A Comparison of Elementary Classroom Practices Based on Montessori Certification

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Introduction

Are there differences in classroom practices due to type of Montessori credential?

This study surveyed public Montessori elementary teachers in the United States to investigate their classroom teaching practices. The responses of a subset of AMI certified teachers were compared to those credentialed by AMS to assess implementation similarities and differences.

Research Questions

1. Do public elementary Montessori teachers with AMS and AMI certification differ in their classroom practices? If so, in what way?
2. Do AMI and AMS certified teachers differ in the extent they have modified and value practices typically associated with Montessori education? If so, in what way?

Background

While no known Montessori studies directly assess implementation differences by credential type, a few suggest variation related to teacher certification.

In Lillard’s (2012) examination of outcomes in classic and supplemented Montessori early childhood classrooms, children in the 5 high-fidelity classrooms with AMI teachers out performed classrooms with AMS and AMI teachers. Although no significant relationship was found between teacher training and student outcomes, type of credential may still have played a role.

Daoust (2004) interviewed 66 early childhood Montessori teachers to assess implementation practices and identified 4 subgroups of educators. Teachers in the highest fidelity subgroup were significantly more likely to be AMI certified than teachers in the other 3 subgroups. Although neither study was conducted with elementary teachers, these findings suggest Montessori implementation differences may to some extent be related to credential type.

Method

In 2010, 444 lead teachers in public Montessori elementary schools completed an online survey assessing dimensions of practice related to Montessori elementary teaching. In this study the responses of the two largest groups of participants by certification type – 215 AMS and 40 AMI credentialed teachers – were compared.

Results

Credentialed Teachers

Similarities and Differences in Values

AMIs and AMSs indicate many similarities and differences. While both groups indicated valuing: • Allow children to decide where they will work 4.38 4.17 • Letting children choose where they work 4.00 3.83 • Allowing children to choose when to have snack 4.37 4.48 • Letchildren decide how long to use a material 5.05 4.77

Credential Type Differences

AMSs are significantly more likely to indicate they:

- Organize history around fundamental needs 5.13 4.96
- Give key Montessori science lessons 5.36 4.96
- Provide children with work plans 2.90 3.51
- Have children record activities in a work journal 4.48 3.62
- Encourage investigations based on interest 5.05 4.38
- Maintain a clean, well-organized environment 5.10 5.09
- Allow children to assist one another 5.63 5.59
- Let children decide where they will work 5.35 5.22
- Allow working together in self-selected groups 5.48 5.19

AMSs differ significantly in how strongly they valued:

- Introducing material in self-selected groups 5.48 5.19
- Letting children choose where they work 4.00 3.83
- Allowing children to choose when to have snack 4.37 4.48
- Permit children to correct their own work 4.23 4.21
- Have children help develop their work plans 4.24 4.08

Discussion

AMI trained teachers tend to focus more on classic Montessori curricular approaches especially for science and history while AMS credentialed teachers are significantly more supportive of traditional educational practices such as giving children due dates and spelling tests and assigning research groups.

AMI teachers tend to place more value on classic Montessori priorities like student choice, cosmic education, and “going out” while AMS teachers are more accepting of whole class activities, workbooks, textbooks, and teachers correcting students’ work.

While it is easy to focus on the differences between teachers with AMS and AMI training, it is important to note the general direction of responses to all of these questions is toward what would be expected for quality Montessori environments. If non-Montessori educators were asked about individualization, child led learning and autonomy, the results would likely be very different.

Limitations

This is an initial analysis with a small sample of teachers from 2010 so additional study is warranted to further explore these areas of similarities and differences as well as their causes and implications.

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References
