Public Montessori Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of

Psychological Needs Fulfillment

by

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Abstract

As attrition rates of teachers remain a concern and the establishment of Montessori public schools increases in the United States, studying the needs satisfaction of Montessori public school teachers is a way to address issues of retainment. This qualitative methods study used the Self-Determination Theory framework to guide an analysis of factors that impact the levels of autonomy, relatedness, and competence within a public Montessori school teacher's work environment. This study gave public Montessori teachers an opportunity to share their stories and provide context to the issue of work satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Findings indicated that there are several factors and experiences that impact a public Montessori school teacher's experience with autonomy, relatedness, and competence in their daily work. Additional findings are that these factors impact Montessori teachers on different levels: personal, school, and external. In analyzing these factors and level of impact, administrators and school districts can make sure that the work environments of public Montessori teachers are conducive.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Tables

Table

Figure

Chapter 1: Introduction

Context

Montessori education in the public sector is on the rise. According to data gathered by the Montessori Census, there are roughly 2,217 private and 565 public Montessori programs in the United States. The Montessori Census is implemented by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS) and the Center for Research on Developmental Education (NCMPS Staff, 2019). NCMPS states that Montessori public programs face several challenges including a short supply of Montessori trained teachers, funding to prepare Montessori environments, and the ability to deliver the Montessori philosophy with fidelity.

The Montessori philosophy examines the idea that when a child's needs are satisfied, they engage in classroom work for the joy and love of learning intrinsically rather than through extrinsic rewards (Montessori, 1967). Likewise, Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-determination theory (SDT) of human needs states that if an individual's needs are satisfied, they can enter a state of intrinsic motivation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Wehmeyer and Abery (2013) offer a view of self-determination which theorizes that individuals must be given the opportunity to act upon what is of value to them, to make choices, and accomplish goals which ultimately leads to an improvement in their quality of life.

In our current educational climate, it has become more challenging for teachers to have their needs met. Teachers are leaving the workforce at alarming rates citing burnout and stress as main causes (Madigan & Kim, 2021). If teachers are not finding joy and meaning from their work, they are not intrinsically motivated to do their work. If teachers are unable to make choices and to act on what is of value to them, they will feel unfulfilled in their work.

Dr. Angeline Lillard, a leading Montessori researcher, and her team at the University of Virginia hypothesized that the self-determination developed by a child in the Montessori environment may lead to general wellbeing (happiness, self-confidence, competence) and engagement (ability to seek challenges) (Lillard et al., 2021). Although this study focused on the children in the classroom and their wellbeing, the elements of this study focusing on self-determination in the Montessori environment could be applied to teachers and their development of wellbeing and engagement in the workplace. Montessori philosophy emphasizes the need to prepare the teacher spiritually as just as important as preparing the teacher instructionally (Standing, 1957). Montessori (1967) explains the spirituality of the teacher,

> The teacher, when she begins work in our schools, must have a kind of faith that the child will reveal himself through work. She must free herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which the children may be... To this she must devote her energies, and her activities will change from stage to stage in a spiritual ascent. (p. 276-277)

This spirituality requires the teacher to prepare three aspects of themselves: the keeper of the classroom environment, how they interact with children, and how to appropriately present materials and guide the child without interrupting their learning (Montessori, 1967). Just as Montessori theorized that if a child's needs are not met, they cannot work to their fullest potential, it can be assumed that if the adult's needs are not met, they cannot prepare themselves fully (spiritually, physically, emotionally) to meet the needs of the child in the Montessori classroom. This aligns with the SDT in that when an adult's needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are satisfied, it is theorized that they can enter a state of motivation that leads to a more satisfying life and in these circumstances, more engaging and meaningful work (Deci &

Ryan, 2000). This type of motivation is developed from intrinsic factors rather than extrinsic factors. This study will focus on this idea as it applies to work as a Montessori teacher in public classroom school settings. Further, when three psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are satisfied, intrinsic work motivation increases (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Schools, especially ones in the public sector, are struggling to retain teachers (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021), and the three psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) proposed by SDT may play a role in supporting teachers. Montessori schools in the public sector are expanding and Montessori teachers face many of the same challenges as other public-school teachers. This qualitative methods study aimed to determine factors that are leading to high or low levels of intrinsic work motivation among Montessori teachers, in the public sector, to create a framework for retaining and recruiting teachers. This research focuses on the psychological needs of public early childhood Montessori educators and their perceptions of what aspects of their work environments hinder or enhance their feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment in their work.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) of early childhood public Montessori school teachers. 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. The literature around the work motivation levels and psychological needs fulfillment of Montessori teachers is limited. While literature around motivation and self-determination of children in the Montessori setting does exist, this study will explore adult motivation in relation to self-determination.

The findings of this study may help to address recruitment and retainment of Montessori teachers, especially in public school settings. Montessori administrators, Montessori teacher trainers, and public-school districts may better understand teachers' challenges related to autonomy, relatedness, and competence and then better able to develop support systems and professional learning opportunities. The study may provide the beginnings of a Montessori self-determination framework for creating a future tool to determine work motivation and psychological needs fulfillment levels in Montessori teachers.

Qualitative data was collected through interviews from six Montessori teachers at two public Montessori school settings in a specific Midwestern state to develop an understanding of public Montessori teachers' perspectives of their psychological needs and the satisfaction of those needs.

Research Questions

To address the issues of teacher retention and attainment in public Montessori schools through an analysis of the three psychological needs found in SDT (autonomy, relatedness, competence), the following research questions were asked:

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?

Organization of the Dissertation

In chapter one, I introduced the context, the rational for the study, and the research questions. In chapter two, I review literature related to attrition and retention, motivation, burnout, dissatisfaction, teacher self-efficacy, Self-determination theory (SDT) and Montessori

philosophy. In chapter three, I explain of the methods for selecting participants, the risks and limitations of the study, the tools used, and how the qualitative data was gathered and analyzed. In chapter four, I provide the findings and discusses of the trends and themes found in the qualitative data that was collected. Specifically, I discuss the factors that Montessori public school teachers feel impact their work satisfaction in specifically within three areas that align with the SDT framework: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I also discuss how each of these factors impact the satisfaction of teachers on a personal, school, or external level. Finally in chapter five, I discuss how the findings can be useful in providing recommendations for Montessori administrators and teacher trainers as a tool for reducing teacher attainment and increasing retention in public Montessori schools.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

In 2016 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) determined that to achieve universal quality education, the world needs to recruit 68 million new teachers by the year 2030 (UNESCO, 2016). UNESCO (2016) also state that teachers should be "[e]mpowered, adequately recruited, well-trained, professionally qualified, motivated, and supported within well-resourced systems" (p. 8).

It is evident that the United States in not on track to achieve this goal. The Economic Policy Institute (2019) found that the teacher shortage in the United States is real and has severe consequences. This shortage is caused by a gap between the supply and demand of teachers. As teachers choose to retire, leave the occupation, or transfer schools, there is not an adequate supply of new teachers to fill the vacancies. The Learning Policy Institute (Sutcher et al., 2016) projected that from 2011 to 2018 the gap between the supply and the demand for teachers in the United States would quadruple (68,000 to over 110,000 teachers) due to a decline in teacher preparation enrollments, district efforts to return to appropriate teacher/pupil ratios, increased student enrollment, and high teacher attrition. This projection called for a plan of action, citing that if attrition rates could be reduced by at least half, the shortage could be virtually eliminated. A high rate of attrition in the field of teaching and education is the central contributor to the teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Within the midwestern state of Missouri, 5% of teaching positions were vacant during the 2020-2021 academic school year (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021)

However, Culclasure, Fleming, and Riga and colleagues (2018) found that of public South Carolina teachers, 98% of Montessori teachers reported either loving or liking their job compared with 89% of South Carolina traditional public school teachers (Culclasure et al.,

2018). This difference might be explained, in part, by the Lillard et al. (2019) study which found that Montessori teachers reported that positive social climates, the three-year cycle of work with students, and in-depth Montessori training led to an overwhelmingly positive response to job satisfaction.

In the following sections, I present information about teacher attrition and retention, the role of motivation in teachers' job satisfaction, reasons for teacher burnout and job dissatisfaction. Next, I discuss teacher self-efficacy and self-determination. Finally, I describe the Montessori approach and how it intersects with SDT. By understanding and using a SDT lens, I will explore factors impacting autonomy, relatedness, and competence of public Montessori teachers, which may help address issues related to the attrition and retention of teachers. The literature shows that work satisfaction leads to high levels of motivation and low levels of burnout and job dissatisfaction (Gagne & Deci, 2005, Madigan & Kim, 2021, Sklavvik & Sklavvik, 2014).

Attrition and Retention

Although attrition is present and a problem in all occupations, the rates at which teachers are departing from the field of education are alarming in comparison (Madigan & Kim, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing survey, Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found,

> At 8% annually, teacher attrition in the United States is noticeably higher than that in some other high-achieving countries where teacher attrition is half that rate or less. More than two-thirds of this attrition is due to reasons other than retirement. (p.16)

The problem with attrition lies within the two-thirds of teachers that leave the field due to factors other than retirement. The highest levels of attrition are found in the Southern region of the

United States, schools that serve a high percent of students with greater needs, and schools in which teachers received low salaries compared with teachers from other regions in the U.S. There is also a high rate of attrition in the state of Missouri, with only 46.5% of teachers who continue teaching in public school beyond their fifth years of teaching (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).

Rosenberg and Anderson (2021) found that within the six school districts they studied, teacher turnover declined from an average of 17.3% in 2021 to 12.6% in 2020. However, although there is a slight decline in turnover rates within these individual school districts, job satisfaction in teachers has not improved. Rosenberg and Anderson (2021) found that morale was much lower than prior to 2021 and the beginning of the COVID pandemic. Although turnover rate could mean that teachers were accepting a role at a different school or in a different teaching specialty, there was still a level of dissatisfaction associated with this turnover. A nationwide survey by Hart Research Associates (2020), 38% (one third) of teachers surveyed (n=816) were more likely to leave teaching or retire early due to experiences during the COVID pandemic. These findings make it evident that districts and schools cannot be complacent even if they notice a slight rise in retention. To avoid attrition, school and district leadership needs to actively work to address low morale and feelings of dissatisfaction.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) explain that 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. Research shows that currently there is a high need for teachers as there is a gap between the supply of certified teachers and the demand for positions to be fulfilled (Rosenberg & Anderson, 2021) This research also shows that in some

districts or schools there is a slight increase in the retention of teachers; however, teachers are not satisfied in their position, thus the threat of attrition looms.

The cost to find qualified individuals, fill vacant positions, and train new hires is high. A "national analysis of teacher shortage estimates that attrition costs $2.2 billion per year and approximately $4.9 billion per year for replacing teachers who transfer schools" (Castro et al., 2018, p. 3). Not only is high attrition costly, but also directly impacts school and student success. Castro and colleagues (2018) determined that the impact of teacher shortages is reflected in achievement, school climate, and cost. Schools that experience a shortage of teachers ultimately exhibit low levels of student achievement and a less positive student experience overall. High levels of turnover and attrition result in schools with weak climates and less community investment within the school and surrounding community (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Ultimately, these factors contribute to the development of poor workplace conditions which may lead to teachers quitting or moving positions (Nguyen et al. 2019).

Motivation

Teachers often lack motivation or engagement in their work due to stress responses, emotional exhaustion, and lower self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). Baumeister (2015) provide two definitions of motivation. First, motivation can be defined as the desire to satisfy basic human needs such as hunger and safety. Motivation in this sense is the behavior that leads to satisfying those needs. The second type of motivation, work motivation, is more complex and is highly contextualized (Baumeister, 2015). 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 (Latham & Pinder, 2005).

Latham and Pinder (2005) developed a work motivational framework based on an individual's needs, personal traits, and values which play an integral role in the person fit in a work context. When psychological needs are satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000) an individual can enter a state of deep motivation. This state of motivation can be associated with work-related flow (Bakker, 2000). Bakker (2000) measures flow at work or a state of immersion in an activity in which the individual enjoys it immensely. Bakker (2000) finds that work-related flow can be categorized by three sub areas: absorption, work enjoyment, and intrinsic work motivation. The importance of work-related flow is that an individual who is motivated will typically do more than is expected of them, provide a positive image to their environment, and assist colleagues. Gagne and Deci (2005) state that autonomy as opposed to control increases satisfaction,

> [m]anagers' autonomy support led to greater satisfaction of the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy and, in turn, to more job satisfaction, higher performance evaluations, greater persistence, greater acceptance of organizational change, and better psychological adjustment. (p. 345)

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) asked Norwegian elementary and middle school teachers to complete the Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, after analyzing the results of 2,569 teachers, they found that "teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy positively predicted engagement and job satisfaction and negatively predicted emotional exhaustion" (p. 74). When leadership exerts too much control in the workplace, pressure increases which leads to amotivation (Nguyen et al., 2019). School leadership can encourage autonomy within their staff through meaningful evaluation processes, professional development, and increasing decision making opportunities (Nguyen et al., 2019).

As theorized by Blanchard et. al (2009) when viewing work motivation through a self-determination theory lens, optimal functioning can be predicted leading to employee engagement, job performance, and retention. Using a self-determination theory lens to increase retention may prove valuable to a profession such as teaching that traditionally experiences low levels of retention and high levels of burnout, especially in the public sector (Castro, Quinn, Fuller, & Barnes, 2018).

Burnout and Dissatisfaction

Burnout and dissatisfaction are leading causes of teacher attrition (Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teachers who feel burnt out or dissatisfied in their work seek new positions or jobs. Efforts to recruit teachers are meaningless if half of the teachers recruited are not retained past five years of teaching (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). Both burnout and work dissatisfaction impact teachers in a variety of ways and are caused by numerous factors.

Burnout

According to Madigan and Kim's (2021) definition, burnout comprises three symptoms: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy. Emotional exhaustion can be caused by the overexertion of teachers. This may be due to high demands of work and a low supply of adequate resources. Madigan and Kim (2021) define cynicism as an "[i]mpersonal reaction towards those around you" (p. 3) or giving up on the hope that things can be better. Reduced efficacy is exhibited when teachers feel incompetent in their work or that they are no longer capable of their job.

Through an analysis of several studies focused on the concept of burnout, Woods and McCarthy (2002) define symptoms of burnout as avoiding work, a sense of inadequacy, feeling

overwhelmed by work, withdrawing from colleagues, irritation, insomnia, digestive disorder, or inability to function professionally. Burnout can be caused by a high demand of work and a low supply of resources to get the job done. Other contributing factors such as exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment directly impacted teacher's intention to quit.

Fiorilli et al. (2002) explored the experiences of 500 teachers in Italy utilizing a burnout inventory, work engagement scale, and index of confidence to develop a conceptual model (Table 1). They found that work engagement can predict either burnout or confidence in one's work. With respect to teaching, work engagement can present itself in a teacher's level of vigor, absorption (how engrossed the teacher is in their work), and dedication to their work. Burnout can be categorized as personal (outside of school context), work related (impacted by colleagues or administration), or student related (behaviors, academic growth, caregiver involvement).

Table 1: High and low work engagement

High Work Engagement		Confidence in Training
Vigor Absorption Dedication	leads to…	Professional & personal related growth

Low Work Engagement		Burnout
Low vigor Low absorption Low dedication	leads to…	Personal related Work related Student related Negative impact on confidence in training

Note: Table 1 created based on the findings of Fiorilli et al. (2002)

Dissatisfaction

Individuals who are motivated to work are more engaged in work and thus more satisfied with their work (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Job dissatisfaction directly leads to amotivation and reduced enjoyment at work. In a meta-analysis of 14 studies, Madigan and Kim (2021) found that dissatisfaction results in withdrawal from the classroom and withdrawal from the teaching profession as a whole. A teacher's dissatisfaction may stem from a feeling that there is no ability to make instructional or curricular decisions, that they are being controlled by school or district leadership (Gagne & Deci, 2005), or that they have no room to grow professionally (Friedman & Kass, 2002). The less satisfied a teacher is, the more likely they are to disengage with their work and ultimately the profession of teaching. Garcia and Weiss (2019) found that specifically in high-poverty schools, there is a struggle to hire and retain teachers.

Solutions to Addressing Burnout and Dissatisfaction

Based on the empirical evidence, two areas of solutions to the crisis of high rates of teacher attrition will be discussed: psychological and organizational. High levels of attrition can be reduced by addressing the psychological needs of teachers such as alleviating burnout, addressing dissatisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2019), and promoting high self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, 2016). Attrition can also be addressed through imposing practical organizational level solutions such as addressing salary, access to resources, professional learning, and positive school climates (Nguyen et al., 2019). This approach gives a broad view to solutions through a psychological approach and then narrows the view to a concrete implementation through practical organizational level changes.

Teachers who feel burnt out may be experiencing more than just a dislike for their work, they may feel extended beyond their abilities. Kyriacou (200l, as cited in Wood & McCarthy, 2002) suggests that to mitigate teacher stress and burnout, administrators should communicate clearly with teachers, and teachers should be involved in school decision making, provided adequate resources, given clear expectations, and be provided with meaningful professional development opportunities. These solutions to preventing burnout can be implemented by district and school leadership.

Addressing burnout is one way of reducing high teacher attrition rates. In working to alleviate burnout, teachers may become more satisfied in their work. Raising the rates of work satisfaction is a way to address teacher retention and shortages. Porter and Lawler (1968, as cited in Gagne & Deci, 2005) advocated that,

> [s]tructuring the work environment so that effective performance would lead to both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, which would in turn produce total job satisfaction. This was to be accomplished by enlarging jobs to make them more interesting, and thus more intrinsically rewarding, and by making extrinsic rewards such as higher pay and promotions clearly contingent upon effective performance. (p. 331)

Efforts to make the profession of teaching more interesting and intrinsically rewarding may lead to more individuals entering the profession and staying in the profession longer. Intrinsic motivation is led by satisfaction with activity (Gagne & Deci, 2005). If a teacher is satisfied with their work, they will be intrinsically motivated to work at a higher more meaningful level. Porter and Lawler (1968, as cited in Gagne & Deci, 2005) reference higher pay and promotions as opportunities to increase job performance and satisfaction.

There are a multitude of empirical factors to consider when addressing burnout and job dissatisfaction that contribute to attrition and retention. Nguyen et al. (2019) reviewed the current literature surrounding this topic and established three categories of empirical factors: personal correlates, school correlates, and external correlates. These correlates provide a practical framework in addressing teacher attrition and retention. Each of these correlates as seen in Table 2 has an influence (positive or negative) on teacher attrition and retention.

Table 2: Influence of personal, school, and external correlates

Personal Correlates	School Correlates	External Correlates
Teacher Characteristics Teacher Qualifications	Organizational Characteristics School Resources Student Body Relational Demography	Accountability School Improvement Workforce
Teacher Background Marital Status Age Qualifications Subject Area Specialization Scholastic Achievement	Class Size Physical Classroom Resources Support Caregiver Support Student Behavior	Pay Rate Evaluation Systems Principal Effectiveness Initiatives Teacher Buy-In Employment Rate

Note: Table 2 was developed based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention (Nguyen et al., 2019).

In Table 2, which presents information based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention (Nguyen et al., 2019), the personal, school, and external correlates provide administration or school leadership with a clear guide to the factors that directly impact teachers in their building or district. From these correlates, practical changes within the

workplace that administrators and leadership can make include (but are not limited to) increased salary, access to resources, professional learning, and positive school climates.

The rate of salary impacts the hiring and retention of teachers, "The teacher labor supply literature has shown that 'quality' teachers respond to financial incentives" (Gilpin, 2012, p. 15). Hendricks (2015) conducted a simulation using data from two large school districts in Texas to determine the immediate and long-term impacts of reshaping salary schedules and increasing teacher pay,

> I have shown that school districts can improve student achievement gains (teacher productivity) by reshaping their salary schedules, which has no cost initially and actually reduces total payroll over time. Districts can also improve by paying teachers more across the board, or by targeting pay increases to relatively inexperienced teachers. However, these policies come with added payroll costs. If the district were to increase salaries by 5% in each experience cell, teacher productivity increases in the long run because turnover rates decrease, and the district attracts a more effective distribution of new hires. (p. 166)

Hendrick's findings show that pay has a direct impact on the retention and productivity of teachers. Salary may not be a solution for a building level administrator to implement, but a change that can be made by policy makers or district level leadership. At a building level, administrators can impact teacher satisfaction through positive leadership as well as access to resources and learning opportunities.

Teachers feel supported by their administrator, through the ability to make decisions and feel supported through mentorship opportunities, they are much less likely to leave teaching

(Anderson, 2007; Boyd et al., 2011, as cited in, Nguyen et al., 2019). School administration can also directly impact the resources and professional learning opportunities available to teachers. The negative effects of burnout and dissatisfaction can be lessened by providing teachers with adequate teaching resources as well as a well-maintained classroom space (Woods & McCarthy, 2012). In terms of classroom organization, the class size and teacher to student resource has a great impact on a teacher's level of efficacy and satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2019). Providing meaningful opportunities for professional learning allows teachers to develop a professional identity which ultimately leads to more competent teachers with high levels of efficacy who feel confident in their abilities (Sklaavik & Sklaavik, 2014). Offering professional development is utilized worldwide to positively impact both teacher and student experience,

> One of the key challenges in improving education today is optimizing teachers' professional development. It has been documented that countries with high-performing education systems implement professional development policies. (Fiorilli et al., 2020, p. 8)

Offering teachers meaningful professional development opportunities is a way to increase teacher confidence and competence, referred to as professional validation (Nolan & Molla, 2016). Professional validation is a result of teachers acknowledging their competence and recognizing their strengths through developing professional knowledge and skill. These concrete solutions can be implemented by school or district leadership to directly impact burnout, dissatisfaction, and self-efficacy in the teachers that work in their buildings.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Alleviating burnout and increasing job satisfaction can lead to higher retention rates and lower rates of attrition. Self-efficacy has been defined as "[t]he extent to which a teacher believes that she or he can influence students' behavior and their academic achievement, especially of pupils with difficulties or those with particularly low learning motivation" (Friedman & Kass, 2002, p. 675). Self-efficacy is whether a teacher feels capable or competent at their work. Acknowledging and working to raise the self-efficacy of teachers is a way to directly solve emotional exhaustion and positively impact job satisfaction,

> Research on teachers shows that self-efficacy is positively related to work engagement and job satisfaction, and negatively related to burnout. For instance, Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found that teacher self-efficacy was positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to emotional exhaustion. Avanzi, *et al*. (2013) also found that teacher self-efficacy was positively related to job and negatively related to work-related burnout. Using confirmatory factor analysis, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) also found moderate negative associations between teacher self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 70)

High rates of self-efficacy led to high rates of job satisfaction and low rates of emotional exhaustion. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016) found through research that teacher self-efficacy "[p]redicts higher teacher engagement and job satisfaction, lower levels of burnout, and less intention of leaving the teaching profession" (p. 1787).

Friedman and Kass (2002) determined that the commonly accepted definition of teacher self-efficacy could be expanded. They developed a model based on empirical evidence that includes a more "[r]ealistic description of teacher professional functioning and teaching context"

(p. 683). Based on the Classroom and School Context model created by Friedman and Kass (2002), there are two contexts that impact a teacher's level of self-efficacy: school and classroom,

> Teacher self-efficacy is the teacher's perception of his or her ability to (a) perform required professional tasks and to regulate relations involved in the process of teaching and educating students (classroom efficacy), and (b) perform organizational tasks, become part of the organization and its political and social processes (organizational efficacy). (Friedman & Kass, 2002, p. 676).

It is evident that school or organizational efficacy may be impacted (negatively or positively) by interactions with colleagues and administrators (Friedman & Kass, 2002). A teacher's classroom efficacy is impacted by their interactions with students and caregivers. In both cases, the teacher's efficacy is dependent on those interactions and whether they can achieve the classroom or organizational goals that were set. This research provides school leadership and administrators with a tangible framework for impacting teacher self-efficacy in a positive way.

Self-Determination

Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that as hungry people act to get food, all behavior can be traced back to disequilibria like this. Behaviors occur to satisfy basic needs. In self-determination theory (SDT), an individual acts to satisfy a set of needs to achieve deep focused motivation. Wehmeyer and Abery (2013) theorize that self-determination varies based on an individual's personal goals, interests, and what the individual perceives as important to them. Wehmeyer and Abery suggest four characteristics to determine if an action or choice can be determined as self-determined,

(1) the person acts autonomously; (2) the behavior is self-regulated; (3) the person

initiates and responds to the event(s) in a psychologically empowered manner; and (4) the

person acts in a self-realizing manner. (p. 399, 2013)

The social or work environment you are placed in can either support or impede the development

of intrinsic motivation depending on the ability to act on the factors that the individual perceives

as important. This deep focused motivation will influence the environment around the individual

and attain outcomes from within it. Deci and Ryan (2000) define this as a psychological need.

These needs are relatedness, autonomy, and competence. *Relatedness* is the experience of

belonging and the feeling of connection to others. Teacher's level of self-efficacy is directly

related to their own teaching and less reliant on the support from a collaborative team. Although

a teacher may receive support from peers, when teaching they are primarily alone, relying on

their own abilities (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2019). However, collective efficacy does increase a

teacher's sense of belonging. *Autonomy* is the need to feel control of one's life through making

choices and the desire to self-organize. The literature shows that regardless of self-efficacy

levels, autonomy is positively associated with engagement and job satisfaction (Skaalvik &

Skaalvik, 2014). *Competence* is the ability to master one's own life and environment, which

energizes human activity. The satisfaction of these needs depends on the individual's culture and

context (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The satisfaction of these needs can be applied in a Montessori and

educational context. Assor et. al (2009) stated that SDT is useful in guiding educational reforms

that aim for deep internalization of concepts and high-quality implementation of new ideas

within a professional learning setting. If the goal is for a deep motivation to teach, resulting in

engaged teachers, then the basic psychological needs of the teacher must be satisfied.

Relatedness, autonomy, and competence are also represented and influenced by cultural values and depend on the context of employment and sociodemographic situations (Keller, 2012).

Autonomy

Autonomy is an essential aspect of healthy human functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Stefanou (2004) determined that there are three types of autonomy present within the classroom: organizational autonomy, procedural autonomy, and cognitive autonomy. *Organizational autonomy* includes the ability for students to determine group members and assignment structure (due dates, rules, evaluation). *Procedural autonomy* includes the ability to choose materials, display work, and discuss wants. *Cognitive autonomy* includes the student's ability to receive feedback, debate ideas, and ask questions.

The implementation of strategies such as rewards and punishments undermine the development of a child's autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2002). When a child is controlled by external factors, they are less likely to independently engage with classroom work. Individuals feel a greater tendency to take on learning activities because they sense a personal identification with the learning goals rather than feeling compelled by external factors (Koh & Frick, 2010). Koh and Frick (2010) determined the importance of autonomy support in the Montessori classroom. When the correct supports are established for students to think critically, reflect, engage socially, and find value in their work, the opportunity to act autonomously in the classroom has a positive impact on the competence and intrinsic motivation levels shown by students.

The Montessori philosophy espouses the goal of education to be that the child loves the work that they do. If they do not love the work that they are engaging in, they will lack purpose (Montessori, 1967). Maria Montessori used the term 'horme' (a Greek word meaning vital

energy as an urge to purposeful activity (Merriam-Webster, 2022)) to describe the divine urge

that stimulates growth in the child. She stated that the child feels an impulse to discover their

environment as well as master it (1967).

Just as the child can function at a more meaningful level in the classroom when they are

given opportunities to act autonomously, so can the teacher. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) found that

the more a teacher's sense of autonomy is undermined, the less enthusiastically and creatively

they engage with teaching. A teacher's sense of autonomy may be undermined from pressures

from above (administration, policies, parents) and from pressures to succeed (curriculum

expectations). Ultimately Niemiec and Ryan found that the less autonomous teachers were, the

more control they exerted in their classroom and the students then experienced less autonomy as

a result which led to levels of motivation suffering in both teachers and students. Niemiec and

Ryan encourage administrators and policy makers to acknowledge the necessity in providing

opportunities for autonomy to be encouraged in teaching positions.

Competence

Competence stems from an ability to develop relationships and have meaningful

experiences. Meaningful experiences may be professional learning opportunities that lead to skill

development, network establishment, and confidence building for teachers. Like relatedness,

teacher competence can be developed from an establishment of trust,

> Social capital highlights the importance of trust, networks, and norms of reciprocity
>
> among teachers. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) propose that social capital is more
>
> important than human capital simply because the latter cannot be effective without the
>
> former which also plays critical roles in building the talent and competence (human

capital) of individuals. In this respect, teacher professional confidence and certainty is a

collaborative functioning: it results from shared expertise, trust, and openness to

improvement. (Nolan & Molla, 2017, p.11)

Social capital and professional capital are integral parts of a positive teaching experience.

Through ongoing professional learning opportunities teachers develop confidence and expertise.

Novice teachers and experienced teachers can develop professional capital and increase their

feelings of competence through mentorship programs. Through these experiences teachers'

feelings of isolation and self-doubt lessen and they experience greater rates of job satisfaction

(Nola & Molla, 2017).

Relatedness

The need for a sense of relatedness has been deemed as necessary for students' success

and the ability to develop a sense of intrinsic motivation and belonging in students (Niemiec &

Ryan, 2009). However, teachers can also develop a deep sense of motivation to do their work

through a sense of belonging and relatedness within their work environment,

SDT (Self Determination Theory) posits that satisfaction of the need for relatedness

facilitates the process of internalization. People tend to internalize and accept as their

own the values and practices of those to whom they feel, or want to feel, connected, and

from contexts in which they experience a sense of belonging. (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009, p.

139)

When a work environment that promotes opportunities to develop relatedness between

employees is developed, there is a higher likelihood that individuals feel supported and satisfied

in their position. [S]tructuring work to allow interdependence among employees and

identification with work groups, as well as being respectful and concerned about each employee, may have a positive effect on internalization of autonomous motivation and work outcomes (van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000; Wall et al., 1986 as cited in, Gagne & Deci, 2005, p. 355).

Montessori Philosophy

Maria Montessori referred to her method as "scientific pedagogy" (Gutek & Montessori, 2004). She was interested in the science behind young children's development and learning. She claimed children had an innate desire to learn and grow. This intrinsic love for learning could be cultivated in a highly specialized learning environment that was intended to attract the child and meet their intellectual, physical, and emotional needs. In a school setting, the success of the Montessori method relies on highly trained Montessori teachers and carefully curated Montessori learning environments which include specific materials (the prepared environment).

The Montessori philosophy uses the term "prepared environment" to refer to the classroom community. The prepared environment is created by the teacher with the needs of the individual students in mind. In what Maria Montessori referred to as the "Old Method" of education, the teacher speaks and the child listens. Montessori's philosophy of a "New Method" introduced the third factor of education which was the learning environment (Standing, 1957, p. 266). The teacher, children, and learning environment were to all be considered. The goal of the prepared environment is to offer a specially prepared space for children to grow into independent beings (Standing, 1957, p. 266). The prepared environment offers children freedom within limits set by the teachers. In the prepared environment, the teacher is not the focus of learning, but the materials presented, and the organization of the environment are. The teacher's role in creating the prepared environment will be discussed in the next section.

A typical morning for a Montessori student includes a three-hour work cycle. This is an uninterrupted time when the child can make choices of materials to engage with from the prepared environment (Standing, 1957). The children receive lessons that involve the use of different materials. After the child is shown a lesson, they are invited to choose to use those materials during the work cycle. The teacher prepares these materials to be available with the child in mind. Certain materials and lessons are presented to meet different needs and learning areas such as fine motor development, language, mathematics, practical living skills, art, sensory refinement, science, and more.

Montessori Teacher Training

Maria Montessori introduces the idea of the 'new teacher' (Standing, 1957). The Montessori philosophy emphasizes the need for a moral preparation of a teacher. Montessori recognized that teachers hold a level of authority and need to exercise this authority in a way that is respectful of children. The Montessori teacher is expected to be knowledgeable of the Montessori materials. This knowledge allows the teacher to prepare the classroom environment to suit the needs of the child. The classroom environment consists of many materials and lessons that are prepared by the teacher. The teacher shows lessons and proper use of materials to individual children daily. After lesson presentations, the teacher then allows the materials and the environment to teach the child, rather than relying on instruction from the adult (Montessori, 1967). Montessori applied a view of the teacher that was a shift from the traditional view of the teacher as the focus of the classroom.

It is my belief that the thing which we should cultivate in our teachers is more the spirit

than the mechanical skill of the scientist; that is, the direction of the preparation should be

toward the spirit rather than toward the mechanism. (Montessori, 1912, p.10)

This new approach to teaching avoided the teacher as an authoritarian and focused on the teacher

as a guide. This emphasis on guidance was seen as revolutionary and required an intentional

training and preparation of each adult who aimed to be a Montessori directress (Standing, 1957).

If the preparation of the teacher is not solely focused on skill, but also emotional, physical, and

mental preparation, the possibilities expand much further than meaningful instruction, but a love

for teaching and a drive to do the work in an influential way. For an individual to be truly

intrinsically motivated, they need to be free of pressure. This pressure can come in the form of

rewards or consequences (Deci & Ryan, 1989).

The adult in the classroom can control the existence of rewards or punishments. Along

with limiting control of punishments the adult can support motivation, in alignment with SDT,

by limiting controlling vocabulary. Deci et al. (1994, p. 124) states that the vocalization of

"shoulds," "musts," and "have to" are controlling and limit the opportunity for self-regulation. In

Montessori philosophy, it is expected that children can function successfully without the help of

an adult (Montessori, 1967). Deci et al. (1994, p. 124) found that to promote integrated

internalization, meaningful rationale needs to be provided regarding the selected activity.

Similarly, Koh and Frick (2010) discovered that to stimulate motivation, the teacher must limit

interruption, suppress criticisms, and provide rationales when setting limits for children.

The Montessori philosophy deems the teacher as the 'dynamic link' between the child

and the prepared environment. The teacher assesses the needs and interests of the child to

prepare the environment that suits the child and engages them (Standing, 1957). The role of the

Montessori teacher is to be a 'non-teacher' who takes on a seemingly passive role within the classroom. The 'non-teacher' utilizes observations to determine the needs of the children within the classroom. The teacher guides the child within the classroom without allowing the child to rely on them (Montessori, 1965). The Montessori teacher is trained to guide the child independently in constructing their own learning, success, and well-being.

The Montessori Child and SDT

Lillard (2019) states, "Montessori practice aligns with research in educational psychology by giving children considerable choice, which clearly confers a sense of self-determination" (p. 946). Through the ability to make choices, children can develop a self-driven ability to learn and grow intellectually, emotionally, and physically. Lillard's (2019) research shows that SDT is evident in a child's experience within the Montessori classroom. Deci and Ryan (2000)'s definitions of autonomy, relatedness, and competency can be seen in the Montessori classroom. Opportunities to engage in autonomy are present in the order and organization of the classroom environment which promotes independence and autonomous decision making. The extensions (ways the materials can be used beyond their initial presentation to meet a child's needs) and interesting variations of Montessori materials and lessons may lead to the development of competence. Finally, the ability to learn from and work with peers in three different age groups may allow for a sense of relatedness to develop.

Montessori and Human Needs

Maslow (1943) theorized that any motivated behavior can be understood as a connection to what needs an individual aims to satisfy or express. When an individual's physical and psychological needs are being met, they are more likely to engage in spontaneous and productive activity, which leads intrinsic motivation (Ryan et al., 1997). The psychological needs of

individuals, as opposed to physical needs (e.g., health, safety, well-being), may differ based on personal and cultural experiences. Nonetheless, when an individual's physical and psychological needs are satisfied, this can lead to a meaningful life: purpose, efficacy, value, and positive self-worth (Baumeister & Stillman, 2009). An individual's needs, particularly psychological needs, align with the SDT needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence and efficacy, value, positive self-worth, and purpose contribute to the work experience and motivation.

If education is the solution to a peaceful humanity and that educational efforts need to be focused on forming the inner human (Montessori, 1967). This inner formation is explored in Montessori's research of the 'Sensitive Periods' (1966). Like Maslow, Montessori theorizes that these periods are certain times of a child's life where their needs must be met, or they will lose the ability to possess those skills in that area of special interest. For example, when a child is in their sensitive period of order which begins around the age of two and lasts for two years after that, the child naturally seeks to organize their environment around them. When the sensitive period ends, it is difficult for the child to engage deeply with developing a sense of order. A teacher can determine a child's strengths and needs through close observation of interactions with peers, materials, and the environment by the teacher (Montessori, 1966).

Similarly, in SDT, adults have an innate psychological need that must be satisfied to lead a fulfilled and optimal life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The teacher's needs must be fulfilled to be an effective and motivated teacher. Yeoman (2013) finds that meaningful work is a fundamental human need, and that people can experience meaningful work if relevant capabilities are developed. When an individual engages in less meaningful work, they are susceptible to an inhibited sense of self-efficacy and stunted capabilities.

In analyzing Montessori teacher's levels of satisfaction through the SDT needs lens (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) purpose, efficacy, value, and positive self-worth may be contributing factors to each of the three SDT needs. If these needs are being satisfied within the workplace, individuals may have a more positive work experience.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Purpose

Currently, educational systems are facing a culture of burnout and high attrition rates, which may be related to job dissatisfaction and low motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2019). This study explored Montessori teachers' work experience and satisfaction through the lens of self-determination theory (STD), which states that humans can achieve deep intrinsic motivation when autonomy, relatedness, and competence are achieved (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT aligns with the Montessori philosophy that intrinsic motivation leads to more meaningful work in a classroom and satisfaction with work from the adult's perspective.

Through interviewing current public Montessori school teachers, their stories and experiences were collected to provide context to the problem of dissatisfaction or satisfaction in the teaching profession. The findings from this study may lead to the establishment of more conducive work environments for public Montessori school teachers and even traditional teachers.

Research Questions

Guided by the Montessori philosophy and SDT framework, I aimed to address the following 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?

Theoretical Framework

The research was based on SDT and the Montessori method. Data was gathered from six primary (preschool/kindergarten combined classroom) educators who currently teach in a public

Montessori school setting in a specific Midwestern state. SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) states that humans can achieve deep intrinsic motivation when autonomy, relatedness, and competence are achieved. Montessori also theorizes that intrinsic motivation leads to more meaningful work in a classroom.

Autonomy, relatedness, and competence may be related to burnout and attrition. Understanding a Montessori teacher's levels of work motivation and efficacy can lead to recognizing the factors that lead to intrinsically motivated and engaged Montessori teachers. Data was gathered by conducting responsive interviews with questions that were developed using the Montessori philosophy and SDT frameworks as a guide. The data was analyzed to determine what factors impact public Montessori school teachers' work satisfaction and how they are impacted by the fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Table 3: Framework for Self Determination Theory and Montessori Philosophy

Psychological Needs (SDT)		
Autonomy	**Competence**	**Relatedness**
School Supports	Montessori Training	Relationships with:
Risk Taking	Professional Learning	Peers
Trust	Opportunities	Administrators
Creative Freedom	Peer Observation	Caregivers
The Prepared Environment	Meaningful Feedback	Assistants / Support Staff
	Provided Resources	Children
	Personal Reflection	

Note: This table explores the aspects of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Montessori that may relate to the satisfaction of psychological needs in Montessori teachers.

Researcher Positionality

As I engaged in this research, I was a practicing teacher as well as a doctoral candidate. I have training in early childhood Montessori education. I have an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Montessori education and a master's degree in educational studies. Further, I brought five years of teaching experience in an urban public Montessori school. I also personally attended a Montessori school in my early childhood years from the ages of two to six years old. My mother is a trained and practicing Montessori teacher. My grandmother is a trained Montessori administrator and teacher although she is not currently practicing. I also have experience conducting a summer course as a leader of professional learning among Montessori teacher trainees. I offer these findings only as one possible interpretation based on my standpoint as a self-identified, white, heterosexual, twenty-eight-year-old living in the U.S.

As a researcher, I aimed to study Montessori practices and contribute to the literature surrounding Montessori in the public-school setting. For the field of Montessori to continue expanding, especially within the public sector, more research is needed.

I studied teachers and their school context to understand Montessori teacher efficacy, retention, and satisfaction. My interest in this topic emerged from observing multiple individuals leaving their positions as teachers in public Montessori schools. Further, recognizing my positionality in relation to the participants I interviewed helped me to recognize biases I may have (consciously or unconsciously). At the time of this study, I also taught in a public Montessori school within the same state as the participants. As I held the same position as my interview subjects, there was no concern for coercion based on power dynamics. I did not directly supervise any of the participants or hold any authority over them. I believed I was well positioned to do this work as I am Montessori teacher. As I did have a previous relationship as a colleague of the participants, I aimed to address my own biases before interviewing participants

to enter the interview space objectively. I made an active effort during the interviews to maintain a professional position and to allow participants to share openly. This relationship as a colleague to the participants allowed me to gain nuanced details from the interview subjects and engage in meaningful conversation as I have a deep understanding of the context in which they work. I understand the nuances of Montessori education, more specifically public Montessori education, and can engage in the common language (Montessori specific terminology and practices) of the profession.

A bias I had in relation to the study is that of my positive association with the Montessori philosophy and the Montessori philosophy being a core tenant of my own educational beliefs. Qualitative research requires the researcher to be aware of how their own opinions and experiences may impact what they ask and how they ask it (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As I had developed my own opinions around Montessori and through this research, I had developed opinions around the fulfillment of teachers' needs, so I was continuously aware of how these opinions impacted the way I analyze data from the interviews.

Methods

This study used qualitative interview methods to provide a strong contextual understanding of the participants' experiences. In using a qualitative approach there was an opportunity for individuals who have experience in the field of Montessori to provide in depth context to the problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), the retention, attainment, and recruitment of public Montessori teachers. Using the method of a qualitative interview to gather data was appropriate in this context as it allowed for a deep understanding of participants' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain nuanced information and contextual details from the teachers related to their experiences with autonomy, competence, and

relatedness. Open-ended questions were posed around the three psychological needs areas to provide insight into what teachers are thinking and feeling with respect to psychological needs fulfillment as well as their satisfaction with their work. Demographic information such as years of teaching experience, Montessori training type, and school type were collected. The personal experiences gathered in this study may lead to a deep understanding of how psychological needs are or are not fulfilled in the context of working as a Montessori teacher. The questions posed fell into five areas of focus: general work satisfaction, experiences with independence (autonomy), experiences with belongingness (relatedness), confidence in teaching (competence), and future work plans. The interview questions allowed for expansion and gave participants the chance to elaborate on certain concepts in relation to the research questions.

I had a personal connection with the participants as we worked in the same school district. Three of the participants worked at the same school I taught at. While this may have caused certain limitations and opportunity for bias, my personal relationship with the participants allowed me to make it clear that their information will not be shared and can remain confidential. I also believe that during our interviews the participants did not need to explain certain Montessori specific terms and phenomena as it was knowledge I shared as a fellow public Montessori teacher. As both the participants and I had a personal stake in the setting and context of the subject matter, public Montessori school teachers' needs, I believe the personal connection allowed for a more authentic response to be collected.

Settings and Participants

I recruited six participants who were Montessori credentialed and state certified who taught at the primary grade level (children ages three – six years old / early childhood) within public Montessori elementary schools. The two Montessori schools were both part of the same

urban public school district. The schools shared the same administrative team and participated in

professional development together a few times a year.

Data Collection

This study involved semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. Each participant

was interviewed one time. The length of interviews lasted an average length of 40 minutes,

follow up interviews were not conducted. The interviews were audio and video recorded, then

transcribed. Prior to the interviews, an oral consent statement was read, and oral consent was

given by the participant. As the interviewer, I ensured that the participants knew their identifiable

information would not be shared and that I would be conducting member checks to share my

summary of findings with them prior to the completion of the study. I aimed to lead the

interviews with a responsive approach. A responsive approach to interviewing was used to allow

the interview flow as a conversation does (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). At the beginning of each

interview, demographic information such as years of teaching experience, Montessori training

type, and classroom organization (class size, if there is an assistant present, etc.) was gathered.

The sections of interview questions were structured around five topics: general work satisfaction,

experiences with autonomy, relatedness, competence, and future work plans. The personal

experiences gathered in this study allowed for a deep understanding of the experiences of these

teachers and whether their needs are or are not fulfilled in the context of working as a Montessori

teacher as well as how certain factors of their work experience impact retainment.

It was my goal for the individuals being interviewed to feel comfortable to share their

stories or thoughts and thus provide great context and detail to the questions being asked. Follow

up questions were presented to offer teachers an opportunity to expand deeply around certain

concepts of their responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A caring relationship between the

interviewee and interviewer was evident and the central goal was for the interviewer to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Minikel-Lacocque, 2019). Utilizing the responsive semi-structured interview format gave the participants a voice.

Data Analysis

During the interview process a separate file with transcriptions, analytical memos, and notable quotations was kept to assist with summarizing key themes during the coding process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). After transcribing each interview with "a full and accurate word-for-word written rendition of the questions and answers" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 190), I coded the data using Vaughn and Turner's (2015) strategies for qualitative analysis. First, based on responses and recurring themes, categories were identified. Each transcript was marked for terms, themes, events, and examples given that fit within the categories that were relevant to the research questions being asked. I coded data based on terms that fit within the themes of categories of needs based on the review of current literature - autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Within the responses and categories, relationships were mapped to determine meaning between the responses and constructed themes. I looked for how the themes of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were experienced (fulfilled/unfulfilled) by teachers on a personal level, school level, and external level (see Figure 1).

Coding allows for transparency and validity of data in qualitative research while giving participants a voice (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). To ensure theoretical relevance (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019), deductive coding was used, however, there was opportunity for new codes to emerge if necessary. The combination of deductive and inductive coding allowed for the recognition of the SDT and Montessori frameworks to guide the coding process, however, allowed myself as the researcher to be open to any new findings or unexpected themes.

Based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention (Nguyen et al., 2019), the findings of Deci and Ryan (1985 & 2000), and of Gagne and Deci (2000) a coding framework (Figure 1) was established to organize themes in the interview transcripts. The events and experiences that the participants described in their interviews will be coded into three categories based on the model developed by Nguyen et. al (see Figure 2): personal, school, and external. Within each of the categories the experiences or events will be classified as impacting the individual's autonomy, relatedness, or competence.

Figure 1: Coding for factors that impact the work satisfaction and psychological needs of public Montessori school teachers
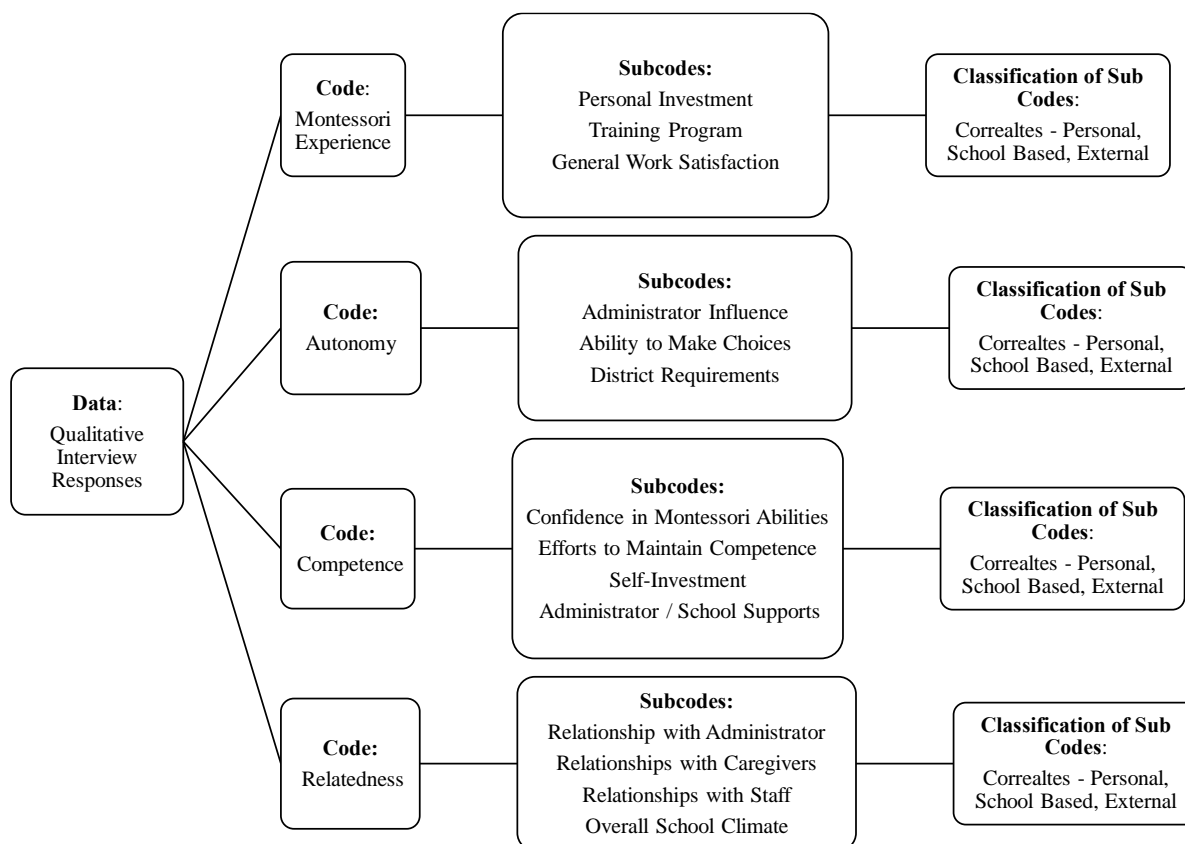
Note: this coding framework is based on a qualitative coding scheme developed by Saldana (2016)

Code Development

Through a deductive coding process, (Saldana, 2016) codes were preestablished based on the research presented in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, (see Figure 1: Coding framework). The three main categories of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness were established as a beginning criterion based on literature (see Table 3: *Theoretical framework of Self Determination & Montessori theories*). Although the coding process was developed in a deductive manner, there was opportunity for other codes to emerge inductively. The category of Montessori Experience was developed inductively after transcribing and coding interviews.

Montessori Experience

The category of Montessori experience was developed inductively during the coding of interviews as many of the participants referenced their personal experiences with the Montessori philosophy when describing their work experiences. The subcodes that were developed were personal commitment to Montessori, Montessori training program, and their general experiences as a teacher in a public Montessori classroom.

Autonomy

The code for autonomy was defined based on the literature in Chapter 2 including decision making, trust from administrators, the ability to take risks, and expectations from admin and caregivers. The subcodes developed related to autonomy based on the interviewees' responses were administrator influence, choice making, and district requirements.

Competence

The code of competence was developed based on the literature in Chapter 2 includes support from in school specialists, resources, professional development classroom management, achieving goals, network establishment, mentorship, peer observation, and feedback from

administrators. The competence sub codes that were found after coding interviews were confidence in Montessori abilities, individual efforts to maintain competence, self-reflection, and administrative or school supports.

Relatedness

The code for relatedness was developed deductively based on the literature in Chapter 2 include time and opportunities to engage with and connect with colleagues, ability to ask for help, general school climate, and relationship with caregivers. The subcodes that emerged were relationships and experiences with administration or school leadership, staff relationships, caregiver relationships and school climate.

Categories of Subcodes

The subcodes were developed using the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention (Ngyuyen et al., 2016). Within this framework factors that impact teacher attrition and retention are organized into three categories: personal, school, and external correlates. When coding for the initial codes of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, the information found was then coded further into one of the three correlates to determine the level as to which the factor impacts the Montessori teacher. As Nguyen et al. (2016) explains, at each level the individual is impacted at a different rate. Personal with the greatest impact, then school, and finally external correlates with the least likely of the individual teacher being able to affect change on that correlate. Determining which correlate each of the subcodes falls into allowed for the findings to be implemented in a more practical manner when determining how to address the issue of teacher retention and attrition.

Figure 2: Influence of correlates on the individual public Montessori school teacher
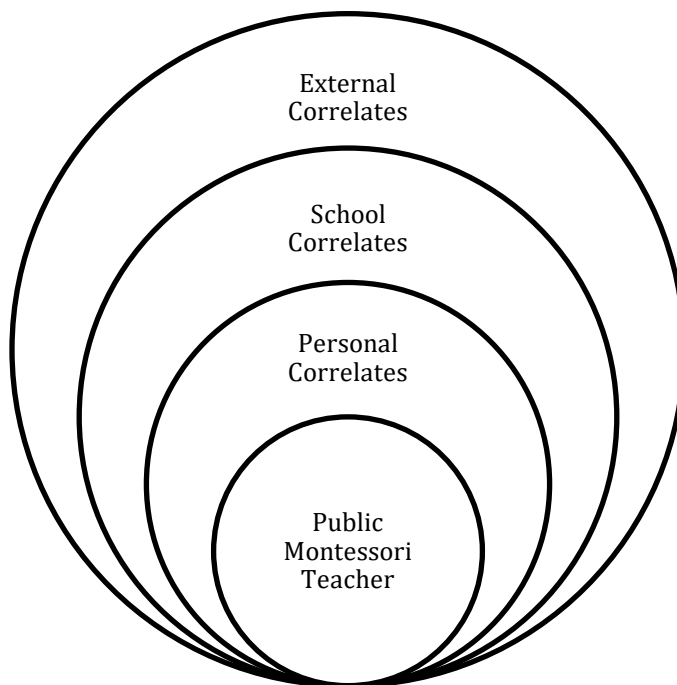
Note: Figure 2 based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention

(Ngyuyen et al., 2016)

Personal Correlates. Personal correlates impact the individual most directly. These

factors include teacher background, marital status, age, race, qualifications, subject area, and

scholastic achievement (Nguyen et al., 2016). In this study, a public Montessori school teacher's

personal correlates may be Montessori training, bachelor's degrees, years of experience in the

Montessori classroom, personal experience with Montessori.

School Correlates. School correlates include factors that impact the teacher within their

specific school building. These factors include school and class size, type of school (charter,

private, public, etc.), student discipline, working conditions, administrative support, professional

development, resources, community and caregiver support, student body demographic (Nguyen

et. al, 2016). For the purposes of this study in terms of school correlates the classroom ratio,

access to Montessori professional development and materials, relationships with school support

staff and administration, as well as caregiver buy in will be analyzed.

External Correlates. Nguyen et. al (2016) explores five factors of external correlates: teacher evaluation, merit pay, teacher effectiveness, and principal effectiveness. These correlates also include federal policies, union involvement, tenure, employment rate and school reform. In this data analysis when referring to external correlates the focus will be on pay, evaluation, and district buy in or support of the Montessori method.

Member Checking

Member checking was used to establish credibility in the qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The member checks involved presenting categories, interpretations, and conclusions to individuals participating in the study in an informal and/or formal manner. I engaged in member checks by sending a summary of the key points they shared during each of the interview sections (Introduction to Montessori, General Work Experience, Autonomy, Competency, Relatedness, Future Work). Participants were asked if the information shared was representative of the conversation that was had. Each participant confirmed that the key findings were representative of their experiences and interview responses.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This qualitative study aimed at addressing the issues of attrition, retention, and dissatisfaction in the field of education and teaching. The purpose of this study was to gain context around the experiences of public Montessori school teachers to better understand issues related to their working conditions and their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Research Questions

To gain understanding around the experiences of public Montessori school teachers, qualitative interviews were conducted to provide insight into the following 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?

I present the findings to these questions based on data analysis of the interviews, using a hybrid of deductive and inductive coding.

Interview Results

Six Montessori public school teachers from a Midwestern state were recruited to participate in the study. The participants work at two different school sites within the same city. The school sites are in neighborhoods with differing student populations. Due to the small sample size and to maintain confidentiality of participants, the specific nature of their employment, demographic information such as gender and race will not be shared. However, the participants were intentionally recruited to represent a diverse population. Including multiple races, ages, and gender. Their teaching experiences in public Montessori ranged from 2 year to 24 years, and one participant had experience teaching in private Montessori setting. To maintain

confidentiality, when sharing quotes and information I refer to participants using gender neutral names and plural pronouns (they/them). The pseudonyms being used are Chris, Alex, Kyle, Peyton, Sam, and Taylor.

Findings are presented in four main themes: Montessori Experience, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness. Within each theme I discuss the subthemes that emerged as well as provide the general sentiments and experiences of the six participants including quotes to provide evidence to these findings.

After discussing findings for each category, the data will be aligned to one of three levels of correlation (see Figure 5): personal, school, and external. This will help to provide a visual framework for the impact that each of the determined influences has on a public Montessori school teacher's work experience. I also provide insight into the future career plans of each of the participants to provide context to the issues of attrition and retention.

Montessori Experience

A sense of personal commitment to Montessori and teaching in a Montessori classroom stemmed from participants' personal experiences with Montessori, their Montessori training program, and their general satisfaction with their current work as a Montessori teacher.

To obtain a Montessori teaching certification, an individual must complete a Montessori training program. There are a variety of Montessori training programs that exist within the United States. The programs may differ in length of time or structure (meeting in person or virtually). Most programs require participants to complete coursework in which they are trained to present lessons on Montessori materials, learn and write about the Montessori philosophy, read writings from Maria Montessori, observe Montessori classrooms, and engage in an internship or student teaching placement. At the end of a Montessori primary training program

individuals have completed assembling a set of Montessori albums. These albums are organized by area of the classroom (practical life, math, language, sensorial, geography, etc.). Each album includes the lesson presentations for that area. The albums are organized in a way that guides the teacher in presenting the lessons and materials to a student in a developmentally appropriate progression.

Four participants were certified through Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and two were certified through the American Montessori Society (AMS). Four participants were trained locally and two were trained out of town. Two participants completed their Montessori training program during the time that they were working as Montessori assistants in a classroom. Four participants completed their Montessori training program while they were working full time as classroom lead teachers. Out of those four participants, two were working in a Montessori classroom and two were working in a traditional classroom. Five of the participants training programs were funded by the school district which they currently work for, one of the participants trainings was funded by a private Montessori school which they were working for at the time of their training.

Everyone seemed generally satisfied with training programs and believed that they were fully prepared to implement the Montessori approach as a teacher in a classroom. Participants cited that they were much more confident in their role as a Montessori teacher after completing their training program as opposed to during their training program. One participant reflected on the benefits of their training program being held during the school week which allowed them to practice what they had learned at training the next day in their Montessori classroom.

I asked participants to reflect on what led them to finding Montessori or choosing to participate in a Montessori training program. All six of the participants had a specific story

detailing what led to their initial spark of interest with Montessori. Each story included an instance where the participant had direct exposure or experience with the Montessori method either by observing it in a classroom or teaching in the classroom as an assistant. Alex reflects on their involvement as an assistant as their reason for joining a Montessori training,

> I initially came in as an assistant so that really helped me to dive in as to see what this curriculum entails. Having that initial contact as an assistant was very eye opening, which led me to make my decision to pursue the training. (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2022).

Kyle reflects on their own child's educational journey as the catalyst for their interest in Montessori philosophy,

> My son was three years old, and I'd heard about Montessori. I started reading about it and found a Montessori school [to observe]. I was shocked and was like 'I need to know how this is done.' They're all sounding out words and I was just amazed. (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023)

The other participants similarly cited "falling in love" with the philosophy and method through their observations of classrooms, involvement as a parent, or introduction as a classroom assistant. Sam reflected on having "ah-ha" moments when seeing a Montessori classroom in session for the first time and feeling as though, "what they were doing just really made sense and I couldn't go back [to traditional methods] after that" (Sam, personal communication, January 12, 2023).

General Montessori classroom experience seemed to have a great impact on the participant's satisfaction with their current work environment. All six participants reflected positively on their role as a Montessori teacher and the impact they have on children's daily

lives, "The children need us there. They're excited to see us" (Peyton, personal communication, January 9, 2023). Taylor shared what a successful day looks like in their classroom, "[Children] are busy and focused on their work. They're concentrating. They're getting their work completed. They're laughing. I love to hear them laugh and be silly and have fun. And they are learning" (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023). When asked what a great day looks like in their classroom Taylor, Peyton, and Alex emphasized that they were able to teach lessons, the children were busy independently choosing work and exhibiting concentration when engaging with the work, it looked like a typical Montessori environment.

Ultimately, each of the six participants referred to their personal experiences with Montessori as an influence on their decision to pursue Montessori teaching as a career. As participants reflected on what a good day in their current classroom environment looks like, it was clear that seeing the Montessori philosophy and method in action in their classrooms brings a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment to the Montessori teachers. Gagne and Deci (2005) explained that individuals who are not interested in the activity they are engaging in will require extrinsic motivation, whereas those who have an interest in the activity are motivated more intrinsically. This idea may explain why the participants are satisfied in their experiences as Montessori teachers. The participants made an intentional effort to enroll in and complete Montessori training which shows interest and commitment.

Autonomy

An individual's ability to function as an autonomous being in a work environment is essential to the development of intrinsic motivation and purposeful work engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When teachers feel less autonomous due to pressures from administration, parents, policies, or expectations, the teacher, and the children in their classroom both suffer (Niemiec &

Ryan, 2009). I asked participants to reflect on the level of autonomy they feel they have as a teacher and if they are satisfied or dissatisfied with that level. Overall, each participant seemed to value autonomy highly. Participants believed they maintained autonomy in their classrooms, however, reflected on how several factors led to higher or lower feelings of autonomy depending on the certain experiences. Three subthemes were identified that influence a teacher's level of autonomy: administrator influence, ability to make choices, and school district requirements.

Administrator Influence. Chris emphasized that they value their autonomy and do feel a great sense of it, however, this feeling of autonomy can be interrupted by administration within the school building, "My day is interrupted by administration with an email...it can take me right off again into the frustration I feel with the administration in my building" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). Similarly, Sam alluded to the idea that they themselves experience a great level of autonomy, but they know that the level of autonomy afforded by administration to teachers is inconsistent within the school building, "I feel very independent [administration] doesn't interfere with me. They leave me to do my thing, but I know that's not the same for everybody" (Sam, personal communication, January 12, 2023). Peyton cites their relationship with administration to be a positive influence in their feelings of autonomy. Peyton expressed their comfort with seeking out help and receiving feedback as a positive aspect of their experience as a Montessori professional. Peyton felt as though they were able to grow their confidence in their Montessori practice through feedback and conversation with their administrator. Although each participant highly valued their feelings of autonomy, it seems as though their daily experiences autonomy depend on interactions and relationship with administration. It also seems as though the amount of autonomy afforded to teachers is not consistent throughout the school.

Ability to Make Choices. An essential aspect of autonomy is the ability to make choices and control preferences (Keller, 2012). When asked to reflect on their abilities to make choices or take risks within their work environment, Alex and Chris were comfortable and confident in taking risks; however, they knew there could be a chance they would be reprimanded or told a choice (lesson introduction, material usage, classroom activity) they had made was wrong, "As far as me in my classroom...I feel absolutely, positively confident, and comfortable doing what I want until I'm told not to. I feel extremely independent" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). Alex stated, "I do feel comfortable taking those risks. I'm not really asking for permission, but I ask for forgiveness later" (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023). Alex explained that if they are unable to follow through on decisions that they know benefit the learning of the children in their classroom, they are doing them a disservice.

This feeling of comfort and confidence in taking risks was not reciprocated by other participants. Kyle explained an experience when they believed as though their students would benefit from a break in the morning to run around the gym, however, was fearful that they would be reprimanded for interrupting the morning Montessori work time. During the discussion of choices and risk-taking Kyle and Taylor indicated that there was a lack of trust between administrators of the school building and teachers, "[Administration] doesn't want teachers walking in the hall because they are watching the cameras at all times so sometimes, I feel guilty. I just need to go and [print something] or find this material" (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023). Ultimately this micromanagement leads teachers to feeling as though they cannot best serve the children in their classroom, "I can't really be the teacher that I want to be because there could be consequences" (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023). Both Kyle and Taylor reflected on personal experiences where they attempted to take a risk or

make a choice and it was not supported by administration. This denial led to them feeling as though they could not make independent decisions.

District Requirements. Most all participants indicated at least one instance in which requirements made by the school district impacted their classroom experience and their feelings of autonomy. As the two schools studied are public Montessori schools, there are certain requirements that are necessary to maintain funding and accreditation. Peyton and Sam both described the workload including district requirements such as testing as a challenge in maintaining their sense of confidence and autonomy, "The whole classroom is killing me...It's the paperwork, the lessons planning, the managing large numbers of kids, the testing. It's the whole thing" (Sam, personal communication, January 12, 2023).

The relationship between the Montessori philosophy and the state requirements seems to influence Montessori teachers' experiences greatly. Alex and Kyle expressed frustration that they could not follow the Montessori process of meeting a child's individual needs due to district requirements of focusing on math, language, and science rather than exploring arts, culture, or practical living skills. Alex expressed their frustration towards having to balance the expectations imposed by the district and upholding authentic Montessori practices, "Constantly teetering on the seesaw of the authenticity of Montessori [while] upholding the [traditional] standards" (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023). The state expects certain curriculum to be taught at certain times of the school year whereas the Montessori teachers have been trained to teach students based on their needs and interests using the albums they completed during training. Kyle mentioned their desire to have flexibility within the district requirements, especially when the child starts their kindergarten year, "Sometimes the district requirements are not appropriate for the students we are working with...I'd rather follow the child rather than put something on the

child that they're not quite ready for or enthusiastic about. It's something that's imposed from the outside" (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023). Kyle mentions following the child, meaning they would rather plan instruction based on the individual child's needs and development rather than a predetermined set of standards that the district provides. Kyle felt as though it was more possible to teach in an authentic Montessori way when the children are in preschool and there is not a set of academic state standards or expectations like there is during the child's kindergarten year.

The district which was studied offers two public Montessori schools as a choice for families who live within district boundaries, they do not need to live in a certain neighborhood. Alex emphasized that the two schools are viewed positively by families and are actively sought after. Taylor and Alex both expressed disappointment that the district may not have a clear understanding of what the Montessori schools and Montessori teachers need to be successful. Alex posed a solution to this,

> I feel like if we had more of a representation at the top then it could be a boost. Within public Montessori we are always fighting the top people, to have that representation so they can see what we do from our lens would be a tremendous boost to not only to our confidence as educators, feeling valued, but also an open door to attracting more people to this field and being able to retain teachers who want to do this. (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023)

Alex suggested that there should be individuals with Montessori experience within district leadership positions. These leaders would be able to advocate for the needs of a public Montessori school. These specific needs may be including a Montessori work cycle in schedules, a trained assistant in each classroom, funding for Montessori materials, options for outdoor work

spaces, and alternative views on standards or lesson plan expectations. The district's lack of

Montessori recognition or support led Taylor to expressing their fear for the future of public

Montessori, "We are a big part of the district. I have fears that there will be no Montessori in the

future because we're not promoting it as much as we should" (Taylor, personal communication,

January 19, 2023).

In terms of autonomy, although each participant highly values their sense of autonomy,

there are factors that impact their ability to feel independent as professionals and comfortable

with making choices, acting as independent individuals. Relationships and interactions with

administrators as well as requirements imposed by the school district heavily influence teachers'

sense of autonomy.

Competence

Teachers can experience greater rates of job satisfaction when they engage in

opportunities that increase their professional capital and levels of confidence in their work (Nola

& Molla, 2017). Feelings of competence may stem from skill development and effective

professional learning. I asked participants to describe what areas of their work they felt confident

in as well as what led to those feelings of confidence. Four subthemes were identified that

influenced the teachers' feelings of competence: confidence in Montessori abilities, individual

efforts taken to maintain competence, self-reflection, and administrator or school supports.

Confidence in Montessori Abilities. In our conversations around competence, many of

the participants expressed feeling a great sense of confidence in their abilities as Montessori

teachers. They expressed feelings of joy and happiness when they saw the children in their

classroom learning as well as the great pride they took when they achieved a meaningful

Montessori work cycle. The Montessori work cycle is an uninterrupted time for students to

engage in independent work with Montessori materials. A successful work cycle may look like students making choices, engaged in their work, and the teacher being able to give students lessons. Kyle described a successful day in their classroom,

> We get into the swing of things. We get into the groove. The more things happen. Kids are working. They're interested in what they're doing. They're talking to each other. They're showing what they can do. It's just very satisfying. (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023)

On the other hand, when it is not a great day in the classroom and the work time (students making choices, engaging with Montessori materials, receiving lessons) is not flowing, Peyton indicated that this "lack of productivity" may lead to a sense of low self-confidence, "I take the lack of productive work personally" (Peyton, personal communication, January 9, 2023). Taylor and Peyton both cited how interruptions to the day such as guest readers, fire drills, negative feedback from administration, behavior challenges, emotional moments from children, or changes in routine can cause a stop to the productive Montessori work cycle,

> If someone is having a meltdown or if I'm dealing with putting out a lot of fires, or if it's just things that were overwhelming or stressful in that day, it's a horrible day. I don't want to relive that. (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023)

Ultimately, the interruptions to the work cycle can lead to teachers feeling unsuccessful or overwhelmed. They feel less competent in their abilities as Montessori teachers when they cannot achieve what is perceived to be a "successful" work cycle.

When asked what leads to this successful work cycle and feelings of confidence, Sam jokingly said they wish they had the answer, because they would then do it every day. Several

participants cited their years of experience as what has led to their increased confidence in the classroom,

> This third year I have felt [confidence] from preparing the environment down to the material and really diving into lessons that I wanted to be able to touch and haven't been able to do so. (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023)

Along with years of experience, Peyton and Alex cited their completion of their training as the leading cause of their confidence in their Montessori abilities.

Individual Efforts to Maintain Competence. When determining what led to increases or decreases in public Montessori school teachers' feelings of competence, the conversations focused on if the efforts to develop competence were self-initiated or supported by organizational opportunities.

During a Montessori training program, teachers assemble an album with the complete curriculum and lesson presentations for each subject area of the Montessori classroom. Chris, Alex, and Taylor referenced their Montessori albums as a great resource for leading to feelings of confidence and competence in their work. However, they felt as though there is not enough time to engage with the albums during the workdays. Taylor shared that they wish there was a more structured time to engage with their albums in a meaningful way, suggesting a professional development focus around the Montessori albums,

> If we had a built in 10 days weekly or bi-weekly where we were able to sit with our albums and review some of those lessons that we haven't given in a while, I think that would be awesome. (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023)

Taylor proposed that if the district or school leadership allowed for contracted time or professional development time to practice lessons from the albums, engage with materials, and read the albums, it would be beneficial.

Chris, Alex, and Taylor referenced an established weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meeting as an opportunity to share ideas and engage in discussion around Montessori practices with the other teachers in their specific grade level. Research supports the idea that PLCS are an opportunity to increase satisfaction in a teacher's experience and can lead to supportive and nurturing work environments (Owen, 2016). The ability to engage with grade level colleagues seemed like a positive influence for each participant. Kyle indicated that they seek assurance and assistance from their grade level colleagues frequently,

> Going to an experienced teacher and just saying, "This is happening. What am I doing
>
> wrong with...?" and then being reassured that I'm not doing anything wrong. This child is
>
> not going to be the mold of what you expect and the idea of following the child does
>
> work. It can happen. (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023)

All six of the participants at some point in their interview reflected on their positive experiences with their Montessori colleagues and grade level team as confidence building supports. They emphasized their positive experiences with seeking help or support around challenging student behaviors, lesson modifications, and new ideas from their colleagues. There was no indication of competition or discomfort in asking for help from colleagues, and these types of interactions help participant to maintain their competence.

Self-Reflection. When discussing confidence and feelings of competence, the theme of self-care emerged. Participants reflected that when they were feeling good, they were confident and capable in the classroom. The Montessori philosophy emphasizes the prepared teacher as an

integral part of the classroom environment, the reflections from the interviewees align with this idea. Taylor emphasized the importance of time to think about their practice and begin the day with intention, "I was able to really think and process about and focus on what my day was going to look like because I was in the car alone" (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023). Alex reflected on how lacking that preparation impacts their day,

> Not so great days usually stem when I know I have pushed myself to a limit. Exhaustion plays a part there, and so I'm not able to give my best when I don't feel like I'm the best. (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023)

Administrator & School Supports. The participants' discussion on competence and feeling confident in their work resulted in conversations around personal efforts and investment in themselves rather than school or administrative supports. Although the participants do mostly feel confident and competent in their work, they are interested in formal supports from school leadership, "I'm thirsty in looking for more resources, more ways to use materials, different extensions, different behavior mod ideas" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). Participants would like to receive classroom supports, including Montessori specific supports. One participant went into detail about their experiences with a past administrator who had taught in a Montessori classroom for many years prior to being an administrator, they believed as though this gave that administrator the ability to support their development as a teacher,

> I could go to [the administrator] and ask because they had actual classroom experience and that is very valuable. They were there. They were on the front lines and until you've experienced the 3-year cycle, it's not helpful. (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023)

Although participants are interested in their administrators being Montessori trained and having

Montessori teaching experience, they do not want to be overly managed, "I would prefer if [the

administrator] did have the Montessori experience. I think that would help a lot, but also, I would

prefer not to be micromanaged" (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023). There is a

delicate balance of having knowledge of the method and allowing the Montessori trained

teachers to be the experts, "I feel good about the amount of support [I receive]. It's not too much,

it's not too little. I could reach out [for help] and it would be given to me" (Peyton, personal

communication, January 9, 2023).

Relatedness

In Self-Determination Theory, the importance of relatedness is emphasized as integral for

individuals to be satisfied in their work (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Through the development of

relationships and connections individuals feel supported and motivated in their work. I asked

participants if they felt a sense of belongingness in their place of work and prompted them to

elaborate on what led to or detracted from that sense of belongingness. Four subthemes were

identified that influence a teacher's sense of relatedness: relationships with administrators,

caregiver relationships, staff relationships, and overall school climate.

Relationships with Administrators. Like the discussion of how administrators can

support or hinder teachers' sense of autonomy, participants again emphasized the importance of

administrators, particularly those with Montessori training and teaching experience. Kyle

believed that when there is a lack of mutual understanding, it was difficult to have effective

communication,

If I'm speaking one language and the person who I'm reporting to is speaking another,

then we don't understand each other [and] cannot relate. (Kyle, personal communication, January 8, 2023)

When there was an opportunity for open dialogue and conversation around expectations, teachers believed they receive more support, and they were more comfortable in their relationship with administrators. For Chris, Kyle, Sam, and Taylor, it was evident that they did not experience a positive relationship with the current administrators at their school building, "I have to work really hard to push aside negative sentiments about the administration at my building every morning" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). These participants cited feelings of poor communication, inconsistent treatment of staff, administrative and teacher turnover as the main influences on these weak relationships with administration.

Taylor specifically cited the fact that they have had multiple different administrators in a short period of time which led to difficulties in establishing relationships. Alex and Peyton, who have had experience with the same administrator for many years at their school, seemed to be generally comfortable and satisfied in their relationships with administration. They referenced that they received positive feedback as well as held productive conversations around areas to grow in their instruction.

Relationships with Caregivers. The goal of a Montessori cycle is for a child to be in a classroom with the same teacher for three years before moving onto the next classroom level. This leads to the unique opportunity for Montessori teachers to have a set of children and their caregivers (parents or guardians) remain consistent over a three-year period as opposed to a traditional model where the children and caregivers are part of a classroom community for one year. When discussing caregiver relationships and experiences in interviews participants strongly aligned with the idea that they had a generally positive experience with the caregivers in their

classroom communities. All participants noted that every so often there may be issues in communication or hard conversations with caregivers, but for the most part they feel respected by caregivers, "The majority absolutely supports me and speaks highly; I feel like they are in line with what I do" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). Participants did reveal frustration with caregivers regarding the lack of awareness when caregivers enroll their children in a public Montessori program, "They come in and the caregiver's attitude is, 'I'm just glad they're at school,' and so it makes our job a little harder to really embrace the trueness of what we do" (Alex, personal communication, January 5, 2023). Since the participants all teach within a public school district, the Montessori school is tuition free and any family from the district can apply to enroll their child. There is no interview process or requirement to have knowledge of the Montessori method. As the participants interviewed teach children ages three to six years old, several of them referenced their frustration that they feel as though the Montessori program is viewed as a daycare rather than an early childhood education program.

Sam reflected on an alternative view that in their experience, some caregivers have too high of expectations of the public Montessori program,

> I don't think they know what they're doing. I think a lot of them expect private school experience [because it's Montessori] and they don't understand there's things we have to do [from a public-school standpoint]. (Sam, personal communication, January 12, 2023)

Both viewpoints may lead to the teacher believing as though they cannot meet the expectations of the caregiver or that the caregiver is not viewing the teacher as a Montessori professional. The two schools where the participants work are within the public school district, however, caregivers (parents and guardians) must participate in a selective enrollment process to be admitted to the public Montessori schools. Although students must live within district

boundaries, it is not a neighborhood specific school. When asked who is responsible for increasing transparency in the enrollment process Taylor responded,

> I think parents should be able to research [Montessori] and know exactly what their child is doing and what they've signed up for once they apply for the school, but I believe the district should promote the Montessori part. (Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023)

Peyton, Alex, and Sam did reference efforts made by their current school administration to lead caregiver information sessions virtually that address educating parents on certain Montessori practices and areas of the classroom. They believed as though these information sessions lead caregivers to developing a greater awareness and understanding of Montessori. However, attendance is optional and not all caregivers attend.

    Relationships with Staff. As referenced in the competence section of this paper, each participant felt satisfied with their relationships with their grade level colleagues. Research shows that when an individual has a connection to a specific group identity they are motivated to work as a group and can attain goals in the workplace (Latham & Pinder, 2005). This may be true for participants as they share the identity of Montessori teachers. Overall, participants believed they experienced generally positive interactions with the staff (teachers, assistants, office/cafeteria/custodial staff) at their school. However, they recognized that relationships are built solely through individual efforts and not due to organized opportunities presented by the school, "If one [a relationship] exists, it's because certain people will, from a different grade level, seek out others and build upon prior relationships" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). There are no whole school staff meetings which may contribute to the inability to develop relationships outside of grade level groups. One participant cited the opportunities to

engage as a staff during the COVID pandemic over video call enhanced their ability to build relationships with the staff as there were many more meetings and collaborative opportunities.

Overall School Climate. The six participants work at two different schools, and it was clear that participants in one of the schools experienced a more positive culture and climate that was more conducive to teaching. Alex and Peyton emphasized feeling positive about the climate, "I feel like I can walk into any room and talk to anybody. Everybody's been very welcoming, very helpful every day" (Peyton, personal communication, January 9, 2023). However, Sam who works at the same site emphasized that they try to engage less, "I stay out of the way, and I don't cause trouble" (Sam, personal communication, January 12, 2023) as they have experienced times in which the treatment of the staff by administration is not consistent. Sam did not elaborate on the inconsistent treatment but did allude to their ability to be taken seriously by administration and that administration does not "interfere" with them. They stated that others do not "fit the box" and are not treated the same way.

At the second school site, where Chris, Kyle, and Taylor worked, there is an overwhelming sentiment that the culture was very negative and isolating, "...everyone is just trying to stay below the radar and keep their neck above the water...there is not a comfort level or a level of joyousness or humor" (Chris, personal communication, January 3, 2023). Chris cited the lack of whole school staff meetings as "divisive" and the lack of time to build whole school community as a leading cause of joylessness and dissatisfaction in the overall school climate. Taylor stated that multiple teachers had left during the school year which negatively impacted the school culture,

> The culture is horrible. I've never experienced our school like it is right now. It's not a
> great place to be. We have a lot of teachers who are leaving because they are very

unhappy, and I don't blame them. If I wasn't so vested, I would probably leave as well.

(Taylor, personal communication, January 19, 2023)

During interviews, all three participants who worked at one of the school sites cited "camera watching" as a leading cause of discomfort and fear within the school building. The participants at this school indicated that they would be more comfortable in their work if there was open communication about expectations rather than reprimanding based on camera footage,

> We have a very camera watching culture. The culture by admin is to watch and look for what someone's doing wrong as opposed to getting out of the office and walking around and asking what someone needs help with. (Chris, personal communication, January 19, 2023)

Chris, Kyle, and Taylor alluded to a lack of trust due to the feeling that their actions are being watched on camera and they may receive a reprimand at any time in person or via email after the fact. Kyle and Taylor discussed a fear of leaving their classroom to get something out of a hallway closet or even walking down the hall on their break because they are nervous, they could be reprimanded due to past experiences or experiences of their colleagues. The participants who worked at the other school studied did not mention camera usage during their interviews.

Trust and the ability to build connections lead to the development of relatedness. At one school site there seems to be strong trusting relationships between teachers and administration. At the other school site there is not a sense of trust and there is a sense of fear. At both school sites, the teachers feel connected to and trusting of their colleagues, however more distant from colleagues who work in other grade levels. There seems to be a lack of relationship building opportunities between teachers in other grade levels at both schools.

It appears the participants feel a general sense of satisfaction in their relationships with grade level peers and their classroom climates, but at one school site the overall school climate is not conducive and as one participant cited, a factor that may have contributed to teachers quitting mid-year.

Future Career Plans

At the end of each interview, participants were asked to reflect on where they see themselves as a professional in the future. For three of the participants, they reflected on retirement as their next step. Chris stated that they anticipate staying in the same classroom for two more years before retiring. Kyle plans to retire within the next few years and continue teaching in a private Montessori school setting. Sam aims to retire in the next few years and find a position as a reading interventionist or specialist who would have an opportunity to work with smaller groups of students. Two participants, Alex and Taylor, both predicted they would continue working in their classrooms before hopefully pursuing a position working in district level leadership or instructional coaching. Peyton, who has been teaching for only a few years, would like to continue working in their same classroom and school for the time being with no plans to change their career path.

Categorization of Correlates

In reference to Figure 2 (see Chapter 3), which was developed based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and Retention (Ngyuyen et al., 2016), the subthemes for each category, Montessori Experience (m), Autonomy (a), Competence (c), Relatedness (r), have been organized in to one of three correlates. The correlates allow for a representation of how each of these experiences or factors impact a public Montessori school teacher.

Table 4: Influence of correlates on the individual public Montessori school teacher

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

Table 4 organizes the themes found within each of the four categories (Montessori Experience, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) and how they impact the Montessori teacher in a public school. Based on this table, Montessori experiences influence the teacher on a personal level of impact. Experiences with autonomy may impact the teacher personally or on a school level. Experiences with competence impact the teacher personally, at a school level, and at an external level. Experiences with relatedness impact the teacher at a school level.

Summary

Most all the experiences discussed with the interview participants fell into one of the three correlates (personal, school, and external). Analyzing the participants responses using the SDT framework and aligning the results to the correlates allow the abstract ideas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to be explored through actual teacher experiences. Although this study engages with a small sample size, the information gathered allows for context and nuanced details of the participants' experiences.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Summary of the Study

The goal of this study was to address the issue of retention and attrition of public Montessori school teachers. Literature shows that retention and attrition are directly impacted by burnout and job dissatisfaction (Madigan & Kim, 2019). Madigan and Kim (2019) emphasize that addressing the psychological needs of teachers can alleviate burnout and dissatisfaction, thus leading to lower attrition rates.

A self-determined individual acts upon choices in their life, these choices are driven by their goals, desires, and what aspects of life they perceive to be important (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory states that there are three main needs which, when fulfilled, motivate individuals in a work setting. To determine the level of fulfillment and perceived satisfaction of teachers in a public Montessori school setting I chose to focus on the psychological needs outlined by Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Using these psychological needs to guide my interviews and research, I interviewed current public Montessori school teachers to gain a better understanding of their experiences in their current work environments surrounding job and needs satisfaction. I then utilized Nguyen et al.'s (2019) research around the three correlates that impact attrition and retention: personal correlates, school correlates, and external correlates. I was able to organize my findings of autonomy, relatedness, and competence in correlation to the level at which they impact current public Montessori school teachers' experiences.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to give context to the experiences of Montessori teachers in public school settings to address the issue of attrition and retention. In studying the psychological needs satisfaction or dissatisfaction of these teachers, the experiences and reflections from

participants in the interview process give insight into practical ways for administrators, school districts, and Montessori teacher training programs to increase retention and develop work environments conducive to the development of job satisfaction. Initially I asked the 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 the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a public Montessori teacher's psychological needs?

Question 1 asks, to what extent are the psychological needs of public Montessori teachers satisfied. Overall, participants believed there were aspects that led to a feeling of satisfaction and aspects that led to a feeling of dissatisfaction in terms of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Although each participant seemed generally satisfied in their work, there were areas in which each was dissatisfied. Aligning the responses of participants to the level at which it impacts the teacher (see Figure 4) may allow for the 'extent' of how each factor impacts the teacher to be determined. I was able to determine teachers' perceptions of their needs and gain a general sense of their satisfaction, but this study did not determine the exact level of satisfaction. The ability to gauge the extent of satisfaction would be an opportunity for further research.

Question 2 asks what factors and experiences impact the public Montessori school teachers' perceptions of their psychological needs and satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Using the SDT framework these needs were autonomy, relatedness, and competence. In terms of autonomy, the factors which impacted the participants' perception of autonomy were administrative support, independent choice making, and district requirements. The factors that impacted relatedness were relationships with administration, staff relationships, caregiver

relationships, and overall school climate. Finally, the factors and experiences that impacted

competence were confidence in Montessori abilities, self-reflection, and administrative support.

These factors either inhibited or led to higher levels of satisfaction depending on the context of

the experiences which the teachers were describing and their perceptions of how those needs

were or were not being met.

       Additional findings based on the Conceptual Framework of Teacher Attrition and

Retention (Ngyuyen et al., 2016) were that within the factors and experiences determined to have

impacted the teachers' satisfaction in terms of autonomy, relatedness, and competence also

would impact them on different levels (see Figure 5). Factors that impacted teachers most closely

were those that were personal correlates, next school correlates, and then the furthest level of

direct impact were external correlates. Madigan and Kim (2019) state that high levels of attrition

are a result of burnout and dissatisfaction which can be reduced by addressing the psychological

needs of teachers.

       The findings of this study showed that public Montessori school teachers are similarly

impacted by the fulfillment of psychological needs, but the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of these

needs were manifested in unique ways due to differing personal experiences. Participants

reflected on several factors that contributed to experiences of stress in the workplace, but the

factors that were focused on by majority of the participants were relationships with

administrators, district expectations, independent choice making, general school climate, and

caregiver relationships as stressors. When aligning these findings to Nyguen et al.'s framework

(2016), these factors reflect how teachers are impacted on personal school, external and level.

       Each participant reflected on how teaching in a Montessori setting was important to them

and detailed their connection toward the Montessori philosophy. The participants' own

experiences as Montessori assistants, parents of Montessori children, or just from an observation of a Montessori classroom felt a motivation to work in a Montessori environment. Sam stated, "...what they were doing just really made sense, I couldn't go back [to traditional teaching] after that" (personal communication, January 12, 2023). Gagne and Deci (2005) described how making the profession of teaching more interesting and thus intrinsically rewarding, more individuals may enter the profession and stay in it longer. The findings of this study show that although there are factors of the public Montessori school teachers' work experiences that cause stress or dissatisfaction, in general they are invested in their classrooms and consistently satisfied by the Montessori aspect of their work. This is also shown in the discussion of future work plans with each participant. None of the participants mentioned a need to leave their work for any reason other than retirement or pursuing a leadership position within the same area of work (public Montessori). Peyton clarified their satisfaction with their current position, "Where do I see myself in the next few years? At [this school] in my classroom with hopefully with the same assistant...you know this is the dream job" (personal communication, January 9, 2023). These findings suggest that individuals who have a strong investment in Montessori and a positive experience with personal correlates may be more likely to stay in their teaching position. Participants cited stressors more often at the school and external level. Stressors at the external and school level may lead to feelings of dissatisfaction but not enough to push a public Montessori teacher away from their current positions as external stressors do not impact the individual as directly as personal and school level stressors.

This study led to findings beyond just the SDT framework and public Montessori school teachers' psychological needs. The information provided from participants has allowed for insight into practical approaches to retaining Montessori teachers within public school programs.

Below, the implications of these findings will be discussed. In Table 5 a framework for practical implementation of these findings is presented.

Implications

This study focused on the fulfillment of psychological needs and job satisfaction of public Montessori school teachers. These teachers provided valuable insight into their teaching experiences and implications for administrators in public Montessori schools, public school districts, and teacher training programs. Further, this study may help administrators, districts, and teacher training programs to recognize the value of giving teachers (Montessori or traditional) an opportunity to share experiences and reflect on their work environments and to listen to their concerns. The participants offered insight into what could make work conditions more positive as well as practical solutions for addressing some current issues in the workplace.

One implication is that administrators in public Montessori schools are most effective as leaders when they have hands-on experience in Montessori classrooms or completed Montessori training. This perspective would allow them to have productive conversations with and manageable expectations of the teachers they supervise. Based on these findings, administrators can build trust by having direct conversations with teachers and eliminating a "camera watching" culture. In terms of relatedness, administrators can establish staff-wide opportunities for connection with multiple grade levels whether it be in the form of a staff meeting or activities during contracted hours. Further, administrators can provide teachers dedicated time to review their Montessori albums, practice with materials, and engage with their colleagues around their practices.

The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (2023) estimates that there are currently around 530 public Montessori schools within the United States. As the demand for

Montessori public schools increases, the need for teachers does as well. This study also provides

insights into how school districts can retain and recruit Montessori teachers within public

schools. Investment in public Montessori school teachers' needs is important as districts may put

a significant amount of money and effort into recruiting Montessori trained teachers or even

paying for the teacher's Montessori training. For a district to achieve a return on the investment

put into establishing public Montessori schools, they must retain Montessori trained public

school teachers. Districts should recognize that Montessori teachers desire a balance between

district requirements and Montessori practices. A way this could be achieved is through

representation of the Montessori philosophy within the district leadership team, trained

Montessori instructional coaches, or principals who have been Montessori teachers in the past.

This study also may support the idea that individuals who teach in specialized programs are more

intrinsically motivated by their work. As a result, school districts may be interested in expanding

Montessori public programs in their districts as the Montessori teachers seem to be generally

motivated to stay in Montessori teaching.

Finally, Montessori teacher training programs may benefit from the findings of this study

due to the significant influence training and Montessori exposure had on participants early in

their Montessori careers. Training programs may implement a variety of classroom observation

opportunities and Montessori school tours to give trainees a chance to see the method in action.

These findings also bring attention to the impact that external correlates have on a Montessori

teacher's satisfaction with their work. Training programs may utilize this information to plan

training around merging district expectations of lesson planning with Montessori approaches to

lesson planning. The knowledge of what external factors impact a public Montessori school

teacher can allow training programs to better prepare Montessori teachers for success in a public-school setting.

Table 5 offers an overview of the findings and implications presented above. The information provided by the participants in this study can be utilized by Montessori public school administration, public school districts that offer Montessori programs, as well as Montessori teacher training programs. The recommendations provided are based on the discussions held with participants around what factors could impact or are currently impacting their work experience positively. Although some of the ideas for implementations are specific to the field of Montessori teaching, many can also be beneficial to those in the field of traditional education.

Table 5: Recommendations for Montessori public school teacher retention

Correlate	Factor	Recommendations
Personal	Training Program	Fully completed Montessori Training. Access to completed Montessori albums. Student teaching practice.
	Confidence in Montessori Abilities	Time to practice with Montessori materials independently or with grade level colleagues. Time to read or review Montessori albums. Time to develop modifications and extensions of Montessori lessons. Opportunities to visit other Montessori schools.
	Independent Choice Making	Trust from administration. Autonomy within classroom environment to make choices. Conducive dialogue with administrators about feedback. Ability to take instructional risks when deemed necessary by lead teacher.
	Self-Reflection	Time to reflect on practice. Time to "prepare" self for the day.
School	Relationships	Organized time for relationship building across grade levels/staff. Whole school staff meetings. Opportunities for grade level colleagues to engage in meaningful conversation.
	Administrator Supports	Trust between teachers and administrators. Clear and consistent communication. Open dialogue and conversations around concerns or feedback. Teachers given autonomy to make decisions.
	School Supports	Access to Montessori specific professional development. Access to Montessori classrooms and materials.

		Schoolwide policies and consistent communication. Transparency of Montessori expectations to caregivers (parents/guardians) during enrollment process.
External	District Supports	Funding for Montessori resources/materials/training. Montessori representation in leadership. Promotion of Montessori programs. Montessori approach to standards/lesson planning. Hiring administrators with Montessori teaching experience.

Note: Table 5 is based on Table 4 – Influence of correlates on the individual public Montessori school teacher.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that the small sample size does not allow for saturation of the findings. More participants would allow for saturation of data and the opportunity for consistent findings to emerge. Although the smaller sample poses some limitations, it did allow for useful and contextually rich findings from participants. The aim of the study and richness of data outweighed the need for a large sample size (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

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. The inability to discuss student demographics due to confidentiality concerns is a limitation of this study.

Potential Significance

This study helps us to better understand early childhood Montessori teachers' current job satisfaction and factors that contribute to it, which in turn can help us to understand the retention and attrition within public Montessori schools. The findings may help administrators and teacher trainers develop a framework to support teachers through the fulfillment of psychological needs, leading to high levels of job satisfaction and intrinsic work motivation.

This study also contributes to the growing body of research related to the Montessori philosophy in the United States. It may provide a framework for developing a scale to determine levels of work motivation and psychological needs satisfaction in public Montessori school teachers. This is important because a reliable scale does not exist currently.

Future Research

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 consistent findings could emerge. Including a larger sample size will allow for more analysis based on more demographic information.

As mentioned in the findings section, there was an inability to gauge a concrete 'extent' of how satisfied or dissatisfied the needs of Montessori teachers were. There are tools to gauge individuals' perceptions of self-determination, yet not many tools to reliably evaluate the exercising of self-determination in action (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). A second path for future research would be to develop a quantitative tool for assessing the satisfaction of public Montessori school teachers. The tool needs to account for the context of a Montessori setting.

A third area of future research would be comparing the psychological needs and job satisfaction of public and private Montessori school teachers. As there are differences in the structures and expectations of private and public Montessori schools, there is an opportunity to determine if the needs of the teachers are similar or different. This study could be replicated with these two populations to provide insight into the experiences of Montessori schools in both settings.

A fourth area of future research would be examining the perspectives of Montessori public school administrators and district level leaders. This would allow for the perspectives of administrators and leaders within the public Montessori school community to be considered and analyze if they align with the experiences and perspectives of Montessori public school teachers.

Concluding Comments

This study provides insight into the experiences and needs of public Montessori school teachers. As the Montessori method continues to be implemented in private and public-school settings, it is necessary to ensure that the teachers working in those schools are satisfied in their work. Maria Montessori believed that before being able to successfully teach children, the adult themselves needed to be fully prepared (physically, mentally, emotionally). Maria stated,

> An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking; it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live (Montessori, 1949, p. 30).

The findings of this study show that still, to feel successful in their work as teachers, individuals must feel fulfilled in their psychological needs. When these needs are not fulfilled, the teacher and the greater school community suffer. Addressing the way work environments of public Montessori teachers support or hinder the satisfaction of these needs may aid in the retention of teachers and the growth of positive school communities.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Date

Emma Allen-Blevins. Montessori Teacher
8901 W 71st St
Merriam, KS 66204

Dear _____

My name is Emma Allen, and I am a Montessori teacher. I am also a doctoral student enrolled in the Curriculum and Teaching (Ed.D.) doctorate program at the University of Kansas. I have been granted permission by KU's Institutional Review Board to conduct a research study for my dissertation, titled Psychological Needs Satisfaction of Early Childhood Educators in Montessori Public Schools.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explore public Montessori teachers experiences as it relates to their general work satisfaction, confidence in teaching abilities, their professional independence, sense of belonging in the school, and future work plans. As there is a trend of teacher attrition, I am interested in determining how administrators can use the information found in this study to create more conducive work environments for Montessori teachers in public schools. Most of the scholarly literature concerning teachers' levels of competence, autonomy, and relatedness is focused on traditional school settings. As public Montessori programs are growing it is important to research the needs of teachers in these school settings.

I would like to request your participation in my dissertation study. I recognize your time is extremely valuable. Participation in this important study will require a virtual interview. The interview will last approximately sixty to ninety minutes and will be audio-recorded with your consent.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in my study and look forward to hearing from you. I am hoping to schedule an interview with you at your school site by November 15 at a time that is convenient for you. I will call you within three days to follow up on this e-mail. If you have any questions, my phone number is 314-974-8444, and my email is emmaallen1395@gmail.com. In addition, the chair of my dissertation committee is Dr. Barbra

Bradley; her phone number is 785-864-9726 and her e-mail is barbarab@ku.edu.

Sincerely,
    Mrs. Emma Allen-Blevins

Appendix B: Planned Interview Questions

Demographics

1. Age

2. Gender Identity

3. What is your bachelors degree in?

4. Do you have an advanced degree? (masters, doctorate, etc.) If so what is the degree in?

5. What type of Montessori program did you train in (include certification type (AMS/AMI) and location)?

6. How many years have you taught, including this year?

    a. All teaching experiences?

    b. In public Montessori school?

    c. At this current school placement?

7. Describe your classroom ratio: students to full time adults

Questions

General Satisfaction

    a. What made you choose to become a Montessori teacher?

    b. How do you feel coming to work in the morning? (e.g., What is easy? What is challenging)?

Confidence

    a. What aspects of your work make you feel confident in your abilities as a Montessori teacher?

    b. What aspects of your work make you feel less confident in your abilities as a Montessori teacher?

Independence

    a. Do you believe gives you independence as a professional in your current work

    environment?

    b. Which areas would you like to have more independence?

    c. Are you satisfied with this level of autonomy/independence? Why or why not?

Belongingness

    a. Do you feel a sense of belongingness with others at your place of work? Why or why

    not?

    b. What might help you feel more connected and related to those you work with?

Future Teaching/Work

    Where do you see yourself in 5 years professionally?

        If not in Montessori teaching, why?

        If not in education, why?

Appendix C: Code Book

Code	Subcode	Details	Quotes from Transcripts
Montessori Experience	Personal Commitment to Montessori	Involvement or observations Experience as parent/assistant/etc.	*"I appreciated it and understood the adaptability and usage of it."* *"I initially came in as an assistant so that really helped me to dive in as to see what this curriculum entails. Having that initial contact as an assistant was very eye opening, which led me to make my decision to pursue the training."* *"I love the Montessori philosophy and I've been in it long enough to see the results."* *"My son was three years old and I'd heard about Montessori. I started reading about it and found a Montessori school [to observe]. I was shocked and was like "I need to know how this is done." They're all sounding out words and I was just amazed."* *"I fell in love with it. I thought this was really cool and once I was offered the [opportunity for] the bachelor's degree, I jumped right on."* *"Teaching [in Montessori] for me was a purposeful job and yet at the same time it's different every day."* *"There were a lot of "Ah-Has"...what they were doing just really made sense and I couldn't go back [to traditional methods] after that."*
	Training program	Location Resources	*"They would pay for my Montessori certification...it was the local one...[that's] why I did it."*

		Structure	*"I have felt more prepared this year...I finished my [Montessori] diploma and got a certification."* *"[At a local training center] what I really enjoyed, and love was just being able to learn something one day and then go back the next day and work with children in the morning and actually see it in action as we're learning. That's what made me love it [Montessori]."*
	General Work Satisfaction	Feeling in Classroom Good day / bad day	*"How did I efficiently help this child today?"* *"I enjoy coming to work. I enjoy meeting my children. I enjoy teaching. I have no problems with the parents or the students. I have difficulty [at times] with the administration."* *"When they actually come and ask for a lesson. That's it. That's it. That's the fabulous part of Montessori."* *"The children need us there. They're excited to see us."* *"[On a great day] I feel like a teacher, and I've done my job, and I'm not just a babysitter."* *"The bad days are now just those [behavior issues]. Today was one of them. The energy level was insane. I didn't give very many lessons. I just spent most of my day redirecting."* *"I look forward to giving lessons."* *"They're busy and focused on their work. They're concentrating. They're getting their work completed. They're laughing. I love to hear them laugh*

			and be silly and have fun. And they are learning."
Relatedness	Relationships with Administration	Trust Dialogue Teaching experience Inconsistent treatment Changes in administration	*"I have to work really hard to push aside negative sentiments about the administration at my building every morning."* *"It is energy sucking."* *"If I'm speaking one language and the person who I'm reporting to is speaking another, then we don't understand each other [and] cannot relate."* *"I've never had an administrator longer than maybe 3 years."*
	Caregiver Relationships	Support Awareness (or lack of) Montessori	*"The majority absolutely supports me and speaks highly; I feel like they are in line with what I do."* *"I don't come to your house and parent so let me be the teacher."* *"They come in and the caregiver's attitude is, "I'm just glad they're at school," and so it makes our job a little harder to really embrace the trueness of what we do."* *"I don't think they know what they're doing. I think a lot of them expect private school experience [because it's Montessori] and they don't understand there's things we have to do [from a public school standpoint]."* *"I think parents should be able to research [Montessori] and know exactly what their child is doing and what they've signed up for once they apply for the school, but I believe the*

			district should promote the Montessori part."
	Staff Relationships	Individual effort Organizational opportunities Grade level connections	*"We've gone to absolutely no whole staff faculty meetings and that's really been divisive."* *"There is not a community, whole staff community whatsoever."* *"If one [a relationship] exists, it's because certain people will, from a different grade level, seek out others and build upon prior relationships."* *"Those supports [to develop relationships], yes they're there, but I feel like this is more of an individual thing."*
	School Climate	Isolation "Camera Watching" culture Self acceptance	*"...everyone is just trying to stay below the radar and keep their neck above the water...there is not a comfort level or a level of joyousness or humor."* *"I stay out of the way and I don't cause trouble."* *"You just never know what to expect once you walk out of that safe space (the classroom) and that's the reason why I'm a little distant and kind of keep to myself."* *"The culture is horrible. I've never experienced our school like it is right now. It's not a great place to be. We have a lot of teachers who are leaving because they are very unhappy, and I don't blame them. If I wasn't so vested, I would probably leave as well."*

			"We have a very camera watching culture. The culture by admin is to watch and look for what someone's doing wrong as opposed to getting out of the office and walking around and asking what someone needs help with." *"...more freedom to express myself and bring up difficult situations without feeling [or being made to feel] that I was incompetent, and I couldn't handle it."* *"I feel like I can walk into any room and talk to anybody. Everybody's been very welcoming, very helpful every day."*
Autonomy	Administrator Influence	Communication with Administration Interruptions Inconsistency	*"My day is interrupted by administration with an email...it can take me right off again into the frustration I feel with the administration in my building."* *"I'd like a dialogue; I'd like to hear why it wasn't okay."* *"Having a discussion or a conversation rather than just [the information] just coming from on high and "you need to do this."* *"I feel very independent [admin] doesn't interfere with me. They leave me to do my thing, but I know that's not the same for everybody."* *"I feel supported and confident and everything, but I do feel bad for how I see other people being treated...There's a lot of people who bring a lot of great things to the classroom that are not appreciated."*

			"It's very uncomfortable to ask for help. But that's a personal thing. The few times that I have approached it's been taken seriously, so I feel okay about that. But I also know [it's not the same] for everybody. If you don't fit the box, just right [you won't be taken seriously]. I fit the box just right, so I get taken seriously."
	Independent Choice Making	Risk taking Asking for permission Rationale for choices Lack of trust Set up of classroom environment	*"As far as me in my classroom...I feel absolutely, positively confident and comfortable doing what I want until I'm told not to. I feel extremely independent."* *"If I have a purposeful reason to do something. I could do it."* *"People kind of shrink back worried all the time that they're going to do something wrong. Rather than being trusted that what they're doing is right."* *"I do feel comfortable taking those risks. I'm not really asking for permission, but I ask for forgiveness later."* *"They [administration] don't want teachers walking in the hall because they are watching the cameras at all times so sometimes, I feel guilty. I just need to go and [print something] or find this material."* *"We're basically given the tools [from albums and training] or the outline of how your environment should be, what is inside of the environment, what tools you're using, what skills you're practicing."*

			"I think a lot of decisions are made for me [by administration]. So I feel like I don't have the freedom to do a lot of things that I would like to do within my classroom, because a lot of decisions are made for me, and if I did go do those things, I feel like I would be in trouble for doing that." *"I can't really be the teacher that I want to be because there could be consequences."*
	District Requirements	Restrictions Impact on Montessori process Balance of requirements District transparency (regarding Montessori programs) Lesson plans/paperwork/tests	*"We are always fighting the top people to have representation there so they can see what we do from our lens"* *"Constantly teetering on the seesaw of the authenticity of Montessori [while] upholding the [traditional] standards."* *"[B]eing under that public umbrella we're sometimes forced to hone in on more skills in language or math versus enjoying all aspects of the environment"* *"There should be more transparency from the top."* *"What bothers me most about the public school system is that [t]here's so much we have to do with district requirements."* *"It's almost too much freedom in the lesson plan area...Am I meeting the standards? Are these the right standards? Maybe there's too much [freedom]."* *"The whole classroom is killing me...It's the paperwork, the lessons*

			planning, the managing large numbers of kids, the testing. It's the whole thing."
			"We are a big part of the district. I have fears that there will be no Montessori in the future, because we're not promoting it as much as we should."
Competence	Confidence in Montessori Abilities	The Montessori flow Teacher experience (years of) Interruptions to day Assistant support	*"...little minutes of joy of learning from a student's perspective that feed my soul."* *"This third year I have felt [confidence] from preparing the environment down to the material and really diving into lessons that I wanted to be able to touch and haven't been able to do so."* *"We get into the swing of things. We get into the groove. The more things happen. Kids are working. They're interested in what they're doing. They're talking to each other. They're showing what they can do. It's just very satisfying."* *"Last year I was asking for help all the time, now I've kind of taken a step back and I feel more comfortable."* *"I take the lack of productive work personally."* *"If someone is having a meltdown or if I'm dealing with putting out a lot of fires, or if it's just things that were overwhelming or stressful in that day, it's a horrible day. I don't want to relive that."* *"[On a great day] I check everything off my list...of what I want to do and*

			accomplish that day. I was able to give all my students a lesson today...so I was moving around the room and able to really impact those students today.”
	Individual Efforts to Maintain Competence	Montessori resources Montessori peers/fellow teachers Reading albums School supports	*“...through my workbook (album), through the internet, and observing.* *“Going to an experienced teacher and just saying, “This is happening. What am I doing wrong with...?” and then being reassured that I’m not doing anything wrong. This child is not going to be the mold of what you expect and the idea of following the child does work. It can happen.”* *“If we had a built in 10 days weekly or bi-weekly where we were able to sit with our albums and review some of those lessons that we haven’t given in a while, I think that would be awesome.”*
	Self-Reflection	Self-care Personal efforts/reflection	*“Not so great days usually stem when I know I have pushed myself to a limit. Exhaustion plays a part there, and so I’m not able to give my best when I don’t feel like I’m the best.”* *“I was able to really think and process about and focus on what my day was going to look like because I was in the car alone.”*
	Administrative or School Supports	Administration’s “lived” Montessori experience Resources	*“I could go to them [admin] and ask because they had actual classroom experience and that is very valuable. They were there. They were on the front lines and until you’ve experienced the 3 year cycle, it’s not helpful.”*

			"I would prefer if [the administrator] did have the Montessori experience. I think that would help a lot, but also, I would prefer not to be micromanaged." *"Without that experience [with Montessori teaching] it's hard to convey and have [them] receive it receptively and by the person who is listening to understand because they don't have that background. There's no commonality."* *"I would want an administration that had not only a textbook understanding of Montessori, but a lived experience. It's the experience that makes all the difference."* *"Things like the reading specialist went away and so I don't feel like there's that instructional support outside of the classroom."* *"I'm thirsty in looking for more resources, more ways to use materials, different extensions, different behavior mod ideas"* *"I feel good about the amount of support [I receive]. It's not too much, it's not too little. I could reach out [for help] and it would be given to me."*