Public Montessori Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Psychological Needs Fulfillment

Dr. Emma Allen-Blevins

Purpose

- As attrition rates of teachers remain a concern and the establishment of Montessori public schools increases in the United States, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into **the influence of psychological needs fulfillment on job satisfaction**.

- Through determining what factors impact the psychological needs of Montessori teachers in their daily work experience, context was provided around how the satisfaction of the needs of **autonomy, relatedness, and competence impact work motivation and job satisfaction.**

Literature

Attrition and Retention

High attrition rates lead to consequences which affect the quality of education and thus it is vital to understand the factors and reasons that contribute to individuals leaving the teaching profession.[1]

Motivation

Work motivation is complex and highly contextualized. The environment in which an individual works affects their needs, personality, and values. However, the individual's needs, personality, and values in turn affects the environment.[3]

Burnout and Dissatisfaction

Burnout and dissatisfaction are leading causes of teacher attrition.[4] Teachers who feel burnt out or dissatisfied in their work seek new positions or jobs.[5]

Self-determination

Psychological needs are defined as relatedness (the feeling of connection to others), autonomy (the desire to self- organize) and competence which energizes human activity.[7]

Montessori

Maria Montessori introduces the idea of the 'new teacher'.[8] The Montessori philosophy emphasizes the need for a moral preparation of a teacher. When an individual's physical and psychological needs are being met, he/she is more likely to engage in spontaneous and productive activity, which leads intrinsic motivation.[9]

Limitations

- Findings cannot be generalized due to a small sample size. The population of this study is highly specific to one location (e.g., participants are from the same school district and with the same administrator).

- Due to the specificity of the location and the small sample size, it was vital that identifiable information be removed from the study to ensure the privacy of participants and the security of their employment.

Discussion & Findings

- A better understanding of early childhood Montessori teachers' current job satisfaction which in turn can help us to understand retention and attrition within public Montessori schools.

- The findings may provide administrators and teacher trainers a framework to support teachers through the fulfillment of psychological needs, leading to high levels of job satisfaction and intrinsic work motivation.

- A set of recommendations to increase job satisfaction was developed based on the findings.

The categories of **Montessori Experience, Autonomy Competence, and Relatedness** were determined to be the overarching themes in which factors that impact work satisfaction could be organized into three levels of impact on the teacher: personal, school, and external.
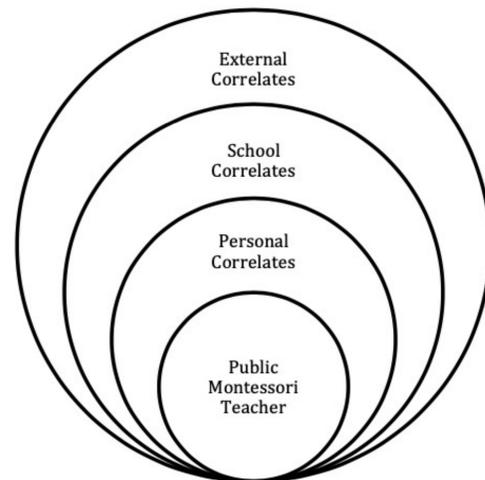

Figure 1: Influence of correlates on the individual public Montessori School teacher

Personal Correlate	School Correlate	External Correlate
Personal Investment in Montessori (m)	Relationships with Administrators (r)	District Requirements (a)
Training Program (m)	Administrator/School Supports (c)	
General Work Satisfaction (m)	Administrator Influence (a)	
Independent Choice Making (a)	Caregiver Relationship (r)	
Confidence in Montessori Abilities (c)	Staff Relationship (r)	
Self-Investment (c)	School Climate (r)	
Individual Efforts to Maintain Competence (c)		

Table 1: Influence of correlates on the individual public Montessori school teacher based on Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention[6]

Future Research

- This study contributes to the growing body of research related to the Montessori philosophy in the United States.
- This study focused on the experiences of public Montessori school teachers in a specific Midwestern state. A direction for future research would be to expand this study to public Montessori schools within the state, region, or nation to see if the findings could be generalized. Including a larger sample size will allow for generalizability of findings but also will allow for more demographic information to be shared.

Research Paper

Recommendations

Connect on LinkedIn

emmaallen1395@gmail.com

Research Questions

1. To what extent are the psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence of public Montessori educators satisfied in their current workplace environment?

2. What factors and/or experiences contribute to a public Montessori teacher's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with how well their psychological needs are met?

Methods

- Qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted over Zoom

- Participants: six teachers who were Montessori credentialed and state certified who taught at the primary grade level within public Montessori elementary schools within the same district.

- Data analyzed and coded into four main themes: Montessori Experience, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness.

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