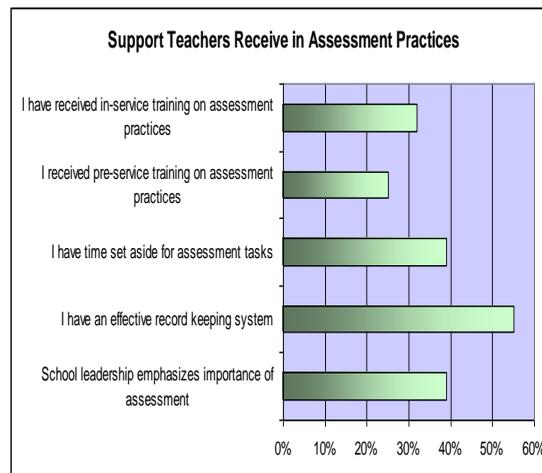
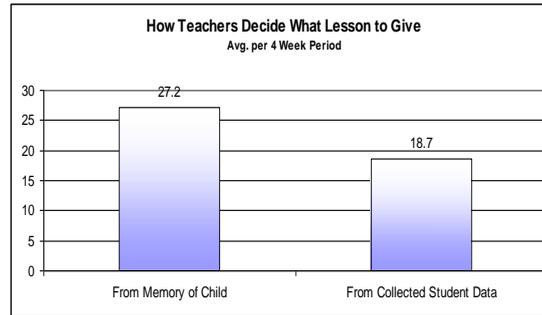
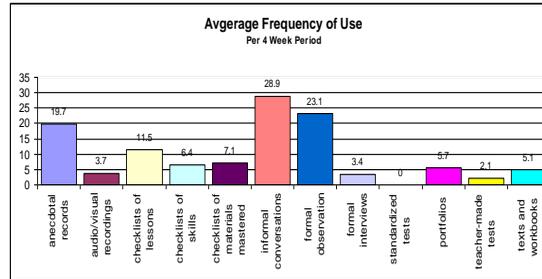
### Data Collection

- Data collected Winter 2008
- Recruitment efforts via email and phone
- Participants completed an anonymous paper survey and mailed to researcher

### Instrument

- Survey consisted of structured questions (demographic, yes/no, checklist, and numeric response items) and two unstructured, or free response, questions.
- Survey was developed by the researcher based in part on Roemer (1999) as well as Daoust (2004).
- Survey was piloted with a small group of educators matching the target group, revised, submitted to an expert reviewer, and revised again.

## Results



## Discussion

Though many teachers are observing their students and presumably are making intentional decisions, it is clear that many do not engage in the full cycle of observing, analyzing, and decision-making. The actual processes by which decisions are made regarding instruction, design of the environment, and so forth remain unclear.

The data suggest both that teachers do not often refer to the information they collect and that they communicate infrequently with other teachers regarding this information. In the absence of these uses of student information, it seems that the real use of student information is informal and unstructured. Rather than a systematic analysis of each student, student information likely serves to focus the attention of the teacher and update their mental pictures of students in order to inform decision-making.

## Future Work

1. Future studies on the topic of assessment in Montessori classrooms should focus on improving the sample population. Ideally, the sample should be random and much larger in terms of both number of participants and geographic location.
2. Efforts should be made to address more adequately how Montessori teachers actually make decisions regarding individuals and groups, perhaps using a different methodology.