

Montessori Teachers as Policy Advocates: A Systematic Literature Review

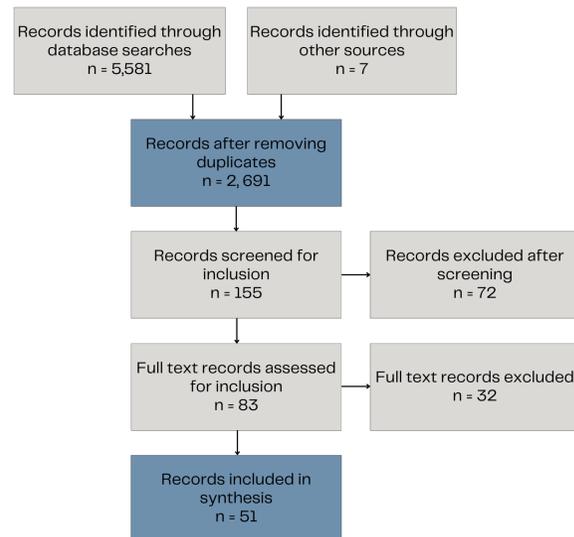
Heather Gerker, PhD Candidate, University of Cincinnati
gerkerhr@mail.uc.edu

Introduction

The current state of education revolves around test-based accountability, accompanied by a growing distrust of public schools (Good et al., 2020). This distrust is further intensified by an increase of external policies imposed on teachers. While policies shape the work of all teachers, regardless of the education method, Montessori teachers in public schools often face unique challenges. Montessori Teacher advocacy is more critical now than ever before. Yet, in order to empower Montessori teachers to voice their opinions and take action, it is imperative to understand their involvement in advocacy – when, how, and if they participate. Firmly rooted in the belief that teachers are integral to shaping policy, I conducted a literature review to examine Montessori teachers as advocates.

Methods

Through multiple, iterative steps and clear inclusion criteria, 51 records were identified to include in this literature review. Records were first uploaded to Zotero for initial screening, then imported into MaxQDA for full text screening and coding.



The initial literature search included different combinations of key search terms. Databases searched included Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, Education Research Complete, Education Full Text, Eric, EBSCO, Proquest, and Google Scholar. The initial searches did not reveal many studies of Montessori teachers as advocates. As a result, additional key search terms were used. Beyond searching databases, I explored the websites of nationally known Montessori organizations such as AMS, AMI-USA, NCMP, and MPPI. I also explored reference lists of relevant articles and books.

Initial Inclusion Criteria
• From 2000 to 2023
• United States
Full text Inclusion Criteria
• Teacher experiences with policy and advocacy
• Policies that shape pedagogy
Exclusion Criteria
• Before 2000
• Outside of the United States
• Teacher Educator Advocacy



Research Questions

1. How do Montessori teachers respond to externally imposed policies?
2. How have Montessori teachers engaged in policy advocacy at the school, district, state, and national levels?
3. What strategies have been identified or implemented to support teachers in their advocacy for Montessori education?

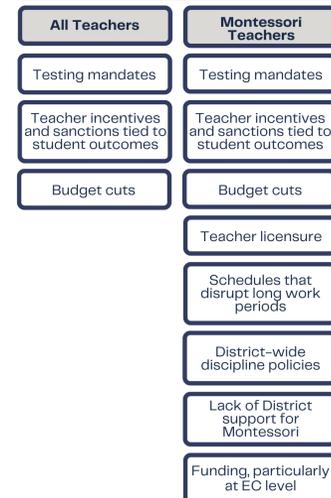
Results

Type of Records – Montessori Specific	
Empirical Journal Articles	6
Dissertations or Theses	4
Non-empirical Journal Articles	4
Types of Records – Non-Montessori	
Empirical Journal Articles	34
Dissertations or Theses	2
Non-empirical Journal Articles	1
Total Records	51

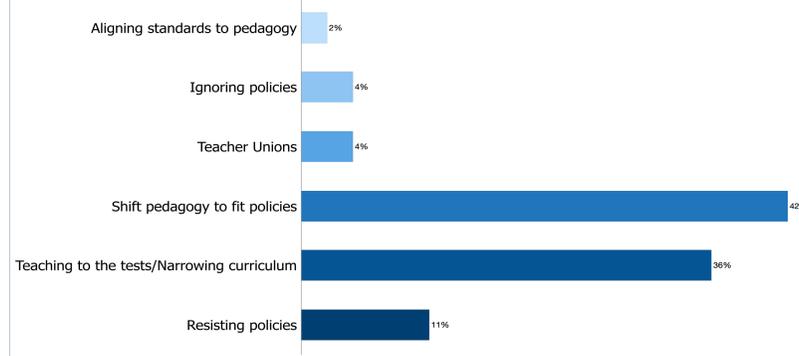


Records that specifically address accountability mandates such as standardized testing.

Significant Policy Challenges Highlighted in the Literature

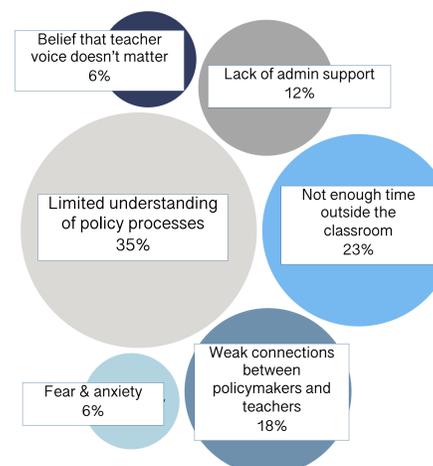


Teacher Response to Policies



Barriers to Advocacy

There is not much evidence as to how teachers participate in advocacy. A few examples include increased collaboration with colleagues, leaning on Teacher Unions for support, or leaving the classroom to focus on advocacy. Mostly, teachers feel policymakers disregard their experiences and expertise. Barriers to advocacy that are most salient in the literature include:



Implications

Implications of this literature review for Montessori theory and practice include direction for future research, the role of teacher education programs can play in preparing Montessori teachers to be advocates for the pedagogy, potential suggestions for education leaders for ways the Montessori pedagogy might be better supported in public schools, and suggested ways policymakers can elevate Montessori teacher voice and expertise. As noted below, the top five well documented strategies to support teachers as advocates include adding policy and advocacy to teacher education programs and more.

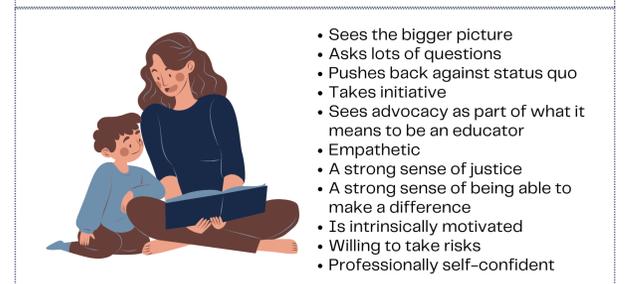
“The glaring reality is that when policy is made without teachers, the policies fail kids” (Colvin et al., 2015).

Top Five Documented Strategies to support Teachers as Advocates

1. Add policy & advocacy to teacher education programs
2. Support from Administration
3. Provide time outside classroom for teachers to advocate
4. Targeted policy & advocacy professional development and PLCs
5. Join formal education advocacy organizations

According to the extant literature, characteristics of a teacher advocate should be nurtured and instilled as a natural part of the teaching profession.

Characteristics of a Teacher Advocate



Limitations

One important limitation to the initial purpose of this literature review is that there is limited literature specific to Montessori teachers as policy advocates. Also, a literature review is a snapshot in time. There may be future developments or current studies underway that are impossible to include. Finally, while I attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, there is no finite way to ensure that all relevant literature has been included in a literature review.



Scan for references.



Scan for MPPI website.