

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
April - May 2004

**National Conference
San Antonio, Texas
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That's a Good Question.

Eighth in a series of questions often asked about what is Montessori.

Isn't Montessori a religion?

What gives rise to this question are the bits and pieces of information that people gather. Montessori was Catholic, wasn't she? Montessori sounds like Monastery. Isn't this a Catholic program? And the bits and pieces continue to gather until someone can share the truth and shape the reality of what Montessori really is.

Montessori is an educational program that has a very real spiritual basis. There is nothing intrinsically spiritual about red rods. It is our approach both to the materials and to the child that takes in to account the spiritual dimension of our lives.

When education is just considered the accumulation of facts or skills it loses the power to excite, motivate and enthrall the learner. Education is discovery and exploration. Real education (discovery and exploration) is hard challenging work. But it is the kind of work that touches not only our minds but our hearts and souls. Real education has a spiritual dimension. We see this dimension effectively produced in a

Montessori classroom. We see this transforming power not only in the lives of the children and of the guides but we also see it in the environment. A Montessori environment is a unique place. The daily "miracles" of transformation that happen there begins to make us think of the environment as a "holy" place – some kind of living shrine where "miracles" happen. (No wonder people question whether it is a religion or not.)

What gives Montessori this spiritual dimension is that in the environment we are acting and reacting as we were designed to. The world has given all kinds of names to this phenomenon – being in the groove, the zone, a state of higher consciousness. Or we can simply identify it as the way God intended for us learn and to be.

It is this phenomenon of acting as we were designed to that does give us a spiritual experience and awareness. If you have a relationship to God this becomes another reminder of the Creator and the uniqueness of His creation. There are many people who have no name to give this Creator. They, however recognize the uniqueness of this gift and therefore pour themselves into Montessori whole heartedly. For many it does become a "religion". It has a creed. (It even has denominations.) It has an "other worldly" purpose. It gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It creates good. It has fanatical (in the good sense) adherents. It has all the

aspects to create a religion but it is only a tool designed by the creator and revealed to Dr. Montessori.

There is one major theological point that does need addressing. The humanistic practitioners of Montessori adapt the philosophical viewpoint that man is essentially good. A Montessori education and life style releases and develops this innate goodness.

There is no significant difference in a “Christian” approach to Montessori – respect, values, consideration but there is a major philosophical/theological difference. We might phrase it that man is essentially valuable. And because of this value he is worthy to be redeemed, renewed and transformed. If man is essentially good he does not need a savior. If man does not need a savior we have no need of Christ and therefore we have no need of Christianity. The difference that Montessori makes in our “Christian” approach is that we are far more respectful of “sinful” man - made in God’s image – yet born in sin.

God values us so highly that He sent Jesus to die for us. Though Montessori isn’t a religion it has certainly enhanced my understanding of true Christianity – with insights that are full of love, compassion and tender respect.

A Baker’s Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Sensitive periods

Of all of the insights that Dr. Montessori presents to us the concept of sensitive periods enlightens and explains so much about the ‘mystery’ of human development. As Yogi Berra has been reported to have said “You can see a lot if you just look.” But it is knowing

where to look and what to look for that requires training and practice.

So many things seem obvious after we’ve been informed. It is so much easier to connect the dots after you’ve been shown the dots. When we take into account the sensitive periods of the child we can see more clearly when they enter that “groove” that leads to enhanced learning without undue toil or stress.

Sensitive periods can be likened to being a morning or night person for an adult. We work at a higher level of efficiency if we are working within our biological time frames. The only difference for children is that these biological time frames disappear – much like baby teeth when they have served their purpose.

The sensitive period for order is classic in Montessori. But consider the three elements that create a successful utilization of this unique time. First it is recognizing this phenomenon in the child. We are at an advantage in Montessori because this is a fundamental tenet of our methodology. Now that we’ve recognized it how do we exploit it? Again it falls into a second tenet of Montessori. We are tasked with being models of action. The most effective means of teaching is modeling. Words often get in the way that is why the emphasis is on presentations, if not in silence, in near silence so the child can isolate the senses to bring them to bear on the lesson at hand. When we are consistent in our actions we give rise to the child noticing this consistency and empower them to its imitation. The third aspect is also classic – everything has its place. It has its own home. It has its own routine. When the child begins to notice this it gives rise and direction to this interior sense of order.

If every time you came into the classroom you put your coat in a different place – on a chair, over a chair, on a table, over a doorknob or on a hanger (OK, I know you wouldn't do that) you would give the child no direction by modeling. But the consistency of your actions and your placement of materials allows the child to fully develop and express this interior "need" for order. This is why toy boxes are a triple travesty: they don't fulfill the child's need for expressed order, they don't develop order and there is no aesthetic fulfillment in putting things back "where they belong".

This sensitive period for order needs all three components for the child to successfully utilize this once in a lifetime gift.

Our eighteen month old granddaughter, Madeline, (Would you like to see pictures? You'll have to ask Grandma.) on her own has been taking the napkins in the napkin rings from the table and putting them in the drawer where we keep them. The drawer is over her head. But she will pull it out and "dunk" the napkins in their "special" place. She also begins to take her Kleenex after using it will open the cabinet door where the trash is kept and put them in and close the cabinet door.

The power of order, the power of observation, the power of modeling and the power of everything having its own place again utilizes effectively this sensitive period.

Again, the other sensitive periods for language etc need to be kept in mind as we create and operate within our environments.

One consideration to note is that when you have a multi-staffed classroom, in particular, is that all of the staff make their presentations in a

similar manner for the children. No matter what rubric you were trained under (AMS, AMI, NCME etc) everyone – even within the same training groups make presentations slightly (and often more than slightly) differently.

So you have to account for the differences. As adults we can have our variations but our children need consistency. A consideration for a director is whether there should also be consistency across various environments.

Memorial Day

Maybe this year more than ever we need to share with our children the significance of Memorial Day. The joyful exuberance we celebrate on the fourth of July is made possible by the solemnity of Memorial Day.

Everything has a cost, everything has a consequence. Memorial Day is a reminder that our freedoms (and the freedom of much of the world) has been purchased with "blood, sweat, toil and tears".

Patriotism – a love of country – is an honorable and worthy virtue to share with and teach our children but it is also necessary to teach them that there are duties and responsibilities that go along with our privileges of living in the greatest land on earth. Many people will choose to point out to our children our multitude of sins and shortcomings and fail to balance that with our striving to be a just, if not Godly nation.

Give our children a good balance of understanding our rights as well as our responsibilities.

The 10 P's of Ministry Problems

Part 7 Procedures

The establishment of procedures is a two-edged sword. Procedures both cause and prevent problems. Wisdom is knowing when to create them and when to apply them.

If you have the privilege of starting a school there is a great liberty in not being bound by endless reams of procedures. After a while you begin to realize that so many of the decisions you make are repetitive and really could be handled by having a standardized approach - a procedure.

Procedures next become significant when you grow and you have more than one teacher or environment. Though we pride ourselves on being individualistic on our approach to the children we find that consistency among the adults is a requisite for being able to effectively deal with the children as well as a requisite for dealing with the parents and the staff.

While we find procedures very liberating there are times when we have created procedures that proscribe our ability to act creatively or individualistically. There is a tendency to let procedures become rules. A procedure is a standard way to address operating situations. Rules become the standard. Allowing flexibility with procedures within reason is a rationale approach to management.

We create problems for ourselves when we let the procedures dictate the flow of the organization. And we tend to create even more problems for ourselves when we let procedures become absolute rules. An example of this is when we create procedures or rules because of one person. Instead of dealing with the situation as a personnel problem which is what good

management should do we create a burden for everyone because of our inability to face the music. We've all been guilty of not wanting to confront a guilty party so we occasionally create a procedure or rule to deal with the situation. The irony is that the guilty party never thinks it applies to them.

What happens when you come into or take over a well established school that has numerous procedures in place? You walk very lightly until you have time to observe whether the procedure fulfills the intent it was created for or if the procedure creates more difficulty and ill-will than is worth it.

You have to have courage to change procedures but you also have to have wisdom in knowing that change is always difficult even if it is for the better.

You might even ask what procedures no longer serve the school community or what procedures might better serve it. The willingness to change, not for change's sake, but for efficiency and harmony is a sign of effective management.

One thing to keep in mind is do not have rules or procedures that you ignore or do not intend to enforce. Get rid of all of the encumbrances and keep only that which will help you achieve your goal of harmoniously serving your children and their families.

Ultimately, procedures are designed to eliminate problems not add to them.

Membership

Your membership is vital for the encouragement of Christian Montessori. Please join today.

Educational Principles Of Montessori

4. Hands on

The delightful part about exploring Montessori principles is the ability to filter all of our activities through this list of fundamental requirements or objectives. Hands on is not only one of the major tenets but a foundational approach that helps guide what we do.

When confronted with a topic we wish to present immediately we begin to look for a way to make it hands on. Just about everything can be presented in this manner – I'm still pondering how you might present the care of porcupines but that's another story.

By following the rubric of hands on we become more creative in how we present materials that might traditionally be lecture only. It is this creativity which also adds to the uniqueness of the presentation and the enjoyment for the learner.

Hands on is the use of one more sense within the learning process (multi-sensory). The more senses we bring to bear the greater the input, the greater the understanding.

In the "Secret of Childhood" Montessori devotes a chapter to the hand. "The human hand, so delicate and so complicated, not only allows the mind to reveal itself but it enables the whole being to enter into special relationships with its environment. We might even say that man 'takes possession of his environment with his hands'. His hands under the guidance of his intellect transform this environment and thus enable him to fulfill his mission in the world."

Hands on activity is more than just the ability to touch external objects it is the ability to touch that which is internal in the developing child and bring it to fruition.

It is the hand, among other uniquenesses, that makes us the most special of God's creation. What we can do with our hands to further our own development and the development of society is amazing.

Again, in looking at hands on materials and approaches, it is more than the ability to touch – it goes deeper than that. Montessori notes that when people marry they join hands; a woman is asked for her hand; when you take an oath you raise your hand; you shake hands in greeting and the list goes on.

Interestingly, hands on is more than tactile, it is more than symbolic; it goes to the very heart and nature of our being. That is how God made us. Is there a "logical rationale" for it? It is immaterial if there is or isn't. It is just the way God made us and Dr. Montessori observed and noted the significance of that observation.

Therefore understanding that there is a significance, whether we fully understand the significance or not, places us in a position that requires us to make use of this knowledge.

So, as you look at your environment and the things you introduce into it let your creativity soar as you ponder how to make learning more hands on.

Be careful about the "purists" in Montessori who would frown upon your creativity. It is the spirit of Montessori. NOT the letter of Montessori which is its guiding force. That is why you need to filter what you do through the principles of Montessori and not just the practices.

If Montessori were to come back today she would chide us for having been too timid to make new strides within our environments – a lot like the servant in the parable who buried his talent in the back yard and didn't make

use of its potential to give a good return to the master.

An interesting development in the last ten years has been the extensive brain research in regards to learning. The research offers us both a tremendous satisfaction in the affirmation of what Dr. Montessori observed and put into practice and a tremendous challenge to continue applying these insights into the marvelous structure we already have for our children.

Ponder the principles and use them to enhance the environment, enhance the learning and enhance the joy for our children.

Christmas in June

It is never too early to start your Christmas shopping. As Dennis the Menace tells Joey “It’s almost Halloween.” “How do you know?” “Because they already have the Christmas decorations out.”

It is not quite that bad but here is a significant thought for you. There is a gift that you could get that would bless three significant relationships in your life. It would bless the children you teach. It would bless God. And it would bless you.

The gift you give your children will be an excited teacher full of enthusiasm and new ideas to share.

The gift that you give God is a better trained ambassador to the world. The privilege we have of teaching in a Montessori environment, secular or Christian, requires us with thanksgiving to make a good return on God’s provision for us to be in such an exciting place, doing such valuable work

And the gift you give yourself by attending the Christian Montessori

Fellowship conference will be deeper insights, new methods and strategies, a fresh excitement and renewed passion for your calling.

Even if, and maybe more especially, if you don’t teach in a “Christian” environment you will receive instruction that will not only challenge you intellectually, making you a better teacher but you will be encouraged spiritually allowing your “ministry” to your children to flourish even more.

Yes, there is a cost of both time and money to attend but what you will receive will more than compensate you for your efforts.

You will also fellowship with people who share not only this fascinating way of teaching but people who share your deep and abiding faith in Jesus.

Let me share with you comments from last year’s attendees.

“The fellowship of other believers almost surpassed the Montessori presentations.”

“I felt valued, (you took good care of us.) The speakers were excellent. I will use what I learned. I am inspired to keep doing better.”

“I just feel so refreshed after each conference and it is good to be able to share with others who face the same problems as I do each day through the year.”

“This year’s conference was so much more in depth. I came away with so many ideas that I can use immediately.”

“I came discouraged and left focused and encouraged.”

“I had no expectations when I arrived. I spent the first day feeling sorry for myself that others can openly acknowledge Christ but I can’t. So what was given to me – I may not be able to plant seeds at the moment but I am preparing the soil. Thank you for a jewel of a conference.”

“Christian Montessori has opened a whole new world for me. I can hardly wait to put these ideas into practice. My students will be blessed and God will smile. This is the way God ordained our children should be taught.”

Prayerfully consider the opportunity. We are going to extend the early registration period until May 15th.

Grace and Courtesy Please and Thank You

Montessori offers many unique approaches to learning and life. Grace and courtesy, once upon a time, were common virtues or at least more common than they seem to be today. But it is only Montessori that has made this an integral part of its curriculum.

Please and thank you are not only powerful words that affect others around us but these two have amazing power to change the user as well.

I am reminded of this again as I observe my oldest granddaughter, Jacqueline (see Grandmother for pictures). She will turn three this month but for the last two or three months it has been amazing to see her use and understanding of the concept of please and thank you. It is now spontaneous with her. She uses the words, not only in the normal context of asking and receiving but in ways that many of us as adults could well do to mirror. When

Barbara picked Jacqueline and Madeline up from school last month Jacqueline looked at her grandmother and said, again spontaneously, “Thank you so much for picking me up.”

The “please and thank you” will serve her well in all of the interchanges of life. People will respond to her differently, and positively, because of this.

I remember as a child getting in trouble for failing to say please and thank you. Of course I got in trouble for a lot of other things too but two occasions forty to fifty years old still remind me about please and thank you.

Yes, please and thank you will give our children wonderful advantages but even more importantly it is what please and thank you ingrained into their hearts and minds will do for them spiritually and emotionally.

Please reminds me that I am not the center of the world. And my tantrum demands do not even bring me happiness.

Thank you reminds us constantly to live in a state of thanksgiving for all of our blessings.

Brighten the Corner...

Cindy Bussey from Shreveport, LA relates when her youngest son was five he asked if the family dog was a boy or a girl. Cindy asked her son if he was a boy or a girl. “I’m a boy.” He stated. “How do you know?” “By my clothes, my haircut and I don’t paint my toe nails.” “Does our dog have painted toe nails?” “No” he smiled, “He’s a boy too.”

National Conference

June 24-26

The Absorbent Mind

The Absorbent Heart

The conference begins at 10:00 A.M. Thursday June 24th and runs through Saturday evening.

Conference cost is \$325 (\$300 if paid by May 15th, an additional \$25 discount for CMF members) and includes 3 lunches, 2 full breakfasts, morning and afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner. More details are available on our websites:

www.christianmontessorifellowship.com

www.crossmountainforum.com

Or call 210-698-1911

Send in your registration Now

Lodging costs \$98.28 (tax included)
Double or single
Rates are good if you register for the hotel by May 24th

Conference topics include:

The special needs child

Observation

Classroom management

Hands on Bible

Record keeping

Parent conferences

And more!

We will be doing a special two session discussion and book review of the

“Secret of Childhood “

Outlines of the discussion will be sent when you register.

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Make your reservations at

The Crockett Hotel
Across from the Alamo
1-800-292-1050