AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY
education that transforms lives

AMS Research Committee White Paper: Topics for Montessori Researchers
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The AMS Research Committee is providing this white paper to encourage research on Montessori education on topics relevant and meaningful to the furthering of the role of Montessori education in the broader education community.

One of the goals of AMS is to support efforts which give Montessori education a voice in scholarly dialogue about educating children. AMS supports research efforts to refine and provide perspective on current Montessori practice. However, AMS specifically wishes to promote research which will contribute to better understanding, in the broader educational community, of the Montessori approach. This outreach is crucial as society becomes more critical of education in general and as Montessori education strives for recognition in the public sector.

Achieving a voice can come through Montessori research contributing in meaningful ways to the wider body of knowledge regarding the education of children. The ideas outlined in this white paper represent suggestions for topics of study which will provide avenues for Montessori education to make contributions that will benefit those both within and outside the Montessori community. These suggested topics are organized around three broad categories: Montessori theory, Montessori practice and Montessori outcomes.

Montessori Theory

Contemporary theories that are the focus of much attention in educational scholarship provide a useful lens for examining Montessori education. The foundation of Montessori education was built upon Maria Montessori's empirically developed theories about the optimal learning environments for children. Her work resonates with many of the popular topics discussed in the broader educational community. Potential areas for linking Montessori theories with contemporary educational thinking include examining Montessori theory in light of current scholarly research in the areas of:

- motivation
- executive functioning
- student engagement (flow)
- constructivism
- sensitive periods
- brain development
- planes of development

Montessori Practice

In terms of practice, many aspects of Montessori education align with what mainstream educational research suggests are "best practices" in education. This list of Montessori educational elements are just some of many which have potential for being incorporated into studies focused on effective educational practice in general. Research opportunities include highlighting aspects of Montessori practice which align with best practices recommendations based on scholarly research in the areas of:

- phonemic awareness

- writing before reading

- contextual learning

- interdisciplinary curriculum

- educating the whole child

- uninterrupted work time

- self-directed learning

- sensory education

- inclusion of students with exceptionalities

- individualized pacing, differentiation

- use of manipulatives

- mixed ages

- fostering autonomy

- practical life activities

- decreased emphasis on grades

- authentic assessment

- incorporating nature and the outdoors

- music in the classroom

- peace education

- bullying/social justice

- class meetings

- high quality teacher training

- critical thinking

Montessori Outcomes

When thinking about the need for Montessori research, studies of the outcomes of Montessori education often come to mind. In fact, these studies are often the ones most frequently requested by legislators, school administrators and even prospective parents. As Montessori education is focused on educating the whole child, research on Montessori outcomes must not be limited to academic outcomes or, even more narrowly, to results of standardized tests. While the United States seems obsessed with standardized assessments as the sole indicator of educational success, Montessori research must participate in but not be confined to these definitions of success. A crucial element in examining Montessori

outcomes is the identification of a relevant basis for comparison. Due to the potential confounding element of parental selection of Montessori education, it can be particularly difficult to identify an appropriate "control group." These challenges will be addressed in a subsequent white paper. Presuming that a relevant reference group can be established, these topics represent viable opportunities for examining Montessori educational outcomes:

- student attention
- problem solving skills
- creativity and innovation
- social or emotional intelligence
- career aspirations
- love of learning
- community service
- academic success
- attainment of state standards
- long term impact, longitudinal research
- self-regulation