Montessori Schools and Students of Color: Reviewing the Research

Katie Brown, PhD
Virginia Montessori Association Spring Networking Event
April 28th, 2018
Agenda

• History: Montessori and students of color

• What we know about:
  • School diversity
  • Academic outcomes
  • School discipline
  • Teacher preparation/pipeline
  • Family engagement/recruitment

• Areas where we could learn more:
  • SPED
  • Culturally responsive teaching
  • Montessorians of color
  • ELLs
History

Montessori and Students of Color
Montessori in the US

1st Wave: 1910s
- Short-lived

2nd Wave: 1960s
- AMS
- Suburban private schools

3rd Wave: 1990s-now
- Public sector growth
- Charter schools
PoC in American Montessori History

What We Know

Research on Montessori and Students of Color
Education Research and the Deficit Narrative

The Moynihan Report

The “Culture of Poverty”

The “Achievement Gap”
The Montessori Method: Some Recent Research

Selvega Miestis/OISE

This paper on recent research with the Montessori method includes a brief review of this method for educating preschool-age children and criticisms leveled against it, and a review of comparative research studies in relation to several types of non-Montessori preschool programs with economically disadvantaged and middle-class populations. The comparative results are discussed in relation to three kinds of preschool experience: no schooling, traditional early childhood-oriented programs, and structured cognitive-oriented programs. The findings are interpreted in terms of Hunt's conceptual level matching model.

Cet article a proposé des recherches récentes sur la méthode de Montessori comprise une brève revue de ce système pédagogique appliqué aux enfants prêscolaires et des critiques de ce système, et des études comparées avec les nombreuses sortes de programmes prêscolaires non-Montessori qui traitent des populations économiquement désavantages et des populations de classe moyenne. Les résultats comparatifs sont discutés par rapport à trois sortes d'expériences prêescolaires: pas d'école, les programmes traditionnels prêescolaires, et les programmes structurés orientés vers la cognition. Les conclusions sont interprétées en employant le modèle conceptuel de Hunt.

The Montessori method, which gained wide acclaim in Europe around the turn of the century, was brought to the United States during the first decade. After a brief period of popularity, Montessori's educational system on this continent was abandoned in favor of the progressive education and social development oriented educational philosophies of William Heaul Kilpatrick and John Dewey. Only a handful of Montessori schools remained until the current Montessori revival, which began around 1958, when Nancy Rambusch founded the Whiby School in Greenwich, Conn. Ashfield (1976) reports that at present about 600 schools carry the Montessori name. Many of these schools were initiated by middle-class parents who wanted individualized early learning for their children. More recently, the application of the Montessori method has been extended into the areas of compensatory education for the economically disadvantaged, and special education for exceptional children. The present paper presents a brief review of the method outlining the principles relevant to each of the above areas of instruction, and a review of research studies that evaluate the comparative effectiveness of the Montessori method in achieving motivational and cognitive goals with different groups of preschool children.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first Italian woman physician, became interested in problems of learning in her work with disturbed and retarded children. In a search for more adequate techniques of instruction for these children, she studied the methods.

Several investigators have followed Hunt (1964) in hypothesizing that the Montessori method would be particularly fruitful in promoting cognitive development among lower-class children because of the suitability of the method for coping with their educational liabilities. Kohlberg (1967), for example, anticipated...
White Kids Continue to Fall Behind In Latest NAEP Results

Whites Fall Behind Asians by 17 Points In 8th Grade Mathematics
Diversity in Public Montessori Schools

Who Are We Serving?
Race at Whole-School Public Montessori Schools 2012-2013

Distribution of Public School Students by Race 2004-2026

Source: National Center for Education Statistics
Racial Diversity in Public Montessori Schools

Academic Outcomes

How Effectively Are We Serving Students of Color?
Early Research: Academic Outcomes for African American Children

• Deficit orientation
• Conflated race and poverty
• Often poor controls for Montessori fidelity
• Failure to disaggregate results by race
• Mixed results
Montessori “Works” for African American Students

Mean Reading & Math Scores by School Setting Grade 3

- Montessori
- Magnet
- Traditional

- Reading
- Math
Discipline Outcomes

Disrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline
Out-of-School Suspensions and Race
OSS for Black Children in Montessori vs. Traditional Schools

Montessori: 2.61x higher

Traditional: 11.15x higher
## Relative Rate Index (RRI) for Montessori and Traditional Schools

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>White Student OSS *</th>
<th>Total No. White Students</th>
<th>OSS Rate per 100 White Students</th>
<th>Black Student OSS</th>
<th>Total No. Black Students</th>
<th>OSS Rate per 100 Black Students</th>
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<th>Total No. White Students</th>
<th>OSS Rate per 100 White Students</th>
<th>Black Student OSS</th>
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Note: * OSS = Out-of-School Suspension; ** = value could not be calculated.  
*** p < .001
The Teacher Pipeline

People & Preparation
A Problematic Teacher Pipeline

- American Indian/Native American: 2
- Asian: 15
- Black/African American: 5
- Hispanic/Latino: 9
- Middle Eastern/Arab: 1
- Pacific Islander: 1
- White/Caucasian: 68
- Other: 4
## Montessori Teacher Preparation: The Surround

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Course Strands</th>
<th>Neurobiological Perspectives on Developmental Education</th>
<th>Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice</th>
<th>Advanced Seminar on Language and Literacy</th>
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### Addressed in every Strand

- **Practical Applications**
  - Observation • Case Studies • Managing the Prepared Environment • Assessment Montessori Style

- **Theoretical Throughlines**
  - Self-Regulation, Normalization, and Adaptation • Social Justice • Preparation of the Adult • Reflective Practice
Family Recruitment and Engagement: African American Families

• High value placed on early learning\(^1\)
• Concern for academic rigor
• Sense of self
• Shadow of historical educational inequities; “making up for history”\(^2\)
• Appreciation for strong sense of community in Montessori schools and classrooms
• Implications for family recruitment and engagement


Open Questions

Areas for Future Study
We should learn more about...

• Special education
• Culturally responsive pedagogy
• Montessorians of color
• Outcomes for Latinx students
• English language learners
Next Steps: Courageous Conversations

• What can we do to make our school community more inclusive?
• How can we make sure our discipline policies and procedures are equitable?
• Do our teacher recruitment and hiring practices prioritize diversity?
• How are we engaging families and communities of color?
Questions?

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