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Perceptions Of Adult-Child Collaboration In Toddler Environments In A Midwestern Montessori School

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**PERCEPTIONS OF ADULT-CHILD COLLABORATION IN
TODDLER ENVIRONMENTS IN A MIDWESTERN MONTESSORI SCHOOL**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctorate in Education

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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DEDICATION

Thank you to my parents, for pushing me to achieve great things and to never give up. Thank you to my partner's mother, Cheryl, for all the time spent having adventures caring for my children, allowing me to work on my dissertation. Thank you to my committee chair, Barbara Swanson, for all of the support and feedback as I navigate the process. And thank you to my chair readers, Mary Beth Noll and Walter Enloe for encouraging me to not give up throughout this long haul. Thank you to all of the women who participated from "One Midwestern Montessori School" to help me gather the data needed to complete this work. Thank you to all of the children I have had the pleasure to work with who inspired me to do this work. Thank you to my two children, Oskar and Margaux, who kept the inspiration alive in me to finish my dissertation. And of course, thank you to my partner, Gustaf, for all the tireless support in helping me to accomplish my goals – I truly could not have completed this work without you!

“All the people working with children, and especially the people working with children at the very beginning of human life, can testify that these still non-walking or --speaking persons show a special mind and behave in a way that provides great hope for a better human destiny.”

-Dr. Silvana Montanaro

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Dr. Maria Montessori and Dr. Silvana Montanaro: Your lives on earth have ceased, but your contribution to children's welfare worldwide lives on through your wisdom and work. Thank you. May we all humbly carry on the seeds you planted within us.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One could say I have been on a Montessori journey all of my life. My early years were spent in a Montessori Children's House at Lake Country School, which was a forerunner of the Montessori revival in the United States that began in the 1960s (Standing, 1998). I still have sweet memories of those days and my experience mirrored Lillard's (1972) description of the purposeful work that took place in my Children's House. For instance, sewing quilts for my dolls with my teachers (purposeful, practical activity to refine the hand through joyful work), grinding eggshells to enrich soil (care for the environment through fine-motor work), counting the golden beads (math material that concretely introduces the decimal system), writing in cursive (natural circular movement for the 3- to 6-year-old hand) and reading in the loft (a language-rich environment) (Lillard 2005; Stephenson, 2013). Our class watched baby chicks hatch and observed plants grow from seeds. The beauty of life was protected, supported, and embraced. A sense of joy permeated our work, which was guided respectfully and unobtrusively by the adults in the room.

Many years after my time in Children's House, I returned to my Montessori roots. Searching for a purposeful mission in my life, I enrolled in the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) primary training course in St. Paul, Minnesota. I recall that during the course, a cynical classmate laughingly commented, "How does folding napkins lead to inner peace?" Later on in the year, as she was practicing for exams while meditatively folding napkins, she began weeping and humbly stated, "I get it." In that moment, my classmate understood how using her hands quieted her mind and calmed her

body. She also understood how purposeful, movement-oriented activities enhanced concentration. Lillard (2005) writes, “Dr. Montessori called the peace that she saw to be achieved through concentration ‘normalization,’ because she observed that most of children’s troublesome behaviors disappeared when they experienced concentration on meaningful activities” (p. 50).

Montessori activities, referred to as *work*, are designed to integrate movement and cognition (Lillard, 2005; Montessori, 1995). Children learn by making direct contact with the environment and using all their senses to experience the environment. Teachers, or guides, prepare the classroom and create developmentally appropriate lessons and materials that promote independence. Children care for these materials with respect in a peaceful, tolerant environment (Montessori, 2002).

Montessori guides carefully observe each child’s social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Rather than directing children, the adults guide them as they choose the work that interests them (Montanaro, 2002; Montessori, 1991, 1995). The relationship between guide and student is collaborative rather than authoritative. The collaborative interaction between teacher and student is one of the major principles underlying Montessori education (Lillard, 2005). Montessori believed this collaborative approach is especially critical for children younger than 3 years of age in order to “effectively support the complete natural development of children” (Stephenson, 2013, p. 270).

Research Question

To better understand the dynamics of the adult-child relationship in toddler Montessori environments, this study investigated this question: *How do Montessori*

toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?

The first part of this chapter describes my personal journey and how it led to the research question for this study. The next section presents relevant historical information beginning with a background on the history of early childhood education followed by a section describing Maria Montessori and the Montessori method. The last two sections address the professional and personal significance of the research as well as the limitations of the study.

Background on Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a branch of education that encompasses education for children ages birth to 8 years old. ECE developed out of Enlightenment in European countries (Hinitz & Lascarides, 2011). It expanded gradually during the nineteenth century throughout the Western world as primary education became a universal protocol.

Parents are widely considered a child's first teacher during the first two years of life and it is through these relationships that children attain their first impressions of the world through secure attachments, develop a sense of self, and construct their worldview (Hinitz & Lascarides, 2011). It is during this time that a foundation is created for children for future benefits and success in all environments.

ECE often focuses on Jean Piaget's (1896-1980) theories of learning through play, that play meets children's needs: physical, intellectual, linguistic, emotional, and social to develop optimally (Follari, 2014). Through play, children first learn how to collaborate. Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) thought that play allowed children time to

socially interact and build their imagination and intellectual skills. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) believed that children learned through moving and using their senses.

Today, the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) believes that child-centered learning, one-on-one learning, and meeting children where they are developmentally are essential components of high quality early childhood education (Hinitz & Lascarides, 2011). The world over agrees that ECE or Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are of utmost importance. The first world conference on ECCE gathered in Moscow in 2010, organized in partnership with UNESCO and the city of Moscow, to discuss the goals of giving all children the right to adequate resources for development. The 2010 world conference on ECCE was an outgrowth of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which is the foundation of UNICEF and the most widely ratified international human rights treaty in history signed by 196 countries since 1989 but not ratified by the United States for conservative religious and political reasons (Smolin, 2006).

Further, a plethora of research exists that states that early childhood education brings with it tremendous economic benefits for societies around the world.

History of Maria Montessori and the Montessori Method

This section discusses key aspects of Maria Montessori's life and describes the experiences that shaped the development of her method. It also provides information regarding the development of the Assistants to Infancy (A to I) course for adults working with children from birth to 3 years of age. Finally, information is provided regarding the relevant components of the Montessori birth-to-3 program.

Montessori's Life

Maria Montessori was born August 31, 1870, in Chiaravalle, Italy (Standing, 1998). She was an only child. Montessori's mother wanted Maria to have access to the same education as her male peers, and she fought with Maria for the right to attend schools that focused on science and mathematics (Standing, 1998). Montessori became the first female to graduate from medical school in Italy, and in the late 1880s she began giving lectures to teachers around Europe (Standing, 1998). She was heavily influenced by Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard and his disciple, Edouard Seguin, and their work with "defective" children (Standing, 1998, p. 32). During this period, children with mental challenges were referred to as defective. She became convinced that education was the way to help these children and that role of the teacher was to aid development of the child, not to pass judgment (Standing, 1998). Teachers were to guide students and "awaken something in the child that was asleep" (Montessori, 2002, p. 106). She emphasized that the learning that takes place has to be "the work of the learner" (Montessori, 1991, p. 56), which was a marked difference from the teacher-directed approach at that time. Ultimately, she identified teachers as guides and directresses who provide the setting and materials so that the child can choose that to which he or she is called to satisfy the innate human need to self-construct (Montessori, 1991; Standing, 1998).

Using this approach, children who were previously deemed defective were able to perform well on national exams (Standing, 1998). Based upon this success, she then implemented her method with typically developing children in the slums of Rome. On January 6, 1907, she opened a daycare in the projects called Casa dei Bambini (Lillard,

2005). She created a house-like atmosphere with child-sized furniture and developed activities for the impoverished children who attended (Standing, 1998). Maria taught the children practical life exercises such as how to take care of their bodies and showed them how to wipe their noses, wash their hands, and how to set a table. She found a way to explain to the children when and why they should do these things. The children saw themselves as respected, productive individuals and this brought them joy (Lillard, 2005; Montessori, 1995; Standing, 1998).

At the request of the parents, Maria began to teach the children how to read and write. Based upon the work of Seguin, she used sandpaper letters and gave the sound of the letter, not the name (Montessori, 1991; Standing, 1998). As cited in Montessori (1991) and Standing (1998), the next thing Montessori knew, the children began to write with sticks and dirt. She then designed a moveable alphabet filled with smaller cursive moveable letters. The children could write with the alphabet and began reading what they wrote. News of this spread, and Montessori was again questioned how she did it. She merely gave the children the alphabet in a simple form that made it easy for them to learn and use.

Montessori's techniques and observations evolved into the *Montessori method*, which soon spread across Italy and later the world (Standing, 1998). Montessori developed national and international courses to train teachers to use her approach (Standing, 1998). In 1929, a congress was formed in Amsterdam that became the Association Montessori Internationale (Lillard, 2005; Stephenson, 2013). From this point on, AMI protected and supported Montessori and her work.

When Mussolini came into power in the 1930s and Montessori refused to let him use her schools to teach his doctrine, he closed all of them (Standing, 1998). She moved to Spain and then India (Lillard, 1972). She returned to Europe after the war to rebuild Montessori schools and to develop her ideas for the Assistants to Infancy program for children birth to age three (Lillard, 2005; Stephenson, 2013).

Assistants to Infancy Montessori

It was during the early 1940s that Montessori became convinced that age three was too late to have the most beneficial effect (Stephenson, 2013). When she returned to Rome, she organized a group of Montessori teachers and parents to research and design a course for pregnancy through age 3 (Stephenson, 2013). Under the direction of Adele Costa Gnocchi, Assistants to Infancy (A to I) became a 2-year full-time course. Dr. Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro, an Italian pediatrician, was pivotal in growing A to I (Lillard, 2005; Montanaro, 2002). When she was in the hospital having her first child, she interacted with an assistant who had the A to I training. She became immersed in the A to I approach, and after a few years began lecturing for A to I training courses. She gained a profound understanding of infants and young children. In Montanaro's (2010) words,

All the people working with children, and especially the people working with children at the very beginning of human life, can testify that these still non-walking or –speaking persons show a special mind and behave in a way that provides great hope for a better human destiny (Education and Peace section, para. 14).

In 1979, Montanaro gave a presentation at the AMI congress in Amsterdam and was allowed to give her first A to I training in Rome. In 1983, the first course moved from Rome to Texas.

Graduates of the A to I course include parents, early childhood professionals, and Montessori teachers and administrators (Hall, 2002). They earn a diploma and are able to teach in Montessori infant-toddler programs that offer components such as prenatal classes, the parent-infant class, the Nido for children ages 6 weeks to approximately 14 to 16 months of age, and the Young Children's Community for children approximately 14 to 16 months to 3 years of age (Lillard, 2005; Montanaro, 2002).

The next section describes the Nido and the Young Children's Community, which is the focus of this research study. The Young Children's Community is also referred to as the Toddler Community, and these terms will be used interchangeably throughout the text.

The Toddler Community

The Young Children's Community serves children who are comfortably walking (approximately age 14 to 16 months) to age 3 in a small and intimate group of 12 children and two trained staff persons. There are a few program options, depending upon the culture of the school: half-day, full-day, or full day with a.m./p.m. care child. A toddler might be at school ranging from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The environment conforms to the physical needs of the children, both in the size of the furnishings and in the opportunities for motor development. Montessori environments commonly include an observation area for adults, minimal furniture, tiled floors, maximum natural light, selected art placed low on the walls, toilets sized for small

children, and defined spaces to challenge coordination of movement (Lillard, 1972). The environment is organized in distinct areas for the children to easily access as it calls to their need for order and organization (Lillard, 2005). The setting includes an area for the children to put their jackets and shoes when they come into the classroom, as well as a child-sized bench to sit on to take off their shoes. There are shelves with manipulatives such as stringing beads and puzzles; shelves for art expression such as gluing, scribbling, chalking, painting; and a shelf with musical instruments (Lillard, 2003; Stephenson, 2013). There is an area for language that includes a range of items from real objects to the more abstract language cards (Stephenson, 2013). A cozy book area is available for looking at books (Lillard & Jessen, 2003; Stephenson, 2013). There is a practical life area with a low dishwashing stand for the children to wash the dishes and also a flower arranging stand. Cleaning supplies are available in one area so that children can do everything from sweeping to mopping to wiping up a spill to take responsibility for themselves and take care of their environment (Lillard, 2003; Stephenson, 2013). Each time a child wipes up a spill or creates a flower arrangement, the more attached they grow to the environment and the community (Lillard & Jessen, 2003).

Children eat lunch together or have snacks at community tables. Shelves nearby have food work on them such as apple slicing or banana cutting (Stephenson, 2013). There is a snack hutch and snack table where children can eat snack alone or with a friend (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). Children have easy access to sinks to wash hands, get a drink of water, or fill up a pitcher to wash dishes (Lillard & Jessen, 2003; Stephenson, 2013). In the toileting area, children are assisted in learning toileting independence by providing them with a place to put wet underwear, access to clean underwear, and a

changing bench to sit to undress and dress (Lillard & Jessen, 2003; Stephenson, 2013). The outdoor environment of the Toddler Community mirrors the indoor environment as such that there is work set up for the children to choose and materials for them to take care of the outdoor environment such as gardening and plant watering (Lillard & Jessen, 2003; Stephenson, 2013).

Children learn by doing (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). Children in the Toddler Community might peel and slice a hard-boiled egg and create a snack for themselves or to share later with their community. Before children master this activity, they might try and eat the whole egg—including the shell. This is where the adult steps in and represents the activity (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). The adult provides the support and scaffolding until children have gained full independence of the work and refined their skills (Stephenson, 2013). This is adult-child collaboration (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). Conversely, Montanaro (1991) observed, “[t]here are still many children who are never given the chance to collaborate in the environment. Rather, the more they develop the physical potential to act positively, the more they are restricted and rejected” (p. 129).

In a Montessori environment, adults and children collaborate to promote self-sufficiency and independence (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). This collaboration results in motivated and engaged learners (Montanaro, 1991). According to Orion (as cited in Stephenson, 2013), “[o]nce this foundation is laid, future learning for children is easier. These children have a positive self-image, and trust that the world is a wonderful place to be. They trust themselves and their ability to function in this world” (p. 72).

Professional and Personal Significance of the Research

Although the collaborative relationship between teacher and child is a fundamental principle of Montessori education, little to no research is available that examines how Montessori adults perceive adult-child collaboration in the Montessori environment. This study will contribute to the research literature on this topic.

This research is significant to me not only because I have had a strong relationship with Montessori education throughout my life, but also because it has greatly affected my family. My son began in the toddler community at 16 months while I finished the second portion of my Montessori A to I training. When he was a baby I tried to follow what I had learned in the first portion of my training—and quickly faced the reality that it can drive one crazy. As a first-time mother, my Montessori training made me hyper aware of all of my child's needs—both a blessing and a curse. I also led parent-infant classes at various Montessori schools in the area and shared my knowledge, experience, and struggles as a first-time mother trying to do everything perfectly. I learned so much through my experience with my son and the mothers and infants who joined the classes. I realized many other parents were just as anxiety-ridden as I was to give the very best to her child at every possible moment. I became acutely aware that no mother is meant to raise her child in isolation—we are meant to raise children in a community. Although it is rare today to have grandparents, aunts, and uncles all living on the same block or in the same locality, community can be created with a little effort, which reaps benefits that are priceless: psychologically healthy parents and caregivers—thus, psychologically healthy children.

My next challenge was going back to work in the Montessori Nido with my newborn baby who was 9 weeks old. All my life I had opposed the idea of all-day infant care. That changed when I completed my A to I training and was in a position where I needed to go back to work with a new infant. This presented many challenges. It was difficult getting a toddler and infant to school by 7:30 a.m. so that I could greet parents and their infants on time and with ease. Being on a nursing schedule was difficult. Having my daughter hospitalized with RSV that morphed into pneumonia and then bringing her back to the incubator of germs was difficult. I am so thankful that that period of my life is over! However, it was a time so richly filled with lessons that have left me with a much deeper understanding of what the majority of mothers in the United States experience. Even though my daughter suffered significant illness as a baby exposed to all of those germs, I believe she developed a strong immune system that has kept her from experiencing sickness as a toddler. She is an independent, happy, thriving child. I sincerely believe the Nido is a paradise for a baby's delight and development.

High-quality, authentic Montessori methods are enriching my life, my children's lives, and my family's life on a very profound and personal level. In the following chapters the dissertation will delve more deeply into collaboration between children and adults in the Montessori environment. The roles of the child and the adult in Montessori environments are examined, collaboration is defined and discussed, and Montessori research is reviewed.

Boyer's Scholarship of Application

Ernest Boyer's, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1992), provides a model of four areas of scholarship: scholarship of discovery, the scholarship of

integration, the scholarship of application and the scholarship of teaching. For the purposes of this dissertation, the research focuses on the scholarship of discovery; scholarship to develop or test theory, and empirically generate new knowledge, as no research has been done on perceptions of adult-child collaboration in a Montessori environment.

Summary

This chapter highlights seven main points. First, the research question is presented: *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* Second, a background on early childhood education is highlighted. Third, key aspects of Maria Montessori's life were described that shaped the development of her method. Fourth, it provides information regarding the development of the A to I course and a description of a Toddler Community. Fifth, the chapter discusses the professional and personal significance of the research. Sixth, this chapter provides a brief overview of the research to be executed and the possible limitations of the study. This chapter concludes with Boyer's scholarship of application.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate this question: *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?*

One of the fundamental principles of Montessori education models is that adult-child collaboration is conducive to optimal child outcomes (Lillard, 2005; Loeffler, 1992; Montessori, 1995, 2002). Although much has been written regarding professional collaboration and peer collaboration in early childhood settings, a dearth of qualitative or quantitative research exists regarding adult-child collaboration in the Montessori environment and how adults perceive that collaboration.

Early childhood educators are acutely aware of the impact of positive and negative interactions on children's development (Norton, 2010). Educators recognize how vigilant they need to be if they are to consistently meet the needs of young children in their care. The focus of all early childhood practitioners should be on promoting "stable and predictable relationships both within the family and in childcare settings" so that children can become psychologically mature (Norton, 2010, p. 47).

This chapter discusses literature relevant to this study's research question regarding collaboration between children and adults in the Montessori environment. First, the roles of the child and the adult in Montessori environments are examined and the roles of the child and teacher in Montessori programs discussed. This investigation provides the foundation for a better understanding how teachers and children collaborate. Second, collaboration is defined and discussed in the context of

child cognitive development. Montessori education is based upon positive collaboration between adults and children. Children from birth to age three must be guided by the adult as they engage in purposeful work as their will is not yet developed and they are not fully conscious beings. Montessori (1995) wrote that in this way, children move “into a conscious being” and that “[t]his is the new path on which education has been put; to help the mind in its process of development, to aid its energies and strengthen its many powers” (Montessori, 1995, p. 28).

Third, background literature is reviewed that examines perceptions of adult-child collaboration in Montessori environments. The theories of Piaget and Vygotsky as they relate to adult-child collaboration are discussed. An in-depth definition of collaboration, and cognitive development theory and collaboration is presented. Four studies based on decision making, empowerment, prosocial behaviors, and what it means to be a Montessori teacher are discussed.

Roles of Guides and Students in Montessori Environments

A large body of literature supports the importance of positive, nurturing teacher-child interactions (e.g., Davis, 2003; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Lefevre, 2017; Zaslow et al., 2016). Norton (2010) reported the findings of a 2008 University of Virginia research study that revealed quality teacher-child interactions played a key role in children’s development. Downer, Sabol, and Hamre (2010) found that children have improved executive functioning skills when teachers provide appropriate learning opportunities with interesting materials. When teachers also facilitate access to such activities, children are more likely to develop autonomy and self-regulation skills (Rimm-Kaufman, Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009). According to Hatfield, Burchinal,

Pianta, and Sideris (2016), “evidence suggests that children learn more in classroom environments that are well-organized and managed, characterized by sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating interactions that promote autonomy, conversation, literacy skills, and executive functioning” (p. 563).

The previous paragraph is also a general description of a Montessori educational environment. In a Montessori setting, the child and the teacher collaborate to achieve positive outcomes. Children choose their activities from a thoughtfully prepared environment in collaboration with a guide who knows when to step aside and when to intervene (Montanaro, 2002; Montessori, 2002).

Montessori believed the child is the center of education and should be “guided by her inward mind” (Tzuo, 2007, p. 36). She argued that direct instruction was not needed, only guidance to explore the environment. Montessori (1995) wrote, “the teacher’s happy task is to show children the path to perfection, furnishing the means and removing the obstacles” (p. 254). She felt teachers should not interfere with children’s work unless children needed to be guided toward their natural selves.

The next sections discuss the roles of the child and teacher in Montessori programs, which is required in order to have a better understanding of how teachers and children collaborate.

The Role of the Child

The Montessori classroom is a structured environment in which children choose their own work, and the emphasis is on successful problem solving in the environment (Simmons & Sands-Dudelczyk, 1983). Loeffler (1992) described a successful Montessori environment as one in which children “are engaged in self-initiated activities

with a degree of autonomy and independence that is unique in an educational setting” (p. 109). Children are free to move and explore. They choose their own activities, as well as where, how long, and with whom they work (Moore, 2000).

Montessori (1991) believed children are natural learners who can make more appropriate learning choices than their adult mentors. When children can make decisions about their learning, they are more motivated and interested. Children are better able to concentrate on a task they have chosen and when they have freedom of movement to explore. They learn to follow a natural cycle of work that contributes to self-discipline and the development of their true nature (Montessori, 1991).

The Role of the Adult

Montessori (1991) acknowledged that children require guidance from an adult to make some decisions while they are still developing. Guidance is needed if children are not yet “in control of self” and have an undeveloped will (Lillard, 1996, p. 23). Teachers must guide the development of the will in order to establish an “atmosphere of concentration and focus” (Moore, 2000, p. 26).

According to Montessori, the will develops in three stages (as cited in Moore, 2000). In the first stage, children can accomplish tasks occasionally but not always. In stage two, tasks can be performed consistently because of increased consciousness, but may not always perform as well upon request. The third stage is reached when children can direct their own actions and consistently perform a task when requested. When children have a strong will, “they will be capable of making choices, and be responsible and dignified human beings, with a love and concern for their fellow man and their

natural environment” (Fafalios, 1997, p. 13). Montessori believed adults are needed to help children make choices based on a fully developed will.

When children can make choices about their learning, they are more interested and learn to follow their true nature. Montessori (1995) considered the true nature of the child to be love of work, concentration, and self-discipline. She asserted the guide’s first priority is to help children concentrate and persist in their work (Montessori, 2002). Adults also have the responsibility to establish clear cultural expectations for behavior and include children in decision making (O’Shaughnessy, 1998).

Collaboration

Collaboration has been linked to several positive learning outcomes for children, including increased motivation, enhanced problem solving, and improved self-regulation (e. g., Heyman, 2008; Lai, 2011; Sills, Rowse, & Emerson, 2016). Much research has been conducted regarding the benefits of collaborative learning for elementary and secondary students, although less is known about collaborative relations between adults and children in preschool or birth-3 settings. This section first defines collaboration and then discusses cognitive development theories that are relevant to the discussion of collaboration and young children.

Definition of Collaboration

Collaboration is the “mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together” (Lai, 2011, p. 2). This definition is perhaps a simplification of the often-quoted definition of collaboration presented by Roschelle and Teasley, who defined collaboration as a “coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem” (as cited

in Lai, 2011, p. 6). They explained that collaboration takes place within a structure that facilitates meaningful discussion about the problem, which they referred to as a *joint problem space* (Lai, 2011, p. 6). The collaborative process may include exchanging ideas, giving and receiving help, and encouraging others to participate within this joint problem space (Lillard, 2005).

Effective collaborations depend upon quality interactions among participants. Wilford (2006) delineated six principles of effective collaboration, which are presented as the Six Cs of Collaboration:

1. Conversation: the act of people talking together.
2. Confrontation: the act of expressing an alternative viewpoint, which is helpful in leading to bigger ideas. This should not be delivered in an angry way by the speaker or perceived as a threat by the listeners.
3. Communication: the understanding that occurs when people are making connections with each other. This can happen through conversation, but also facial expression and gesture.
4. Cooperation: the willingness to work with others.
5. Collaboration: the building of communal knowledge.
6. Community: a group who has built a culture of mutual understanding through collaboration. (p. 15)

Children must collaborate in order to contribute (Rogoff, Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2001; Tomasello, 2014). Warneken, Grafenhain, and Tomasello (2012) noted that in the first year of life, children collaborate by adjusting their behavior to that of another person when playing simple social games. However, these interactions must be scaffolded by an

adult. Warneken et al. also observed that during the second year of life, “children become progressively more adept and active partners in joint activities” (p. 55). Brownell, Ramani, and Zerwas (2006) supported these findings when they reported in their study that the ability to cooperate with peers developed over the second and third years of life. Tomasello wrote that, for children 1 to 3 years old, “collaborating toward a joint goal created a new kind of social engagement, a joint intentionality in which ‘we’ are hunting antelopes together (or whatever) with each partner playing her own interdependent role” (p. 43).

In a review of 21 studies that investigated the role of peer collaboration in the cognitive development of children ages 4-7, Sills et al. (2016) identified ability as one of the major factors that affect cognitive development. They found that pairing low-ability children with higher-ability peers produced short-term cognitive gains. Peer collaboration also appeared to be more beneficial on more complex tasks, which children encountered as they developed.

Cognitive Development Theory and Collaboration

Montessori’s approach is discussed with regard to her educational philosophy and the roles of children and adults in Montessori environments. Her child-centered approach supports the work of Piaget and Vygotsky, two cognitive development pioneers whose theories were published years after her model was implemented in schools across the world. Their theories emphasize the importance of social and cooperative interaction to improve children’s learning outcomes and are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Piaget’s system of developmental stages is well known. He believed that developmental growth was enhanced by cognitive conflict, described as “the sense of

dissonance experienced when one becomes aware of a discrepancy between one's existing cognitive framework and new information or experiences" (Lai, 2011, p. 9). He also believed peer social interactions facilitated cognitive conflict, or "disequilibrium" (Sills et al., 2016, p. 313). Equilibrium is restored when children verbally explore conflicting approaches and opinions with others (Lai, 2011).

Although Vygotsky supported much of Piaget's work with peers, he differed in that he placed more emphasis on the importance of social interactions between adults/older children and young children. These interactions occur within the *zone of proximal development* (Sills et al., 2016; Wilczenski, Bontrager, Ventrone, & Correia, 2001). Vygotsky described the zone of proximal development as "the distance between what a student can accomplish individually and what he/she can accomplish with the help of a more capable 'other'" (Lai, 2011, p. 10). In the proximal zone, independent work is followed by work with an adult on learning tasks that are of the same or greater difficulty.

Tzuo (2007) reported that Piagetian classrooms give children the greatest amount of freedom to explore by themselves in a rich environment, whereas Vygotsky classrooms balance teacher- and child-directed activities. Teachers in Vygotsky classrooms challenge children and guide them so that they can "attain the top level within their zone of proximal development" (p. 35).

Children create new understandings based upon their social interactions. The adult supports, models, and guides this through working with the child.

Adult-Child Research

Healthy development depends upon a foundation of quality and consistent relationships with adults. “Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009, p. 1). The literature is saturated with research studies that examine the academic practices of educators in Montessori and other early childhood settings and how they affect cognitive development. Studies examining either professional collaboration or peer collaboration are also available. However, it is difficult to locate studies that investigate how adults and children collaborate in early childhood settings and even more difficult to locate studies that evaluate how educators in these settings perceive adult-child collaboration.

In this section, five research studies are reviewed that explore the perceptions of early childhood educators regarding aspects of early childhood educational settings. None of these studies focuses specifically on adult-child collaboration, although aspects of the topic are discussed in each study. One study involved senior practitioners in early childhood education and support services; four involved adults in Montessori educational programs.

Perceptions of Adult-Child Co-Teaching

This section discusses dissertation research conducted by Norton (2010), who explored the potential impact of adult-child interaction in the early childhood environment. More specifically, she assessed the perspectives and attitudes of practitioners who worked with children. Her findings revealed four themes: adult characteristics that supported positive adult-child interaction, the context in which

interactions occurred, the potential impact on children's emotional development, and strategies to enhance positive interactions. The first three themes are the most significant to this study and are reviewed in the following sections.

Adult characteristics. Adults cited the need for self-awareness as the first key feature of positive communication. Norton (2010) emphasized how this finding supported previous research that educators must be introspective and reflective in their practice. The participants in Norton's study reported that "stressful environments" (p. 34) and "bureaucratic requirements and environment deficits" sometimes interfered with their self-awareness and resulted in negative interactions (p. 34).

The second characteristic highlighted in the Norton (2010) study was empathy, which she noted was greatly influenced by one's self-awareness. Empathy requires adults to put themselves in the child's situation and think differently. When discussing this characteristic, Norton observed that empathy is one of three core elements of quality adult-child interactions typically cited in the early childhood research literature.

Openness is the third adult characteristic identified by participants in the study. They reported that "active listening and contingent response" are important in developing children's self-esteem (Norton, 2010, p. 42). However, they acknowledged that bureaucratic demands on their time and skills interfered with their openness.

Context in which the interactions take place. Similar to findings reported in the previous section about self-awareness and empathy, bureaucratic demands also had an impact on the context in which adult-child interactions occurred. Participants reported the regulatory requirements regarding curriculum created a sense of anxiety that negatively affected their interactions with children.

Participants highlighted the need to address the emotional needs of both adults and children in the setting. They recommended team building and other strategies that provide mutual support, including structures that allowed time for “reflective practice” (Norton, 2010, p. 43).

Potential impact of adult-child interactions. The adult participants in this study expressed their belief that positive interactions support children’s emotional development. They indicated how important it is in developing secure attachment, which then encourages development growth and continued exploratory learning. Respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining an empathetic relationship, particularly when children are “feeling stressful or overwhelmed” (Norton, 2010, p. 44).

Respondents also recognized the importance of positive interactions in promoting learning abilities. They referred to the findings of neurological studies to support the role of emotions in “supporting or diminishing the brain in learning, thinking, or remembering” (Norton, 2010, p. 44). It is the educator’s responsibility to provide the nurturing environment that supports healthy emotional development in children.

Perceptions of Montessori Education

Four studies are reviewed in this section that assess perceptions of various aspects of Montessori education. Specifically, these studies address decision making, empowerment, prosocial behaviors, and what it means to be a Montessori teacher.

Decision Making

Student choice is central to the Montessori mission. Moore (2000) conducted master’s research to examine how children advance to higher decision-making levels and

what obstacles prevent them from advancing. In addition, her study discussed how teachers help students become better decision makers.

Moore (2000) interviewed 34 Montessori teachers in Portland and Seattle. Higher-scoring participants in the study described children as making decisions about “what to study, how to show what they learned, how long to spend on a task, record keeping, planning and decisions in various non-academic areas” (p. 130). Lower-scoring children were not provided as many ways to participate. Obstacles to student participation were related primarily to structural/program concerns and included concerns regarding training, student recordkeeping, interruption-free work time, and adult/child ratio.

Empowerment

When children are able to participate in decision making, they are empowered. To examine empowerment in the context of teacher-child interactions, Vaughn (2002) conducted in-depth observations of three Montessori lower-, middle- and upper-level classrooms in a Midwestern Montessori school. She also interviewed nine teachers from those classrooms to learn about how they perceived the use of power/decision making. The self-report data Vaughn collected revealed a focus on teachers and students “balancing their individual freedom with the needs of the whole” (p. 197). Students engaged in behaviors for reasons other than to please the teacher. Teachers carefully planned the environment and learning tasks and allowed students the freedom to choose. This contributed to students feeling motivated to “keep the space that they share with others suitable for learning” (Vaughn, p. 197). Students felt more control over their environment and learned to manage their freedom.

Teachers reported their language and student interaction with students facilitated the creation of an optimal learning environment. Their language conveyed choice. They allowed students to self-manage their own learning, work with others, and concentrate on tasks for long periods of time.

Prosocial Behaviors

Carter and Ellis (2016) conducted a study in Australia to determine how Montessori educators perceived how they supported children's social learning and development. The authors developed a 124-item survey that 34 Montessori educators completed online. All 34 respondents indicated that teaching children basic social behaviors supported children's ability to learn how to live with and respect others. Punishment and rewards were not supported as an effective means of teaching children to behave. Respectful and nurturing caregiving styles were considered to be important in the context of "multi-age classrooms, a philosophy of peace education, orderly environments, consistent guidelines for non-violent interactions, 'grace and courtesy' lessons (individual and group), explicit social instruction, kind-hearted and courteous relationships and calm interactions" (p. 111).

Teachers supported several prosocial behaviors, including "sharing, taking turns, speaking courteously, working productively and moving carefully" (Carter & Ellis, 2016, p. 111). They also cited the importance of hands-on and real-world experiences in teaching problem solving and collaboration.

What It Means to Be a Montessori Educator

Malm (2004) collected narratives from eight female Montessori teachers in Sweden in order to understand what it means to be a Montessori teacher. In their

narratives, teachers expressed a strong commitment to their responsibilities as Montessori teachers. Malm identified two attributes as being particularly important: “seeing each child [and] assisting the child’s motivation to learn and being humble and accommodating” (p. 404). Effective teachers have a strong grasp of Montessori philosophical and pedagogical practices and demonstrate genuine care and warmth toward their students.

Summary

There is nearly no research conducted on the perceptions of adult-child collaboration in toddler Montessori environments. This chapter provided a review of the literature that will ground this study’s research on perceptions of adult-child collaboration in two toddler communities at a Midwestern Montessori school. This chapter consisted of three sections. First, the roles of the child and the adult in Montessori environments are examined. Second, collaboration in the context of child cognitive development is defined and discussed. Third, research is reviewed examining perceptions of adult-child collaboration in Montessori environments.

The following chapter discusses the qualitative paradigm and research methodology used to collect, analyze, and unravel deeper insights into the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration in two Montessori toddler environments. This will allow access to deeper insights on *How Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?*

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to gain deeper insights into the primary research question, *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* For the purpose of this study, adult is defined as the toddler Montessori guide within the toddler Montessori environment. The second part of the research question is *How do Montessori toddler assistants perceive adult-child collaboration?* Adult-child collaboration is defined as guides and toddlers working together through presentations, work, and creating community within the prepared Montessori toddler environment. The research is conducted through interviewing two Montessori guides and administering surveys to five assistants at one Midwestern Montessori school.

Five main sections are presented in this chapter. First, the chapter discusses the research framework of a case study along with a rationale. Second, the chapter presents the setting and participants for the case study. Third, the chapter illustrates the framework for the data collection methods and tools to be used: interviews and surveys. Fourth, the chapter gives the framework for the data analysis of the data collected from the interviews and surveys. Fifth, the chapter demonstrates the approval to conduct research.

Research Framework and Rationale

Although adult-child collaboration is a foundation of Montessori education, no studies have been conducted to specifically examine adult-child collaboration in toddler Montessori environments. Most of the existing literature is focused upon the importance

of building positive adult-child relationships, the roles of the adult and child within the Montessori environment and the importance of collaboration. Through the framework of a phenomenological case study, the research methods utilized will be interviews and surveys. These methods will reveal a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the adult perceptions of adult-child collaboration and lead to the theory of why this is important in child development. The analysis of children's language, independence, and social interaction as perceived by adults will create the background needed to support this theory.

A case study is the necessary vehicle to guide and give shape to the research framework for this study and will be used as the foundation for the research design. The case study will be conducted within two toddler classrooms at one Midwestern Montessori school. A qualitative case study fits the research question for it is "interested not only in the physical events and behavior that are taking place, but also in how the participants in [the] study make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). The research will focus on a small group of individuals connected to one location. This will help better "understand how the events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which [they] occur" (Maxwell, p. 30). A qualitative approach helps make the research understandable to both those studying the topic as well as those who are not (Maxwell, p. 31). It is hopeful that the research will be accessible to anyone interested in Montessori education, particularly Montessori birth to three. The qualitative approach also "emphasizes the perspective of teachers and the understanding of particular settings...having far more potential for informing educational practitioners" (Maxwell, p. 31).

The case study of two Montessori toddler guides and five assistants at the Midwestern Montessori school provides this real-life context to help unravel the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration within the toddler environments. “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). This is an instrumental case study as its aim is to examine in-depth the perceptions of adult-child collaboration in two Montessori toddler environments. Using the qualitative case study for this research design will enable the researcher to use vignettes to describe the experiences of the participants and create an interesting and accessible presentation of the data collection and results.

Participants and Setting

The site chosen for the case study was a Midwestern Association Montessori Internationale (AMI)-recognized Montessori school. The term AMI means that the school upholds standards and practices that follow along with the foundation that Maria Montessori began in 1929 (Lillard, 2003). A benefit of this organization is to create a reliable cohesion among all AMI Montessori schools worldwide. American Montessori Society (AMS) serves as another driving source in providing access to Montessori education in the United States. However, it does not meet the same standards set by AMI nor does it develop guides with the same rigor and incarnation of the method. This researcher has been deeply entrenched in the site as a guide and parent of two children for the past 4 years. It has proved to be a qualified site for research because it upholds high standards and expectations among staff in order to provide for children and families an authentic AMI Montessori experience.

The school serves about 100 children, ages 8 weeks to 6-7 years old. There is one Nido community for infants, two Toddler Communities for children aged 16 months-3 years old, and three Children's Houses for children 3 years to 6-7 years old. Each room has between two and five adults to work with children throughout the day; a child's day can range in schedule from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., year-round. This is considered all-day Montessori.

For this case study, two female toddler guides were interviewed. An explanation of the term *guide* will help the reader better understand the selection of participants. AMI Montessori schools refrain from using the term *teacher* because it depicts the authoritative notion that the adult is transmitting knowledge to the child and that the child is a passive vessel. Instead, the adult is guiding the child on his or her path of self-construction through collaborative work in the toddler Montessori environment. Some school cultures also use the term *director* or *directress* to indicate that the adult is directing the child in his or her work. The contrasting background and experience of the two toddler guides provide for rich data to analyze. One guide has nearly twenty years of experience with different Montessori schools around the country, working with both toddlers and adults. The other guide has several years of experience working with toddlers entirely at the selected site. In order to be qualified to hold the position of guide at an AMI-recognized school, one must go through a rigorous training that involves full-time study for 9 months of lectures, 250 hours of birth-to-3 observations, student teaching, creation of several albums with personally recorded presentations with illustrations, authentic materials made for the classroom, and passing oral and written exams.

Surveys were administered to five female toddler assistants. The role of the assistant is that of one who plays a supporting role for the guide. The assistant supports the guide in collaborating with the toddlers in his or her work. This may comprise of assisting children with toileting; preparing snacks, maintaining the room to keep it clean, beautiful, and orderly; and protecting presentations for the guide (allowing the guide to give a lesson to a child without interruption). If trained by the guide, assistants also sing songs with the children, read books, work with language materials with the children, and conduct observations. It is not required for AMI-recognized schools that the assistant be trained or have a college degree, but a 2-week Montessori assistant training is provided. The varied experience, education, and Montessori training provides rich data to code and analyze. Although the number of participants is small in size, the depth of analysis provides insights and new understandings that suggest quality triumphs over quantity.

Data Collection: Methods and Tools

The two key components of my research for this phenomenological case study are a survey and intensive interviews. The sample includes two toddler classrooms composed of 11-12 toddlers in each with three to four adults in each room throughout the day. This sample is “purposeful sampling [that] is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61).

Surveys were administered and interviews held. Five Montessori toddler assistants completed the survey to gain better insight on perceptions of adult-child collaboration and how it affects language, independence, and social interaction

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The assistants responded to the questions on how she perceives the guide collaborating with the toddlers within the environment she works. The three areas covered in the survey are language, independence, and social interaction and how these components are affected by adult-child collaboration within the Montessori toddler environment.

Second, interviews were used to collect research data. Two toddler guides from a Midwestern Montessori school were interviewed. The “interview [will be conducted] with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, p.

3). Comparing the toddler guide interview data with the assistant survey data provides information regarding different perspectives. Due to the small number of toddler guides, interviews were in-depth. I had an initial meeting with the interviewees a week before the scheduled interview for participants to sign a waiver and be given the questions so that they would have a chance to think deeply about them (Englander, 2012). Interviews were approximately 1 hour in length, recorded, and transcribed. Interviews were analyzed and coded so that patterns emerged.

The researcher has been deeply entrenched in Montessori theory for nearly 2 decades, which she hopes will allow for deeper understanding of the interviewees’ perspectives (Merriam, 1998). There is a possibility of bias during the interview process because most of the interviewees are quite well known by the researcher. Thus, it was important to create an open atmosphere during the interview so that adults did not feel pressured by the interviewer to answer the questions (Charmaz, 2014).

The survey and interview data collected in this research study are designed to

reveal a deeper understanding and meaning of the phenomenon of adult perceptions of adult-child collaboration within Montessori toddler environments. Specifically, these data will contribute to a better understanding of how adult-child collaboration affects language skills, independence, and social interaction.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research is to provide enhanced awareness of the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration in toddler Montessori environments through adult perceptions within the framework of a case study. This will be useful to parents, teachers, and anyone who works with children or simply wishes to foster a thriving future for society.

Survey and interview data were analyzed and coded. Given the time frame allowed for the research to be conducted, the timing of both methods may overlap. For instance, there may be an interview in the afternoon, and surveys sent out online at night.

Themes that emerged were categorized. This categorization allowed the researcher to glean new insights surrounding the research. It also provided clarity and purpose for the compare/contrast process with the interviews to aid in discovering the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration and how it affects child development.

Interviews with the two toddler guides of the Montessori school were transcribed and put into a categorical coding matrix. They were then analyzed and examined for emerging patterns and themes and then organized into groups used for more comparisons. Coding specifically means highlighting, circling, creating markers to signify differing ideas and themes for further analysis (Charmaz, 2014). From here, focused coding took place. These analyses lead to more insight, greater clarity in

interpretation, motivation for more positive change surrounding early childhood education, and the generation of further questions surrounding the topic of study.

Approval to Conduct Research: Human Subject Review

Permission was received from the School of Education's Human Subject Committee to conduct the data collected for this study.

Summary

Five sections were presented in this methodology chapter. First, the chapter discusses the research framework along with a rationale for this. Second, the chapter describes the site and participants for the case study. Third, the chapter illustrates the data collection framework. Fourth, the chapter presents how data are analyzed. Fifth, the chapter demonstrates the approval to conduct research.

In the next chapter, results from interviews and survey are analyzed and discussed. Research findings are presented to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon of the question: *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?*

CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

The investigation into *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* in one Midwestern Montessori school grew from a question into a secondary question, *How do toddler assistants perceive adult-child collaboration?* which led to a collection of data ripe for analysis. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the data collected, creating connections, relationships, and interpretation for deeper and original insights to illuminate the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration in Montessori toddler environments.

This chapter begins with an in-depth analysis of the survey and survey results, followed by an examination of the data collected from interviews. The survey data were analyzed in this order: general data, perceptions of language development, perceptions of independence, perceptions of social interaction, and perceptions of adult-child collaboration. The data collected through the interviews are examined in the order in which the questions were asked (See Appendix C) as well as data grouped into coded themes that arose in both interviews: collaboration, language, independence, social interaction, observation, choice, preparation of the self/adult, and preparation of the room.

Participant Overview

To investigate the research question, a list was created of 6 toddler assistants and 2 toddler Montessori guides at one Midwestern Montessori school. To reiterate, both toddler Montessori guides work with toddlers full-time serving as the leads. The guide makes all of the decisions for the room, gives presentations to the children, handles all

parent communication, upholds Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) standards within the environment, to name a few of the duties. Four of the five assistants are former, full-time toddler assistants who typically worked from 9-5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday. One assistant is still currently a full-time toddler assistant, and she is AMI 3-to-6 trained. One assistant who is AMI birth-to-3 trained is now a lead in the Nido at the Midwestern Montessori school. The other assistant surveyed, AMI 3-to-6 trained, is now a full-time children's house assistant at said school. Two of the former assistants no longer work at the Midwestern Montessori school. Five of the six assistants completed the survey and both toddler guides were interviewed.

As for experience, for the assistants, the number of years working with toddlers in a Montessori environment ranged from 1 year to 10 years. Two of the assistants had been working in Montessori in some capacity for over 10 years. All assistants had either completed some or all of college for their education. The survey was not set up to obtain how many years of college completed, but gave the following choices for level of education completed: high school, vocational/technical school, some college, college, graduate, or other. All assistants need either some college completed or extensive hours spent working with children to qualify for this role since it requires times spent alone with children according to the Department of Human Services (DHS) licensing requirements. AMI also offers a two-week assistants' course that many assistants with no training or Montessori experience are encouraged to take. The assistants' main role is to support the lead guides so that they are able to give presentations to the children within a prepared environment. Montessori toddler assistants may do the following throughout the day: observe the children, help with toileting, maintain the cleanliness and orderliness

of the toddler environment, and interfere if a child is not being safe with herself, materials, or others.

For the toddler guides, experience ranged from 10 to 20 years working with toddlers. AMI Montessori Toddler guides are required to have completed the AMI Assistants to Infancy training in order to be a toddler guide at an AMI-recognized Montessori school. Over the course of a year, the training includes extensive lectures, extensive presentation write-ups as well as papers, student teaching, practical work with materials, and 250 hours of observation of newborns through three- year-old children. They must pass oral and written exams to earn the AMI diploma. For other Montessori schools that are not AMI-recognized this is not always enforced. Toddler guides are not required to have a college degree, but many schools look upon this favorably and many guides currently hold an undergraduate as well as graduate degree.

Electronic Survey: General Data

The survey, created using SurveyMonkey, was entitled *Survey on Perception of Adult-Child Collaboration in a Montessori Toddler Environment* (See Appendix B). The survey was emailed to participants over the course of a week. The administration timing varied since the participants needed to return a consent form first. Within 10 days of sending the survey out, 5 of 6 assistants completed it online. One assistant never responded.

The survey consisted of 30 questions grouped in categories of language, independence, social interaction, and adult-child collaboration. The survey, which included Likert-scale and short-answer questions, had an average completion time of 12 minutes. The Likert-scale questions were designed to discover adult perceptions of the

following aspects of adult-child collaboration: language development, development of independence, social interaction, observations of adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment, and the importance/benefits of adult-child collaboration. The Likert-scale questions were set up on a scale of 1-5. The five-point Likert-scale questions ranged from never (1) to very often (5), with one question ranging from not at all important (1) to very important (5). The short-answer questions allowed the assistants to express their own observations and perceptions of adult-child collaboration as experienced in a Montessori toddler environment, using specific examples.

In the following sections, the data are analyzed through defining any key terms in section of questions, giving the number of questions in each question, and explaining the statistical analysis for each section. It is acknowledged that the survey is short and the number of participants small. To add depth and interest within the analysis, processes and procedures of each section are connected to examples of Montessori theory and practice.

Survey Data Analysis: Perceptions of Language Development

The first section of the electronic survey pertains to assistants' perceptions of language development within the Montessori toddler environment. Language is a key component of a thriving Toddler Community. "Language is a treasure accumulated by every human community. It is given to all those belonging to the community in order that they may participate in its life" (Montanaro, 1991, p. 135). Dr. Montessori (1995) wrote that the child, birth to 6, has a mind that absorbs every aspect of his or her world like a photographic image. Language acquisition occurs the same way. Montessori (1995) wrote:

To develop language from nothing needs a different type of mentality. This the child has. His intelligence is not of the same kind as ours. It may be said that we acquire knowledge by using our minds; but the child absorbs knowledge directly into his psychic life. Simply by continuing to live, the child learns to speak his native tongue. (p. 25)

In a Montessori toddler environment, the guide provides the best, richest, most accurate language to speak with the child and gives as much language in many different ways, such as books, songs, and working with language materials, so that the child can absorb it and build his vocabulary of his world. If it was poor quality language and sparse walls and shelves, that is what the child would absorb as his language. As Hatfield, Burchinal, Pianta, and Sideris (2016) indicated in the literature review, “evidence suggests that children learn more in classroom environments that are well-organized and managed, characterized by sensitive, responsive, and cognitively stimulating interactions that promote autonomy, conversation, literacy skills, and executive functioning” (p. 563).

How the adult demonstrates execution and appreciation of language through literature, song, conversation, and working with the Montessori materials with the children all encompass a language-rich environment that sets the toddlers up for future language success and literacy. Beyond that, language development is important for the child in building self-esteem through respectful conversation modeled and it creates more self-confidence through her ability to navigate through a world of language by being knowledgeable of a wide array of vocabulary in her world as well as better preparation for future reading and writing (Montanaro, 1991).

For the first six questions of the electronic survey, a Likert scale was used to measure responses, ranging from never (1) to very often (5), measuring adult perceptions

of language development within the Montessori toddler environment. All of the questions in this section received answers. The questions called for a response measuring frequency.

The first question on language development asked assistants *How often do you observe toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult speaks to toddler at his or her eye level.* All assistants (100%) replied that they had observed Montessori toddler guides speaking to a child at their eye-level very often. This consistent behavior is important for the adult to embody because it allows the child to see the adult's mouth move, to hear clear language, to feel respected (for the adult to talk to the child not down to the child), and to model respectful, meaningful conversation (Montanaro, 1991).

The second question on language development asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult reads and sings to toddlers.* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guides sing and read books to the children very often. This helps the children expand their vocabulary and creates greater future literacy abilities. Many toddlers also receive language in song more easily than in simply speaking. It also fosters a love of literature and books in the children that again supports future literacy (Montanaro, 1991). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that parents with 18-month-old children “read books and talk about the pictures using simple words” and that parents of three-year-olds should read to their children “every day” and to “ask [their children] to point to things in the pictures and repeat words after [them]” (2018).

The third question on language development asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult names vocabulary of toddler's environment to toddler.* All five assistants responded that the guide names vocabulary items to the children very often. This will aid toddlers in future success with literacy as well as greater self-confidence by knowing the world around them by name (Montanaro, 1991). CDC (2018) recommends that parents of 2 year olds “teach [their children] to identify body parts, animals, and other common things.”

The fourth question on language development asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult works with language materials within the Montessori environment with toddlers.* All five assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide very often uses language materials with the children in the toddler environment. Again, this will help toddlers enhance their vocabulary and be able to start classifying information at a young age. For instance, children learn five different birds' names through small replicas of the birds. The child can then name some of the living birds he or she sees in his world. Language given is exact and scientific. Language in a Montessori toddler community should never be dumbed down (e.g., “here's a birdie”). This is respecting children's capabilities (Montanaro, 1991).

The fifth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult speaks respectfully to the toddler within the Montessori toddler community.* Four assistants (80%) responded that the toddler guide speaks respectfully to the child very often

whereas one assistant (20%) responded with often. Again, speaking respectfully is important for not only language development but for children to create a positive self-image and confident relationship with language (Montanaro, 1991).

The sixth question of this section asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to language development? Adult does not use baby talk with toddlers.* Four assistants (80%) responded that the toddler guide does not use baby talk with toddlers very often, and one assistant (20%) responded that the toddler guide never does not use baby talk with toddlers. This is a double negative, which means the toddler guide does use baby talk, but this could have been confusing to the assistant taking the survey. Again, this is important for children to build not only a positive self-image but also a positive relationship with language and the use of language (Montanaro, 1991).

Survey Data Analysis: Perceptions of Independence

Montessori (1995) defined independence as “Except when he has regressive tendencies, the child’s nature is to aim directly and energetically at functional independence” (p. 83). Montessori (1995) wrote, “The child’s first instinct is to carry out his actions by himself, without anyone helping him, and his first conscious bid for independence is made when he defends himself against those who try to do the action for him” (p. 91). Stephenson (2013) quotes Orion in describing independence:

One of the major acquisitions of the first three years is independence; children during these early years master certain abilities, giving them the foundations for functional independence. They learn to feed themselves, undress, they dress themselves, and bathe themselves. With the acquisition of motor skills and then the refinement of those skills,

children master basic abilities in caring for their own bodies. This acquisition of functional independence gives them human dignity, the ability to take their place in humanity knowing they are capable, having abilities like everyone else. (p. 78)

This section of the electronic survey focused on perceptions of developing independence within the Montessori toddler environment. There are eight questions asking frequency ranging from never to very often. All assistants responded to all of the questions.

The first question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult gives toddler two choices.* All assistants responded to the first question that the toddler guide very often gives the child two choices. This is important because the toddler will learn through this choice-making how to eventually independently make choices for herself. For toddlers, it is important for the adult to give only two choices until around three years old (Montanaro, 1991). More than two choices can overwhelm the child under three. They are barely conscious beings and their will is developing. This can be likened to too many choices of salad dressing at the grocery store. Too much choice can often overwhelm a fully developed, functioning adult.

The second question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult assists toddler in dressing and undressing when necessary.* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide very often helps the child with dressing and undressing as needed. This is an important aspect of supporting functional independence with the children. Toddlers are perfectly capable of putting on their own shoes or pants when

given the time and space to do it without the adult stepping in, doing it for them, and sending the message that they should not try, that they are not capable of doing this themselves. In the beginning the adult is collaborating with them in this, helping the toddlers, supporting them so that they may do it by themselves eventually (Montanaro, 1991).

The third question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult assists toddler to engage in work and then fades away.* Three assistants (60%) responded that the toddler guide very often helps engage children in work and then fades away, making this response the most frequent. It is a practice for AMI Montessori toddler guides (all levels, actually) to help engage a child with work, give a presentation, or represent a work to the child (Montanaro, 2002; Montessori, 2002). Once the child shows concentration the adult can step back, “fade away,” and give the child the space needed to enter into deep concentration with the work. Often, the guide will need to step back in, then step out, step in, like a dance, to help support the child in her work and concentration. This is to also prevent the child from becoming overly dependent on the adult in order to engage in work (e.g., needing the adult to sit next to him in order to complete a simple puzzle). One assistant (20%) responded with often for this question and another (20%) responded with undecided that the toddler guide fades away from children after helping them engage in work.

The fourth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult represents work to toddler when he or she struggles.* Two assistants (40%) responded with

very often for this question, two assistants (40%) responded with often for this question, and one assistant (20%) responded undecided for this question. Representing materials to the toddlers helps them to refine their work and movement with the materials within the environment (e.g., a toddler pours the handwashing pitcher full of water on the floor). The guide represents pouring the water into the basin. The toddler is unconsciously asking the guide for a representation (Montanaro, 1991).

The fifth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult assists toddler in difficult tasks, i.e., carrying a table.* Four assistants (80%) responded that the toddler guide assists the toddler with difficult tasks such as carrying a table, very often. One assistant (20%) responded that the toddler guide assists children with difficult tasks often. This is one example of adult-child collaboration that may lead to independence.

The sixth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult encourages toddlers to wear cloth underpants and use toilet (versus diapers).* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide very often supports toileting with cloth underpants versus diapers, which facilitates toileting independence. When children wear underwear that can be easily pulled up and down and access a low toilet or portable potty chair, they are able to stay in tune with their body and take care of their own toileting needs. It sends either the message that they are capable and can do this themselves, or it sends the message that they are not capable of doing this themselves and that they need an adult to do it for them (Moudry, 2012).

The seventh question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult encourages toddlers to feed self for snacks and meals.* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide very often encourages the child to feed himself meals and snacks. Again, this is important for independence for the same reasons learning to use the toilet independently is important for toddlers. Either children will learn that they are capable and can do themselves or they are not capable and need an adult to do it for them. Independence in eating is also important because it allows children to control how fast or slow they eat and monitor when they are full or has had enough food. It is also empowering self-esteem and diminishing reliance upon adults (Montanaro, 1991). CDC (2018) recommends that parents of 18 month olds encourage their children “to drink from [their] cups and use a spoon, no matter how messy.”

The eighth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to developing independence? Adult encourages toddler in self-care, i.e., wipe own nose.* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide often encourages the child in self-care such as wiping her own nose. Again this independence allows children to feel empowered, capable, and trust themselves that they are able to take care of their own needs. This builds the foundation for confidence and healthy self-esteem that is coming from within the child (Montanaro, 1991).

Survey Data Analysis: Perceptions of Social Interaction

Social interaction is how the children interact with each other socially, how the adult interacts socially with the children, and how the adults within the Toddler

Community interact with each other. Social interactions include how one expresses thoughts, feelings, and emotions to others and how one engages with others either individually or in a group. Do children engage peacefully or create conflict? Maria Montessori (1995) also called this “cohesion of the social unit” (p. 232). Montessori (1995) wrote:

[L]ittle by little, these [children] become aware of forming a community which behaves as such. They come to feel part of a group to which their activity contributes. And not only do they begin to take an interest in this, but they work on it profoundly, as one may say, in their hearts. Once they have reached this level, the children no longer act thoughtlessly, but put the group first and try to succeed for its benefit. (p. 232)

This section of the electronic survey is on perceptions of social interaction within the Montessori toddler community. This section contains six questions ranging in value from never to very often.

The first question asked *On a five-point scale, how often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult engages in conversation with toddler.* Four assistants (80%) responded that the toddler guide engages in conversation with the child very often. One assistant (20%) responded that the toddler guide engages in conversation with the child often. The child learns from the adult healthy, respectful communication. The toddler guide is modeling this for the children. The CDC (2018) recommends that parents of 18 month olds “use simple, clear phrases” with their children and “ask simple questions.” At all ages—18 months, 2 years, and 3 years—the CDC (2018) recommends that parents

talk to their children about their emotions to help them identify their feelings. Montanaro (1991) writes, “a good emotional atmosphere is an essential requirement for the optimal development and use of language” (p. 143).

The second question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult encourages toddler to care for the environment, i.e., wipe up a spill, create a flower arrangement.* Four assistants (80%) responded that the toddler guide encourages the child to take care of the community/environment by wiping up a spill, for example, very often. One assistant (20%) responded that the guide does this often. How children integrate and take care of the community in which they function is an important aspect of socialization. CDC also recommends that parents encourage their 2-year-old “to help with simple chores at home, like sweeping and making dinner” and to “ask your child to help you open doors” and “once your child walks well, ask her to carry small things for you” (2018). These are examples of how parents are encouraged to collaborate with their small children and they reflect what is happening in a Montessori Toddler Community.

The third question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult encourages empathy within the toddler community, i.e., showing care for peers when one is hurt.* All assistants (100%) responded that the toddler guide always encourages a child to show empathy for peers when hurt. This is a piece of social interaction, or social consciousness. Empathy and the beginnings of social consciousness are possible in young children in the toddler community when it is encouraged and modeled by the adults around them. The CDC (2018) also recommends that parents of 18 month olds

“encourage empathy...when he sees a child who is sad, encourage him to hug or pat the other child.”

The fourth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult models grace and courtesy to the toddlers, i.e., greets others upon arrival.* Three assistants (60%) responded that the toddler guide models grace and courtesy by greeting a child upon arrival very often. Grace and courtesy are terms used in Montessori at all levels and refers to the manners one uses to function peacefully in the world (Standing, 1998). For example, when someone sneezes, it is courteous to say, “Bless you” or when someone offers you a snack to eat, it is polite to say, “Thank you.” This is all modeled from the very beginning of life. Even when children are not yet verbal, they are absorbing this behavior. Children observe behavior in the world around them and will model that behavior later in life. Two assistants (40%) responded that the toddler guide greets children often. This response could possibly have to do with the lack of greeting a child upon late arrival after the work cycle has begun, thus causing an interruption to the community if that child is greeted verbally.

The fifth questions asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult models affection, i.e., gives hugs.* Three assistants (60%) responded that the toddler guide very often gives the children hugs whereas two assistants (40%) responded that the toddler guide often gives hugs to the children or shows affection. Giving children hugs could be seen as important to some, not important to some, or even inappropriate to many. This social interaction can help comfort or show love to the child. Many of the toddlers spend

more time at school than at home, so it is important at this young age to receive love and affection from the adults caring for them. They in turn hug each other. When there is a selfish intention present for the adults, such as the adult needing to feel love from the toddler because she lacks it in herself, that is taking advantage of the children. However, when the intent is to show and receive love in a healthy way, positive social interaction is being modeled.

The sixth question asked *How often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers with regard to social interaction? Adult models helping others, i.e., helps a struggling friend put on his or her shoes.* Three assistants (60%) responded that the toddler guide very often models helping others such as helping a child struggling with his shoes. Two assistants (40%) responded that the toddler guide often helps a struggling child. This is again modeling empathy for others, an important aspect of social interaction and socialization. It shows the children that the adults and children are working together in a supportive, collaborative environment.

Survey Data Analysis: Perceptions of Adult-Child Collaboration

For the final section of the electronic survey, the assistants were asked a general Likert-scale question about adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment, with values ranging from not at all important (1) to very important (5). There are also three open-ended, short-answer questions regarding adult-child collaboration.

The first question asked: *From your experience within the Montessori toddler community, how important do you feel it is for adults to know about adult-child*

collaboration? All assistants (100%) responded that adult-child collaboration is very important.

The first short-answer question in this section asked how adults in a Montessori toddler environment support adult-child collaboration. Three assistants responded that her role is to be a “role model” and “observer”; they are supporting the “development” of the toddlers and be there to support the children when they need help. Another assistant wrote it is important to know when to step in and out when helping a child; that it is important to know where each child is developmentally to be aware of what he is or is not capable of. Two assistants also wrote that a “strong connection” or “a bonded and trusting relationship” is key to properly assisting a child on his path toward independence. And finally, another assistant wrote that adults support adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment “By continuously collaborating with the children every day.”

The second short-answer question asked for an example of adult-child collaboration within the Montessori toddler environment where the adult assists. Three of the five assistants mentioned tasks the adult can do with the child to collaborate such as helping with laundry, “Carrying a laundry basket,” putting cots away after nap, or generally asking “to help the adult in different task[s] in the classroom.” Another assistant simply responded, “toileting,” which does involve a great deal of adult-child collaboration. Finally, an assistant wrote that she collaborates with the children dressing and undressing as part of the child’s work in the bathroom. For example, when she assists the child in putting on underwear, she says the prompt, “find the waistband.”

The third short-answer question asked assistants to describe in one sentence how they would explain adult-child collaboration within the Montessori toddler environment to a peer. An assistant wrote that the Montessori toddler environment is a “safe and prepared environment for children” and “the right place.” Another assistant wrote that adult-child collaboration helps “the kid[s]’ development” and the adults are there to assist them with “their needs.” A third assistant wrote that she strove every day to support children “in realizing his or her physical, intellectual, social, and emotional abilities in a positive and gentle way.” A fourth assistant wrote that “adult-child collaboration is dynamic” and varies depending on each individual child, “where they are developmentally and how independent they are.” This assistant then gave an example of what adult-child collaboration looks like via sweeping. The adult and child take turns using a broom. Finally, the last assistant stated the importance of empowering “toddlers to be independent” and on the way toward independence the adult must offer “the support [the child needs] with adult collaboration.” In addition, the assistant wrote that the children need this collaboration “to help them learn and refine skills and confidence until they are ready to do the tasks on their own.”

Overall, the assistants had a very strong understanding of what adult-child collaboration means and the importance of their work, as an assistant, within this process.

Interview Data

General Data Description

Both toddler guides agreed to an interview. The interviewees were both female and are currently employed at the same Midwestern Montessori school. To reiterate, Guide A has 20 years of teaching experience working with toddlers at various Montessori

schools throughout the United States. She also has worked as a Montessori toddler consultant, has done some teacher training, and gives talks and workshops around the U.S. Guide B has 10 years of teaching experience working with Montessori toddlers. She also has the 3-6 Montessori training and has spent time working with that age group as well. She has taken on a leadership role within the Midwestern Montessori school as the 0-3 level leader. Guide A is 60-65 years old, and Guide B is in the age range of 30-40 years old.

The interview with Guide A lasted 1 hour, 5 minutes, and the interview with Guide B lasted 26 minutes. The average time between both interviews is 46 minutes. The interview with Guide A took place in a café at a grocery store on a Sunday afternoon. The interview with Guide B took place after her workday, in a private conference room, at a library near her workplace. Both interviewees were emailed the interview questions ahead of time, although both declined to read the questions before the interview, stating they wanted to answer the questions with a fresh perspective. During the interview, the question guide was used. Oftentimes, planned interview questions were answered within the initial question asked, causing the interviewer to quickly assess which following question would be most adequate and which question should be skipped in order to avoid redundancy. Both interviews were recorded using an iPhone recording application and then transcribed into a Word document to be analyzed. The transcripts are not included in the dissertation. This did not seem necessary for the reader as the transcripts are thoroughly analyzed and explained for the purposes of the dissertation. It is important to note that the technical difficulty that occurred during the interview with Guide B. Unknown to the researcher, the recording device stopped recording at 10

minutes into the interview. The interview was picked back up where the researcher thought it left off, repeating interview questions. This caused the recorded interview to be shorter than it originally had been the first time.

Interview Data Analysis

The interview analysis generally follows the order of the interview questions on the interview list (See Appendix C). However, given that the interview was an organic conversation as well, interviewees went on tangents and at times answered many of the questions on the list before the question was asked, thus the need to pass over the question in order to avoid redundancy.

Question 1: Please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment.

It was not necessary to define adult-child collaboration for either interviewee because it is such a key component of working with toddlers in a Montessori toddler environment. Guide B began answering this question with “I feel like my whole day is involving collaboration with the toddler.” Guide A said, “I mean, they’re happening in every exchange between the adult and the child. If the adult is willing to go in with that spirit of, let’s do this together.” Guide A elaborated on the adult-child collaboration involved in undressing and dressing in the toddler community. Guide B retold a story from the day, collaborating with a child to wash cloths, the community’s snack placemats, to get them ready for the next day. Both guides explained the delicate dance that takes place, the back and forth exchange between adult and child. The balance of collaboration taking place, meaning how much or how little does the adult do within the interaction of working with the child, is determined by the adult who has been keenly

observing and noting where each toddler is developmentally. The guides guide the development of the will in order to establish an “atmosphere of concentration and focus” (Moore, 2000, p. 26).

Children choose their activities from a thoughtfully prepared environment in collaboration with a guide who knows when to step aside and when to intervene (Montanaro, 2002; Montessori, 2002). If the child has had a lot of practice filling up pitchers, according to Guide B, then he can fill up the pitcher for cloth washing on his own the first time he is presented this work because she knows that he has already had a lot of experience with this and can do this successfully independently. When a child is first learning to put on his shoes for the first time, the adult is doing most of it for him, while giving the language for toes and heels while guiding his hands to put on this shoe, according to Guide A and B.

Both Guides mentioned that adult-child collaboration leads to independence. Guide A mentioned that it is important for the adult to pay close attention to see what the child is asking for help with and what she does not want help with. Eventually, the child is doing all of the work on her own and the guide is able to step away.

Question 2: What was this experience like? How did you respond? What influenced your actions?

Only Guide B was asked this question. It seemed redundant for Guide A since she went into great detail addressing these points in the initial question. Guide B said that observations influenced the cloth washing in collaboration with a child. She knew from experience and previous observations what the child was capable of so knew where

to step in when to step away. Guide B also talked about the importance of letting the child know that you, the adult, takes a turn first, but to be sure that the child knows he will receive a turn as well.

Question 3: Could you please describe what led to this adult-child collaboration?

This question was skipped during both interviews as it seemed irrelevant at the time of the interview, given the content that had already been shared.

Question 4: Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects language development within the Montessori toddler community?

Effective collaboration depends upon quality interactions among participants. According to Wilford (2006), three of the six principles highlighted for effective collaboration include conversation, the act of people talking together; confrontation, the act of expressing an alternate viewpoint; and communication, the understanding that occurs when people make connections with each other. These three principles are achieved through language, both verbal and through body language.

Both Guides responded that language is present in every aspect of the environment throughout the entire day. In every presentation, the guide is giving the child the vocabulary that is built within the materials. For example, the dustpan and brush, “the dustpan is blue and it is metal.” Guide B mentioned that it is important for the child to hear the language and then see the action that goes along with it, or vice versa. For example, the child fills the water pitcher up at the sink. The adult instructs the child to watch the water filling the pitcher. Or the adult makes bubbles while washing cloths, pauses, and points to the bubbles and says, “bubbles,” isolating the word. It is

also a point of interest for the child and keeps the child engaged with the work. Guide B also mentioned the collaborative language used while working together such as “Let’s put the soap on the washboard,” and then listening to the sound of the soap on the washboard, saying, “Oh, let’s listen!”

Guide A went into detail describing how collaborating with language can turn into a power struggle when it involves behavioral issues. Because the child is developing his will during toddler years and learning how to choose and make decisions, he can come into opposition with the adult that is wanting to give the child limits and choose the choices for him. Guide A gave the example of offering an apple or a banana to a child. The child did not want either; he wants an orange. So the guide offered it again, saying “That is what we have today, we’ll have oranges tomorrow.” When the child still did not choose, the adult chose for the child--an apple. The child has shown the adult that he chose nothing. The child then wanted the banana. The adult is collaborating with the child because “they’ve told [Guide A] that [she’s] the one responsible for choice now by choosing a food that wasn’t offered as a choice. When [Guide A] make[s] the choice, then they choose the other choice.” Guide A then goes on to explain that this shows the child that his choices have power and now that he has had some experience with choice, the next time he is offered a choice it will be easier for him to make a decision. Montessori (1991) acknowledged that children require guidance from an adult to make some decisions while they are still developing their will or have an undeveloped will. Guide A said, “So experience with that collaboration in language with the child then they begin to understand and master, um, really understand how much power their language has and to master using it.” Montanaro (1991) writes that “this approach,

combining respect, consideration and collaboration, is the only valid response to the crisis of opposition” (p. 160).

Guide A also discussed collaborative language versus directive language. She uses directive language if a child is not being safe or behaving in an unacceptable manner. “You may not,” versus “I wonder if you could show me another way.” Tomasello (2012) wrote that for children 1 to 3 years old, “collaborating toward a joint goal created a new kind of social engagement, a joint intentionality” (p. 43). Adults also have the responsibility to establish clear cultural expectations for behavior (O’Shaughnessy, 1998). Montanaro (1991) writes, “Real collaboration only comes from those who do not feel overpowered and can contribute freely. Only when we are free is it possible to make choices.”

Guide A continued to talk about language and adult-collaboration. She talked about the different ways adults communicate with toddlers. Because toddlers are mostly nonverbal, they are receiving communication on an unconscious level from the adult. Therefore, all of the nonverbal language an adult conveys to the child will also either suggest an invitation to collaborate and work with us, or it can give the toddler something to oppose. As stated previously, communication is one of the principles of effective collaboration, and it is the understanding that occurs when people are making connections with each other. This can happen through conversation, but also facial expression and gesture (Wilford, 2006).

Guide A also gave part of her definition to collaboration within this question when she said,

So everything's about--needs to be about--their own self-construction. And, um, collaborating is a way that we can really invite them into that work, uh, trusting there's an adult there to show them show them the way, to give them correct information about that. And that's what collaboration to me, means.

Warneken, Grafenhain, and Tomasello (2012) wrote that children in the first year of life collaborate by adjusting their behavior to that of another person when playing simple social games. However, these interactions must be scaffolded by an adult. In their second and third years of life, they are able to direct more and more on their own as their will develops and they have the ability to make a choice.

Question 5: Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects independence within the Montessori toddler community?

Both Guide A and B were asked this question. Guide A said, [C]ollaborating is helping the child move towards independence. Because they start out dependent and then they collaborate with us, we're working together and we're helping the child move towards independence. If the collaboration piece is missed, then the information and skills that they need to be independent is missed, because we're the ones that are available to show them the way to independence. So if we're not collaborating, then that isn't possible.

Guide B said that independence is a "huge part of our work." She also talked about the wide range of abilities when the toddler comes into the environment at sixteen months and leaves around three years old. She said the guide is working toward independence with the child. At the beginning, for the young toddler, she said, the child

is very dependent but the guide is building on this each time she collaborates with the child where eventually the child will need less and less adult support and then be completely independent. She again mentioned that the guide observes the child and sees what she is capable of and steps in and out as needed.

Guide A also talked about the balance of collaborating with a child and helping her or him reach the goal of independence. She said the opposite of collaboration is abandonment, leaving children to their own devices. She said children do not come equipped with those skills to be independent human beings and so the adult needs to show the children the way--that it is all of the adults' responsibility to do this within a child's life. She also talked about the controlling, authoritative adult who says "I'll show you how to do it," and that's not helping the child either because then he is not building up that independence and knowledge that he can do it and has to discover how to do it. Guide A gave the example of showing a child how to paint. If the adult holds the child's hands and guides it every time, the child will not know how to hold the instrument on her own. The toddler guide instead shows the child how to use the paintbrush by painting on a piece of paper next to the child. That is collaboration, "always moving towards independence...the goal [for the adult] is to not be needed" (Guide A).

Question 6: Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects social interaction within the Montessori toddler community?

According to Carter and Ellis (2016), respectful and nurturing caregiving styles were considered to be important in the context of "multi-age classrooms, a philosophy of peace education, orderly environments, consistent guidelines for non-violent interactions,

‘grace and courtesy’ lessons...explicit social instruction, kind-hearted and courteous relationships and calm interactions” (p. 111).

Guides A and B were asked and responded to this question. Guide A focused on food and its relationship to a toddler’s socialization in the toddler Montessori environment. She said that children learn how to interact socially, from the beginning, through food. She gave the example of breastfeeding and then how the child grows and is able to receive food in different ways, such as the adult sitting across from the child, assisting them in eating food. She said, “that models the social relationship with another human being and then as they grow into a toddler community then they’re sharing food as a community of 10 or 12 young children with a couple of adults.” Guide A also went into a detailed explanation of how setting the table reinforces the 1:1 ratio for the child. When they set the table, they see one placemat, one plate, and so forth. But they are all going to share a snack or meal at the table with a community of children. She said that this highlights the concept for the child that he is “a part of a community but [he’s] still [his] own entity where people are not coming in and taking things away.” She said in the toddler community, the children are encouraged to work by themselves, perhaps side by side, but not in a group. This is because toddlers “do not have mastery of their social skills yet.” She said that’s why “we try really hard to keep that kind of group activity...focused on the food experience.”

Through this socialization via food, the adult is there to give the child “the correct information about how to interact with other human beings. Your friend needs space, I can help you. I can help you move over. Well, let’s make space for your friend on the bench. Here, I can help your body. So you’re always involved in that, inviting the child

to be...inviting the child to participate with you in...those kinds of interactions rather than coming in and being authoritative with that information.” Malm (2004) found in her research that Montessori guides said it was important to see “each child [and assist] the child’s motivation to learn and [be] humble and accommodating” (p. 404).

Guide B said that she sees social interaction through the children helping each other, modeling how the guide had helped the children, or collaborated with the children. So as a result, the social interaction is modeled collaboration the children are learning from the adults, she said the children are “saying the exact same words that you are using as well (laughs). It’s really, it’s really sweet. Ok, you’ve got to put your toes in, you’ve gotta stand up or you’ve gotta push it down.” Guide B’s observation goes along with Vygotsky’s emphasis on the importance of social interactions between older and younger children (Sills et al., 2016; Lai, 2011). These interactions occur within the *zone of proximal development* (Sills et al., 2016; Wilczenski, Bontrager, Ventrone, & Correia, 2001). The zone of proximal development is “the distance between what a student can accomplish individually and what he can accomplish with the help of a more capable ‘other’” (Lai, 2011, p. 10).

Guide B also said that “with language work we work collaboratively in a group.” She has also seen older children “pretend that they’re the guide and they’re giving a lesson and they’re getting little ones together in a little group and they’re giving their own little language lessons and the little ones are looking up to the bigger ones and there’s a social interaction.” This could also be seen as the children modeling collaboration, an example of child-child collaboration. Again, this follows Vygotsky’s theory of zone of proximal development.

Guide A stated that collaboration runs even deeper through the interactions and type of collaboration that goes on in the classroom between adults. She said, “how they collaborate with one another would be a model for the child socially about how human beings work together.” She said if it is not a positive relationship, that is expressed through the children in their interactions with others. Healthy development for children depends on a foundation of quality and consistent relationships with adults. “Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009, p. 1).

Guide A and B talked about boundaries and setting limits with the toddlers as an important piece of collaborating through social interaction as well.

Question 7: Please describe how you see adults working with children before and after this experience?

Guide A said that from her experience of working with children, “that when the adult collaborates with the children, you have peace. When you don’t collaborate, when the adult doesn’t set up a collaborative, uh, interactions with the children, you have chaos. And aggression. That’s what they show you, right? Peace and independence. I would add independence cause collaboration leads to independence. That’s the whole goal.”

Guide B talked about how she learned just how capable toddlers are through her work in the toddler community. She said, “Being in...the toddler community and being in here for so long, you are, you see that they have so much capability and they have, and they’re able to do so much, like giving them the opportunity to do it and giving them the

environment to do it in and giving them the time to do it.” She said the children can see “what they need to be doing as a human” through the interactions with the adults and the modelling of behavior from the adults. Both guides have highlighted that it is up to the adult to set a collaborative tone. In order for there to be a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom, the adult is responsible for creating the proper psychological and physical space in which the children can function and thrive.

Intermediate Questions: Question 1: How have your feelings or thoughts around adult-child collaboration with toddlers changed since your experience in the Montessori toddler environment?

Only Guide A was asked this question because it did not seem relevant while interviewing Guide B since this information was given within the answer of previous questions. She said that in the beginning of her career working with toddlers, she was “manipulating the situation” between adult-child collaboration so that she “felt like [she] was working with the child.” She did not find success in these early experiences and realized that she “really didn’t trust the child.” She tried to have the child work with her to “get to the goal of independence.... It’s that learning to move in and out of collaboration with the child that respects where they are in that process.” Guide A had to learn through her earlier experiences how to get to that point of being able to collaborate dynamically.

Guide A also went on to say that she thinks collaboration is not natural for human beings. She said if it were, “we wouldn’t have as much difficulty working on teams as adults. Right?” She noted that this is “particularly” difficult for adults if they “didn’t have that experience in your earlier...development.” This is important to note. The idea

of adult-child collaboration within a Toddler Community is for the adult to show the child how to work together, a need and desire the child naturally has but is very often disregarded in today's American society (Dell'Antonia, 2018). A U.S. study done over 25 years "found that the best predictor for young adults' success in their mid-20s was whether they participated in household tasks at age 3 or 4. Those early shared responsibilities extended to a sense of responsibility in other areas of their lives." (Dell'Antonia, 2018, p. SR5). Helping around the house creates a stronger sense of connection for children and families (Dell'Antonia, 2018). This same sense of connection is created within a Toddler Community. Just as "[b]eing a part of the routine work of running a household helps children develop an awareness of the needs of others, while at the same time contributing to their emotional well-being" so does collaborating within the Toddler Community, adult-child, child to child (Dell'Antonia, 2018, p. SR5). Dr. Montanaro (1991) also writes that "participation in everyday life develops a feeling of worthiness in a person called upon to share it in an active way...being able to change and transform the environment gives the person a feeling of personal worth that remains forever" (p. 128).

Guide A said that:

[C]ollaborating is the way that you enter into a relationship with the child that serves the child but also serves you as an educator...when I'm collaborating with a child I'm sharing what I know, I'm sharing my environment with them. . . I'm sharing with them what they need in order to continue on their path of development. . . . When I feel like I'm really collaborating, the child is like doing this dance with me and it's real natural, it's very natural.

When adults possess the skills and awareness to collaborate, successful collaboration takes place. If the adult did not already possess this experience of collaborating as a child in their early development, through enough practice and awareness it can become natural. It is a heightened social consciousness where one can learn to care for the greater good, as a child or adult.

Question 2: Could you please describe the most important lessons you have learned through adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment?

Both Guides A and B answered the question mentioning personal growth and the preparation of the adult needed to have success while collaborating with children. Guide A said that “collaborating with young children is an exercise in letting go.” Both Guides A and B mentioned the need to be present for the child in order to have the children respond to them. Guide B said, “being mentally present for them, cause if your mind is off somewhere, like oh I need to get this and this and this done it takes you away from that present moment so then they, you can’t be present with them. Because those toddlers are so, they live such in the present moment and they need you to be there with them, in that present moment as well.” According to Norton (2010), the adult characteristics of self-awareness, empathy, and openness are key components for positive adult-child interactions in the early childhood environment.

These findings align with Montessori’s emphasis on preparation of the adult. Montessori (2002) wrote that “the adult must adjust himself to the child’s needs if he is not to be a hindrance to him and if he is not to substitute himself for the child in the activities essential to growth and development” (p. 107). The Montessori guide must tear down that ancient complex of pride and anger that unconsciously encrusts his

heart; strip himself of pride and anger and become humble; this first of all; then re-clothe himself in charity. These are the spiritual qualities he has to acquire. This is the central point of balance without which it is impossible to process. This is his 'training,' its starting point, and its goal. (Montessori, 2002, p. 114)

The adult truly must go through a spiritual transformation in order to be present, as Guide B stated. For the adult to be present with the children, she cannot be consumed by her unconscious flaws of pride, anger, and so forth. The guide, through her psychological preparation, creates a presence of purity for the children.

Further, in Norton's (2010) study, findings of neurological studies supported the role of emotions in "supporting or diminishing the brain in learning, thinking, or remembering" (p. 44). It is the educator's responsibility to provide the nurturing environment that supports healthy emotional development in children.

Guide A mentioned a few times how important letting go is and to stop trying to control the outcome. She also said collaborating with children is very humbling for her. She offers the child information toward a more peaceful way, and the child, as he takes her two fingers, is accepting what she has to offer him. Malm (2004) found the importance of the guide "being humble and accommodating" through her research in Sweden (p. 404)

Guide B also mentioned the importance of the prepared environment, having the environment ready for the toddlers each day with everything ordered in its place. She said,

[I]f there's no order within the environment then they don't know how to order it

cause that external order, which will eventually build their internal order...And then they know how to go get something they want to work on so it's always in the same place, in the same place and it might not get put back there but it will, each day is fresh and new and the order is always there.

Preparing the environment is an essential piece to facilitate adult-child collaboration. All of the pieces are in place and adults and children in the environment are able to successfully complete their work. Montessori (1995) wrote:

[T]hat the first stage of preparation for the adult is to become the keeper and custodian of the environment.... From this will come healing, and the attraction that captures and polarizes the child's will.... All the apparatus is to be kept meticulously in order, beautiful and shining, in perfect condition. Nothing may be missing, so that to the child it always seems new, complete and ready for use. (p. 277)

Question 3: What are the greatest challenges of working with toddlers in a Montessori toddler environment? What are the sources of these challenges?

Only Guide A was asked this question. It did not seem relevant during the interview with Guide B since she described some of the challenges within other questions. Guide A focused her answer around the adult being mentally prepared and authentic. When the lead adult has so many different pieces and people to focus on throughout the day, she can become mentally split and it turns into a “disjointed focus.” She said this can show up through the children with aggression, or running for instance. When the adult does not have inner “composure” or is the only one that does possess it in the room, the adult may try and “overcompensate” for this. But if this

peaceful attitude is not authentic and it is merely a way to try and control the outcomes of the classroom, chaos ensues.

Ending Questions: Question 1: What do you think is most important in adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment?

Only Guide A was asked this question. It did not seem relevant at the time during the interview with Guide B. Guide A said that “intent and language” are most important in adult-child collaboration:

What do we intend to accomplish when we invite a child into a collaborative exchange with us? And then the language that we use. Cause you can even intend to be collaborative but if you use language that is not then the child still won't respond. Cause the language doesn't communicate to them that they're invited to work with you.

Question 2: Please tell me how you have grown as a person since you began working with toddlers in a Montessori toddler environment? What do you value most about yourself? What do others value most about you?

This question was only asked during the interview with Guide B. It did not seem relevant at the time during the interview with Guide A for it was answered in previous questions. Guide B said,

I feel like I've grown as a person cause toddlers help make me be in the present moment...they help keep me in the now, because if, I feel like that is where, like life is happening. It's not looking ahead, or it's not, oh, what did I do, why did I do that or it's like being with them cause when you are with them you get to see the present moment in their eyes, that's fresh and new and just like looking at a

grasshopper today. He shows up every single day and every day it's exciting and new every single time and that's where it's exciting and new for toddlers every single time and that's where I feel like they've taught me the most. Is to be present.

Question 3: Is there something that you thought about during this interview that you had not before thought?

This question was skipped for both interviews because it seemed unnecessary. This question became a back-up question during both interviews if more information was needed.

Question 4: Is there anything else I should know to help me to understand adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment better?

Guide A put a lot of emphasis on the approach. She said, "The heart and the intention that the adult approaches the child...it's gotta be authentic and honest. Toddlers are so smart. They're unconscious creators. That means they operate on the unconscious level. So you cannot fool them. They are gonna look beyond your face and your words. Everything. And they're reading what's going on with you on that level." She added that the adult must examine herself and bring one's self-awareness to a level of consciousness where the adult knows what he or she is "bringing" into the classroom. She said, "it helps you be more successful in, you know, to collaborate with them cause you're not bringing in something that you're not aware of that the child is completely aware of." She said, "there isn't anything about the child that doesn't work, um, in collaboration when the adult approaches with the right intention. They're dying to do it." When an adult is working in collaboration with a child, it is important to ask oneself, "what's my

intention? What's my attitude? What's the, what am I feeling towards the child? That will make the difference in whether the child can actually successfully self-regulate or not."

Guide B stressed the importance of giving toddlers a chance to work up to of what they are capable. She said that not a lot of the world allows toddlers to have these capabilities and that if they, toddlers were given the chance, they would succeed. Guide B was also asked a question that was not on the original interview list: "If you were to tell a parent that doesn't know anything about Montessori, what would you tell them is the most important part of this?" This question was added due to the relationship between interviewee and interviewer. Interviewee knew a great deal about the interviewer's background and this question was asked in hopes of receiving a more objective and fuller response from Guide B.

Guide B said language is what she would tell parents. And to always give your child something that makes them feel a part of the community they are in. The children want to do what the adults are doing, "they always want to do good." She said,

[S]o if you're cleaning it's always giving them something that they could also clean. And it's not going to be perfect, it's not going to be great but that's not the important thing. It's the important thing is that they are a part of that... community and that feeling of belonging because that's where they feel capable and proud and they're able to build their self-esteem and self-confidence and self-awareness and so it's giving them jobs... it's letting them, giving them jobs where they feel part of the family.

Guide B was also asked an additional question that was not on the original interview list but came up in the first interview before the interviewee saw that the interview was no

longer being recorded: I know you said before how important the first three years of their life is, so could you talk a little more about that? Guide B had shared some meaningful insights during the first interview (that was not recorded accidentally) and interviewer wanted to offer the chance for her to share them again.

Guide B said,

Birth to three...they're building their foundation...and developing their will, their independence, their intelligence, their language, their movement, there is a lot going on...separately but also it's all kind of combining into one fully formed human.....when they leave our community at 2.5/3, they are fully developed....and I feel like if we can plant the seeds now, while they're 0-3, and they're going to be with them for the rest of their life....getting them where they are at, you can teach them how to be a human by modeling it, and working with them, collaborating with them and eventually that just leads to them being a purposeful human in the world that has, that is going to do whatever it is they are meant to be doing.

Montessori (1995) also writes, "By the age of three, the child has already laid down the foundation of his personality as a human being" (p. 7).

Question 5: Is there anything you would like to ask me?

This question was skipped for both interviews because it did not seem to be a natural course for the interview. The interviews flowed rather as organic conversations and this question, at the time, would have seemed too forced.

Summary

How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction? is the main question and focus of this dissertation. Naturally, this question ran as the main thread throughout the interview questions asked. Both interview participants and Montessori toddler guides reported that adult-child collaboration is evident in all of the work they do with children in a Montessori toddler environment. Both toddler guides expressed that language is a part of everything they do within the classroom and is a part of adult-child collaboration. Both guides agreed that independence is a part of everything they do in their toddler environment and that adult-child collaboration leads toward independence. Both guides agree that adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment is modeling a collaboration type of social interaction, socialization, or social consciousness.

As the interview data were analyzed, it became clear that developing language skills and creating opportunities for independence and social interaction are connected and dependent upon the level of adult-child collaboration that takes place within a Montessori toddler environment. Adult-child collaboration is essential for a toddler Montessori environment to function. All adults within the environment acknowledge this importance and work hard to maintain a high level of adult-child collaboration.

Chapter Five includes a discussion of the survey and interview data and how the findings relate to the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Chapter Five elaborates on the themes and insights highlighted in Chapter Four. The themes are knitted together to describe the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration in a Montessori

toddler environment from the toddler guides' and assistants' viewpoints blended together with present day theories and research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

In this chapter, through the framework of a phenomenological case study, the research methods utilized, interviews and surveys, reveals reflection on a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* and lead to the theory of why it is important in child development.

First, the theory highlighted in this chapter takes the presented concepts from the literature review and is then connected to insights and concepts illuminated by those who participated in both the interviews as well as the survey. Second, the implications for study in connection with policies, stakeholders, and educational organizations will be discussed. Third, the limitations of the research will be highlighted. Fourth, plans for further research and study will be described. And finally, fifth, the major learnings from the project will be presented to support current educators, particularly those working with young children in early childhood education.

Reflection and Connections to Literature Review

The study collected data through in-depth interviews and electronic surveys from Montessori employees. Two in-depth interviews were conducted with experienced Montessori toddler guides. Five of the six past and present Montessori toddler assistants participated in the electronic survey. The data collected from both interviews and survey was transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Through this process, new insights were illuminated on the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment. The three emergent categories from the literature review, survey results and interviews include:

- Montessori toddler guides' perceptions of the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction.
- Montessori toddler assistants' perceptions of adult-child collaboration.
- Importance of adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment (according to the literature review and toddler guides and assistants in one Midwestern Montessori school).

By taking a closer look at these categories, new insights are discovered on adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment and theories are revealed. Children have an inner need or drive that Maria Montessori (1995) referred to as their *horme* that drives them to tirelessly work to construct themselves and become an independent, fully functioning human being. An AMI Toddler Community includes at least one trained toddler guide and a carefully prepared environment full of carefully prepared materials. The stage is set for 10 to 12 toddlers to thrive. The adults collaborate with the children in a respectful way as they work. While this collaboration happens, the children form a pattern in their psyches of what positively working together with other people mean.

A large body of literature supports the importance of positive, nurturing teacher-child interactions (e.g., Davis, 2003; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Lefevre, 2017; Zaslow et al., 2016). While collaborating within the toddler environment, the children build self-esteem, care for others, and care for their environment. All of this creates a pattern within the child for how to function peacefully within a group. This creates peaceful socialization. When teachers facilitate access to interesting materials and

provide appropriate learning opportunities, children are more likely to develop autonomy and self-regulation (Rimm-Kaufman, Curby, Grimm, Nathanson, & Brock, 2009).

Collaboration is the “mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together” (Lai, 2011, p. 2). Both guides agreed that adult-collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment is modelling a collaborative type of social interaction, socialization, or social consciousness. With this solid foundation established during the first 3 years of life, children will be able to take this with them into adulthood and how they interact with others collaboratively throughout their lives (Montanaro, 1991).

It is pertinent that parents and other caregivers are aware of this hard work the children are engaging in every day, working toward becoming functioning, collaborating, human beings. The collaborative process may include exchanging ideas, giving and receiving help, and encouraging others to participate within a joint problem space, or place within a structure that facilitates meaningful discussion (Lillard, 2005). Wilford (2006) states six principles necessary for effective collaboration, such as conversation, communication, cooperation, collaboration, and community. All adults in children’s lives can support the work the children are building every day at school in their Toddler Community.

In developing language in the Toddler Community, both Guides A and B said that language is present in every aspect of the environment throughout the entire day. Montanaro (1991) contended “language is important for individual and social development. Just as it is used by the individual, it is also used within society as a continual exchange which enriches both the language and all who use it” (p. 134). Guide

A spoke about collaborative language in relation to children developing their wills and how they discover the power of their words through making choices. The guide is able to collaborate with children and help them through this process so that they are more capable to use their language in a way that helps them become more independent and get what they want. Being able to communicate lessens frustrations for children and encourages healthy self-esteem. Really, the adult helps to empower children through helping them learn how to master communication and language. Guide B spoke about collaborative language in the Toddler Community differently. She mentioned examples of actual collaborative language used while working with children. For example, while washing cloths with a child, she says, “Let’s put the soap on the washboard,” and then listens to the sound of the soap on the washboard and says, “Oh, let’s listen!” This models for the child language that can be used when working collaboratively with someone else. The language she uses helps join the adult and child together in the work by keeping the child engaged.

In the electronic survey, all assistants observed the toddler guides exercising very often actions that foster a thriving language-rich environment such as the guide speaking to the toddlers at their eye level, reading books and singing to the toddlers, and uses the language materials with the toddlers in the toddler environment.

In developing independence in the Toddler Community, both Guide A and B described adult-child collaboration like a dance, the adult steps in and out, as needed. The whole goal for collaboration is independence, “the goal [for the adult] is to not be needed” (Guide A). The child does not start out with the skills necessary to be independent, however, so, according to Guide A, the adult needs to show children the

way to independence. This is the adult's responsibility, to help children self-construct. Part of this self-construction leading to complete independence is the development of the will. Once the children have a strong will, a process which begins at birth and continues into the Children's House (3 to 6 years old), "they will be capable of making choices, and be responsible and dignified human beings, with a love and concern for their fellow man and their natural environment" (Fafalios, 1997, p. 13).

For the assistants' responses in the electronic survey, all of the assistants responded that the toddler guide very often assists the toddlers with undressing and dressing as needed. All of the assistants further responded that the toddler guides very often encourage the toddlers to feed themselves for snacks and meals. The assistants' perceptions of how the toddler guide collaborates with the toddlers in their journey toward independence is important since it is in agreement with what the toddler guides said they did themselves in the interview as well as what the theory, new and old, states is important in child development.

In developing social interaction in the Toddler Community, Guide B spoke about how she observed children modeling the collaboration in which she had engaged with them, the older children collaborating with the younger children. The older children are helping the younger children construct skills within themselves that the older children have already mastered. The older children are now teaching the younger children who become the students. Again, this goes along with Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* where "the distance between what a student can accomplish individually and what he can accomplish with the help of a more capable 'other'" (Lai, 2011, p. 10). The toddler guide has set the tone of a collaborative atmosphere in the environment

and the children know, consciously or unconsciously, we are doing this together. Brownell, Ramani, and Zerwas (2006) reported in their study that the ability to cooperate with peers developed over the second and third years of life. This contrasts with Piaget's belief that peer social interactions facilitated cognitive conflict, or "disequilibrium" (Sills et al., 2016, p. 313).

Tomasello (2012) wrote that, for children 1 to 3 years old, "collaborating toward a joint goal created a new kind of social engagement, a joint intentionality" that the activity is being done together (p. 43). Children at a young age learn that they are important contributing members of the group or community. This takes place every day in adult-child collaboration within a Toddler Community. Guide A reported that within the Toddler Community, "when the adult collaborates with the children, you have peace. When you don't collaborate, when the adult doesn't set up a collaborative, uh, interactions with the children, you have chaos. And aggression." Children want to collaborate, they want to work together with the adult and then eventually independently or with other children. The Montessori Toddler Community is set up to serve children's need to fulfill this. Both guides during the interviews said that it is up to the adults to set up a collaborative tone. The adult is responsible for creating the proper psychological and physical space in which children can function and thrive. Dr. Montanaro (1991) wrote,

The first stage of a good social life comes from within each human being. When our psychic parts are not well integrated, are in continuous conflict or are ignored...this makes life difficult for each person, family and society. The external world is a mirror of the individual's internal world and the many

conflicts we can see in it can be solved only if we start using a new form of education to harmonize and make each of us more integrated. Only then can social life at any level improve so as to offer human beings a suitable environment for growth. (p. 88)

Respectful and nurturing caregiving styles were considered to be important within “a philosophy of peace education, orderly environments, consistent guidelines for non-violent interactions, ‘grace and courtesy’ lessons...kind-hearted and courteous relationships and calm interactions” (Carter & Ellis, 2016, p. 111).

In order for this harmonious environment to take place successfully, the adults must be aware of their own psychology. Both guides talked about the preparation of the adult in their interviews. Guide B talked about the importance of being present for the children. She said the children are in the present moment and the adults need to be able to meet them there too, in the present, in order for the children to respond to them. Guide A talked about the importance of being extremely self-aware when working with children. The children will react unconsciously to whatever the adults have within their unconscious. According to Norton (2010), the adult characteristics of self-awareness, empathy, and openness are key components for positive adult-child interactions in the early childhood environment. In addition, Malm (2004) wrote it is important for Montessori teachers to be “humble and accommodating” (p, 404). Dr. Montanaro (1991) wrote that the adults must do this “if we really wish to help children, and ourselves, to have a better quality of life and to fully develop the great richness we have inside” (p. 88). Norton (2010) found the need to address the emotional needs of both adults and children in the setting. Team building and other strategies that provide mutual support,

including structures that allowed time for “reflective practice” were recommended (p. 43). This same study referred to findings of neurological studies to support the role of emotions in “supporting or diminishing the brain in learning, thinking, or remembering” (Norton, 2010, p. 44). It is vital that the educator stays mentally healthy and strong in order to create a psychologically healthy space for children in which to thrive.

Adult-child collaboration is not the only aspect of collaboration within the Toddler Community of importance. The way that the adults working within the classroom interact with each other and collaborate is another model for the children for how human beings socially interact and work together. This can be a positive example or negative. All relationships are extremely important to young children for they “experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009, p. 1). Montanaro (1991) writes that “it is our responsibility to children, and therefore, the future of humanity, to provide them with a model for relationships with other people that involves respect for the individual and that allows everyone who lives together to express an opinion and take decisions” (p. 160).

All assistants responded in the electronic survey that the toddler guide always encourages empathy within the toddler community, for example, showing care for peers when one is hurt. This is where social consciousness begins for children. They are completely capable of this when it is modeled by those around them. Empathy was the second characteristic that supported positive adult-child interactions as highlighted by Norton (2010).

It is important to note that the Montessori Toddler Community is a living, breathing, organism, a microcosm of a larger community and civilization. Everything and everyone in the classroom is interconnected, just as everything in life is connected. Montessori (1995) wrote, “Life in association is a natural fact and belongs, as such, to human nature. It grows like an organism and shows a succession of different characteristics in the course of its unfolding” (p. 235). The more conscious one is of this notion, the more empathy and care one will have for all living things. This is a phenomenon that begins to take root through the work of adult-child collaboration within a Montessori Toddler Community.

Through this collaborative work within the Toddler Community, the toddlers’ self-image is created. They will hear the messages: ‘I can, I am capable, I am worthy of something, my collaboration is needed by the people with whom I live, my work is important to others and I can transform the world around me with my work’ (Montanaro, 1991, p. 131). Children must collaborate in order to contribute (Rogoff, Turkanis, & Bartlett, 2001; Tomasello, 2014). When children contribute to the community, they are empowered and feel more in control of their environment (Vaughn, 2002).

The importance of adult-child collaboration is known throughout all adults working in the Montessori toddler environments at the Midwestern Montessori school. For the electronic survey, all of the assistants responded that adult-child collaboration is very important. One assistant mentioned the collaborative dance as well. Two assistants wrote about the importance of building relationships with the toddlers in order to connect successfully with them. These responses also go back to what Guide A and B spoke about

being present with the children and self-aware. It is just as important for the assistants to be psychologically healthy, prepared, and present for the toddlers.

Implications of the Study

For my dissertation, I wanted to focus on a topic that included children birth to 3 in a Montessori setting. I deeply believe this is the most crucial time in a human's life, laying the foundation for what is to come. It is also incredibly overlooked and undervalued in American society. There is very little research conducted with this age group, particularly in Montessori and nearly nothing on adult-child collaboration for children birth to 3. I wanted to put the spotlight on this work that AMI Montessori toddler guides devote their lives to everyday. I have witnessed the joy from my own two children as they experienced the toddler community at the Midwestern Montessori school included in this study and my hope is that this will one day be accessible to all children regardless of socioeconomic status. I have experienced serving as a toddler guide as well as a toddler assistant. It is very hard and very important work. These small children deserve the best from the adults they work with every day and with whom they spend a good part of their early years. My hope is that the insights and theories gleaned from this dissertation can help others working with small children or those in administration leadership roles that can offer support to those working with toddlers as well as parents of toddlers. My hope is that more resources and funding will go to our littlest citizens to ensure they are offered the very best, particularly pertaining to the research of this dissertation, AMI Montessori toddler programs.

High-quality early education programs should be accessible to all children, ages birth to three. Rolnick (2018) writes, "Both economic and neuroscience research show

that there may be no better return-on-investment for taxpayers than quality early education programs” (para. 3). Research states that there is “a \$16 return for every \$1 invested to help low-income children access high-quality learning programs” (Rolnick, 2018, para. 4). Children from lower socioeconomic status homes who have had access to quality early childhood education “are less likely to generate lifelong taxpayer bills related to things like special education, social services, health care, unemployment, law enforcement, and prisons” (Rolnick, 2018, para. 4). So, even for taxpayers that have no interest in early childhood education or babies and small children it is important for all to pay attention to what the research states. Taxpayer money is being spent on an issue that could be resolved if money and energy was intelligently put toward creating accessible, quality, early childhood education programs for the very young. Pouring all allotted resources toward Universal Pre-K (UPK) as the Minnesota Department of Education currently advises, with “no additional funding [going] to scholarships for younger, low-income children” would be a grave mistake (Rolnick, 2018, para. 11). Most have now heard the commonly used phrase “achievement gap” to describe the disparity that has been created due to this lack of value placed on quality early childhood education accessible to all children. “Achievement gaps open as early [as] age 1; they do not wait until age 4. Indeed, we now know that roughly 80 percent of brain development happens by age 3” (Rolnick, 2018, para. 5). More resources should be put toward creating and establishing AMI Montessori birth to three centers and schools where children of all financial backgrounds can access this high-quality education experience where they can learn how to peacefully collaborate in a community with others. What a difference this would make for the future of our children.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of the study are the small number of participants and that they came from a single Montessori site. While the benefits of focusing on one site are apparent through insights gained and presented in this dissertation, collected data from multiple settings would create more extensive and expansive research. Both Montessori toddler guides at this site were interviewed. Six past and present assistants were asked to participate in the electronic survey, and 5 completed the survey.

The small number of participants in the data collection methods limits the possible depth of understanding the phenomenon of adult-child collaboration. The perceptions and beliefs held by the total eight participants only skims the surface for the breadth of experience and knowledge present in the worldwide Montessori community. Further, the study is limited to adult-child collaboration in a very specialized setting, Montessori. This does not take into account possible examples of adult-child collaboration in other alternative methods of education or traditional preschools. The results of the study can be used to take a more in-depth look at adult-child collaboration limited to one Midwestern Montessori school. The results will inform those toddler communities at the Midwestern Montessori school as well as toddler assistants. Additionally, the results can inform guides and assistants working with other age groups at the school: the Nido, serving children 8 weeks to 16 months, what comes before the toddler community, as well as what comes after in the children's house, serving ages 3 to 6/7 years old. This is important for those adults to understand where the child is headed and what the child experienced in the toddler community.

Although the study was small, its findings provide insight for further research. Minimal research has been conducted in Montessori toddler environments or adult-collaboration within these environments. It is important for those invested in education, children, and humanity to understand the importance of what takes place between adult and child in the Montessori toddler environment. The experiences the child has during this year and a half can set the stage for all future social patterns and how the child will function as a human being.

Recommendations for Future Research

While reflecting upon recommendations for future research surrounding adult-child collaboration in Montessori toddler communities, the importance of observing toddlers within the Toddler Community is apparent. In addition, it would be important to include observations of the adult-child collaboration that takes place within the communities that was discussed with the two toddler guides and that which the assistants were surveyed. These observations would help deepen the researcher's insights and theories and create a more holistic perspective on the topic. The researcher would ideally look for key aspects of peaceful socialization and follow children for several years and see how peaceful socialization plays out when children are in elementary school, junior high, and high school.

In addition, it would be key to observe how children collaborate with the other adults in their lives. For example, how do children collaborate at home with parents or other caregivers outside of school? It would be beneficial to see what happens in a toddler's life when he is not at school. How does the culture of a Montessori toddler environment impact families?

Further future research could also include interviewing Montessori guides at additional Montessori schools as well as traditional daycare teachers at traditional daycares. This would deepen the comparisons between settings and present further insights into the practice of adult-child collaboration. This research would contribute to the continuing question of how can our country better serve children ages 0-3 and how can we establish a solid foundation to care for children of this age, as well as their families, and provide opportunities for optimal holistic development.

Plan for Communicating and Using the Results

There are many ways the researcher plans to communicate the findings of the data collected, coded, and analyzed surrounding the research question. First, the researcher plans to report these findings in an academic journal as well as parenting magazines. Second, the researcher would like to present research and findings at an Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) conference and/or early childhood education conference. Third, the researcher would like to present research and findings at the Midwestern Montessori school where the research was conducted. This would illuminate new findings for current teachers, provide knowledge to guides working with both younger and older groups of children, and help them to better understand what takes place in the toddler community. Fourth, the researcher would like to present research and findings to parents at a teacher-led workshop to help them understand the importance of adult-child collaboration and what it implies.

Further, electronic files of the dissertation will be sent to participants as requested. Electronic files of the dissertation will be sent to AMI Assistants to Infancy (A to I) Trainers as a valuable resource for the A to I community as well. Electronic file

of the dissertation to be sent to AMI Primary Trainers in St. Paul, MN as a valuable resource for the Montessori community in general.

Conclusion

“When given good assistance in the first years of life the child at three is an impressive human being. He is able to express himself perfectly, he can deal with all the practical needs of life (dressing and washing himself, etc.), he can collaborate usefully in the activities of the environment, he has developed a logical pattern of thought that prompts him to ask the whys and wherefores of everything, and he has a clear awareness of his ego in all sensesThe picture before us is that of a child who, although still considered to be very young, at three years, is a cheerful and tireless worker who is satisfied only by the continual exercise of his abilities, whose mind has no limits when it comes to absorbing everything in the environment” - Silvana Montanaro

The final chapter of this dissertation reflected upon perceptions of adult-child collaboration in Montessori toddler environments and how this collaboration is important in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction for toddlers. First, the theory highlighted in this chapter took the presented concepts from the literature review and was then connected to insights and concepts illuminated by those who participated in both the interviews as well as the survey. Second, the implications for study in connection with policies, stakeholders, and educational organizations were discussed. Third, the limitations of the research were highlighted. Fourth, plans for further research and study was described. And finally, fifth, the major learnings from the project were presented to support current educators, particularly those working with young children in early childhood education.

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Appendix A: Survey

Survey on Perceptions of Adult-Child Collaboration in a Montessori Toddler Environment

As a Montessori toddler assistant, you have an advantageous perspective within the classroom. You are witness to how the lead toddler guide collaborates with toddlers. Your feedback is voluntary but very important for my research! Thank you for taking this survey.

I am completing a doctorate in education at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN and I am currently working on my dissertation. This survey is one research method informing my dissertation focused on my primary research question, "How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?" Your responses may be used in furthering my research and may be included in my dissertation but will not be identified with you. There is little or no risk involved in participating in this survey. Your identity will be protected. Neither your name nor identifying characteristics will appear in the dissertation. All results will be confidential and anonymous. You may decide not to participate at any time without negative consequences.

Survey Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your sex?
4. What is your level of education?
5. How many years have you worked in Montessori?
6. How many years have you been a Montessori toddler assistant?
7. On a five-point scale (where 5 is "very often" and 1 is "never"), how often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers in regards to language development? Adult speaks to toddler at his or her eye-level.
8. Adult reads and sings to toddlers.
9. Adult names vocabulary of toddler's environment to toddler.
10. Adult works with language materials within the Montessori environment with toddlers.
11. Adult speaks respectfully to the toddler within the Montessori toddler community.
12. Adult does not use baby talk to toddlers.
13. On a five-point scale (where 5 is "very often" and 1 is "never"), how often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers in regards to developing independence? Adult gives toddler two choices.
14. Adult assists toddler in dressing and undressing when needed.
15. Adult assists toddler to engage in work and then fades away.
16. Adult re-presents work to toddler when he or she struggles.

17. Adult assists toddler in difficult tasks, i.e., carrying a table.
18. Adult encourages toddlers to wear cloth underpants and use toilet (versus diapers).
19. Adult encourages toddlers to feed self for snacks and meals.
20. Adult encourages toddler in self-care, i.e., wipe own nose.
21. On a five-point scale (where 1 is "never" and 5 is "always"), how often do you observe Montessori toddler guides practice the following with toddlers in regards to social interaction? Adult engages in conversation with toddler.
22. Adult encourages toddler to care for the environment, i.e., wipe up a spill, create a flower arrangement.
23. Adult encourages empathy within toddler community, i.e., showing care for peers when one is hurt.
24. Adult models grace and courtesy to the toddlers, i.e., greets others upon arrival.
25. Adult models affection, i.e., gives hugs.
26. Adult models helping others, i.e., helps a struggling friend put on his or her shoes.
27. From your experience within the Montessori toddler community, how important do you feel it is for adults to know about adult-child collaboration?
28. Please write a short statement that describes how the adults in a Montessori toddler community support the development of adult-child collaboration?
29. What is one example of adult-child collaboration within the Montessori toddler community where you assist?
30. In one sentence, how would you explain to your peers adult-child collaboration within the Montessori toddler environment where you assist?

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Description of Experience of Phenomenon of Adult-Child Collaboration in a Toddler Montessori Environment

Initial Open-ended Questions:

1. Please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment.
2. What was this experience like? How did you respond? What influenced your actions?
3. Could you please describe what led to this adult-child collaboration?
4. Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects language development within the Montessori toddler community.
5. Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects independence within the Montessori toddler community.
6. Please describe as detailed as possible your experience of adult-child collaboration and how it affects social interaction within the Montessori toddler community.
7. Please describe how you see adults working with children before and after this experience.

Intermediate Questions:

1. How have your feelings or thoughts around adult-child collaboration with toddlers changed since your experience in the Montessori toddler environment?
2. Could you please describe the most important lessons you have learned through adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment?

3. What are the greatest challenges of working with toddlers in a Montessori toddler environment? What are the sources of these challenges?

Ending Questions:

1. What do you think is most important in adult-child collaboration in a toddler Montessori environment?
2. Please tell me how you have grown as a person since you began working with toddlers in a Montessori toddler environment. What do you value most about yourself? What do others value most about you?
3. Is there something that you thought about during this interview that you had not before thought?
4. Is there anything else I should know to help me to understand adult-child collaboration in a Montessori toddler environment better?
5. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix C: Letter of Consent to Participate in Study

Letter of Informed Consent for Survey

August 23, 2018

Dear [Participant's Name],

I am completing an education doctorate at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN and I am currently working on my dissertation. My primary research question for my dissertation is *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* I am requesting your participation in an online survey that will help me learn more about the perceptions you have that will inform my research question.

The majority of the survey questions are on a 1-5 Likert scale with some open-ended questions for your consideration and response.

There is little to no risk involved in participating in the survey. If you agree to take the survey, your identity will be protected. Neither your name nor identifying characteristics will appear in the results. All results will be confidential and anonymous. The results of the survey will only be seen by me and the members of my dissertation committee. You may request a copy of your results if you desire. You may decide not to participate at any time without negative consequences.

If you need additional information please contact me or the Institutional Review Board at Hamline University.

Sincerely,
Anne Estes

Institutional Review Board
Matt Olson, Chair

aestes01@hamline.edu

mholson@hamline.edu

Informed Consent to Participate in Online Survey

(Keep this form for your records. Sign and return the form on the following page.)

I, _____, agree to participate in this online survey as a part of the dissertation project by Anne Estes.

I have received your letter about participating in an online survey as part of your research for completing your dissertation in your doctoral program. I understand that the survey is an opportunity for you to learn more about my perspectives as related to your research topic. I understand there is little to no risk involved in participating in the interview, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty or consequence.

Participant Signature

Date

Please email this form to me at aestes01@hamline.edu by September 1, 2018.

Informed Consent to Participate in Online Survey

I, _____, agree to participate in this online survey as a part of the dissertation project by Anne Estes.

I have received your letter about participating in an online survey as part of your research for completing your dissertation in your doctoral program. I understand that the survey is an opportunity for you to learn more about my perspectives as related to your research

topic. I understand there is little to no risk involved in participating in the interview, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty or consequence.

Participant Signature

Date

Please email this form to me at aestes01@hamline.edu by September 1, 2018

Letter of Informed Consent for Interview

August 23, 2018

Dear [Participant's Name],

I am completing an education doctorate at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN and I am currently working on my dissertation. My primary research question for my dissertation is *How do Montessori toddler guides perceive the importance of adult-child collaboration in developing language skills, independence, and social interaction?* To gather in-depth data, I would like to interview you.

I am requesting your participation in an interview that will help me learn more about the perceptions and experiences you have that will inform my research question. The interview questions are open ended and entirely open for your consideration and response. I will provide the questions in advance if you wish. The interview will be audio-taped and should last 45 - 60 minutes. It will take place at a time and location of your choosing during the first two weeks of September.

There is little to no risk involved in participating in the interview. If you agree to be interviewed, your identity will be protected. Neither your name nor identifying characteristics will appear in the transcription or the report. All results will be

confidential and anonymous. The transcription of the interview will only be seen by me and the members of my dissertation committee. You may request a copy of the transcription if you desire. You may decide not to participate at any time without negative consequences.

If you need additional information please contact me or the Institutional Review Board at Hamline University.

Sincerely,

Anne Estes
aestes01@hamline.edu

Institutional Review Board
 Matt Olson, Chair
mholson@hamline.edu

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

(Keep this form for your records. Sign and return the form on the following page.)

I, _____, agree to participate in this interview as a part of the dissertation project by Anne Estes.

I have received your letter about participating in an audio-taped qualitative interview as part of your research for completing your dissertation in your doctoral program. I understand that the interview is an opportunity for you to learn more about my perspectives and experiences as related to your research topic. I agree to participate in the interview at a time and place of my choosing. I understand there is little to no risk involved in participating in the interview, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty or consequence.

 Participant Signature

 Date

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

Please mail or email this form to Anne Estes by September 1, 2018

I, _____, agree to participate in this interview as a part of the dissertation project by Anne Estes.

I have received your letter about participating in an audio-taped qualitative interview as part of your research for completing your dissertation in your doctoral program. I understand that the interview is an opportunity for you to learn more about my perspectives and experiences as related to your research topic. I agree to participate in the interview at a time and place of my choosing. I understand there is little to no risk involved in participating in the interview, that my confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty or consequence.

Participant Signature

Date