

Introduction

Are elementary Montessori charter schools different from Montessori magnets?

This study surveyed head teachers at public Montessori elementary schools in the United States to investigate their teaching practices as they relate to traditional Montessori methods.

The responses of magnet school teachers were compared to those of charter school teachers to assess similarities and differences, and potential reasons for variation in enactment.

Research Questions

1. Do Montessori magnet and charter school teachers differ in their implementation of practices typically associated with Montessori elementary education?
2. If so, where are there similarities and differences in practice?
3. What circumstances may have contributed to any differences identified?

Background

While Montessori magnet schools proliferated in the 1980s, Montessori charters are a relatively new development. Given that magnets are more regulated than charters (see below), it was hypothesized that Montessori magnet school teachers would face more challenges implementing a classic approach to Montessori education than charter school teachers who are less regulated.

	Magnets	Charters
Admissions	Selective	Open (or lottery)
Governance	District	Own Board or Private Firm
Staffing	District Hires	School Hires
Policies	District	Own Charter
Financing	Non-Profit	Non-Profit or For-Profit

Method

444 head teachers in public Montessori elementary schools completed an online survey assessing dimensions of practice related to public Montessori elementary teaching. In this study the responses of 167 magnet school teachers were compared to those of 159 charter school teachers.

Montessori Magnets and Charters: Similarities and Differences in Implementation

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Results

Magnet & Charter Similarities

Consistent with Montessori practice, most* in both groups indicated they:
• Maintain a clean, well organized classroom
• Encourage children to assist one another
• Use a job chart to maintain the environment
• Permit children to decide where to work
• Regularly engage children in art, music & drama

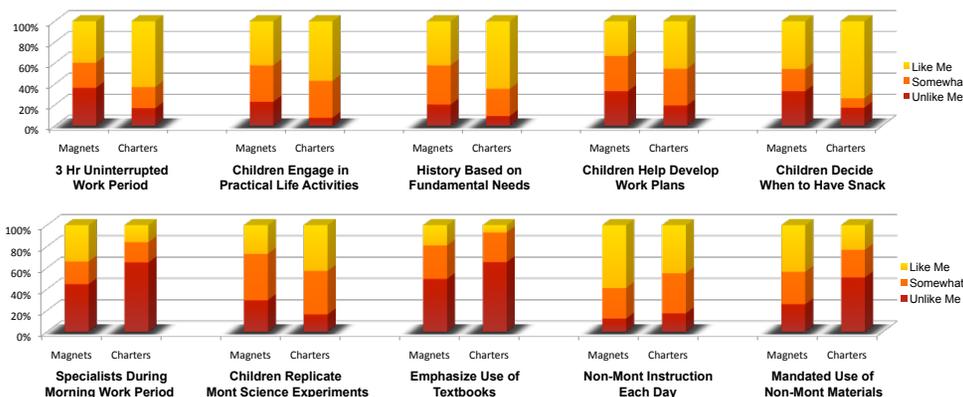
* 80% or more indicating a practice was "mostly like me" or "completely like me"

A majority in both groups indicated they:	M	C
• Present the Creation of Earth story	M=80%	C=73%
• Allow children to decide how long to work and whether to work together	M=66%	C=77%
• Encourage open-ended, in-depth projects	M=80%	C=78%
• Have a full complement of Montessori materials	M=64%	C=76%
• Give lessons to individuals/small groups	M=73%	C=66%
	M=79%	C=75%

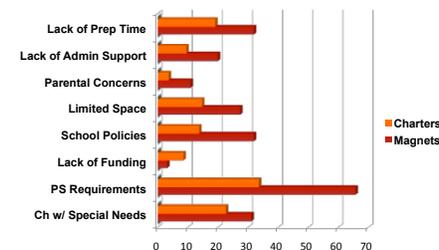
In contrast to Montessori practice, many indicated they:	M	C
• Divide class time into activity periods	M=41%	C=49%
• Assign due dates	M=54%	C=53%
• Correct children's completed work	M=59%	C=58%
• Assign follow-up for each Montessori lesson	M=58%	C=55%
• Require work (e.g. math or language) before children have choice	M=66%	C=53%
• Have children cross-off work on a daily checklist	M=66%	C=59%

Percentages: Those indicating a practice was "mostly like me" or "completely like me".

Magnet & Charter Differences



Circumstances Impacting Implementation



Percentage of teachers indicating a circumstance has impacted their ability to implement Montessori the way they ideally would extensively or completely.

Discussion

These findings suggest many conventional Montessori practices are enacted in both elementary Montessori magnet and charter schools in the US. However, some modification is occurring, and is greater in magnets where district requirements may interfere with more authentic implementation. With research showing higher fidelity programs associated with better student outcomes (Lillard, 2012), providing public school teachers with appropriate training and support will be paramount if Montessori education is to reach its potential in the public sector.

Lillard, A. S. (2012). Preschool Children's Development in Classic Montessori, Supplemented Montessori, and Conventional Programs. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 379-401.

Acknowledgements

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