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## **"What Are the Effects Of Parental Informational Nights/Parenting Classes on the Parent's Understanding of the Montessori Method?"**

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**What Are the Effects Of Parental Informational Nights/Parenting Classes on the Parent's  
Understanding of the Montessori Method?**

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## Abstract

This action research paper aimed to identify the benefits of parent informational classes within the Montessori method. Parents participated in three informational sessions. The sessions discussed Montessori philosophy and each of the core areas in the Montessori classroom. Data was measured using pre-and post-surveys, allowing parents to elaborate on their understanding. Parents were also able to provide questions and feedback regarding areas they desired to learn more. Parents expressed that the informative classes provided them a better understanding of the Montessori philosophy and provided ideas for incorporating the method into their homes. The research concluded the importance of involving and educating parents on their child's method of education. Further research should include a more extensive and more diverse group of parents or involve multiple schools to see the impact on parent involvement and student success. Upon this research, we will prioritize educating parents on the importance of the Montessori philosophy.

*Keywords:* parent education, Montessori method, Montessori philosophy, parent classes, education

## **Introduction**

Our elementary school is a public, title 1 Montessori school. Within our district we have 15 elementary schools, two which offer primary Montessori. Some students within our school are zoned, while others apply and are selected by a lottery in order to receive a place in our school. Many parents seek our school for their child's education since we are a Montessori school. Parents have often heard many great qualities about the Montessori classroom. However, once they are in the program, we realize there is a strong lack of knowledge of the Montessori curriculum. We often receive many questions regarding the Montessori method. Parents have expressed that they do not have an in-depth understanding of what occurs in a Montessori classroom and that their knowledge is general. Parents have expressed interest in wanting to know more about the materials that are being used in the Primary Montessori classroom. Parents want to be involved and want to know the type of education their child is receiving. Upon seeing such an interest and desire from our parents to know more about the Montessori method, we felt there was a need for parent education classes on the Montessori method. We felt that if our parents had a better understanding of the Montessori method and philosophy, they would become more involved and also carry out these concepts into their homes.

The goal of our study was to identify the benefits of parent informational classes on the Montessori method. We began with offering the parents informational classes in our two Primary Montessori classrooms. We did this through holding three virtual sessions which included information on the Montessori philosophy and six of the areas in our Montessori classroom (sensorial, math, culture, practical life, language, and science). We gathered data through surveys using Google forms. Upon completion of the study, we saw a very positive

impact on these classes and feel there is a strong need to continue educating parents on the Montessori method.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mowder's Parent Development Theory expresses the importance of a parent's role in a child's education. This theory highlights the importance of creating a strong sense of self-efficacy to help a child succeed. Mowder believes the perception of parents changes as their child evolves (Mowder, 2005). When a child enrolls in school, it will often be the first time a parent relinquishes control of that child's development to another individual. They must then adjust their role as a parent to fit within this new development system. When parents are involved in school-initiated interactions and create strong relationships, they will effectively be more involved in their child's education (Mowder, 2005). Parents understand and carry out being a guide in their child's development and alter their perceptions of parenting expectations as their child develops (Mowder, 2005). According to Mowder, upholding Parental Development Theory is an instrument that allows parents to become more connected and knowledgeable in the choices that come with all ages of their child's development (Mowder, 2005). Parent Development Theory states that parent education can positively affect a child's growth and development (Mowder, 2005). Parents make a difference in the outcomes of their children. Sensitive and responsive parenting is the best way for a parent to have positive outcomes in their children and how they behave toward their children (Smith, 2010).

Mowder's Theory of Parent Development strongly ties into this study because it expresses the importance and need of parent involvement and education in their child's development. Much research has been done and concluded that successful students often have strong academic support from their involved parents (Sheldon, 2009). In our Title-One school,

there is a substantial lack of knowledge about the Montessori method and philosophy amongst the parents. Most parents only send their children to our school due to their zoning for our public school. Our district consists of 13 public elementary schools. Within these 13 schools, three schools offer the Montessori curriculum. Due to a lack of knowledge of the Montessori philosophy within the community, our school lacks parent involvement. Sanders and Sheldon (2009) state that, schools become successful when a solid and positive relationship among students, parents, teachers, and the community establishes. When a home environment is supportive, students are more likely to attain academic success (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009), therefore reiterating the importance and need for this study to occur in our school.

This action research will analyze the effects of parent informational nights/parenting classes on the parents' understanding of the Montessori Method. Mowder's Parent Development Theory best meets this frame of research because it expresses the importance of a parent's role in each stage of a child's development. As stated earlier, parent education has been researched and proven to impact a child's education directly.

## **Literature Review**

### **Previous Results of Parent Education**

There have been many studies conducted on the effectiveness of parent education. In this section, we will discuss student academic success and parent involvement. There is a positive impact on students' academic success when parents are involved. Children have optimal potential and school success when the adults are engaged and active in their child's learning (Pickard, 2019). When parents were supportive and involved, children understood the value of

schoolwork and therefore had a stronger work ethic (Hill, 2018). Parents have a vital responsibility for their child's growth and development to be successful. (Epstein, 2011). Research demonstrates that when parents are engaged and encouraging, there is higher student achievement and higher academic performance (Lamborn, 1992). "With parent/teacher collaboration, parent education allows educators to gain more information about nurturing parents' needs and expectations because educators and parents have a common bond to collaborate on guiding the child through their educational journey" (Grothaus, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial to coordinate parents and teachers in their children's education. When both are involved, the child has a sense of security, allowing contacts to better understand the child's needs (Berčnik, 2017).

### **Parent Education in Montessori**

While numerous studies have taken place on parent education, we have found little research on this topic with the Montessori method from the literature reviewed. Hiles (2015) says the lack of parents' understanding of the Montessori method. Montessori education is a student-led method of education that believes in 'following the child.'

Maria Montessori's philosophy and methodology are based on the belief that educators should 'follow the child.' Following the child includes watching the child's movement and allowing the child the freedom to develop naturally in a structured and non-competitive environment at his or her own pace according to his or her own capacities (Cosgrove, 2006).

The first woman physician in Italy, Maria Montessori, developed her method of education over a century ago. The classroom is typically guided with the aid of a credentialed Montessori teacher in a prepared environment. This environment maximizes the ability for a child to

facilitate maximum independent learning by the child. The student uses intrinsic motivation, which drives through the child's independence. The Montessori preschool environment is particularly original because the activities are based on the Montessori curriculum according to the requirements of children (Berčnik, 2017). Many parents know little to nothing about the Montessori method and often question many ideas taught, along with the method of teaching inside the classroom. According to Lillard (2005), some parents, familiar with the term Montessori, still do not clearly understand the method. In one study (Murray, 2012), participants rated their knowledge of Montessori education as reasonably low. Of the ones who had heard of the Montessori method, only about 5% believed themselves to be very knowledgeable, while 25% reported themselves to be not at all knowledgeable (Murray, 2012). For example, within this study, less than 10% were knowledgeable of Montessori's views of intrinsic motivation (Lillard, A. S., 2005; Rambusch & Stoops, 1992). Half of the parents in this study believed that students are given tests, and some thought all lessons are shown as a whole group (Lillard, A. S., 2005; Lillard, A. & Else-Q). This study provided strong evidence for educating the public regarding several aspects of Montessori education (Murray, 2012).

“Montessori Parent Education can deepen a parent's understanding of a child's journey in a Montessori environment from the very first year of enrollment through the kindergarten year or end-point in a Montessori three-year cycle” (Pickard, 2019, p. 4). Parental involvement is essential; some believe that if the parents disagree with the Montessori methods, it makes no sense that the child is in the program (Berčnik, 2017). There are many different forms of parent education, including parent discovery day, book clubs, informational nights, focus groups, surveys, webinars, Montessori resource bags, home visits, and hands-on experiences (Harrison, 2014; Biscalgia, 2014).

## **Knowledge of the Montessori Method**

Many educators have utilized parent education workshops and access to parent education classes in their schools and programs. Findings suggest that parents saw a benefit in parent education in their student's preschool through kindergarten or three-year Montessori program (Pickard, 2019). The results show that educating parents on the Montessori Method was beneficial, and parents felt they had more knowledge after being educated. As a result, parents had more questions about the details and styles of education in general (Irving, 2017). Post-surveys revealed in one study that there was a disparity between the utilization of parents' preferences and the Montessori principles due to their lack of understanding of Montessori's principles (Hiles, 2015). Parents' values were aligned in a way that did not reflect how the Montessori Method approaches goal setting, achievement, competition with peers, and teachers preparing and presenting lessons (Hiles, 2015).

This study displays that today's parents value concepts such as intrinsic motivation and independence. However, it also reveals that parents of today value discipline, competition amongst peers, and goals. This leads the researcher to believe that parents hold beliefs that do not align with Montessori's founding principles. If Montessori schools wish to remain viable, they will need to reconcile the Montessori principles with conflicting parent values and determine how to align their principles better with parent views and desires for their children (Hiles, 2015, pp. 79-80).

Holding parent education workshops will improve knowledge of the Montessori method in parents. We can see that there is a need for education by school parents on the Montessori philosophy. Parents wanting to learn more about Montessori education may look to school

administrators to organize parent education about the type of schooling that supports optimal child development (Epstein, 2011).

### **Methodology**

Utilizing the action research method, we studied the effects of virtual parent informational sessions on the parent's understanding of the Montessori Method. The population for this research was the parents of primary classrooms (age 3-6) in a public elementary Montessori school. We recruited parents from our two primary Montessori classrooms. With our action research, we began on a small scale with the hopes to extend parent informational nights on a larger scale to the entirety of our public Montessori school.

The study was extended to 29 parents from two primary Montessori classes, with 10 of those parents consenting to participate in our Action Research project. All participants only have students in primary Montessori classrooms and are new to a Montessori program. Four parents were from one class and six parents from the other.

We began by sending an active consent form to all the parents in our classes via their child's daily communication folders. Parents were given the proper guidelines and paperwork. Then, the parents were asked to fill out a pre-survey (see Appendix A) on Google Forms (a web-based app used to create forms for data collection purposes). The survey was conducted to inquire the quantitative and qualitative baseline of our participant's knowledge. This pre-questionnaire is where we gathered our baseline data. We gave the parents one week to respond to the pre-survey. The day before the deadline, we reminded parents through email to respond. We used the data gathered from the pre-questionnaire to plan for and schedule the parent information sessions.

The research questions we were aiming to answer are “Does our school provide enough Montessori information?”, “Are you confident in your understanding of the Montessori philosophy?”, and “Does your family bring the Montessori philosophy into your home?” All responses were recorded from the pre-survey and analyzed in Excel.

We chose to do our parent informational sessions virtually to keep all participants and researchers safe due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We used Google Meet (an online platform that provides remote video conferencing services accessible on a computer or mobile device). We gave our participants the option to join us for the live session or watch a recording of the session later.

We offered three online sessions discussing the following topics: 1. Montessori Philosophy, 2. Montessori sensorial, math and science, and 3. Montessori practical life, language, and culture. We decided upon these topics because in our pre-survey these are the topics that the parents expressed interested in through the survey.

We offered the sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:00-4:00 pm. In our pre-survey, five parents responded they would be able to attend session one; two parents responded they would be able to attend session two, and four parents responded they would be able to attend session three. One hour before the sessions, we sent out a reminder of our upcoming meeting, along with the link to connect to our Google Meet call.

We set up our live sessions to be recorded and exported a video link that could be shared with the parents after the session was over. We opened and joined each session at 2:55 pm and began each session at 3:05 pm to allow a few minutes for all participants to navigate and join via our link if they were available. We muted all participants when beginning the session, but participants could un-mute themselves if they had questions or comments.

During the session, we used a prepared PowerPoint presentation, including in depth information and photographs of the topics we were discussing. We also used the video feed to show and discuss the Montessori materials in our classrooms in depth. Montessori lessons were presented and discussed during each session.

We emailed a recording of the live session to all parents within one hour of the session's ending. This email included the link for our post-survey. We asked the participants to fill out the post-survey (see Appendix B) within one week of the live session. Included in our post-survey was the space for any further questions that the participants would like for us to address. The survey allowed us to collect data on each session and allowed the participants who could not join us for the live session to ask any questions they may have. After all three sessions, we sent a final post-survey, allowing us to collect data and compare it to the pre-survey sent out prior to our intervention.

### **Analysis of Data**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of holding parent informational sessions on the Montessori philosophy and method. The research design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data using pre-and post-surveys with rating scales and open-ended response questions. We organized parent informational sessions to impact the parents' understanding of the Montessori method, parental involvement with their child's teacher and school, and how to bring the Montessori philosophy into their homes to connect the home and school environments. Once all sessions were completed, we analyzed the data from the pre-and post-surveys.

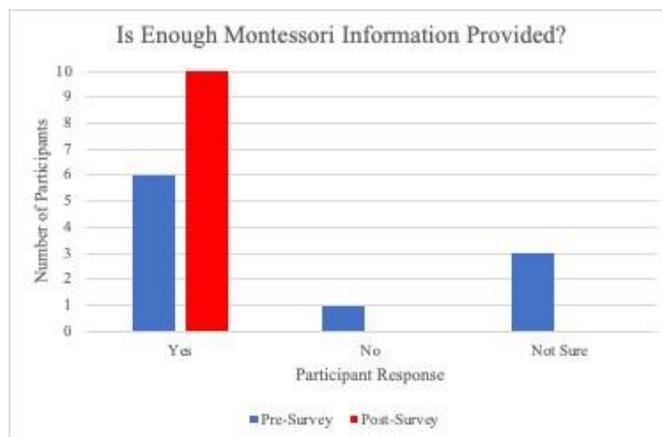
### **Is Enough Montessori Information Provided?**

The first research question that this study addressed seeks to find out if our school provides enough Montessori information to the parents. To answer this question, the researchers asked the participants in the pre-survey, “Does our school provide enough Montessori information?” and recorded participant responses. Upon the completion of our three parent informational sessions, the researchers asked the participants “Do you feel our parent informational sessions provided enough Montessori information?” and recorded parent responses. Participant responses were entered into Excel and analyzed to determine that if the parent informational sessions were available to all parents at our school, would it be impactful on the parents.

The data indicates that the parent informational sessions had a positive impact on the parents. The pre-survey answers indicated that six parents felt we provided enough Montessori information, one parent felt our school did not provide enough Montessori information and three parents indicated that they were not sure. All 10 parents responded that they felt our school would provide enough information on the Montessori method once these parenting classes were available. If these parent informational sessions were put into place, more parents would feel that our school provided enough Montessori information.

**Figure 1**

*Responses from pre-and-post-survey across participants*



### **Confidence in the Montessori Philosophy**

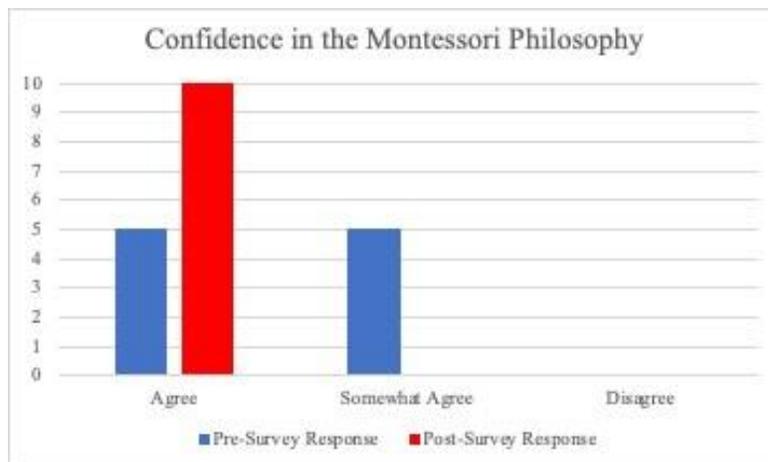
The next research question that this study seeks to answer is if our participants felt confident in their understanding of the Montessori philosophy. To answer this question, the researchers asked the participants in the pre-survey to rate the statement, “I am confident in my understanding of the Montessori philosophy,” as agreeing, somewhat agreeing, or disagreeing. The researchers recorded the participants' responses. After the parent informational sessions, the researchers asked the participants, “Are you more confident in your understanding of the Montessori philosophy than before the parent informational sessions?” and recorded the participants' responses. Participant responses were entered into Excel and analyzed to determine if the parent informational sessions increased the participants' confidence in their knowledge of the Montessori method and philosophy.

The data indicates that the parent informational sessions had a positive impact on the parents. The pre-survey data indicated that 5 parents felt they were confident in the Montessori philosophy and 5 parents felt somewhat confident in their understanding of the Montessori philosophy. All 10 parents responded that they felt more confident in their knowledge of the

Montessori method and philosophy than they did before the parent informational sessions. The post-survey had an open ended response area to add any comments they had on our parent informational sessions. One parent responded “The information was wonderful! It shed so much light on what they are doing in the classroom.” Another parent responded after our second session, “I really enjoyed seeing the materials in this video and how they are used in the classroom. It helps me to better understand the information and skills addressed on the work plan.” These comments in combination with our survey responses showed the success of our parent informational sessions on the parent’s understanding of the Montessori philosophy and Montessori materials.

## Figure 2

*Responses from pre-and-post-survey across participants*

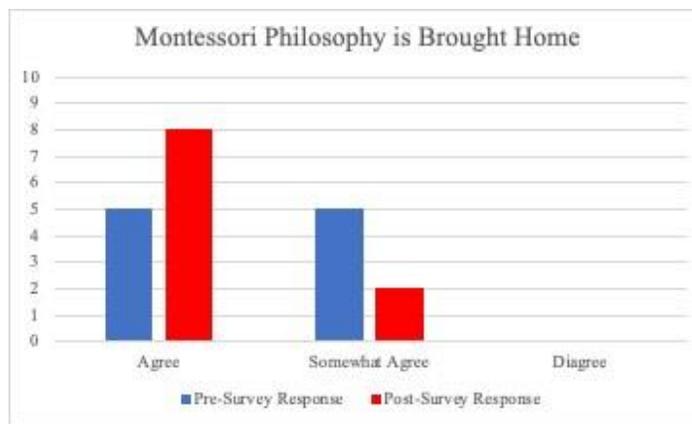


### **Montessori Philosophy is Brought Home**

Another question that this study aimed to gain insight into is if the parents connect Montessori from school to home. The researchers wanted to know if the parents practiced the Montessori philosophy at home to connect the home and school environments. The researchers asked the parents, “Does your family bring the Montessori philosophy into their home?” and recorded participant responses. Subsequently, the researchers asked the participants, “Since learning more about the Montessori philosophy, does your family plan to bring the Montessori philosophy into your home?” in the post-survey. The researchers then recorded the participants' responses. Participant responses were entered into Excel and analyzed to determine if the parent informational sessions increased the likelihood that parents would have their homes be a continuation of the utilization of the Montessori method from school to home.

The data indicates that the parent informational sessions had a positive impact on the likelihood that the participants would bring the Montessori philosophy home. The pre-survey data indicated that 5 parents agree that they bring the Montessori philosophy home and 5 somewhat agree. The post-survey indicated that 8 parents agree that they would be bringing the Montessori philosophy home and 2 parents somewhat agree. The numbers of parents who agreed increased and fewer participants responded that they somewhat agreed they would bring the Montessori philosophy into their home.

**Figure 3**  
*Responses from pre-and-post-survey across participants*



Overall the data shows a very positive impact on the effectiveness of holding parent informational sessions on the Montessori philosophy and method. Parent feedback from our session includes this participant’s response: “We will definitely incorporate some of these activities at home.” There is evident growth in parent understanding, involvement, and bringing the philosophy into their homes

### **Action Plan**

The purpose of this action research project was to study the effectiveness of parent education on the Montessori method. The study investigated three main questions: if enough Montessori information was provided in our school; parents’ confidence in the Montessori method; and if the Montessori method would be brought into their homes. Analysis of the data suggests that parents felt our school currently did not provide enough information, but parents desired to know more about the Montessori method. The data also concluded that upon learning more about the Montessori method, parents had a desire to incorporate the method into their

homes. We can conclude from the data that the parent informational sessions were beneficial and increased the parents' knowledge of the Montessori method.

With the parents being more informed about the Montessori method and what the students are doing in the classroom, the parents are therefore more involved in their child's education. When parents are more involved, the students are higher achievers, and it positively affects the children's growth and development. When parents are more involved in their child's education, the parents are then able to collaborate with the teachers with their child's learning.

Parents also expressed upon learning more about the Montessori method, wanting to incorporate the philosophy into their homes. The data suggests that most of the parents will begin to, or continue to, incorporate the Montessori philosophy into their home. This shows that the parents agree and believe in Maria Montessori's method. When the child is immersed in this method of teaching, both at school and at home, they will more likely become independent learners with natural desires to learn.

### **Further Research**

Analysis of the data revealed that more effective data collection and methods could be used to further investigate the topic of parent education and the Montessori method. For example, studies could be conducted using more classes or the entire school. Expansion of the parent informational nights would allow the researchers to reach more parents with their parent information sessions. Further research should include a more extensive and more diverse group of parents or involve multiple schools to see the impact on parent involvement and student success.

This action research project was conducted during the time of a global pandemic. Because of this, the parent informational sessions were conducted virtually. Further research

could be conducted face-to-face when it is safe to do so. The researchers feel parents could strongly benefit from seeing and practicing with the materials. Parents would also be able to explore the classrooms and be able to ask more questions about the materials in their child's classroom. The researchers conducted their informational sessions from 3:00-4:00pm on weekdays. We may have been able to reach more parents if the sessions were offered at a later time in the evening when more parents were available. The same could be said if we offered the sessions on the weekends, instead of weeknights. We may have been more successful with our population if we were to offer one long session instead of three shorter sessions.

### **Conclusion**

The data shows that some of the parents prior to the informational sessions thought that our school did not provide enough Montessori information. The researchers plan to incorporate parent education into their school in the future by holding parent informational sessions whether virtually or in person. The researchers also plan to use the videos created and a website as a source for parents to go to get more information on their child's education. Data will continue to be collected to see the effects of parent education of the Montessori method and the success of the children. Upon this research, we will prioritize educating parents on the importance of the Montessori philosophy.

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## Appendix A

### Pre-Survey

1. Do you feel our school provides enough Montessori information?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure
2. Did you choose to be at McLaurin for the Montessori program?
  - Yes
  - No, we are zoned for McLaurin and this does not affect me.
  - We are zoned for McLaurin but would choose to put our child in a Montessori program if given the option.
3. I am confident in my understanding of the Montessori philosophy.
  - Agree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Disagree
4. My family brings the Montessori philosophy into our home.
  - Agree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Disagree
5. I would like more information about.... (Please include as much information and detail about what you are interested in.)
6. Are you confident in your child participating in a Montessori school?
  - Yes
  - I think a non-Montessori environment would be better for my child.

**Appendix B****Post-Survey**

1. Do you feel our parent informational sessions provided enough Montessori information?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Not Sure
  
2. I am more confident in my understanding of the Montessori philosophy than before the parent informational sessions.
  - Agree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Disagree
  
3. Since learning more about the Montessori philosophy, my family plans to bring the Montessori philosophy into our home.
  - Agree
  - Somewhat Agree
  - Disagree
  
4. Are you confident in your child participating in a Montessori school?
  - Yes
  - I think a non-Montessori environment would be better for my child.
  
5. Please type any additional comments.