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Montessori in the Home and Connections to Parent Education

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Montessori in the Home and Connections to Parent Education

An Action Research Report

By Barbara Bisceglia

Montessori in the Home and Connections to Parent Education

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By Barbara Bisceglia

Submitted on December 15, 2014
In fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree
St. Catherine University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor: _____

Date: _____

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to make more connections from the school to home environment and allow for more parent education opportunities. There were six families included in the study. Home visits were conducted prior to school starting to gain a better understanding about the child's current home environment. Each week small workbags containing suggestions and pictures on how to organize the home environment, sample fine motor activities from the classroom environment, articles about child development or Montessori, and resources were sent home to families. The families kept these bags for a week and then returned them with a feedback form. Data collection was gathered through pre/post surveys with feedback forms, and observations of morning drop off with parent and child. The findings of this study support prior research in that parents actively engaged with their child's educational journey will help to support their child in more meaningful ways in the home environment. Through analyzing and summarizing my findings this study provides parents and teachers with more resources on how to successfully implement a variety of parent education tools throughout the beginning of the school year.

A toddler teacher in a Montessori classroom is responsible for supporting the overall growth and development of the children in her class. They observe the children's behavioral patterns, motor development, speech and language development, social development, work habits, and cognitive abilities. Through observation they are able to guide the children's learning to meet their needs and support their interests. Research by Galindo and Sheldon (2012) examines the relationship between parent involvements in education as they observe academic and social emotional development. The authors concluded home and school are the most important settings for learning and found that family involvement at school and parents' educational expectations were associated with gains in early childhood academics. According to Galindo and Sheldon (2012), when children are being supported in their home environment the common themes from school are translated to the home setting with more ease. Consistency in both environments is extremely important for our youngest learners and this is achieved when parents and teachers develop a healthy relationship to support the child. This action research focuses on the importance of creating a child-friendly home environment that encourages independence, self-confidence and self-esteem. The goal was to make connections from the school to home environment to help parents gain a better understanding about the Montessori philosophy and create more consistency for learning.

My action research was completed this fall in my toddler Montessori classroom. My class has six children ages 18 months- 24 months who attend school full time. Each child has two parents who all agreed to participate in the action research project. The Montessori philosophy supports overall child development and the natural desire to learn and explore through the materials found in prepared environments. The classroom is

designed to encourage independence and teachers are trained to guide this development appropriately. When a child is given the opportunity to learn in an environment that supports their needs, learning and obtaining new concepts becomes organic and enjoyable. Our school currently offers parents a variety of parent education opportunities throughout the school year. However, due to demanding work schedules, parents are not always available to participate in their child's educational journey. Based on research and personal observations, my hope was to design a parent education program that allows parents to learn about the Montessori philosophy and their child's progress through designing activities for their home environment. Research by Stephanie Woo states "Every time a child masters something, that mastery leads to new possibilities. This way of parenting requires much more thought than parenting in which you do everything for your child, but its rewards are also much greater." (Woo, p 54). In addition to sending home activities I also sent ideas home on how to organize and set up the home setting to help increase their child's overall independence. "In the pursuit of independence, a child's home and school and environment can be each other's greatest asset... Very young children are capable of independent work at home, though they must be provided enough time and space to 'do it myself' (Jensen, p 56).

While planning for my action research project my goal was to give parents a variety of ways to experience parent education that was separate from presentations at school that are typically under attended. However, I was also careful to not add more stress to their already busy schedules by making families participate. Research by Alfie Kohn shows that making homework necessary does not always equate to positive outcomes. In an article by Alfie Kohn (2007), he writes,

The negative effects of homework are well known. They include children's frustration and exhaustion, lack of time for other activities, and possible loss of interest in learning. Many parents lament the impact of homework on their relationship with their children; they may also resent having to play the role of enforcer and worry that they will be criticized either for not being involved enough with the homework or for becoming too involved. (p. 1)

I was careful to explain to parents that the purpose of this study was to help create more natural learning opportunities through creating a space that reinforces the holistic development of their child. By bridging Montessori concepts into their own homes, the learn how to best support their child.

I was inspired to complete this action research due to the literature and research that supports the importance of parent education and parental involvement in a child's educational journey. Research by Lillard and Jessen (2003) reviewed how placing the Montessori philosophy in the home setting would help each child with self-discovery and formation. The literature indicates that parents are not always aware of all the opportunities available in the home setting that can support a child's independence. The research also supports the idea of asking children to complete tasks at home to provide meaningful experiences for them in their toddler years. "By making the child's life meaningful to him as a member of his family in this challenging period, we have helped him to integrate his personality and develop a positive attitude toward himself" (Lillard & Jesson, 2003). It is helpful for parents to have an overall understanding how the works in Montessori help to strengthen concentration which leads to more advanced works. "It is this positive effect on the child's concentration and personality, and therefore ultimately

on his ability to learn, that most impressed Montessori and led her to make exercises that involve cycles of activity the foundation of her approach to the child's later education". Lillard, & Jesson, p. 93). Based on this research, I feel the implementation of my action research project was designed to support family needs while also providing them with more tools to support their child's development and needs.

Description of Research Process

I completed my research in my toddler classroom at a Montessori school that serves children 18 months- Grade 12. This school year I have six children in my class ages 18 months- 24 months. The state regulated teacher to student ratio for this age group is 1:3 and I have an intern who teaches alongside of me. This is the first time these children are in a Montessori setting. The children enrolled in my class this year are all full day students and will attend school five days a week.

My data was generated by multiple sources. To begin my action research, I sent the notification letter (Appendix A) to parents prior to school starting and all parents agreed to be part of the study. After receiving approval from the parents, I planned my home visits during the week before school began. These visits lasted about 30-45 minutes and at this time I spent time with the child and talked with the parents about the start of the school year. I brought one of the classroom materials with me on the home visit. I also used this time to get a sense of current living situations and expectations. I took note of how toys were organized, and opportunities for independence in each room (Appendix B). Also, at this time parents were also given a family questionnaire to fill out (Appendix C). The questions on this form were all short answers. The questionnaire helped me gather information about the family's current living situations, family dynamics and

expectations. This was the data collected prior to the first day of school starting.

The first week of school I sent home a pre survey about current Montessori (Appendix D). This survey contained short answer questions and helped me gather a baseline about the parent's current knowledge. The following week the first workbag was sent home (Appendix E). The bag included a folder, tray, small work rug and hook. Inside the folder included an article, directions on what to do with the materials, and a feedback form. (Appendix F). Each bag moving forward included a work the child was working on in class (food prep, fine motor etc.). Resources were sent home each week to help create more consistency from the school to home environments. These resources included PowerPoint, highlighting each room of the home with ideas to promote independence. Other resources included, Montessori material catalogs, articles, and pictures of their child working at school. Bags were sent home every Wednesday and were supposed to be returned the following Tuesday with feedback forms filled out. The feedback forms allowed me to gain information about what the parents implemented in their homes, what they had questions about, and what they enjoyed learning about. Other data sources included notes at drop off time in the morning. This is one of the only times I have face time with my parents at school and can often gauge their confidence in the classroom and level of trust. Parents carrying their child in from the car, taking their coats off and taking care of their personal belongings indicates to the teacher that the parent is not allowing the child the opportunity for independence. Data I collected at this time allowed me to track how many steps of the morning routine were being done independently and how many questions the parents asked in the morning (Appendix G). The final method of data collected was the post survey. The post surveys were sent

electronically and allowed me to measure how much the parents learned throughout this study based off of their pre survey answers. Originally I had planned to do a second home visit to see if changes were implemented in the home environments, but felt the post survey would adequately cover the information I would collect from a second home visit.

Analysis of Data

After analyzing my data, I have come to find many positive correlations between making connections from the school to home environment. Overall, parents were excited to be part of my study and to learn ways that allow their child to participate more fully in daily family life and celebrations. This enthusiasm helped create positive outcomes.

I started my research by conducting home visits with each of my families. The data collected from the home visits confirmed there was room for improvement to increase independence and overall knowledge about the Montessori philosophy. During the home visits I interacted with the child, observed interactions between parent and child and took notes on environment. During the visits I also gave the parents a pre survey for them to fill out. Question one on the pre survey indicated that 83% of parents chose Montessori based on their child's curious nature and felt the philosophy would support this in a positive way. Question two indicated 100% of parents were willing to learn more about how Montessori helps to foster concentration, coordination, order and independence. Based on the answers of Question three, parents did not think Montessori classrooms were unstructured due to the orderly environment. Lastly, question four revealed that 83% of the parents had read any Montessori books but were willing to learn more through additional resources. (See Figure 1)

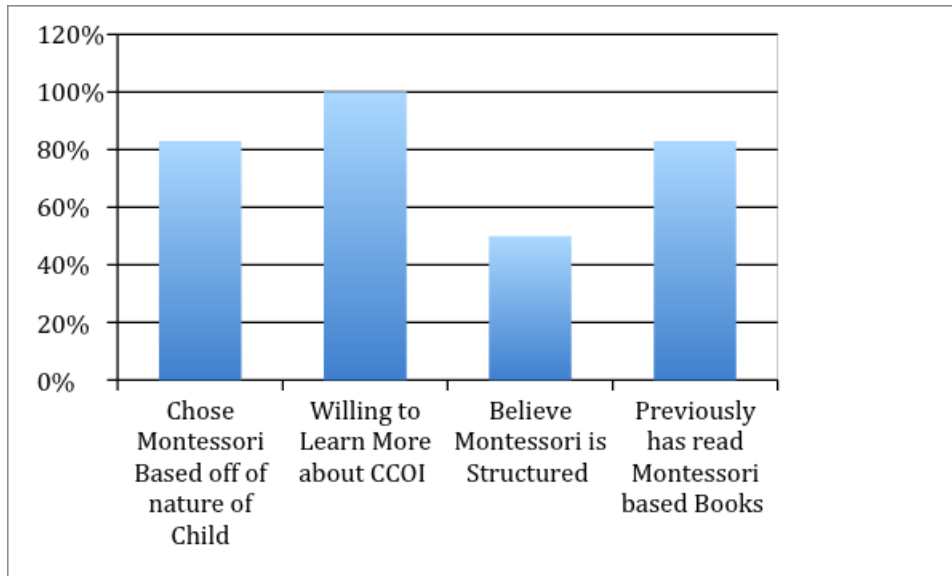


Figure 1: Pre survey results from Parents

When the school year started, toddler teachers were faced with the ultimate challenge: separation! Separation anxiety can be increased when there is lack of trust between the parent and school environment. This is often displayed at drop off, when the parents have to say goodbye to their child. Each day I took notes on questions asked by the parents, length of time the parents stayed, and how many steps the parent does for the child. Based on the data, parents spent an average of 5.5 minutes in the classroom in the morning and asked less questions as the weeks progressed. They displayed an understanding and respect for the fact that they needed to make it a quick goodbye in the morning. The data also shows that opportunities for independence were not recognized throughout the morning routine based on the fact that parents continually aided in taking care of their child's belongings. I took data on the following steps of a typical morning routine for a toddler. The five steps included 1) Walk in independently 2) Take backpack off of back 3) Take lunchbox out of back pack 4) Hang up backpack 5) Say goodbye Originally I had "take off coat" as part of the drop off routine, however the warm weather

in Maryland at this time of year made this step non-applicable. On average, parents completed 80% of the steps for the child. 16% of children walked in independently each day (others were carried in by parent) and 0% independently took off backpack (many times the parents were carrying it), took out lunchbox, or hung up backpack. The one successful step was “saying goodbye”. (See Figure 2) The data does not consider the amount of time each parent has as parents are often dropping off and then heading to work. Also, the data does not determine if parents are doing this to help their child settle into class faster. The works and resources sent home were meant to educate parents on the importance of toddlers working on self-care skills and having them be part of the process vs. having this process be done to them. Although children were not independently participating in the tasks with drop off, as the weeks progressed the morning drop off was positive and did not interfere with children working in the class.

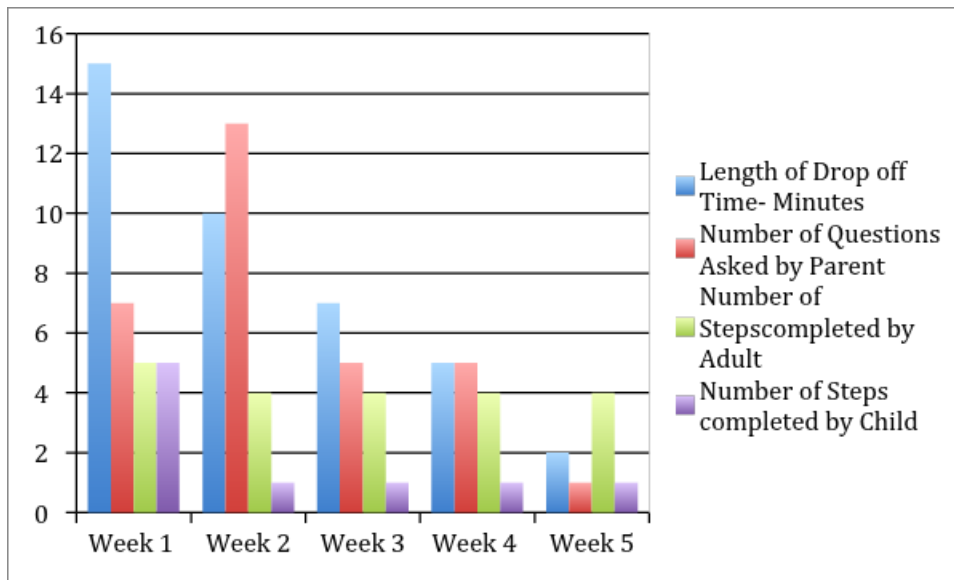


Figure 2: Drop Off Data Results

Starting the second week of school, I began to send homework bags which contained resources for the parents and examples of Montessori works. A part of these

bags included the Parent Feedback form. The parent feedback form was a useful form of data that allowed me measure how the works and resources sent home each week were used. Overall, there were no questions about how to use the works on the feedback forms, however there were follow up questions that indicated curiosity about extensions of works and how to help end the work cycle (cleaning up, how long to keep them on the current work, etc.). The average time on works each time the child engaged with the work was between 15-25 minutes and increased as the weeks went on. The data supports that parents understood that the goals of the works were to increase coordination, concentration and self help skills.

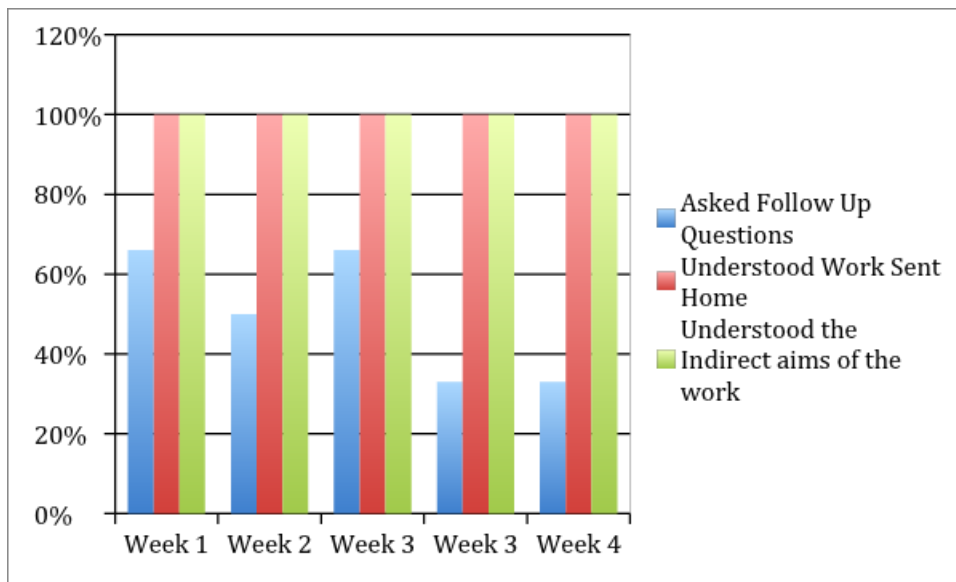


Figure 3: Parent Feedback Forms Weekly Outcomes

One challenge that came with the workbags being sent home was inconsistency of bags being returned on time. On average, 33% of parents returned the bags on time with the parent feedback forms. The families who returned the bags on time were families with first time only children. Other families needed reminders to send bags back to

school and a common theme as to why they were not being returned was due to the fact that they were still using the materials/ resources in each of the bags.

Based on the feedback from the post survey, parents feel they have learned more about the Montessori works in the classroom through the work bags been sent home. 60% of parents still wanted to learn more about the philosophy. 80% of parents wanted more information & resources about how to handle child’s behaviors at home (specifically bedtime routines, tantrums, transitions.), 80% of parents enjoyed the resources on how to organize the home environment. This included utilizing a command hook that was sent home to hang backpack on, and a PowerPoint with ideas and pictures for each room of the house. Overall, 100% parents had more trust in their child’s school experience and felt connected to their child’s school experience and wanted to learn more. (See Figure 4) Due to the short nature of the action research, I would conclude that this project helped form a strong foundation for parents to continue their Montessori journey as a parent.

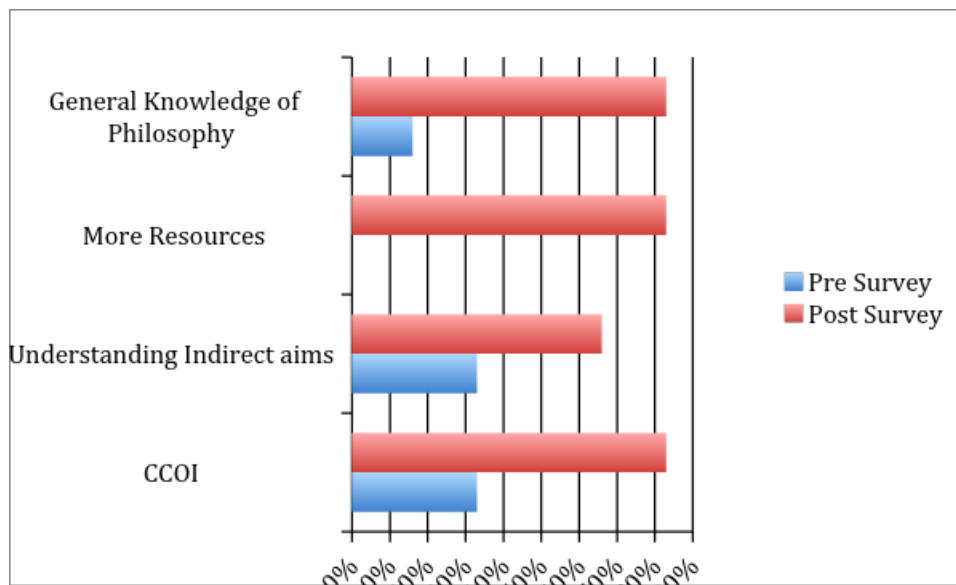


Figure 4: Pre and Post Survey Results of Parents

The goal of a Montessori teacher is to observe and individualize education for each of the children in their classrooms based on their learning styles and needs. By individualizing parent education opportunities for parents helps them to create a more efficient system of learning and more success for the child in the home environment. Giving parents tools to prepare the environment at home and observe their child based on these changes parents were able to learn more about the Montessori philosophy.

Action Plan

This action research helped me to learn about parent- school relationships in our school setting. Parent education is crucial for Montessori schools for retention and student success. However, parents in our school community do not always have the extra time to dedicate to parent education events. As Montessori educators, I feel it is our job to not only educate the children in our class, but also the parents and general population about the importance of this philosophy. When completing this action research project my goal was to offer different parent education opportunities. Similar to toddlers being in their sensitive period for language and movement, toddler parents are in their sensitive period for parenting. They are often hungry for information regarding their child and wanting to learn what is best for them. I feel this action research project helped to connect the school and home environments and opened opportunities for deeper and more meaningful discussions about child development and overall philosophy.

Moving forward, the results of this action research will change my practice in a variety of ways. It has allowed me to gain more information about parent needs and expectations. I have learned that parents and teachers have one common theme as their priority: the

child. Creating a trusting relationship invites many avenues for learning and bonding. Home visits at the beginning of each school year inform the teacher's knowledge about each child's individual needs. It is designed to help support family transition into the school community. This was a valuable time to meet the child in a comforting environment and ask questions. This helped to establish trust and informed me of important aspects of the child's life. Establishing this trust prior to school starting and gaining information about the home environment helps the teacher guide the child throughout their educational journey.

Overall, this action research was time consuming. Carving out time in the beginning of the school year to perform home visits and organize bags with resources took a considerable amount of planning and energy. However, the overall benefits of the action research outweighed the initial commitment. Parents were excited and engaged to learn more throughout the start of school. As a result of this study, I felt it allowed more opportunity for parents to build trust with their teacher, which in turn helped to support the children in the school setting. I found myself engaging in more meaningful conversations about overall philosophy and child development. Having this trust with parents is extremely valuable for the children in the class because it allows for the parent and teachers to work as a team and support the child in different environments. The results of the research will change my practice by giving me more opportunities to connect with parents prior to each school year. I plan to continue to conduct home visits prior to a child starting school and have parents fill out family questionnaires. This information helped me support the child on the first day of school and the remainder of the school year.

I believe this research has significant possible impacts on student learning. When a toddler is experiencing similar expectations in the school and home environment they will be able to master tasks at a faster rate because there are consistent expectations. If a parent has not been given resources to learn about Montessori, they will not know how to properly support the philosophy in the home environment. Also, by giving parents a variety of resources (works, PowerPoint with pictures, articles, catalogs, pictures of their child at school) there is an increased chance that they will learn more from repeated exposure.

The findings of this action research project have confirmed that there are potential future action research investigations. These supplemental investigations include how to connect this study to parent education opportunities at school/ presentations. I would also be curious to learn if connecting this study to our admissions process would help retention rates. For example, if parents were expected to dedicate a certain amount of hours to parent education throughout the year as part of their contract, would they be more likely to stay with Montessori for a longer time? Would this create a healthier school community allowing for more parent and family events? I would also be interested to use the findings of this study to investigate if starting a parent/ infant class at a school helps parents of infants enroll their child in the school's toddler Montessori program. Does starting parent education younger help parents form a stronger foundation for their overall Montessori knowledge?

Moving forward, teachers will benefit from using this action research by committing to working with parents and families in the home setting. Completing home visits helps the child gain trust in their teacher and allows parents the time observe

interactions between their child and teacher. Establishing trust allows opportunities for teachers to educate parents about the Montessori philosophy in a non-threatening manner. Parents will learn more about the philosophy when it is directly connected to their child's abilities. They will enjoy being able to celebrate their child's successes from school and this has the potential to help the child build his self-confidence and esteem. Bridging school to the home environment helps build community in your school setting and opens the door to more parent engagement and school participation. Parents and teachers have similar goals: to support and nurture each child's abilities and strengths. It is the child who benefits from the harmonious teamwork between the parent and teacher, and it is society who benefits from successful, confident future leaders.

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Appendix A

Dear Parents,

As you may know, I am pursuing a Master of Arts in Education at St. Catherine University. As part of my graduate work, I am going to do an Action Research project.

Description of Study

As the teacher of your child in the toddler division at the Barrie School, I have chosen to learn about parent education through connecting toddler Montessori works to the home environment. This action research will allow you and your child to participate in Montessori based works together in the home setting, which will hopefully allow you the opportunity to learn more about the philosophy and curriculum which may be rewarding for your child and yourself.

As part of the study, I will be performing home visits to gather information about your family and child needs. I will schedule a time for this with you in the first weeks of school if you are interested. Throughout the first weeks of school, I will also be sending home practical life works that will include fine motor practice, food preparation and self-care activities. In addition to the works being sent home, I will be sending home ideas on how to prepare your home environment to help support your child's independence and learning. You will be asked to complete pre-and post- questionnaires about the Montessori philosophy and feedback forms about each work sent home.

I will be summarizing my research project and writing about the results. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student or family. Other people will not know if you and your child are in my study.

When I am done, I will share my final research report in the St. Kate's library. By sharing what I learned, I hope to help other Montessori teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching and student learning.

Next Steps

If you decide you DO want to be included in the study you don't need to do anything at this time. Your answers to my questions and my observations will be aggregated and made confidential in my final report.

If you decide you do NOT want your family's data from this project to be included in my final report, please note that on this form and return it by August 29, 2014.

The data I gather will include parent feedback on the works and assignments sent home. Data will also include observations of children's independence in the classroom and work habits throughout the morning.

There is no penalty for not being involved or not having your child's data included in my study. I

will simply not collect data from your child or family. All children will receive the same treatment in my class, regardless of your decision on this matter. Home visits are optional for any family.

Questions

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, bbisceglia@gmail.com. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask my advisor, Jana Morgan Herman whose email is janamorganherman@gmail.com. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at [\(651\) 690-7739](tel:6516907739). You may keep a copy of this form for your records. Please respond by August 29, 2014 if you do NOT want to be involved.

Name of Child

_____ I do NOT want my family’s responses or data about my child to be included in this study.

_____ I have questions I would like to discuss before I make this decision. You can reach me at

_____ or _____.

Signature of Parent

Date

Upon receipt of this notification I will sign here and send this back to you so that you know I received your request.

Signature of Researcher

Date

**If at any time you decide you do not want your family’s data to be included in the study, you may notify me and I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

Appendix B

Home Visit #1
How are the child's toys organized/ stored?
Is there opportunity for independence in the kitchen? (Items placed at child's height for them to access?)
Is there opportunity for independence in the bathroom? (Items placed at child's height for them to access?)
Is there opportunity for independence in the bedroom? (Items placed at child's height for them to access?)
What are the child's favorite activities/ toys in the home environment?
List of toys in home environment:

Appendix C

Family Questionnaire

Child's Name:

Nickname:

Parent/Caregiver Names:

PERSONALITY

First thing you think of when you think of your child

Describe your child's temperament/personality.

What does your child like to talk about the most or listen to you talk about the most?

Your child's top three favorite things?

RELATIONSHIP WITH CAREGIVERS

Identify and list:

Favorite activities with parent/caregiver 1

Favorite activities with parent/caregiver 2

What do you love most about your child?

What are some challenges?

HOME LIFE

Who does your child live with?

Does your child have siblings?

What language(s) are spoken at home?

Describe your child's usual daily routine? (Please include wake time, eating, naptime, bedtime)

How much time do you spend reading with your child at home?

DICIPLINE

What type of boundaries do you use at home?

Identify and explain technique:

Caregiver 1-

Caregiver 2-

Is it consistent amongst all caregivers?

What is your child's reaction to boundaries?

HEALTH and PHYSICAL GROWTH

Allergies, sensitivities to food, or dietary restrictions?

Does your child take regular or frequent medications?

Describe any health or developmental issues, including ear infections, vision, hearing, speech, and physical growth?

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Describe your child's language skills?

Describe any fears your child may have.

How would you describe your child's emotional and social characteristics or qualities?

Has your child experienced any traumatic/ dramatic experiences that would be helpful for us to know?

INDEPENDENCE

How independent is your child with diapering/toileting?

How does your child ask for help?

How successful is your child at self-care skills? (washing, brushing teeth, dressing, picking up toys)

SEPARATION

Has your child ever been separated from you? (Babysitters, vacations, play dates, daycare)

How does your child react to separating from parents and caregivers?

Does anyone else care for your child on a regular basis? Please specify-

Does your child have a security object?

SOCIALIZATION

Does your child have scheduled activities outside of school? Please list-

What opportunities does your child have to play with other children?

SCHOOL

What are your expectations for this year?

What are you excited about for the start of your child's school year?

What makes you nervous about the start of your child's school year?

Questions for me?

Appendix D

Montessori Questionnaire

Pre -Survey

* Required

Why did you choose Montessori education for your child? *

What type of learning outcomes are you expecting from your child's experience at Barrie School?

*

How does Montessori foster independence? *

Do you believe Montessori classrooms are unstructured? If so, what makes you think this? *

How does concentration, coordination, order and independence relate to the Montessori

curriculum? *

Have you read any books related to Montessori philosophy? If so, which ones? If you have not, would you be interested in receiving a list of recommended reads? *

Appendix E



Appendix F

Parent Feedback on Works Assigned

How long did you and your child interact with the work at home? Did they enjoy the work?

Did you understand how to use the work?

How do you feel this work helps your child prepare for more advanced works?

Do you have any questions about this work?

Appendix G

Drop Off Data

Day of week	Time	Questions/ Comments asked by parent(s)	Tasks completed by parent	Tasks completed by child
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				