

Action Research Report
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Montessori and Beyond
Successful Transition to a Traditional Public School in First Grade

Abstract

This Action Research project is aimed at understanding and meeting the needs of our early childhood students and their families in making a successful transition to a non-Montessori school in First grade. The focus of my study was to develop and implement concrete strategies for the success and well-being of our children beyond their Montessori years, while remaining steadfast to the principles of the Montessori Method. When a child moves from a classroom that fosters independence and freedom to take an active and conscious part in her own education, to a new and unfamiliar environment, the loss of this freedom may result in many challenges. One of the key aims of this project was to facilitate collaboration and communication between Montessori teachers, first grade public school teachers and parents to help the child in meeting these challenges. The Montessori ethos is an individualized, child centric and child led learning approach using concrete lessons and sensory, hands on, didactic materials. An understanding of the differences in physical environment and routines; different methods of instruction, curriculum and assessment; and social interactions is required to identify difficulties faced when our children move beyond their Montessori environments. The primary goal of this project was to create a 3 way ‘Crosswalk’ between our Montessori School, Traditional Public Schools and Parents of our third-year graduate students, in order to foster better understanding between the two learning communities, with the common goal of serving the child. Previous year, and current year graduates’ families were invited to participate in surveys to collect data on their successes

and challenges in the new school environments. Local public-school teachers were contacted to gain their feedback on the children's performance and adjustment in their classrooms. Other Montessori school community partners were also contacted and invited to share their experiences regarding their students' transition to non-Montessori environments. A triple-action plan was created and implemented to support our children's successful transition to traditional schools after kindergarten. The results of this study demonstrated that a successful transition can be achieved without compromising our commitment to meeting the needs of the child using the Montessori Method.

Introduction

“If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.” (Epstein, 1995, p.701)

This research was conducted at a small private Montessori school on the east coast of the U.S.A. The school's early childhood teaching team had received feedback from some parents about their children's areas of difficulty in transitioning to the traditional school system after graduating from 3-6 Montessori classrooms. This concern with their children's upcoming transition was also on the minds of parents of rising kindergarteners. My Action Research project was aimed at understanding and meeting the needs of our families in making a successful transition to a non-Montessori school in First grade. The focus of my work has been to develop and implement concrete strategies for the success and well-being of our children beyond their Montessori years, while remaining steadfast to the principles of the Montessori Method.

Theoretical Context

Children's cognitive ability and productivity is enhanced when they operate with freedom and a sense of ownership in their environment. "The child has to acquire physical independence by being self-sufficient; he must become of independent will by using in freedom his own power of choice; he must become capable of independent thought by working alone without interruption. The child's development follows a path of successive stages of independence." (Montessori, 1949, p. 257). This independence valued by Montessorians might not be valued in other educational environments. When a child moves from a classroom that fosters such independence and freedom to take an active and conscious part in her own education, to a new and unfamiliar environment, the loss of this freedom may result in loss of confidence. She may be expected to seek the adult's permission in a traditional school, on occasions when she was previously able to make independent decisions.

Other features of child-centered education that are not always experienced in traditional settings are Dr. Montessori's emphasis on the importance of long blocks of uninterrupted work time and Piaget's recommendation of open-ended activities to ensure an optimal learning experience. The practice of keeping pace with everyone in the class to finish an assignment within a 30 minute period can be challenging to a 6 year old child, despite her competence in the subject matter.

According to Vygotsky, academic evaluations should be a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures (Vygotsky, 1978.). Current system of standardized testing and greater dependence on test scores may bring misleading results, which may be contrary to a child's

evaluation through careful observations in a Montessori classroom. These observations guide Montessori teachers in the adaptation of our curriculum to suit each child's individual stage of development, interests and level of understanding. In contrast, in the new classroom, all children will be following a predetermined, standardized curriculum.

One factor that eases the transition to traditional schooling is the Montessori early childhood emphasis on grace and courtesy and responsibility and respect for the self, others and the environment. A child's relationship with her new classmates and teacher can provide the scaffolding she needs to achieve proficiency in academic subjects. On entering the second plane of development, she is now in the sensitive period for establishing meaningful peer connections. The emphasis on development of social skills, personal responsibility and emotional maturity in her Montessori school will provide a strong foundation for forming these new relationships.

Dr. Montessori's work provides inspiration for constant self-reflection and evaluation for educators. Collaboration with traditional public school teachers will be a valuable opportunity to evaluate our own interpretation and implementation of the Montessori method and curriculum. This collaboration can be cemented when parents help link the two communities. Incidentally, educating parents on this period of transition and giving them tools to effectively advocate for their children will strengthen our connection with the public school community and thus help ensure a successful transition for our students.

Literature Review

The underpinnings of this project are in facilitating collaboration and communication between Montessori teachers, first grade public school teachers and parents, to best serve the child. As in the theory of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970), the development and well-being

of those we serve is to be prioritized over personal or organizational goals. This is both an inspiration and the guiding mantra for this action research. Five considerations, that influence children's success in their new learning environments are explored in this study. These considerations are examined in a dual view:

- (a) identifying the challenges faced by children transitioning to a traditional classroom in First Grade, and
- (b) identifying and aligning solutions to tackle these challenges

I. Physical Environment and Routines

The Montessori Triad, comprising of the guide, the child and the environment, is the essence of Montessori classrooms (Lillard & McHugh, 2019).). A Montessori guide arranges a homelike, aesthetically ordered learning environment that fosters concentration, independence and collaboration, and allows for movement (Lillard, 2017). Children take ownership of the environment and actively participate in its care and maintenance. They may even move furniture around, if needed (Montessori, 1917/1965). A child may choose to practice his lessons at any table or on floor mats, and is free to move about the room to retrieve materials (Lillard & McHugh, 2019). Children are encouraged to be aware of their physical needs. They may take breaks for snack, water, bathroom visits, and even for relaxation, freely throughout the day (Daoust, 2004). In a traditional school setting, children are expected to remain seated in their assigned seats for long durations. Their movement may be deemed disruptive to others in the classroom. Snack breaks are at scheduled times and children have to get used to asking the teacher's permission to use the bathroom or to drink water (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2000).

A child's attempt at the same levels of autonomy, that she was accustomed to, in the Montessori Kindergarten class, may now be considered indiscipline and a hindrance to her academic involvement.

II. Method of Instruction, Curriculum and Assessment

The Montessori ethos is an individualized, child-centric and child led learning approach using concrete lessons and sensory, hands on, didactic materials. A Montessori guide assesses children's progress by careful observation and helps them connect with appropriate didactic materials for independent learning through exploration (Cossentino, 2005; Lillard, 2017). Successes in literacy and math areas are credited to wholesome, project-based learning practices. Practical life experiences, such as cooking, gardening and self-care, as well as general science, cultural subjects and nature exploration are ingrained in the curriculum. Multi-age classrooms allow for older students to teach their younger friends, and students can progress at their own pace, on lessons pertinent to their stage of learning and interest, largely independent of their age (Lillard, Heise, Richey, et al., 2017). However, on entering traditional first grade classrooms, these children are expected to learn through oral instruction and large group presentations on a white board. A predetermined standardized curriculum is to be learned and assignments are predominantly completed on paper. Overwhelming emphasis is placed on literacy and math (Bassok et al., 2016). Precious time previously spent with friends and family, and in creative play may now be devoted to homework assignments. State mandated, standardized tests and federal policies such as No Child Left Behind, implemented in higher elementary grades, have a trickle down effect on first grade and subsequently on Kindergarten programs, (Elkind, 2006). This pressure on teachers for prioritizing a predetermined level of academic performance for all

children leaves little room for tending to children's individual developmental needs, (Hatch, 2002). This performance-based structure of learning with time limits attached to every lesson and assignment is troublesome for Montessori children, who have developed a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006), and are accustomed to learning for exploration and personal satisfaction.

III. Social Interactions

"Yet a third interesting fact to be observed in the child of six is his need to associate himself with others, not merely for the sake of company, but in some sort of organized activity. He likes to mix with others in a group wherein each has a different status. A leader is chosen, and is obeyed, and a strong group is formed. This is a natural tendency, through which mankind becomes organized. " (Montessori, 1948, p. 4)

In this new stage of development children hold great value in building peer relationships. Children in Montessori classrooms make deep bonds with their teacher and peers over an association of 3 years and establish a leadership role with younger classmates. The practice of children staying with the same teacher over a number of years, has now been termed Looping (Darling-Hammond, Flook, Cook-Harvey et al., 2020). How effectively a child performs in assessments and classroom interactions, is dependent on her confidence level which in turn depends largely on her level of comfort and trust, with respect to the new adult (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Positive interactions with the new teacher and building friendships with new classmates is crucial, not just to invoke a sense of belonging, but also to provide scaffolding to help the child in meeting attainable goals within her Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Montessori children have a deep sense of community and are experienced in peaceful conflict resolution (Gökhan & Ramazan, 2016). They are capable of forming positive connections due to their ability to cooperate and self-regulate (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Phillips-Silver & Daza 2018). On the other hand, they also have great appreciation for their personal space and a strong sense of fairness and justice. These qualities may present both as challenges in the beginning, and as great strengths, when the children, their new peers and teacher adjust around each other. This action research hopes to explore these possibilities.

IV. Psychological and Developmental Context

Brain development is greatest in the early childhood period and a positive educational environment during this stage has long term or permanent benefits, due its apparent effects on gene expression (Moffitt et al., 2011). Numerous studies have showed the Montessori Method to have significant advantage in developing Executive Function, Mastery Orientation and Social Cognition in children (Thompson, 2018; Phillips-Silver & Daza, 2018; Lillard, Heise, Richey, et al., 2017). Blair and Diamond, (2008), provide substantial evidence to support the importance of cognitive control in impacting success in school and in life.

Montessori follows child development in stages/planes that are only loosely related to milestones defined by age increments. Each child's individual growth trajectory is respected, and her abilities are enhanced by following the 'whole child' approach. Traditional education's

‘every child must catch up to the pre-determined curriculum’ narrative is not compatible with the true, nature of childhood development, as substantiated by scientific studies (Sharp, 2016).

Moreover, early educational experiences of children shape their lifelong outlook at learning and personal or academic growth (Sharp, 2016). Development of creative thinking skills and mastery orientation is demonstrated by the accomplishments of famous Montessorians like founders of Google (Sergei Brin and Larry Page), the founder of Amazon (Jeff Bezos) and the creator of Wikipedia (Jimmy Wales) (Lillard, Heise, Richey, et al., 2017).

V. Parent Education and Involvement

Christensen, O. (2016) demonstrated the importance of parent education to a Montessori teacher. She found that parent education is crucial to children’s success within the Montessori program and beyond. Parents’ understanding of the benefits of a Montessori background can ensure their advocating for their children, during their transition to Public Schools (Conway & Fink, 2015). On the other hand, a parents’ desire to give their children an academic edge (Lillard. & McHugh, 2019) and their perceived delay or failure in performing well in their new school can result in negative outcomes for the children. When they understand their child’s true abilities and the core differences between the two educational approaches, they will have the ability to mitigate the stress that these differences in environment, assessment methods, etc. may put on the child. Parents are key to creating this crosswalk between Montessori Kindergarten and Public School First Grade classes (Nitecki, 2016).

Conclusion

An understanding of the differences in physical environment and routines; different methods of instruction, curriculum and assessment; and social interactions is required to identify challenges faced when our children move beyond their Montessori environments. It is also

important to note that these children are entering a new plane of development at this time, adding another dimension to our efforts in meeting their needs. Completing a Montessori 3-year cycle as substantiated by these studies, gives developmental, cognitive, behavioral and character enhancing gains that have lifelong benefits. Parent education in all these aspects and their involvement in efforts to support students are proven assets to all stakeholders. This review of previous work on the subject provides a strong foundation and framework to pursue the mission to support our children and their families at this critical time of transition.

Purpose

While the above concerns are understood to largely be responsible for a child's academic performance during their transition period, feedback will also be requested from parents and public school teachers on ways to better prepare children, from their perspective. Expected skills and assessments for First Grade readiness will be re-examined to confirm that a corresponding match in Montessori lessons is offered in our 3-6 classrooms, (Kripalani, 2011). All concerns expressed by these groups will be evaluated in keeping with our understanding of the Montessori method and Early Childhood Development, (Raines, 1984). This project will depend on studying the ebb and flow of children's progress in their new first grade class, in collaboration with their parents and Public School teachers.

“For many years I have been pointing to the child, and you have been looking at the end of my finger”

-Maria Montessori, Raines, S.C. (1984)

Challenge/ Research Question

How can we create a 3 way ‘Crosswalk’ between our **Montessori School, Traditional Public Schools** and **Parents** of our third year graduate students, in order to foster better understanding between the two learning communities, with the common goal of serving the child?

Method

In March 2020, I presented a questionnaire to our teaching team, school directors and parent leaders asking for their insights on the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for growth of our 3-6 program and threats to our success with respect to our children’s experience in their inevitable move to non-Montessori schools in First grade. Careful analysis of their responses helped me in crystallizing the research question for this project. Communication via emails and virtual meetings with these stakeholders helped me in facilitating our collaboration in the common goal of eliminating this ‘blind spot’ in our children’s journey beyond their Montessori education at our school.

Participants and Setting for Action Research

Families of previous year (2019, 2018) kindergarten graduates were requested to participate in an online survey, aimed at identifying specific challenges, and creating a timeline of observable progress in academics and/or social interactions.

Recent (2020) kindergarten graduates and their families formed a focus study group for the year 2020-2021. This group was invited to attend an online parent education workshop at the end of our school year, in preparation for their upcoming transition to Public School. They also

participated in 2 surveys and continued check-ins throughout the transition year. A social media support group was also established. Meetings were as follows:

- 2020-2021 Kindergarten students attended daily 30-minute traditional school style Kindergarten lessons to prepare them for upcoming differences in style of instruction, curriculum and classroom routines.
- 2020-2021 kindergarten year parents were advised during P/T conferences.
- 2021–2022 year prospective kindergarten families attended a community meeting introducing them to the 3rd year in Montessori.
- Meetings were organized with Public School First grade teachers to understand their perspectives and their expectations.

All collected data and correspondence were shared with Long Hill Montessori School directors and Early Childhood Team to implement a strategic action plan.

Procedure and Timeline

<i>March 2020:</i>	Questionnaire to school staff and parent community to identify challenge for action research, using SWOT analysis
<i>April 2020:</i>	Survey (1), Online Survey for 2019 & 2018 graduates' families
<i>June 2020:</i>	Online Community Meeting for 2020 graduates' families
<i>August 2020:</i>	Letter to new teacher and social media group for 2020 families
<i>September 2020</i>	Support 2020 parent focus group via email and social

- *June 2021:* media group
30-minute Kindergarten support class to students
- November 2020* Online interview with a traditional Public School First grade teacher
- December 2020:* Survey (2), online survey for 2020 graduates' families
- February 2021:* Survey (3), online survey for Montessori schools for partnership
- June 2021* Assessment of Actions (1), (2) and (3) as implemented below
- *June 2022:*

Data Collection and Results

Survey I

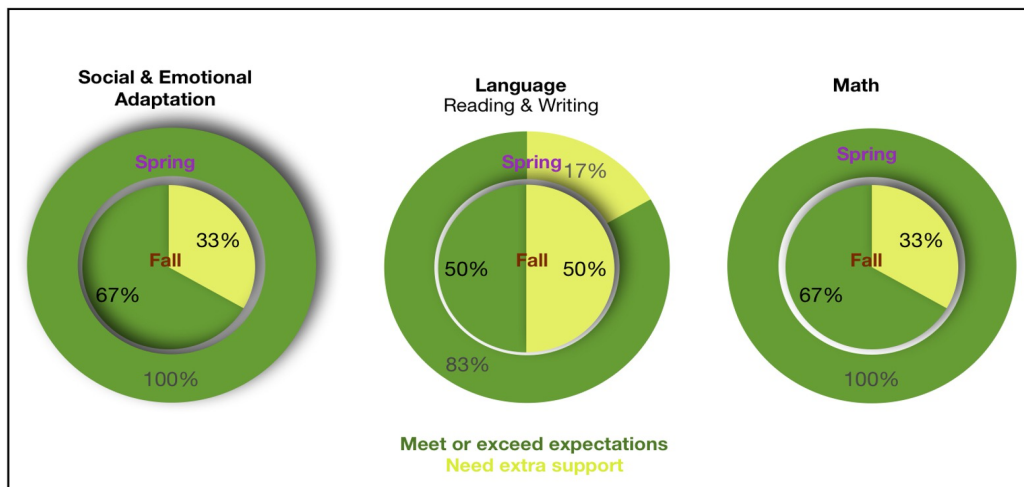
I executed the first data collection stage of this study in April 2020. It comprised of a Survey, (Transition to Traditional School in First Grade) presented to our 2019 and 2018 graduates' families, who had expressed concerns about their children's performance in their new First grade classrooms. The survey questions (Survey 1.) collected feedback on the students' social/emotional adaptation and their performance in Language (reading and writing) and Math subject areas over the course of their first year in a non-Montessori classroom. Strengths and challenges in these three areas as noted at the beginning of the school year and again in the spring, were assessed.

Survey 1: 2019 & 2018 Graduates Feedback

Which qualities helped your child in interacting/socializing with new classmates?
Which challenges did your child face during new peer interactions?
Which social challenges were eased with time, by the end of the school?
Which academic areas was your child strong in at the beginning of school?
Which academic challenges or learning difficulties did your child face at the beginning of the year?
Which academic challenges or learning difficulties were eased with time?
List any social or academic challenges that were still outstanding, at the end of the school year.
Please share any comments or concerns expressed by your child's teacher, in communications throughout the year.
...
Please share any positive attributes of your child's personality, behavior or approach to learning that can be credited to his/her Montessori educational experience.
Your feedback is invaluable to us. Please share suggestions for improvement to our program.

100% recovery was observed in math and social interactions. Two students out of the 8 survey participants reported not to have met their teachers' expectations in the language area by the end of the school year (Figure 1.). \

Figure 1. Meet or Exceed Expectations



Parents were also encouraged to share their first grade teacher's comments from Parent-Teacher conferences and their own experiences and insights. I discussed results from this survey with our Primary class guides and with their help, compared them with our progress report records for each of those children. The two children who did not show complete recovery in language subjects were found to have struggled in the same area according to our progress report data as well. Previous years' parent-teacher conference notes also mentioned their learning differences and their Montessori guide's attempts at customizing lessons that helped overcome these difficulties.

Analysis of Survey (1) results confirmed the need for a triple action approach in order to ease the evident transition process:

Action (1): Raising awareness in parents of what to expect and how to support children during this transitional period

Action (2): Creating a concrete and consistent plan to reflect on our current practices and to better prepare our students for the new environment and different academic experience

Action (3): Opening channels of communication with Non-Montessori School, first grade teachers to facilitate greater acceptance of our alumni in their classrooms, and to understand their expectations

Action (1), June 2020 - February 2021

I hosted, a virtual community meeting and presentation in June, 2020, for families of our 2020 graduates to educate them on their role in aiding a successful transition to first grade for their children. This presentation covered the following topics: change in school environments and children's interactions with new teachers and peers; different pedagogical approach; different ways of assessment, suggestions on how to prepare before school starts; judging when and how to help during the course of the year; resources for preparation and support; and benefits of completing the 3-year cycle of Montessori education.

I also composed a customizable, sample letter for this parent group to share with their new first grade teacher, introducing their child, her Montessori background, her interests and talents and probable areas where she may need support, for her to adjust successfully to her new class. A social media group was started to provide a convenient platform for alumni parents to connect with each other and with our staff members for support. I posted resources and suggestions on this page periodically.

Action (2), June - September 2020

I reviewed previous research literature to understand aspects and theories of early childhood development, Montessori Education, traditional method of education and importance of parent involvement, with respect to a Montessori student making this change at the end of their first plane of development. At this stage of development, she participates actively in her intellectual growth and peer relationships and is aware of her own strengths and challenges.

I studied the NJ State Public School Model Curriculum for Kindergarten and Correlation of the Common Core Curriculum to Montessori Lessons and shared these with our 3-6 teaching team. Montessori lessons offered in our classrooms exceed the state curriculum, but some differences in vocabulary used and methods of instruction in traditional classrooms may be challenging for our children. I facilitated implementation of the following steps to familiarize them with such changes. Starting in September, of the 2020-21 school year:

- Third year students were provided 30 minutes, kindergarten enrichment class each afternoon. This class included traditional school style Language lessons (Superkids Reading Program) 3 times a week and Math lessons (Go Math workbooks) 2 times a week. These lessons were conducted while the younger students rested in the afternoon and did not interfere with morning or afternoon work cycles. I invited our teachers with the strongest interest in these subject areas to lead these lessons.
- Third year students practiced reading a book of their choice and reading level, during the week and brought it home over the weekend, to share their progress with their families.

Action (3), Nov. 2020.

In addition to the letter to First Grade teachers, as mentioned in Action (1), I made direct contact with a Public School First grade teacher in our school district by means of a virtual meeting in November 2020. First grade academic expectations and means of assessment were discussed. The teacher also expressed her appreciation for the ability to work independently and exceptional creative thinking and social skills that she had seen in her students who had previously attended our Montessori school. She was interested in my invitation to observe our classrooms in the 2021 school year.

Survey 2

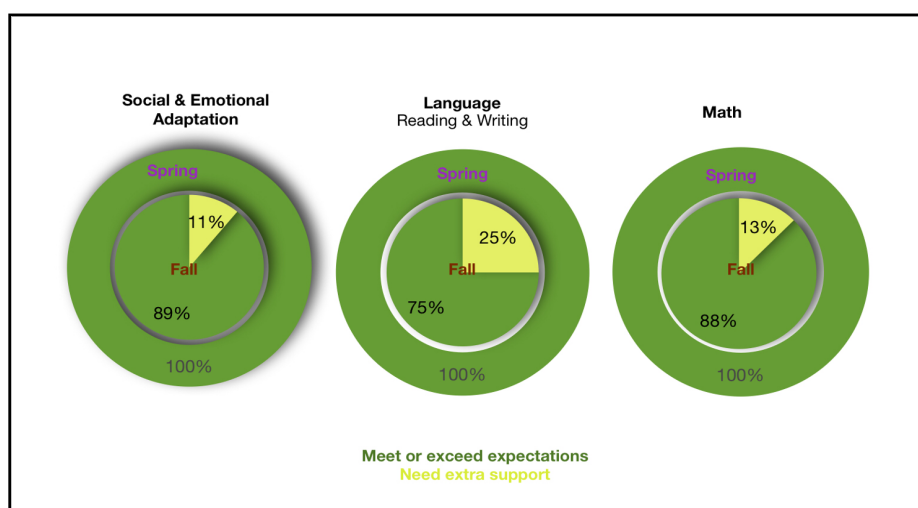
I presented Survey 2, (Progress in a non-Montessori First grade classroom) in December 2020, to our focus parent group of the 2020 graduate cohort to assess the success of our parent education efforts in Action (1). Survey (2) included questions (see Appendix, Survey 2.) on in person and virtual learning experiences, as all schools had been impacted by Covid 19 pandemic restrictions in the 2020-21 school year. 50% of our participants had chosen virtual only instruction for the school year, while the others were receiving a hybrid system of virtual and in person school days.

Survey 2: Progress of 2020 graduates

Has your child been attending Hybrid (in person and virtual) or Virtual only instruction?
How long does your child receive live instruction on virtual days?
Does your child get opportunities to speak during live virtual classes?
Does your child get individual instruction when needed on virtual days?
Please rate your child's virtual class experience from 1-10. ***
What does your child like about virtual school days? What does she/he like about in person school days?
Please share any challenges faced in social interactions or in class participation, in their new Virtual classroom environment.
Please share any challenges in academic performance in their new Virtual classroom environment.
Please share your child's strengths and challenges in interactions with classmates or teachers in their new (non- Montessori) classroom, over all.
Please share your child's academic strengths and weaknesses in their new (non- Montessori) classroom, over all.

This survey showed (Figure 2) only 1 student (hybrid) had difficulty in language, and he showed improvement as the year progressed. 7 out of the 8 participants reported Math to be their strongest subject. All virtual students reported limited opportunity for social interaction, however they participated freely in classes. Hybrid students had positive social interactions and learning experience on in person days, but lower level of focus on virtual days.

Figure 2. Meet or Exceed Expectations



Combined results of Actions (1), (2) and (3) will be assessed through the school year 2021-22 for our 2021 graduates and Survey 2. will be presented to all our future graduates.

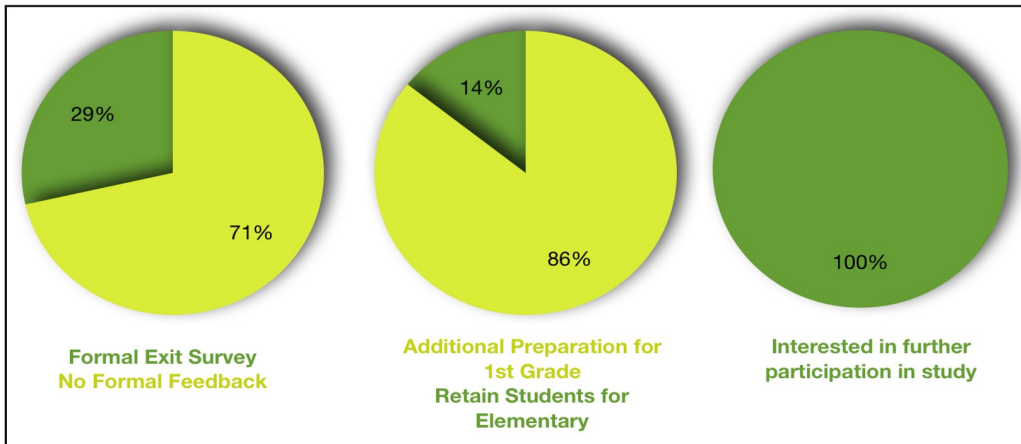
Finally, in January 2021, I invited other Montessori schools in New Jersey via email and social media to participate in Survey 3, (see Survey 3. below) to seek their experiences and insight on this topic and to facilitate a partnership that would benefit children in all of our

communities. 20% of their responses show that they conduct surveys to learn of their students' progress after leaving their schools. More than 80% were using methods such as kindergarten class time and workbooks to prepare their students for this transition and 100% expressed interest in learning about the results of this project (Figure 3.).

Survey 3: Montessori Community Participation

School Name *
Highest level of Montessori instruction offered *
Please share any feedback received from alumni families about their child's strengths in academic and social-emotional areas, in their new first grade class.
Please share any feedback received from alumni families about challenges faced by their children in academic and social-emotional areas, in their new first grade class.
Please list any methods you have used to prepare your third year students and families for their transition to a new Non-Montessori environment.
Please share additional comments or insights here.
Would your school community be interested in learning the results of this study?

Figure 3. Retain Students for Elementary



Action Plan

Parent feedback will continue to be collected through spring and fall surveys as established in the project. We will also seek parents' opinion on how our efforts in advising and partnering with them affected their experience in the new school year. 2021-2022 survey results will determine the overall success of this project, since all three actions were completed in the preceding school year. This triple action plan will be embedded in our school's Early Childhood program.

This project revealed the following avenues for further action that will be pursued in the future:

1. Facilitating greater collaboration and understanding of the Montessori Method with Non-Montessori teachers through in person visits to their classrooms and by hosting them in our school.

2. Understanding how learning differences that are organically accommodated in Montessori classrooms resurface when children transition to a different environment. How can these students be supported to minimize any negative impact on their confidence and performance?

Reflection

Collaboration with parents and creating channels to receive their direct feedback are the strongest tools in creating a bridge for our children's journey beyond their Montessori classroom. They can be educated and inspired to become savvy advocates for their children and are our first link to the new school.

Traditional school teachers who participated in this action research expressed their genuine commitment to the best interest of their students. They welcomed our invitation to engage with them in the best interest of our children. Even so, they came to the discussion with the perspective that they must prevent children from falling behind academically, while my efforts were aimed at making sure the children's well-being is sustained and their natural growth is supported. Much of their concern comes from the traditional school system's requirements to meet curricular timelines. Moreover, while Montessori alumni are often appreciated for their creativity in their new classrooms, their talents are not always allowed to translate into academic gains. Our children need their new teacher's understanding and patience to transition smoothly to their new schools. We can help by continuing dialogue and creating opportunities to observe and appreciate each other's environments. Montessori teachers also often feel pressured in ensuring that our children must meet their kindergarten requirements. We can find our balance by maintaining our firm footing in the belief that we must meet the present needs and interests of the child first. We cannot lose the sanctity of her present in preparing for the future. However,

creative and practical methods can be found to offer additional lessons. For example, hanging a clock and a 12-year calendar at children's eye level and modeling their routine use in the classroom is a more natural and developmentally appropriate manner of presenting date and time lessons than requiring all 5-6 year old children to fill in worksheets.

Our 30-minute kindergarten class was most successful when it was conducted at a time outside the children's morning and afternoon work cycles, in a room outside the Montessori prepared environment and with lessons prepared for the purpose of familiarizing children with traditional methods, vocabulary and implements of teaching. It was deeply insightful to study children's varied responses to these work periods. On a few occasions when a child would choose to bring an unfinished work page to complete in their classroom, they were easily swayed by the natural rhythm of the work cycle. Other times, some children requested additional work sheets. In a few cases these lessons harbored competition between friends, but the children were inherently gracious and collaborative, consistently offering encouragement to and seeking help from their peers just as they did in their Montessori classroom.

This study underscores that a successful transition can be achieved without compromising our commitment to the Montessori Method. Dr. Montessori was a pioneer. She led us on a path of enormous potential for humanity. The foundation for her work was in understanding and meeting the needs of children she observed.

When we ground our work in that foundation and let her methods be our guiding light, we too can meet the needs of children in our care. As we work to expand the Montessori movement, our community's partnership with all stakeholders, at this inevitable stage in our children's educational journey will bolster trust in the Montessori method and highlight our genuine commitment to their well-being.

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