Montessori Teacher Perceptions of Family Beliefs Regarding Young Children’s Learning
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While Dr. Montessori urged both teachers and families to honor each child’s potential by providing a wide array of meaningful learning opportunities, she did not address the need for close collaboration between teachers and families (Epstein, 2015; Montessori, 1929/1970). Effective family-teacher partnerships are essential for student achievement across all age levels (Carr, 2011). They are particularly crucial for the optimal development of young children (Arndt & McGuire-Swartz, 2008). A clear and accurate understanding of family priorities regarding their child’s education is essential for optimal teacher-family collaboration (Hausen-Cram, Srin., & Stilpik, 2003).

Research Questions
1. Do Montessori teacher perceptions of family beliefs regarding children’s development align with family statements?
2. Do Montessori teacher perceptions of family beliefs regarding child raising and family life align with family statements?
3. Does the Montessori approach to education support families in being a parent and supporting children’s development? If so, how?
4. Does the Montessori approach to education support teacher-family partnerships? If so, how?

Participants and Method
Montessori teachers and family members were invited to complete parallel surveys regarding family priorities and stressors. Teachers completed a twenty-seven item survey comprised of four demographic questions, seventeen Likert scale or yes/no questions, two forced ratings, and four open-ended questions. Family members completed a parallel survey containing twenty-six items, with four open-ended questions, sixteen Likert scale or yes/no items and two forced rating questions. Survey items addressed teacher perceptions of parenting issues as well as how Montessori education affects children’s learning and development. All participants volunteered to be members of a panel facilitated by the Research Committee of the American Montessori Society. The survey was emailed to 218 teachers and 89 parents in September 2014. Eighty teachers (37%) and forty-nine family members (55%) completed the survey.

Analysis of variance between teacher predictions of family responses and actual family statements was conducted using a series of Chi-Square analyses and where necessary, Fisher’s exact test. The overall level of significance is 0.05 for 13 different statements, but the individual level of significance for each statement was adjusted using Bonferroni’s method to 0.05/13 ≈ 0.00385.

Statistical analysis provided Doug Baumann (Assistant Professor) and Erica Heying (Student Consultant), University of Wisconsin La-Crosse Statistical Consulting Center.

Discussion: Implications for Montessori practices, next steps, study limitations
Responses to this survey suggest that Montessori teachers, in general, have an accurate sense of how families view parenting and communication now in comparison to five years ago. However, responses reveal a disconnect between what teachers believe families consider to be important and what families actually state is important. Families hold learning social skills and learning to be respectful as more important than teachers predicted.

Simply asking families about their priorities is the first step in building strong partnerships. Teachers will then be able to work effectively with families to provide meaningful information regarding children’s development and learning.

Study limitations: varied backgrounds of study participants. Teachers and families were not from the same classrooms. However, the number of participants (n) was adequate for establishing significance.