Table 2. Self-Rating Versus Field Work Rating: Categories

From Boutique to Big Box: Teacher Change

A Study of Teacher Change Transitioning to a Public Montessori School

Teresa Van Acker

Introduction/Questions

Benham (2010) who states "*Montessorians are still that 10% (in education), and the other 90% have little or no idea what Montessorians are saying or why it works"* (p. 32).

However, often an obstacle in implementing a public Montessori mandate comes from the implementation of combining Standards and Montessori. Therefore, how does a teacher who has a public school teaching background shift teaching practices? Or as Fullan (2007) states "the toughest nut to crack is the instructional nut." In tracking the changes that are involved in this process, my research questions were three-fold:

1. 1. What teacher change has taken place at a particular public school toward the Montessori approach?
2. How has this teacher change occurred?
3. How do teachers navigate the tensions between two mandates: Montessori and standards-based?

Research Methods

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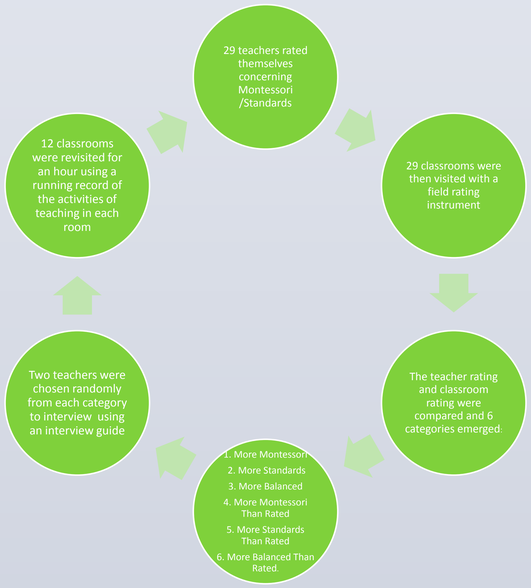

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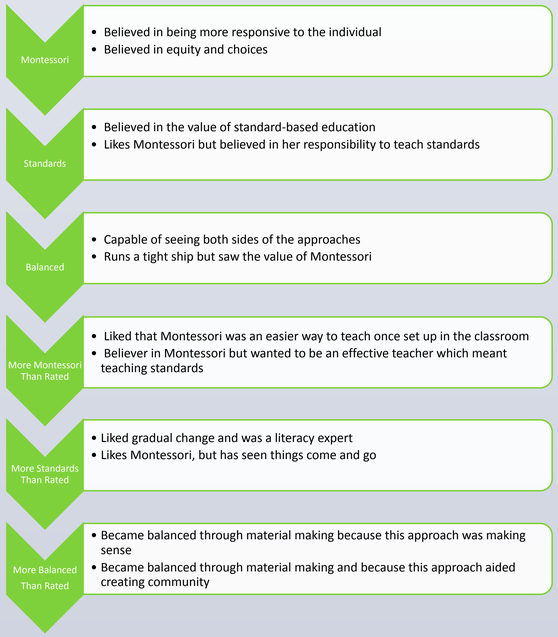
Research Results

Self Rated versus Observed Rated-The graph describes the average of the six categories of teachers comparing their self ratings against their observed rating.

The 12 teachers were interviewed and the statements were sorted by the 3 questions and then by emerging themes. Finally, the 12 statements were compared and common statements were eliminated. The result was a distinguishing statement that summed up the viewpoint of each teacher concerning the change.

Comparison Between Statements Made by all Teachers Interviewed



These statements give insight into the way to support teachers as they make the change to public Montessori instruction.

Results

How did the change happen?

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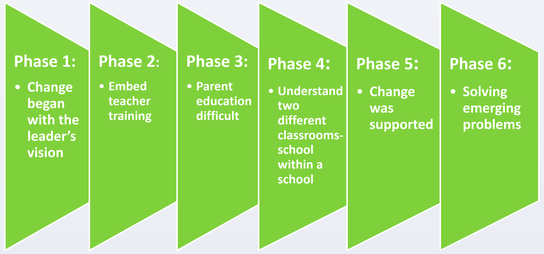
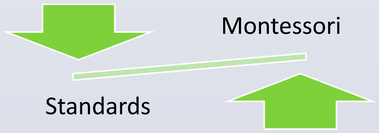


Facilitating Features

1. **Teacher buy in –**The trusting relationship between the principal and the teachers resulted acceptance and ownership of the transition.
2. **Network of support and the power of their teachers' cohort were the repeated teacher comments concerning a positive change-** Consultants who taught weekly and pushed into the classroom with embedded professional development resulted in the greatest impact on teachers incorporating the Montessori Method.
3. **Montessori Materials-**The conceptual based materials were appealing to teachers.

Obstacles

1. **Material making for Gap Standards-**The teachers discovered that there were areas where the Montessori materials did not cover the Standards and they spent a lot of time making materials.
2. **Multi-aged classrooms-** In a standard based system having multi-grades meant multi-standards to teach at once and this was taxing for teacher preparation and difficult to implement time wise.
3. **Recordkeeping-** Every teacher indicated that this was the hardest part of accomplishing the dual mandate.
4. **Balancing the Standards and Montessori dual mandates-** How to "get it all in" was a challenge for most of the teachers. They had difficulty with the idea of this and the implementation of balancing the two requirements of their job.



How was it balanced?

1. **No Balance-** Some teachers refused to balance the two mandates and saw them as conflicting
2. **Supplemental Balance-** Some teachers saw the Montessori materials as supplemental to their Standards teaching.
3. **Schedule Balance-**The group of teachers and administrator arrived at a comprise with the schedule of having a morning Montessori work cycle and an open Daily 5 structure to teaching literacy in the afternoon.
4. **Developmental Balance-**Some teachers saw the balance of Montessori greater at the early ages and less needed in the older ages.
5. **Integrated Balance-** Some teachers were able to combine the two mandates in a seamless way so that in a lesson one would have to watched carefully to identify the separate elements of each.

Traditialassori-In the end the teacher's were able to balance the two mandates through scheduling, confidence in the training and practice, alignment between the standards and Montessori, and they came up with an approach they called Traditialssori-a blended approach. They stated that they figured out what the Standard was teaching and then they traditionalssoried it so that it was taught in a Montessori way.

According to the teachers, the motivation for the change was the students:

"Before the change I used to consider kids but certainly now since I have taught Montessori I listen to them more now." They felt they were better able to serve the needs of their students. One teacher summed it up best when asked what she was most proud of in this change she said, "My kids."

Conclusions

Whitescaver (2008) wrote that the margin (Montessori) and the mainstream (Standards) education influence each other.

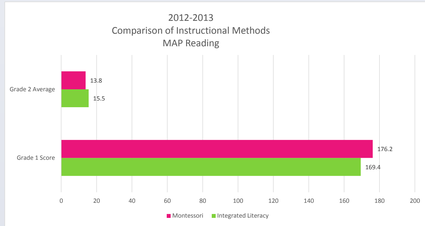
•According to these teachers, they learned from Montessori that they could teach in a more child centered way.

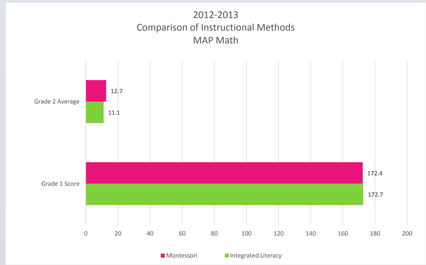
•Montessori education can also learn from this exchange. According to Scott Thomas, the Executive Director of the Magnet Schools of America, Montessori education is a declining magnet choice. (2013, Personal communication at Wake County Magnet Principal meeting). He suggested rebranding Montessori coupling it with STEM or STEAM education to make it more appealing in an Informational Age.

Moreover, the tests results indicated according to a methods analysis that the Montessori methods were equal to results accomplished by the Standards' teacher in the same school.

These test results were provided by the school's principal and they were testing all first and second graders in the school (approximately 500 students). Two thirds of the students were public Montessori students and one third were Integrated Literacy of traditional education students.

The two different ways to report the test, and average and a score were provided by the county. These are the results of the test scores in the second full year of Montessori implementation in this public school. The first year showed a slight drop in scores as could be expected with an implementation dip.





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