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Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to examine the most effective ways of communicating with parents in the Montessori environment, and to see if incorporating technology and communication skills into the classroom would improve parent-teacher communication and relationships. This study was conducted with the parents of children ages two and a half to six years old in a private Montessori classroom. Classroom management and communication technology in the form of Montessori Compass was introduced into the classroom in order to see the impact on parent-teacher communication. Techniques for improved communication with parents were also used during parent-teacher interactions to order to build stronger relationships. The results of the study were largely positive, with 69% of parents preferring the communication interventions. Further research is implicated in the area of introducing counseling skills to teachers in order to see additional improvement.

Keywords: Montessori, communication, parents, technology

In any school, communication between teachers and parents is a necessary and critical part of a successful classroom. Strong communication is essential in linking the home and school environments of the child and building a working relationship connecting the teacher and the parents. However, many schools struggle with fostering regular and effective dialogue (G. Noel, 2008). This seems especially true in Montessori schools. Montessori schools are often unfamiliar environments to the parents without many characteristics of traditional education. As a result, communication between the teacher and parents becomes even more important to help the parents understand the Montessori philosophy and methodology (Damore, 2004). Many Montessori classrooms are located in private schools separate from the public school system. The private schools are not required to follow a predetermined method of record keeping, assessing, and communicating with parents, which can cause inconsistency. In addition, it can result in a lack of knowledge about the best methods teachers can use to communicate with parents in their Montessori classroom.

I first became aware of this problem at my school last year when the parents filled out the school's yearly review. Many of the surveys indicated that the parents would like more information and communication about what their child was doing in the classroom and their progress. In an attempt to solve this problem, I chose to research the various methods of parent-teacher communication currently being used to find which were most effective. The existing research discussed many new methods of sharing information with parents, but none of the studies were specifically focused in the Montessori environment. I saw my classroom as an ideal place to build upon this existing research. This study was

conducted in my early childhood classroom at a small private Montessori school. The subjects of the study included the parents of my students.

In my research, I examined the following question: does incorporating new technology and focusing on creating trusting relationships through the introduction of communication and counseling skills affect parent-teacher communication positively in a private Montessori school?

Review of Literature

Graham-Clay (2005) has addressed reasons for the lack of communication between the teacher and parents. The limited amount of time in the teacher's work day and the increasing amount of tasks and students has made it difficult for the teacher to provide detailed feedback on a regular basis (Graham-Clay, 2005). Many teacher education programs do not train prospective teachers on specific communication skills needed to interact with parents, or how to clearly provide feedback about student progress to the parents (Graham-Clay, 2005). The majority of the time, the communication between schools and families is one-way, directed at the parents from the teacher or school (Graham-Clay, 2005). If the one-way communication is not balanced with two-way communication that allows for parents to feel their concerns are being heard, it can cause a breakdown of parent-teacher communication (Graham-Clay, 2005). These issues are compounded with additional factors in the Montessori environment, such as parental lack of knowledge about the Montessori philosophy and methodology (Damore, 2004). Many Montessori schools do not use traditional methods to assess progress such as tests or grades, which can result in misunderstandings about the child's learning if the parent

does not fully understand the assessments (Damore, 2004). Parental expectations that do not line up with the school can also harm communication (Dikkers, 2013).

Communication Strategies

Past studies on the issue have trialed many different methods to improve parent-teacher communication. One commonly tried method to improve communication is educating teachers on various strategies that could be used while communicating with parents (Symeou, 2012). This training included methods such as basic counseling skills to help the teachers understand parent expectations, improve problem-solving, and respond to feelings expressed by the parents (Symeou, 2012). It also included active listening skills to help the teacher show openness and interest during parent communication and to help the teacher fully understand the problem (Symeou, 2012). The teacher's use of communication skills and relationship building skills help create trusting and positive relationships between the teacher and parents (G. Noel, 2008). A study carried out on a teacher education program meant to educate teachers on these communication skills over a four-week period showed the teachers' confidence in their communication with parents increased, and the teachers reported the skills as useful in their daily communications (Symeou, 2012).

Building Relationships

In much of the current research, building relationships based on trust and respect has been found to improve communication between teachers and parents (K. Noel, 2008). A study carried out by Noel (2008) found that conflict between the teacher and parents was the most harmful factor in developing these trusting relationships. The conflict often took the form of disagreements about student needs and a lack or surplus of participation

from the parents (K. Noel, 2008). Noel found that frequent, honest, and personal

communication between the teacher and parents helped build trusting relationships (K.

Noel, 2008). Other factors that improved communication which the teacher controlled

included spending an appropriate amount of time on communication, encouraging parent

involvement, and proper teacher training about communication skills and relationship

building skills (K. Noel, 2008).

Often parent-teacher communication is seen only as a way to share reminders and

"reinforce student achievement" (Miretzky, 2004). A study carried out by Miretzky

(2004) indicated talk between parents and teachers is beneficial in creating trusting

relationships and improving school-related communication. In the study, teachers and

parents discussed issues unrelated to their children such as mutual goals, respect,

alliances, and the school community (Miretzky, 2004). He found that these talks helped

the parents and teachers identify what they have in common and connect their values,

thus improving communication (Miretzky, 2004).

Increasing Parent Understanding

In addition to focusing on the relationships between the parents and teachers,

studies have indicated a need for increasing parent understanding of assessment and

learning (Deslandes, 2013). A study on a new kind of formative assessment was carried

out by Deslandes (2013) to assess how the parents understood and viewed this alternative

form of assessing and communicating student progress. The assessments judged student

knowledge and competency through formats such as "observation checklists, lists with

statements that describe a series of actions, self-evaluations on the part of the students

themselves, and conferences between the student and the teacher. Using a teacher's

logbook, anecdotal records, and the student's portfolio was strongly recommended to record information" (Deslandes, 2013). This format of assessment was unfamiliar to many parents, who expected grades and tests rather than observations and comments. The study found that parents needed to be clearly informed and educated about the assessment process (Deslandes, 2013). Multiple methods of communicating the progress of the students through this new assessment were found to be effective, including pamphlets, workshops, "parent-teacher conferences, electronic mail, phone messages, memos, and evaluation copies or the child's portfolio sent home with his or her strengths and weaknesses identified" (Deslandes, 2013). However, the study indicated that the parents still viewed the report card as the main way of communicating assessments of their child (Deslandes, 2013).

Incorporating Technology

A more recent strategy for improving parent-teacher communication and increasing its efficiency is incorporating technology into the classroom. Hammonds (2013) reported that a study carried out by Ottenbreit-Leftwich in 2010 showed that teachers value incorporating technology which increases parent-teacher communication into their classrooms. With the large amount of technology now available, this can be carried out in many different ways. One method is teacher-operated class web pages (Eggeman, 2012). A recent study by Eggeman (2012) about the effectiveness of teacher web pages found that both parents and teachers supported web pages as a method of communication. However, the study also found that parents were frustrated with a lack of frequent updates on the web pages, and teachers were frustrated by a lack of school-provided guidelines on what content to post on the web pages (Eggeman, 2012). There

are many sites available on the Internet that aim to make communication in the classroom

easier. Class Dojo is a free site that helps teachers provide feedback to parents about their

child's behavior in the classroom (Hammonds, 2013). Sites such as Dropbox and Diigo

allow teachers easily to share files, links, important articles, and reminders with parents

(Hammonds, 2013). Edmodo lets parents see homework and grades on a daily basis, and

lets the teacher notify the parents about important information (Hammonds, 2013).

Recently there have been studies carried out on the effectiveness of online record

keeping and grading sites designed for use in the classroom. Lacina (2006) reports that

research carried out by Migliorino and Maiden in 2004 found many positive aspects to

using an online record keeping site, such as allowing parents to have immediate access to

up-to-date information about their child from anywhere (Lacina, 2006). Research also

indicates that online record keeping sites help keep information such as attendance and

other student data in one centralized location which is accessible by any teachers working

with the children (Lacina, 2006). This allows the teachers to spend more time on their

lessons and working with their students, rather than recording and calculating grades by

hand (Lacina, 2006). The information recorded on the sites can be printed into

professional forms documenting progress and other information for the parents (Lacina,

2006). Lacina (2006) indicated many factors to consider before adopting an online record

keeping system. Some sites are designed with a specific age range in mind, and so a

system made for high school students is not appropriate for use in an early childhood

classroom (Lacina, 2006). Lacina (2006) found that the records need to be balanced, not

only listing areas in which the child needs to improve. Lacina (2006) also found that

teachers need to be well-prepared and ready before an online system is adopted, as

positive teacher attitudes are critical to the success of the program use. Lastly, Lacina (2006) found that the type of classroom needs to be compatible with the record keeping site. More research needs to be carried out on the effectiveness of record keeping sites designed for specific classrooms, such as the use of Montessori Compass in the Montessori classroom.

Based on these findings, parent-teacher communication in any classroom environment can be strong with the right tools, resources, and training. Teachers need to view communication with parents as more than just a way to send home reminders, and focus on building trusting relationships maintained through the many methods and tools detailed above. If the communication is strong, teachers can help parents understand their child's progress and effectively communicate learning through multiple formats of assessment and technology. This study will build off of this existing research in order to discover how it applies in the Montessori environment.

Methodology

This study was conducted in a private, non-profit Montessori school serving children ages two and a half to six years old. The school is located in an affluent suburban city in California. Eighty-three percent of the families in my classroom are not native English speakers, so there is a need for extra care in communication and understanding cultural differences. My research focused on the parents of my 30 students during the 2014-2015 school year. Of my 30 families, 16 consented to participate in my study.

I began my study by gaining active consent from the parents of my students and informing them about the topic and purpose of the study. I spoke in person with each

parent and explained my research, then gave them a letter detailing the study and the

participation requirements. They were to sign and return the consent form to me by

dropping the form in a box within two weeks if they wanted to participate. Sixteen

consent forms were returned to me by the deadline.

Montessori Compass

The main component of my study was introducing classroom management and

communication technology into the classroom in order to see the impact on parent-

teacher communication. Prior to this study, my school used little technology in the

classroom other than a school-wide monthly newsletter emailed to the parents. In order to

see if additional technology had a positive impact on how the parents viewed

communication in my classroom, I decided to implement a classroom record keeping site

such as the ones described above by Lacina (2006). Since my classroom is a Montessori

classroom, I needed to find a site modeled on Montessori philosophy and pedagogy,

which included the Montessori materials. I researched the different options and surveyed

fellow teachers in order to learn about the sites available.

For my study I chose Montessori Compass, an online record keeping and

classroom management system. I chose Montessori Compass because it received positive

reviews from my peers and was cost-effective for my small school. The site appeared to

be user friendly and there was a support center for teacher questions, which was

important since many teachers at my school were not comfortable with technology.

In order to set up the site for my classroom, I registered for an account and

created my school. I input information about each student and their parents, including

names, ages, email addresses, allergies, and more. I then invited the parents to log in to

the system in order to activate their accounts. All of the parents in my classroom were

given a Montessori Compass account and they all successfully activated and accessed

their accounts. I only recorded data on the 16 families who had returned their consent

forms.

In my study, I used all the features available in Montessori Compass. In the site,

there is a 'classroom dashboard' where the teacher tracks attendance, plans lessons,

records completed lessons, and more. There is an option to share photos or notes with the

parents through the classroom dashboard as well. I chose to switch all my record keeping

to the digital format on Montessori Compass.

Using my work iPad, I accessed Montessori Compass each day during the course

of my study. At the end of every daily work period, I entered the materials that each

student had worked with into the record keeping platform. I also tracked attendance daily,

and sent weekly messages to the parents detailing the next week's curriculum. Weekly

activity reports were sent out each Friday to the parents, listing and describing all the

materials I recorded the child having worked with over the course of the week.

Counseling and Communication In-Service

The second important component of my study was to implement techniques for

improved communication with parents in order to build stronger relationships. In order to

address building stronger relationships with my parents, I chose to research basic

counseling and communication skills to be used in interactions with parents. I created a

presentation which described different techniques which could be used when talking to

parents and presented it to the other teachers at my school during our in-service day. The

techniques included active listening, being aware of body language, monitoring tone of

voice, asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing what the parent is saying, summarizing the parent's main points, and taking notes about important information.

Recording Data

I used four different sources of data to assess how the technology and counseling skills were affecting my daily parent-teacher interactions. I collected this data over the five week course of the study.

My first source of data included field notes detailing my interactions with parents over the five weeks. These interactions monitored the efficacy of the new communication techniques being used by the teachers, as well as the use of Montessori Compass. Prior to beginning the study, I created a form on which I recorded the time, location, content, and tone of communication of an interaction (See Appendix A). By using this form, I was able to record consistent details about each interaction I had with the parents across multiple topics and communication methods. The notes contained information about the tone of the interactions, which was an important element in determining if the communication strategies were having a positive effect on parent-teacher relationships. These notes were recorded on my classroom iPad throughout the day as the interactions occurred, and then transferred onto the physical paper form at the end of the day.

In addition to the observational notes about my interactions with the parents, I tracked each interaction on a tally sheet (See Appendix B). This helped me organize and record the amount and type of parent communication situations I encountered during the study. I categorized the communications by method of communication (in person, Montessori Compass, phone, email, etc.) and also tracked how quickly a response was sent, both by the teacher and the parent. I used one tally sheet per week, with a total of

five tally sheets, in order to see how the communications varied each week. These records also tracked how many communications came through technology and how many communications came in person.

Another source of information about my communications with parents was through computer-generated reports. These reports were online records from Montessori Compass and my email account giving information on how often parents communicated with me through Montessori Compass and email. I also tracked the parents' engagement with the weekly classroom activity reports sent through Montessori Compass. Once the report was sent out, I could check if the parent had read it or not, and how long it took for them to read it after it was sent.

During the last two weeks of the study, I gave the participating parents an anonymous questionnaire containing 10 questions about their feelings about parent-teacher communication and which aspects of communication they valued the most (See Appendix C). Before class, I met each participating parent outside the classroom and handed them the form in person. This allowed me to explain the form and answer questions they had. I gave the parents two weeks to return the form anonymously by dropping it into a covered box. This form was intended to provide me with information about how the parents' feelings about communication had changed over the course of the five weeks of my study, as well as gather data about which methods of communication they preferred. All 16 parents who agreed to participate in the study returned the questionnaire by the posted deadline.

Analysis of Data

My baseline data showed mixed results on how parents felt about parent-teacher

communication at my school prior to my study's interventions. Only 13% of parents wrote positive comments about the communication. Thirty-one percent of parents gave mixed feedback. Some of the comments in their responses were positive, and other comments were negative. Another 31% of parents gave negative feedback about the school's parent-teacher communication. The remaining 25% were new parents to the school, so they did not provide feedback in this area.
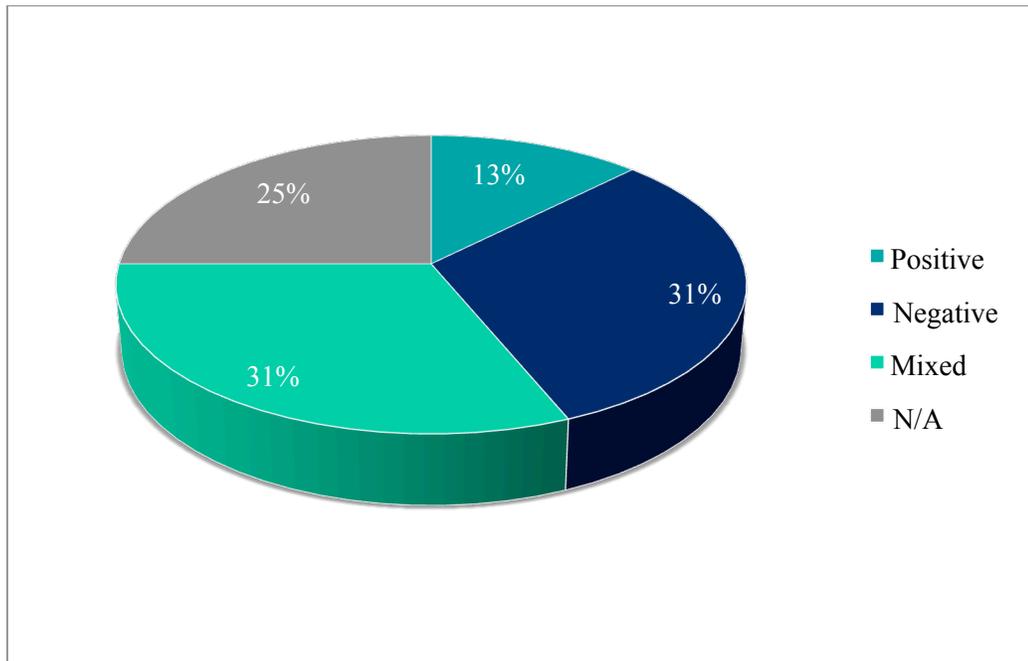

Figure 1. Parent feelings about parent-teacher communication during the 2013-2014 school year.

Of the positive comments about last year's parent-teacher communication, common themes such as teacher availability for in person meetings and the school's monthly newsletter were listed. Some of the negative comments about last year's communication included a lack of information about which materials the children were working with on a daily basis, and generic or simple reports.

I used the same parent feedback form to measure how the parents felt at the end of my study to see if the incorporation of Montessori Compass and new communication strategies had an effect on their view of communication at the school. When the parents were asked how they felt post-intervention about parent-teacher communication, the results were more positive. Sixty-nine percent of parents wrote comments with a positive theme about parent-teacher communication. Twenty-five percent gave feedback which was mixed with positive and negative comments. One parent listed negative feelings about the current parent-teacher communication.
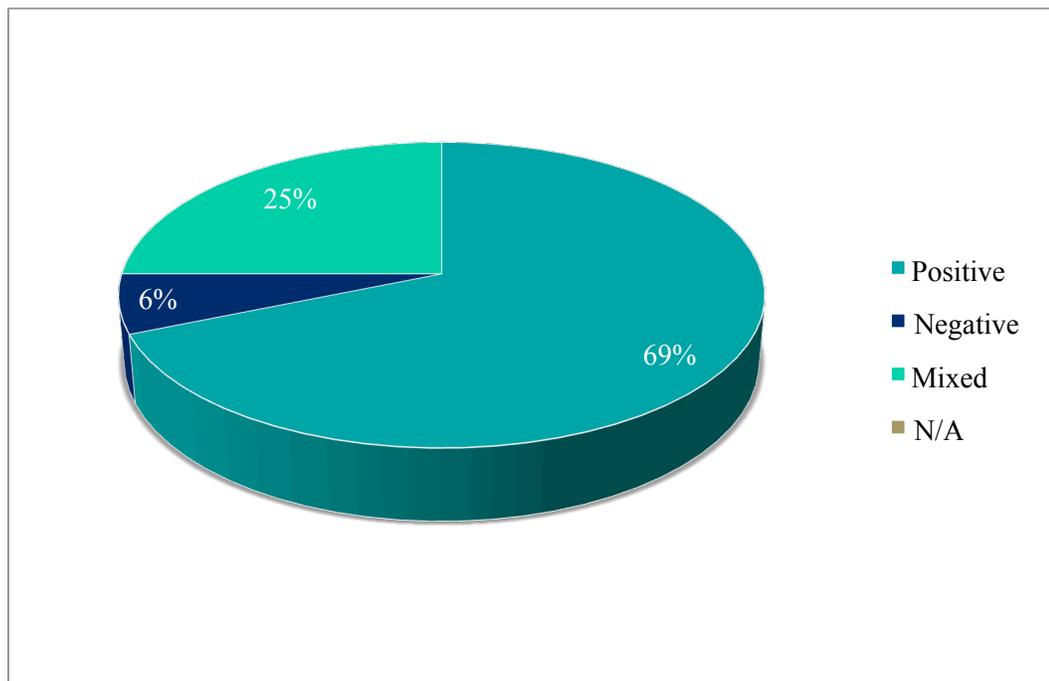

Figure 2. Parent feelings about parent-teacher communication at the end of the study.

In the positive responses, the parents commented on many of the features of Montessori Compass. Many parents wrote that they enjoyed seeing a detailed description of what materials their child was working with each week. They also listed that the weekly activity reports helped them see how their child was progressing in each curriculum area. Other positive comments included the parent-teacher conferences and

availability of the teacher to speak in person to the parents. The parents also liked how all

the information was in one easily accessible place in the Montessori Compass site. The

mixed responses shared a common theme of liking Montessori Compass but that some of

the information on the site was too technical or took too long to read. Lastly, the negative

response felt that the addition of technology was taking away from the face-to-face
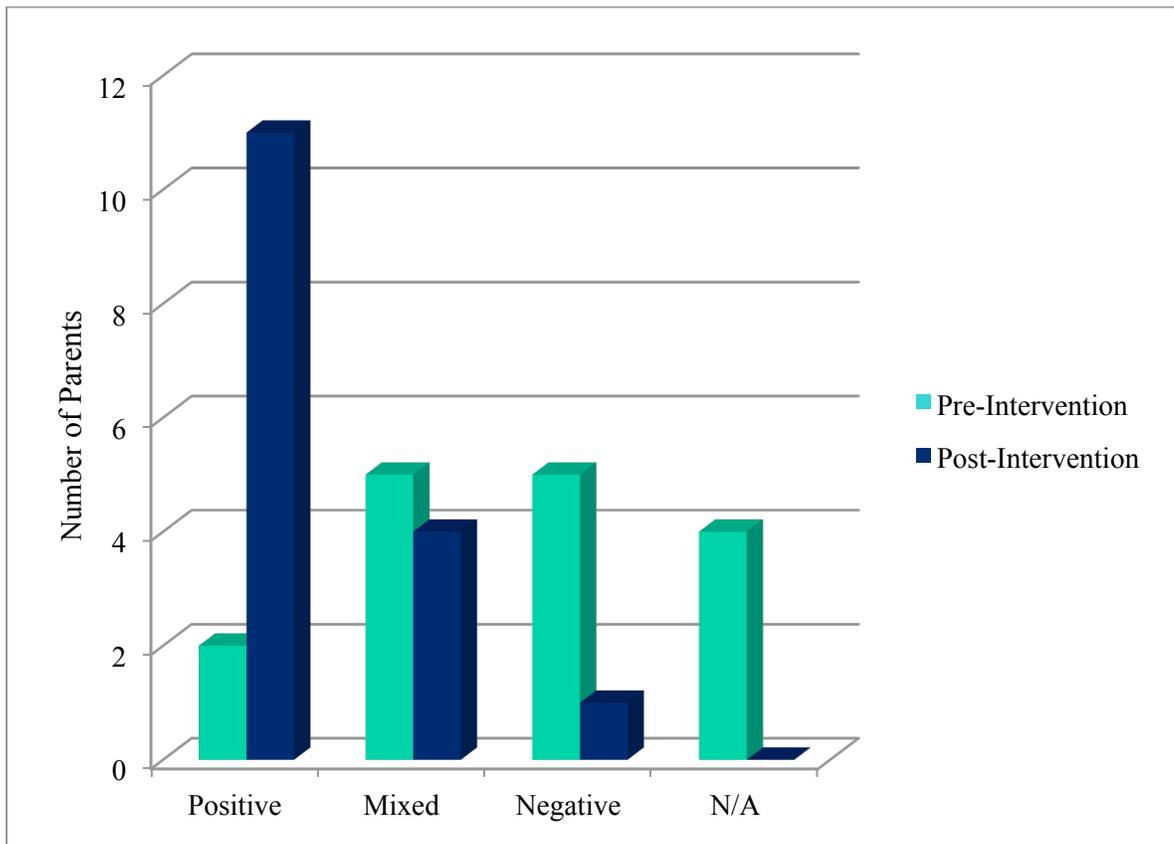
communication between teacher and parents.

Figure 3. Comparison between parent feelings about parent-teacher communication pre-
and post-intervention.

        One important question I hoped to answer through my study was which

information the parents most valued receiving about their child through the new forms of

parent communication. Through the parent feedback form, I was able to extract common

themes in the responses. The most listed response, with ten parents, was which materials

their children were working with during the day. This was consistent with the positive

overall results on parent feelings about communication. Montessori Compass provided a

detailed list of the child's activity each week, thus meeting this need and improving the

parent's view of parent-teacher communication. The next most valued piece of

information, with six parents, was their child's social skills and how they interacted with

friends at school. Five parents listed curriculum as an important piece of information.

Five parents valued hearing about how their child's day went. Four parents wrote that

they wanted information about their child's strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, three

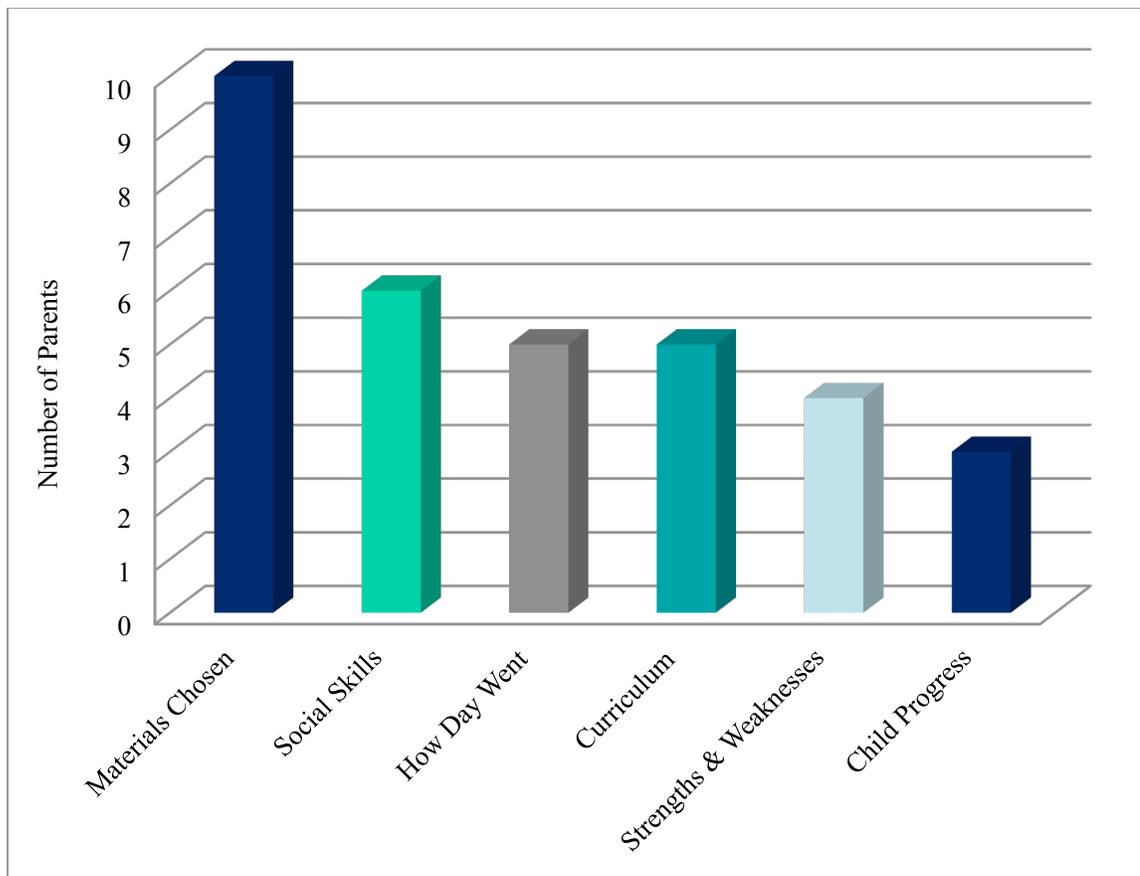parents wanted information about how their child was progressing in the classroom.

Figure 4. Most valued information by the parents.

I also wanted to gauge which methods of communication were preferred the most, and compare answers with my records of parent interactions to see if the data matched. Through the parent feedback form, I described several situations with different conversation topics, and asked the parents which method of communication they would prefer to use in that situation. The methods of communication included in person, Montessori Compass, email, telephone, and a paper sent home with the child.

When discussing a behavioral issue with their child, 100% of the parents indicated that they would like to have an in person conversation with the teacher. None of the parents selected any of the other options for discussing behavioral problems. The results were more mixed for other situations.

When discussing student work and classroom curriculum, eight of the sixteen parents, or half, preferred to use Montessori Compass. Four chose in person conversations, three chose email, and one parent chose a paper sent home with their child as their preferred method of communicating about student work.

When given the situation of sharing casual information with the teacher about their child, five parents chose in person conversations as their preferred method of communication, and another five parents chose email. Four parents selected Montessori Compass, and two selected a paper sent home with their child.

None of the parents chose the telephone as their preferred method of communication for any of the described situations. This indicated that the telephone was the least effective method of communication for the parents in my study group.
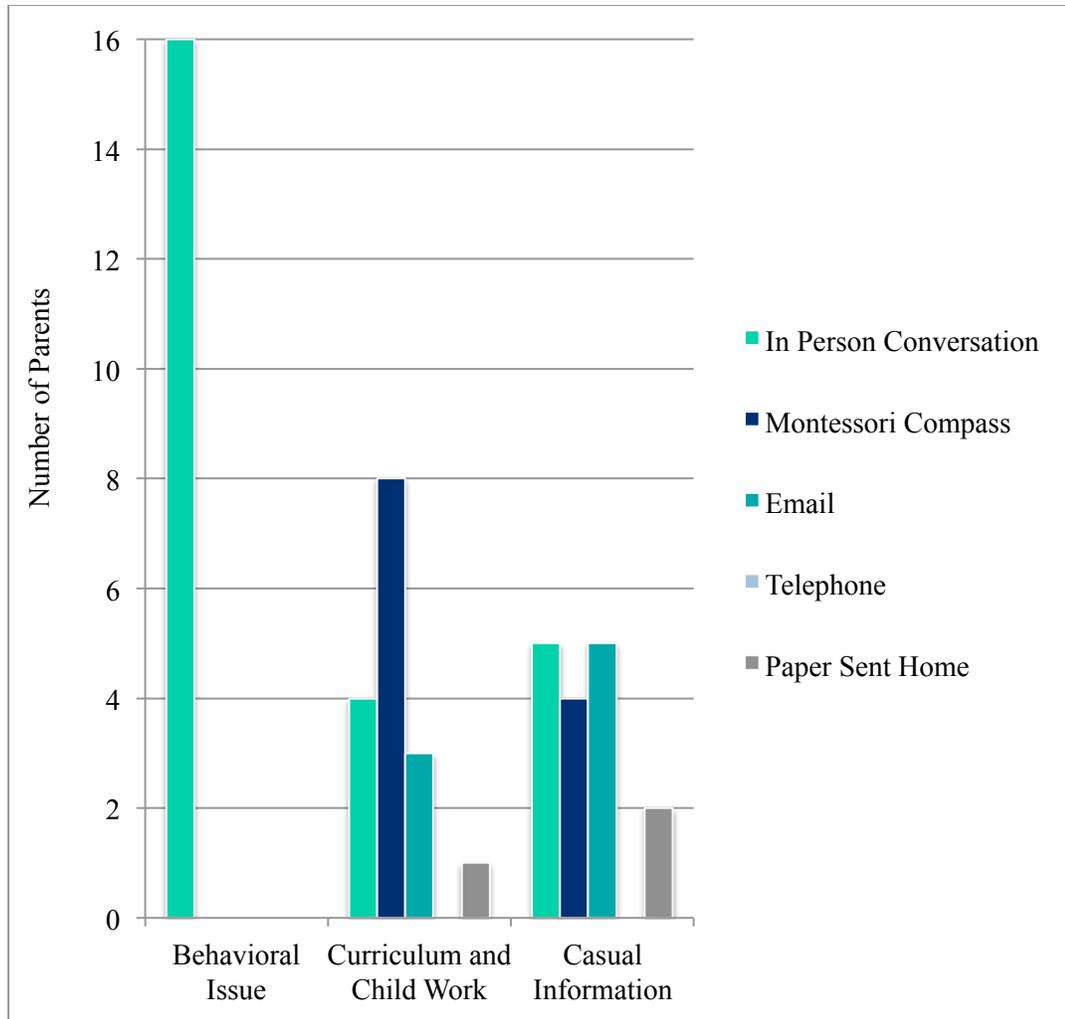
Figure 5. Preferred method of communication by parents based on the topic.

I also wanted to evaluate which methods of communicating child progress the

parents valued most. The choices I provided were anecdotes about the child, lists and

descriptions of the materials the child was working with, photographs of the child

working in the classroom, portfolios of the child's work, and progress reports. The results

were very mixed to which methods the parents preferred. There was not a clear

preference by the group as a whole. In fact, several parents wrote next to this question

that they thought all the listed formats of information were helpful.

Format of Communication	Number of Parents			
	Strongly Preferred	Preferred	Indifferent	Least Preferred
Anecdotes	4	3	6	2
List of Materials	6	6	2	1
Photographs	0	3	10	2
Portfolios	3	2	8	2
Progress Reports	5	7	2	1

Figure 6. Preferred format by parents of communicating child progress.

In order to see if the parent's actions matched the data I received in the parent feedback form, I turned to the computer generated results obtained through Montessori Compass. I wanted to analyze if the parents viewed the weekly activity reports regularly and promptly. The reports contained information about which materials the child was working with, curriculum notes written by me, and photographs of the child working in the classroom.

The reports were sent out automatically by the Montessori Compass system every Friday at 9:00 PM. I analyzed the times the parents viewed the report in order to see how quickly they were being read. The first week, only 19% of the reports were read on the same day they were sent out. Thirty-one percent of the reports were read the day after they were sent out. Thirty-eight percent of the reports were viewed within the same week, and six percent were viewed the next week. Six percent of the reports were never read by the parents.

Over the five weeks of data collection, the reading response time became faster.

By the fifth week, 37% of the reports were viewed on the same day that they were sent

out. Twenty-five percent of the reports were read the next day. Another twenty-five

percent of the reports were read within the same week that they were sent out, with no

parents reading the reports after the week they went out. Thirteen percent of the reports

were not viewed.

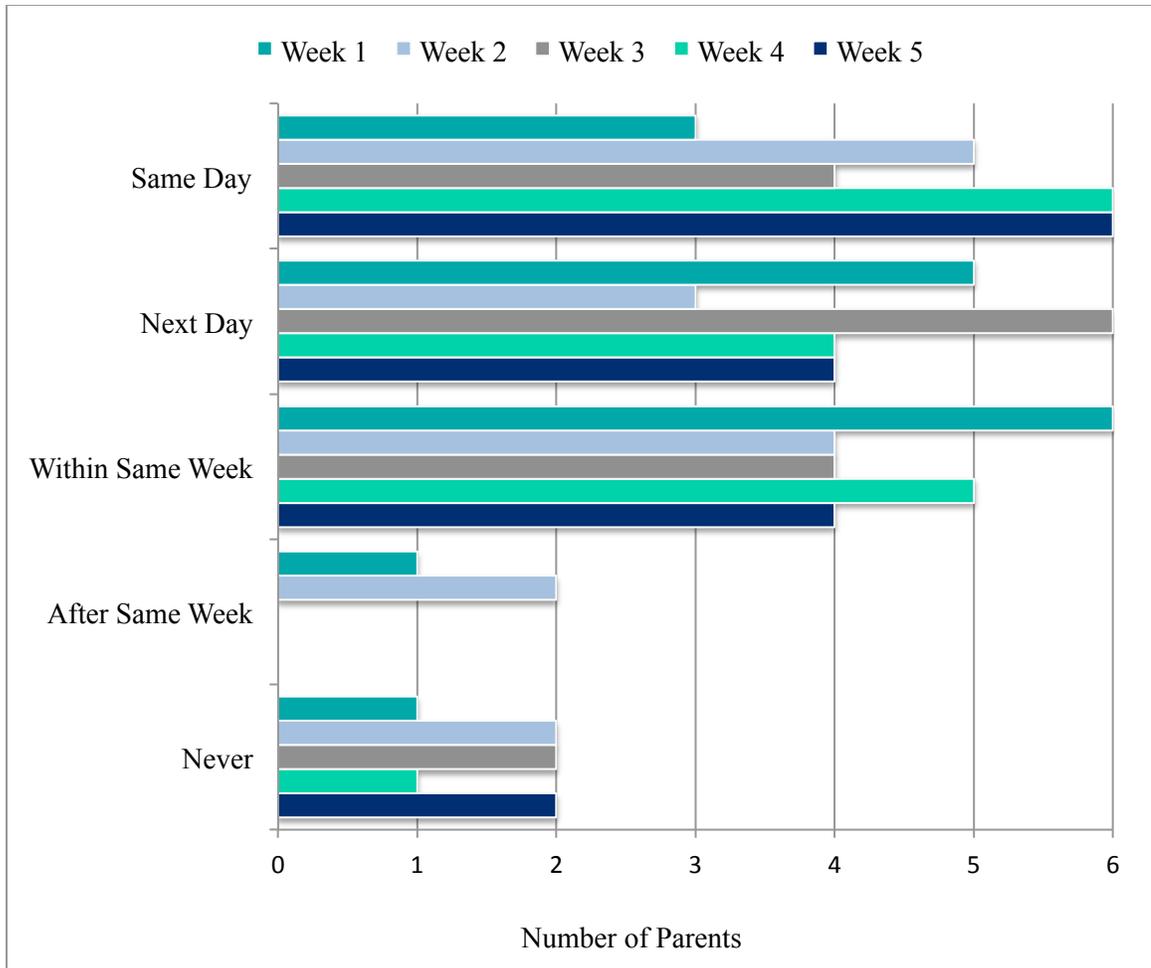*Figure 7*. Amount of time taken for parents to read Montessori Compass activity reports.

The increase in the amount of parents reading the reports the same day, next day,

or same week showed me that parents were interested in receiving the information sent

through the activity reports. The 'never viewed' responses came from the same two to

three parents every week. The number of 'never viewed' responses increased by one

parent from the first week, which led me to believe that perhaps the parent was not viewing the report because they did not find the information valuable. I did not want to affect the results of this study, so I did not communicate with them about their lack of viewing the reports while collecting data. Once the study ended, I asked the parents what was keeping them from viewing the report to see if it was related to their feelings about Montessori Compass. One parent told me that she felt the information on the site was too technical and took too long to read on the weekend, so she usually did not view the reports. Another parent said that she had forgotten her password, and had trouble resetting it. A different response was that the parent wasn't sure how to view the activity report. These issues are ones that could easily be addressed with parent education on the Montessori Compass site following the study, possibly improving the positive response rate.

These findings agreed with the data collected on my tally sheets and observation notes. The majority of my interactions with parents were conducted in person. This remained consistent across the five weeks of the study. The second most frequent method of communication was through the Montessori Compass site, then email, and lastly through the telephone.

The data I collected did not produce clear results on the effect of teachers using basic counseling and communication skills during their interactions with parents. At the beginning of the study I held an in-service day for the teachers at my school where I presented techniques such as active listening, being aware of body language, monitoring tone of voice, asking open-ended questions, paraphrasing what the parent is saying, summarizing the parent's main points, and taking notes about important information.

However, I did not create a concrete data collection method of determining how using the skills during parent-teacher interactions affected the teachers. This area needs further study to collect information such as how the teachers felt about the skills, how often they used the skills, and if the interactions with parents were becoming increasingly positive. As a result of inadequate data, I cannot draw meaningful results in this study about the effectiveness of counseling and communication skills.

Through my field notes detailing my interactions with parents, I did find that for certain issues the parents in my classroom chose to speak with teachers in person over every other method of communication. This reflects that in some instances, parents really prefer face to face communication with a teacher. Therefore, there is a need for more professional development on these communication strategies.

Action Plan

The results of this study have changed the way I communicate with parents in my classroom, and I anticipate that it will continue to change my communication methods over time. The areas in which this study has impacted my practice the most is record keeping and parent communication. Prior to this study, I was using very little technology in the classroom and did all of my record keeping by hand. I tracked attendance in a book, and had to transfer all of this information to my computer when it was time to write the conference reports. It was a time consuming and ineffective process.

The study interventions required me to transfer my record keeping notes, student roster, and attendance to the Montessori Compass site. Throughout the study, and particularly at the beginning, there was an adjustment period while I learned how to use the site and input all the necessary information. As I continue using this site for the rest of

this year and next school year, I believe I will continue to grow more comfortable with the system. At this point in my study, record keeping and parent communication is taking slightly less time than it did before. It could potentially take increasingly less time as I become more familiar with Montessori Compass. I believe I will also be able to use all the site's features more effectively, such as the progress reports.

The results of the parent feedback form have also impacted my communications with parents. The study showed that the parents most value hearing about which materials their children worked with during the day. In order to meet that need, I responded with the Montessori Compass activity reports. Following this study, I will continue to use the weekly activity reports in my classroom. It is an effective way for me to record my observations about the children's work and levels, while also communicating this information with the parents at the same time.

One change I will make next year is introducing Montessori Compass at the beginning of the school year, rather than halfway through the year. This way, the parents would be able to access the information the entire time their child is in my classroom. It will also allow the parents to see their child's progress throughout the school year. I anticipate that this change will strengthen the positive response from the parents, as progress was one of the types of information parents valued on the feedback form.

I also would like to see if the parents are more active on Montessori Compass if it is presented to them at the beginning of the year as the main source of information on their child's activity. I believe it may have an effect on how the parents view the site, and they may be more active if they use it throughout the year rather than as an addition in the middle of the year.

The findings of the study have also led me to consider having a Montessori Compass information night at the beginning of the school year. The purpose of the workshop would be to show parents the Montessori Compass site layout, walk them through the information available, and answer any questions they have in person. When I introduced Montessori Compass this year, I explained how to use the site mostly through the invitation email I sent each parent to allow them to sign up for an account. My study found that a few of the parents did not read the activity reports regularly because they felt the site was too technical or did not know how to access the reports. An information night could potentially help those parents feel more comfortable using the site, and improve the reading rates of the activity reports.

Since the study showed positive results, I believe the research will continue to improve parent-teacher communication in my classroom. I now know more about what information parents value hearing about their children. Next year I plan to focus on that information in my communications. I also will use my findings to guide the methods I use to communicate with the parents in the future, such as in person conversations and Montessori Compass.

My study did not produce clear results on teacher use of basic counseling and communication skills while interacting with parents. Despite this lack of results, I will continue to use the basic counseling and communication skills I researched and presented at the teacher in-service. I chose to hold an in-service day on counseling and communication skills because the literature said that teacher proficiency in these skills could strengthen relationships between teachers and parents. However, I believe this topic needs to be examined separately in a second study in order to understand the impact

of these skills and draw meaningful results. It is relevant to this study because parent-teacher communication comes in many different forms. One form of communication is through technology, which this study showed improved parent feelings about communication. Another form of communication is the human element. According to my data, serious topics tended to be discussed more frequently through face-to-face interactions, rather than through technology. It is possible that counseling and communication skills could improve the tone in these interactions. My study also found that in person communication was the most favored method of communication by the parents, so it would be beneficial for teachers to be comfortable in this area. The data collected through my observations did not fully align with the main component of my study, which was introducing technology. The qualitative data I recorded from my observations can inspire future research in this area.

I am continuing to form questions regarding parent communication and would like to devote further study to this area. I do not know how effective incorporating counseling skills are in improving communication and relationships between teachers and parents. I would like to see if a further positive result can be achieved next year in my classroom. I hope that using the counseling and communication skills will strengthen my relationships with the parents, and foster trust and honesty. I believe a well-planned communication program implemented over several months would make an interesting study to see how using these skills change interactions with parents.

Conducting this study in my classroom has been an informative and enriching experience. Through the data I collected over the course of the five weeks, I was able to identify what parents value in parent-teacher communication, and identify strengths and

weaknesses in communication in my classroom. The results of this study will inform and

guide my future practices, and hopefully continue to build strong relationships between

myself and the parents.

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Appendix A

Building Strong Communication in the Montessori Environment

Parent Communication Observational Records

Date of communication:

Where communication occurred (in person, Montessori Compass, etc.):

Content of communication:

Demeanor of parents/tone of communication:

Any other important details:

Appendix B

Building Strong Communication in the Montessori Environment
Parent Communication Tracking Form

Dates Tracked: _____ to _____

Method of Communication - Parent Initiated

In Person	
Email	
Montessori Compass	
Telephone	
Paper	

Notes:

Method of Communication - Teacher Initiated

In Person	
Email	
Montessori Compass	
Telephone	
Paper	

Notes:

Parent Response Time to Teacher

Time	Same Day	Next Day	Within Same Week	After Same Week
In Person				
Email				
Montessori Compass				
Telephone				
Paper				

Notes:

Teacher Response Time to Parent

Time	Same Day	Next Day	Within Same Week	After Same Week
In Person				
Email				
Montessori Compass				
Telephone				
Paper				

Notes:

Appendix C

Building Strong Communication in the Montessori Environment
Parent Feedback Form

Dear Parents,   Date Given Out

Completion of these questions is voluntary and anonymous. By completing this feedback form, you are giving your consent to participate in this study. If you do complete the form, your answers will be completely anonymous and I will not know who has participated or filled out the form. The data I collect from these responses will be used in my research study in order to learn about the most effective practices in parent-teacher communication. Please deposit this completed form into the box in front of Room 3. I value your time and responses, and thank you for being a part of my research.

1) How do you feel about the current parent-teacher communication methods at Villa Montessori?

2) Do you feel like you can easily communicate with the teachers?

3) What information do you most value receiving about your child? (Examples: materials they are working with, classroom curriculum, how their day went, etc.)

4) Please rate the formats of information from best (1) to worst (5).

_____ Short stories/anecdotes about your child

_____ List and descriptions of materials your child is using

_____ Photographs of your child in the classroom

_____ Portfolio of child work

_____ Progress reports

5) Please rate the methods of communication from best (1) to worst (5).

_____ Email

_____ Classroom site such as Montessori Compass

_____ Telephone

_____ Paper sent home with child

_____ In person conversation

6) Which of the above methods (email, classroom site, telephone, paper sent home with child, in person conversation, or other) would you prefer using when discussing a behavioral issue with the teacher?

7) Which of the above methods (email, classroom site, telephone, paper sent home with child, in person conversation, or other) would you prefer using when discussing curriculum and child work with the teacher?

8) Which of the above methods (email, classroom site, telephone, paper sent home with child, in person conversation, or other) would you prefer using when having a casual conversation/sharing every day information with the teacher?

9) What do you feel could strengthen parent-teacher communication at Villa?

10) Please list any additional comments or thoughts here.