

BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW

The Mid- 20th century marked a renaissance for the Montessori movement among schools across America. After decades of decline, shifting trends emerged allowing for the Montessori philosophy to once again become the pre-eminent leader in educating the whole child (Lillard Poke, 1988). While there is a growing base of literature on the efficacy of the Montessori movement with young children, there is an equal amount of confusion (Murray, 2012), leading to the "Montessori Myths". Likewise, while we aim to understand the benefits of a Montessori program, very little has been found in the literature on the Montessori teacher training experience, or what makes a Montessorian. As the Montessorian is a critical component of the triangle (Lillard Poke, 1988) consisting of the prepared environment, child, and the teacher, further research is needed on the impact of the training course.

At the commencement of Maria Montessori's re-birth in America, Nancy McCormick Rambusch probed this line of inquiry in her article "What Makes A Montessorian?" (1962, 2007). The transformation (Rambusch, 2007; Cossentino, 2009, 2005) that occurs during the teacher training courses endeavors to acculturate neophyte Montessorians into what Cossentino (2009) calls the "craft" of teaching to include the "hows", "whys" and "what fors" of pedagogy. McCormick Rambusch originally offered three concepts of how that looked in 1962: A Montessorian was an observer, an exemplar, and protector of the child's right to learn. Drawing upon previous literature concerning analysis of Montessori teachers' lives, to include their own "personal values, beliefs, and convictions" (Malm, 2004), this study aims to explore the ways in which McCormick Rambusch's ideals of being a Montessorian translate into the 21st century modern classrooms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What inherent personal elements are valued in Montessori trainees?
2. In what ways, if any, do Montessori teacher trainees "transform" during the training experience?
3. How does the culture of Montessori life impact views on pedagogy and practice?

RESEARCH METHODS AND DISCUSSION OF VALIDITY

DESIGN: Qualitative Case Study design (Creswell, 2012)

SETTING: AMS affiliated teacher education program located outside of a large urban city in Southern California

PARTICIPANTS:

- Three female trainees in total, 1 American, 1 Brazil, 1 Philippines
- Criterion sampling was used for diversity of nationalities

DATA COLLECTION:

- Data will be collected over a two-year (2015-2017) period
- Systematic focus on teacher interview data
- Additional data includes focus groups, observation, and field notes
- Data coded and analyzed searching for themes within (Glesne, 2010)
- Data triangulated through member-checking

RESEARCHER ROLE

Participant observer (Creswell, 2012) as PI

DISCUSSION

Initial findings suggest that Montessori trainees largely enter the field of Montessori to fulfill philosophical gaps in their career goals, Trainees arrive with multiple years of experience in other industries, but primarily within the traditional elementary school career track. Personal and professional life histories have catapulted these adult learners into a world where they feel as though they can make the most difference in the lives of children. By seeking to create a more holistic teaching environment, these trainees exhibit personal philosophies that are firmly grounded in the belief of Montessori's, "follow the child". These ideologies make them ideal candidates for work in Montessori, to include beliefs in "observation as an art", anticipating the needs of the child, and being an advocate for children, or "the protector of the child's right to learn." (Rambusch, 2007).

REFERENCES

- Cossentino, J. (2005) Ritualizing expertise: A non-Montessorian view of the Montessori method. *American Journal of Education*, 111 (2) 211-244.
- Cossentino, J. (2009). Culture, craft, & coherence: The unexpected vitality of Montessori teacher training. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60 (5) 520-527.
- Creswell, J. (2006). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five approaches*. New York: Sage.
- Glesne, C. (2010). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New Jersey: Pearson.
- Malm, B. (2004). Constructing professional identities: Montessori teachers' voices and visions. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 48 (4) 397-416.
- Montessori, M. (2005). *The absorbent mind*. New York: Holt.
- Murray, A. (2012). Public knowledge of Montessori education. *Montessori Life*, 24 (1) 18-21.
- Polk Lillard, P. (1998). *Montessori: A Modern approach*. NY: Schoken Books.
- Rambusch, N. (2007). What makes a Montessorian? *Montessori Life*, 19 (1) 82-83.

FINDINGS

1. Desire to Adapt to Montessori Culture: The Liberty of the Child

All three participants enthusiastically embraced the holistic culture of the Montessori environment, citing specific examples of how they work to serve children.

"If a child is having a bad day and spends the day what feels like torturing you, it's the Montessori teacher that does not let those actions define the child. The next morning is like it never happened and only love and respect for the child is all that is present."

"Children are superior to us because of their innocence. It is my pleasure to serve children with the best, and for the rest of my life I will never go tired of hearing 'Miss Kasey, I did it!' Those are my favorite words."

"The method is very adaptable and I think regardless of your personality, you can find it in you as a teacher to be pristine and organized about your environment, to have a lower tone of voice when addressing the children, to be patient, etc. I feel like my personality can easily adapt to what it takes to be a great Montessori teacher, even though I am not necessarily an introvert with low-tone-of-voice type of person outside of the classroom."

2. Pedagogical Transformation: Thinking Very Deeply

All three participants felt as though thinking deeply about the implication of Montessori pedagogy greatly influenced who they hoped to become as future teachers, in addition to exhibiting respect for how children learn.

"I don't have much experience with Montessori, but I'm the type of person who thinks very deeply... Montessori has this way of presenting materials that teaches children to see the value of numbers and *why* it became a hundred, *why* it became a thousand. For us before, we didn't get to see why. But, here, we can visualize the meaning of the number."

"You know how our brains work, you can be strong at language, or strong at math, vice-versa. So, Montessori can help you with that. When you're in public school, you just have to do it when you're not yet ready. Montessori nurtures what you have."

"Montessori can provide for him while he is strong and will wait for him until he is ready."

"I think Montessori is ultimately about making this universe we live in a better place with more responsible and respectful human beings, and this is a transformation only possible through education."

"Montessori impacts my thinking in a whole new way...I can give the keys to the universe to the child and witness the wonder and joy."

3. Montessori Influences: New Beginnings and Something Different

- All three participants sought to explore a different and unique model of education, as opposed to the traditional form

- Two out of the three participants were traditionally trained elementary teachers in their home country (five years in Brazil/ twenty years in the Philippines) and wanted to specialize further in the USA, to fill in philosophical gaps

"I had five years of experience as a teacher in Brazil. When I moved here, I wanted to specialize in a different educational methodology and what stood out in the Montessori method for me was the fact that learning can be an individualized experience."

- Two out of the three participants were influenced by Montessori via family members

"I do remember working in La Jolla, California and looking for daycare for my oldest daughter. At the time, she was three years old...It (The Montessori school) was so beautiful and I remember the bead cabinet...I didn't know about Montessori or engage in its philosophy back then."

"I typed in 'organic daycare' and Montessori was one of the results. I will never forget that night, I researched Montessori and I actually cried at how beautiful and perfect it all was. I knew that this was my new life, and I loved it!"

"My niece started in Montessori, now she's graduating Magna Cum Laude from Mt. St. Mary's. I wish my own kids had attended the school because I'm amazed at how much children learn."