

Perceptions of Montessori Education among School of Education Faculty: Preliminary Findings



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Background

Today there are more Montessori schools in the US than in all other countries combined. (Shortridge, 2007)

- 5,000 estimated total in the US. (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006)
- 400+ estimated charter and public schools. (American Montessori Society, n.d.)

Prior Research found (Murray, 2008):

- Most of the general public has heard the term "Montessori education" but claims to know little about
- Knowledge of basic elements of Montessori education is limited.
- Montessori schools are viewed as superior to schools in America in general.
- Belief in commonly reported criticisms not widespread among general public.

Research Questions

This research investigated perceptions of Montessori education in the minds of faculty members in schools of education across the country. Opinions of these individuals are important because they are at the forefront of educating the teachers of tomorrow and forming the body of knowledge that frames the discussion of the future of education in America. This preliminary presentation examines:

- How much do educational faculty members know about Montessori?
- What are the faculty members' perceptions of Montessori education?

Research Methods

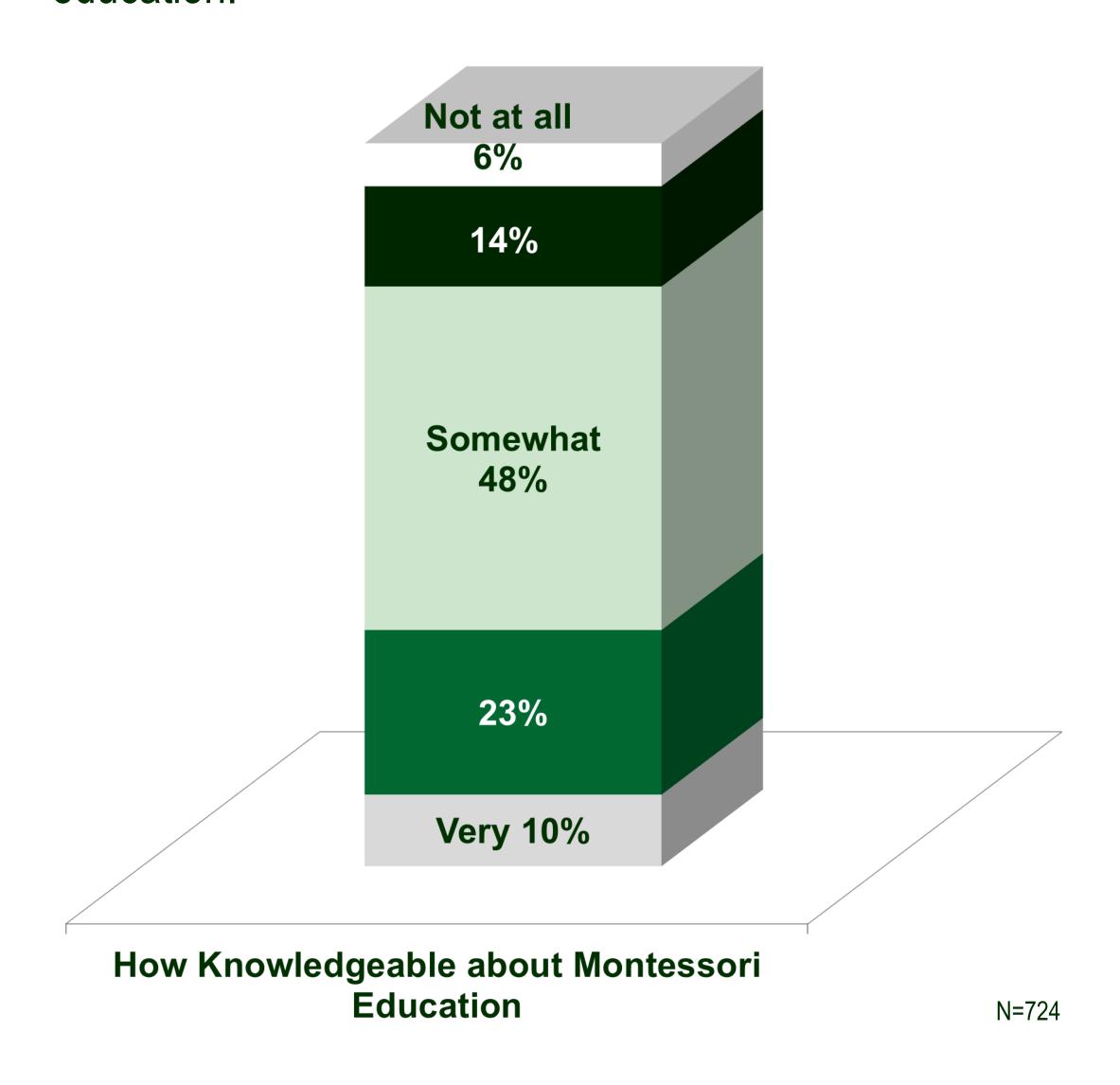
Researchers used websites from National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accredited schools to obtain faculty email addresses within the Schools of Education. Roughly 3,000 individuals were contacted via email with an invitation and a link to an anonymous online survey programmed in Survey Monkey. A total of 721 individuals responded, for a strong response rate about 20%.

NCATE currently accredits 656 colleges of education with nearly 70 more seeking NCATE accreditation. NCATE was founded in 1954 and is the teaching profession's mechanism to help to establish high quality teacher, specialist, and administrator preparation. (NCATE, n.d.).

Descriptive statistics are provided for selected survey results as preliminary findings in this poster.

Self-Reported Knowledge of Montessori Education

School of education faculty reported a moderate level of knowledge about Montessori education. Almost half reported themselves to be "somewhat" knowledgeable while a relatively small proportion said they were either "very" or "not at all" knowledgeable about Montessori education.



Knowledge of Specific Montessori Education Elements

Fifteen questions investigated faculty members' knowledge about various aspects of Montessori education, including:

- Evaluation by observation not tests
- Sensorial activities for primary
- Use of hands-on materials
- Lack of emphasis on grades and grade level
- Goals of respect, self-discipline, community, cooperation, independence, and developing concentration abilities
- Emphasis on self-correction
- Focus on instilling love of learning

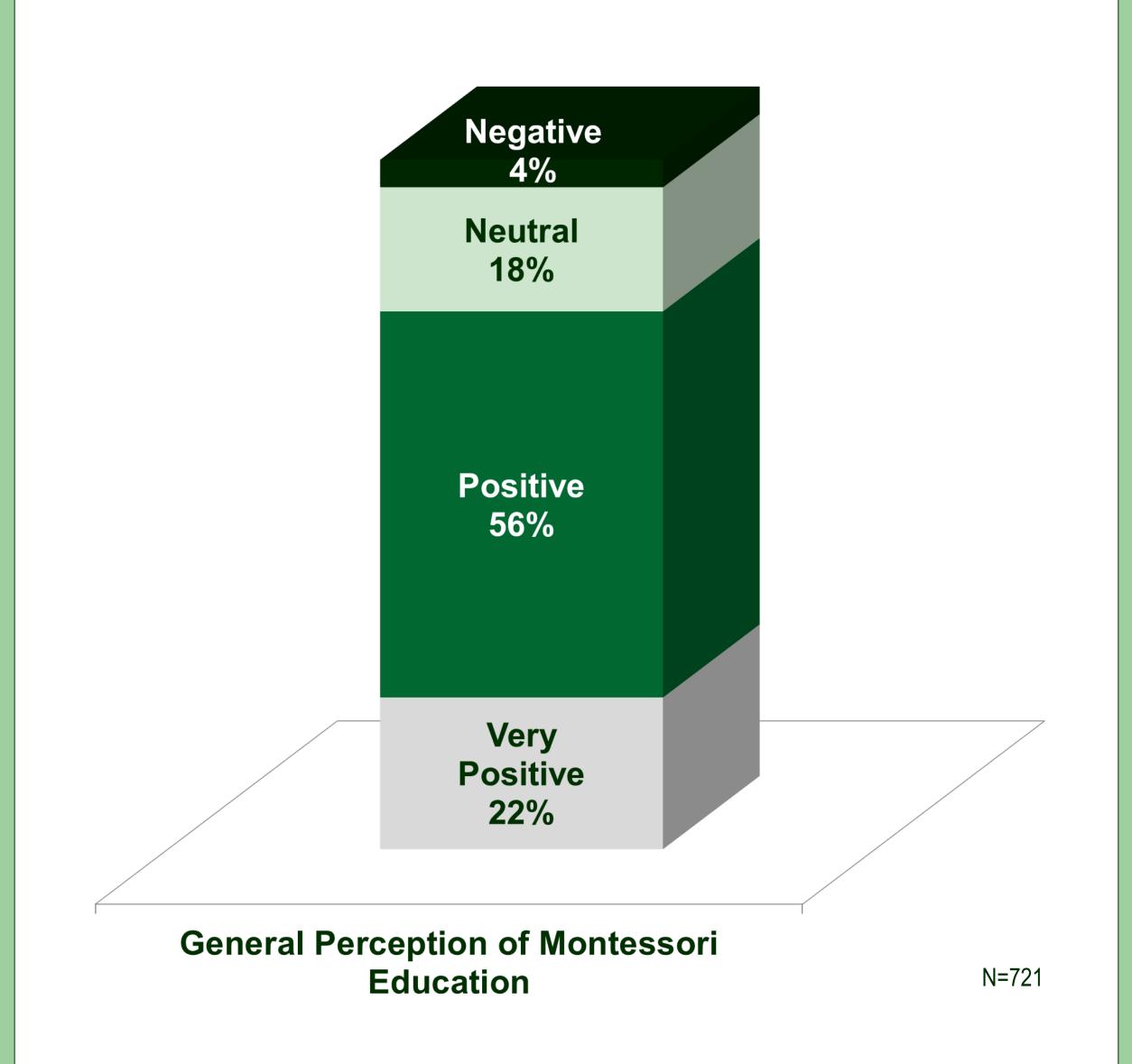
Almost half of respondents answered all 15 questions correctly, and fewer than 10% answered 12 or fewer right.

The only two issues that revealed any degree of confusion (with roughly one-fourth responding in error) were:

- Montessori's goal of developing concentration abilities
- Montessori teachers evaluating students by observing their work

Perceptions of Montessori Education

Very few negative impressions of Montessori education were evident among school of education faculty. In fact, over three-fourths reported either "positive" or "very positive" general perceptions of the method. No participants indicated a "very negative" opinion.



Perceived Montessori Strengths and Weaknesses

The study also examined faculty members' beliefs about the strengths and weaknesses of Montessori education with 18 questions rated on a five-point agreement scale. Most items received fairly positive ratings averaging 4.26 (s=.74). Two areas showing the most positive perceptions:

(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)	N	Mean	S
Encourages children's curiosity	681	4.47	.71
Helps children be independent	680	4.41	.72

Several areas showed relatively lower ratings:

(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)	N	Mean	S
Good at developing children's math skills	668	3.92	.80
Good at helping children develop the ability to concentrate	667	3.90	.84
Good at developing children's reading skills	668	3.85	.81
Good at developing children's writing skills	669	3.78	.83
Good at meeting the needs of children with special needs	664	3.30	.90

Discussion

School of education faculty are reasonably familiar with Montessori education and have a generally positive perception of it as an educational approach.

One of the less well-understood aspects of Montessori education is the focus on developing children's concentration abilities. In fact, faculty members believed Montessori was less effective at encouraging concentration than other goals. Faculty members were also less likely to believe that Montessori teachers evaluate children's work through observation, but the surprising aspect may be the evaluation of work rather than observation.

Montessori education is viewed as strong at encouraging curiosity and independence. Conversely, Montessori is viewed as being relatively less effective at developing children's math, reading and writing skills and meeting the needs of children with special needs. These findings are fairly consistent with those of a survey of the general public's perceptions of Montessori education conducted by one of the authors (Murray, 2008).

The primary challenge for the Montessori community is addressing perceptions that the approach is less effective at developing children's academic abilities—particularly those that are the focus of standardized tests which have become the primary arbiter of academic success in the United States today.

References

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