

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

July 2004

Absorbent Mind Absorbent Heart

Montessori talks about the child taking in all of the sense impressions to create the intellect and define the personality.

The child also takes in spiritual impressions to create the spiritual being.

When we talk about an absorbent mind there is a tendency to picture something as empty waiting to be filled. Yet the mind is not a nothingness but vital and alive waiting for the touch of life. That is what sense expressions are – life; life all around us.

We hold the same kind of image of the soul/ heart as something empty waiting to be filled. Like the mind, the soul is not empty but waits for the divine touch – like the picture of Adam and God in the Sistine Chapel.

Neither the mind nor the soul/ heart are “empty” but only dormant – awaiting the call – like the dry bones of Ezekiel waiting to come to life.

There assuredly is a structure to the mind and the heart – like Ezekiel’s skeletons. But also like Ezekiel’s skeletons needing flesh or life to give definition.

It is the sense impressions that create the intellect. It is the spiritual impressions that create the unfolding of the spirit.

Yet it is not so much of a “creation” but a release of the potentiality that God has already implanted in both heart and mind. It is a potentiality awaiting the call.

It has been said that we are spiritual beings having an earthly experience. Though we are spirit what distinguishes us from God’s other creation is that we are intellect, thought, imagination – all products of the mind – and all reflections of the personality of the creator.

It is not so much that we “become” intellect and heart but that both intellect and heart are revealed, awakened, called.

What we do with children is not so much a “transformation” but a formation from that which is already present in embryo and potential.

You’ve heard the story of the scientists who said to God “We are technologically capable of doing what you did – creating life.” God replies, “You can do that?” “Sure”, they reply. “We’ll let’s see.” says God. “Well, first we take this dirt.” Wait a minute”, says God “Get your own dirt.”

We don’t so much even form and teach as we provide the environment for the

child to self-create or maybe that's even "re-create" or maybe that's just build on the eternal plan that God has already encompassed within the child.

Interestingly it is not only Jesus who has an incarnation. Each of us is incarnated. We our spiritual beings encased in flesh.

We talk about being tri-part beings – mind, soul and body. The body is the house - the temple of the Lord – wherein is housed the mind and heart. When all three function in harmony as they were designed to do we fulfill the highest calling of God.

Just as our mind becomes aware of existence, our soul also has this same kind of "epiphany". As Descartes said "I think, therefore I am." The same holds true for the consciousness – the self-consciousness of the soul.

Montessori repeatedly emphasizes the importance and necessity of the environment as a producer of the personality and intellect. There also is needed this same kind of environment for the definition and awareness for the child of his spiritual creation and reality.

Adults are the models for the children in both intellectual and spiritual development. We need to remember the "passive" and gentle presence we play within the environment and the child's life. Our activity and impact is directed at the environment. It is the environment that has the impact on the child. We use the environment to allow the child to discover both intellectual and spiritual truths. By using the environment we do not overwhelm the child with our own personalities – with what Montessori calls the substitution of

our own personalities for that of the child.

One of the fears of secular Montessorians is that we will impose spirituality on the children. What they fail to understand is that the environment, by the choices of the guide, is an "imposed" environment and that the child already comes with "spirituality" waiting to be stirred.

Again the Montessori emphasis on respect of the nature of the child applies both to the absorbent heart as well as to the absorbent mind.

Just as we prepare a special environment for their intellectual stimulation, we need to prepare the same kind of environment for the realization of their spiritual being.

All of the preparation that we take for intellectual development needs to be mirrored for spiritual development. Things they can see, touch, and feel prepare them to confront their spiritual reality just as they do with their intellectual reality.

The absorbent heart needs the gentleness of the savior rather than the harshness of the "prophet". Remember most prophets were sent to rebellious and disobedient people. Our children will eventually come to a personal confrontation with sin (and often) as they go deeper with God.

Depending on your theology, many people feel that you have to be able to know the exact time and date of your "conversion". But there is also the reality of being "nurtured" into the kingdom; learning to love Jesus long before you fear Him; learning to live

righteously long before you learn of your own unrighteousness.

The absorbent mind finds the environment wonderfully conducive and supportive of the new dimensions and discoveries that lay all about. The absorbent heart needs to find this same kind of environmental support.

Montessori offers educational “grace”. It does not live by “law”. The absorbent heart needs this same kind of grace to be able to go on and discover the greatness and the depths of God.

Discovery is needed for both the absorbent mind and the absorbent heart. Because once you discover something for yourself it is not retained by sheer will or memory, it is retained by “heart” never to be forgotten, never to be let go.

Toddler Materials

Courtesy of Debbie Riley
And your local “Nienhuis” Grocery store
(almost)

Toddlers love to put things into other things that is why they think that God not only made beans but noses and ears to put them in. To help channel this international urge of toddlers you might consider adding a couple of works to your toddler shelf that can be found at your local grocery store.

One of the good parts about securing these materials is that you get to eat what is in the containers before you appropriate them for the classroom. Parmesan cheese often comes in clear cylinders. When the contents have been deliciously consumed you wash the cylinder and remove the wrapper. You add ten coffee stirrers to your cylinder.

You can add them through the three shaker holes. Then after you practice opening and closing the cylinder you can try putting the coffee stirrers into the one large hole on the other side of the lid. If the spaghetti isn’t done yet you can start all over again.

The second material is redeemed after you’ve taken the strawberries from the plastic container they usually come in. These containers normally have holes at both top and bottom that will perfectly accept popsicles sticks. If you really want to be super ecological you can buy a box of popsicles enjoy the contents and wash the sticks and recycle them.

Your toddlers after having put the popsicle sticks into the container then get to open the container retrieve the sticks and start all over again.

If in the course of exploration and use your materials become worn or broken treat yourself to another batch of strawberries and popsicles.

Regional Conferences

The first of two regional conferences are now being scheduled.

Washington D.C. is set for July 31st.

Metuchen, NJ is set for August 7th

Regional conferences are being looked at for:

Atlanta
Houston
Shreveport, LA
Kansas City
Seattle
St. Paul, MN
So. California
No. California
North Carolina

We would love to add to this list if we have sufficient people (usually fifteen) to make a seminar feasible.

There are three major benefits that come from attending regional conferences. First you get to meet brothers and sisters who not only share your passion for Montessori but who share your faith in the Inspirer of Montessori. Two you get new insights, thoughts and practical applications to enhance your “ministry” in the classroom. Three, just by being there you get to encourage others that there are people who share this spiritual calling of serving children in Christ’s name (even if you can’t say it out loud). Fourth, I didn’t mention a fourth did I? Fourth, we hope to encourage you to make the effort to come to San Antonio for a marvelous time of refreshment, insight and fun at the national conference.

Here are some comments from this year’s attendees to encourage your participation in the fellowship.

“This has been the most rewarding and enlightened conference that I’ve ever attended. I came in with very limited knowledge and I now have a wealth of knowledge to get started. And the love of the people! God is truly in this midst. I thank Him for my new family.

Elberta Griffin,
Director of a new Christian Montessori School – Center of Hope
Shreveport, LA

“I look forward every year to the wonderful conference. It is a chance to hear from the Lord and other teachers concerning the coming school year. A

great time of preparation and growing spiritually and intellectually.

Cindy Creel
Shreveport, LA

“It was a blessing to share the love of God with other people.”

Nina Strane
Houston, TX

“I learned so much. The main thing is how Jesus is incorporated in everything.”

April Morris
Shreveport, LA

“The conference gave me such confidence ... as a Christian, as a teacher, as a person. I am looking forward to sharing what I’ve learned with the staff and families next school year.”

Kelly Brunelle
Director
Montessori Children’s House of
Southbridge
Southbridge, MA

“I enjoy it so much and feel so refreshed that on the last day I start looking forward to next year’s conference.”

Mary Book
Shreveport, LA

“Make an effort to get to the conference. I haven’t been able to come for several years and I realized how much I’ve missed by not being here.”

Carolyn Ely
Lewisville, TX

“It is comforting to have met so many Christian teachers. I know I can contact any of them for advice and support when I need it.”

Beth Rutan

Director of a new
Christian Montessori School
Cicero, IN

“Meeting and networking with Christian Montessori educators has inspired and refreshed me. You will be blessed if you attend this conference. The speakers were wonderful.”

Debbie Thompson

Director, University Baptist Montessori School
Shreveport, LA

“It has been an opportunity to get back to the basis of Dr. Montessori’s method of education but ultimately to focus on the real basis – God.”

Patricia Martinez

Houston, TX

“I always get refreshed at the conference. It’s like getting into a hot tub after a hard day of skiing on the slopes.”

Tom Leming

Dallas, TX

Tapes from 2004 Conference Available

The Special Needs Child. Ann McAneer
ADD, ADHD, Downs and more

Health and Fitness Patricia Wong RN
Taking care of you so you can take care of your children.

Parent Conferences Margaret Stephens
Preparing for effective parent conferences.

Record Keeping Primary Margaret Stephens

Keeping effective records to enhance your teaching and parent conferences.

Toddlers - Boundaries Debbie Riley
The special needs of toddlers.

Toddlers and their Materials Debbie Riley
Appropriate toddler materials and material making.

Helping Hurting Children Betty Spillman PHD
Divorce, death, abuse abound in our culture – ways to help children cope. (2 tapes)

Secret of Childhood Edward Fidellow
An exposition of the first 14 chapters of this valuable book. (2 tapes)

Tapes are \$8 each (\$6 for members) All ten tapes for \$50.

The Secret of Childhood

It was a challenging delight to present a book review of “The Secret of Childhood”. It was also an optimistic challenge to think that we could cover it in two sessions. Since confession is good for the soul – confession bringing humility – I confess that it was a lot harder than I had imagined to create a distilled book review. It is one thing to read the book; it is another thing to grasp all of its significance and it is yet a third (and more difficult) thing to be able to grasp it in such a manner to share it lucidly and meaningfully.

Trying to get the hands of your mind around it to squeeze from it the essence and perfume of the method is both exhilarating and humbling. I’ve probably read “The Secret of

Childhood” four times in my career. And it should be no surprise to any of us that the later readings are done with far more appreciation (and sometimes awe) of the God given inspiration that enlightened Dr. Montessori.

It is interesting to note that often CMF is accused of trying to drag religion into Montessori and trying to divide Montessorians over religion. An honest reading of any of her books will reveal a God, church and Bible consciousness in Dr. Montessori and her writing. Christian spirituality formed the basis of who she was and her approach to the children.

Montessori is truth and therefore can be used by anyone. You don’t have to even accept the underlying suppositions (about God) for the system to work. It works better if you are able to meet all the needs of the child –intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual but the method works whether you meet the spiritual needs of the child or not. Many people live their lives without ever fully developing their spiritual dimension. Truth works whether you know or even acknowledge Him who is truth.

Below are the first three chapters outlined. Numbers in parenthesis indicate page numbers in the Ballantine Books edition of “The Secret of Childhood”.

1. The Era of the Child

It is the spirit of the child that can determine the course of human progress and lead it perhaps even to a higher form of civilization.

A psychosis can have its origins in infancy.

Potential causes of psychic illness in adults can spring from the repressions of a child’s spontaneous activity by a dominating adult.

There are two levels of inquiry:

1. The struggle between an individual's natural instincts and the environmental conditions.
2. And a deeper level, struggles between a child and his mother or an adult. (10)

”When dealing with children there is a greater need of observation than probing” because they can’t tell you about childhood memories (like adults can) because they are still living them.

Observing does not involve the difficult task of probing the ills of a diseased mind but of grasping the realities of human life as mirrored in the soul of a child. (11)

New field of study concerned with what is normal with children instead of abnormal to strive to assist the psychic life of children.

2. The Accused

“Adults are accused of repressing children not from unwitting errors but from unconscious errors.”

“We are pained by conscious errors but attracted and fascinated by unknown errors, for it is this kind of error that holds the secret of progress...”

“All spiritual development is a conquest of consciousness, which assumes to itself something that was formerly outside.”

“Now if a child is to be treated differently than he is today, if he is to be saved from the conflicts that endanger his psychic life, a radical change ... must first be made; and this change must first be made in the adult.” (15)

“There is part of the child’s soul that has always been unknown but which must be known.”

We must go in search of the unknown child. “This is what the adult must do who seeks the unknown factor that lies hidden in the depths of the child’s soul.”

“This remedy is not that adults shall gain some new intellectual knowledge or achieve a higher standard of culture. No, they must find a different point of departure.”

“The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from “seeing the child” as he is. (15)

Adults: “look upon everything pertaining to a child’s soul from their own point of view.”

“Look upon a child as something empty that is to be filled through their own efforts.”

“As something lacking an inner guide and in constant need of direction.”

“An adult who acts in this way, even though he may be convinced that he is filled with zeal, love and a spirit of sacrifice on behalf of his child, unconsciously suppresses the development of the child’s own personality.” (16)

3. Biological Interlude

Inner forces work toward a predetermined goal.

You start with a cell that makes extensive transformations – some become cartilage, others nerves, others skin etc.

“The inner plan can only be seen in the accomplished work of the indefatigable cells.”

“The growth of the embryo is a miracle of creation and so wonderful because it is carried out in secret and alone. Cells make no mistake in their extensive transformations.” (18)

“But the being that is born is something more than a mere physical body. It is like the germ cell in that it has within itself predetermined psychic principles. Its body will not function merely through its various organs. It has instincts which are not to be found in the individual cells but within a living body.” (19)

“When a new being comes into existence, it contains within itself mysterious guiding principles which will be the source of its work, character and adaptation to its surroundings.”

“A child’s spirit can be so deeply hidden that it is not immediately apparent.” (20)

Regional Conference Schedule

9:00 – 4:00

**What is Christian Montessori?
Hands on Bible
Grace and Courtesy**

Classroom management
Spiritual life in the classroom
Parenting

Seminar fee \$125 (\$100 for members)

Washington D.C. Conference July 31st
Location: TBA
210-313-1642 (c)

Metuchen, NJ Conference August 7th
Children First Christian Montessori Sch.
10 Jersey Ave.
Metuchen, NJ 08840
(732) 635-1300

Christian Montessori Fellowship
22630 East Range
San Antonio, TX 78255

Join and support the fellowship by
making your check for \$25 payable to:
The Christian Montessori Fellowship or
use your Visa, Master Card, Discover or
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Credit card number _____
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It's Time!

**To become a member of the
Christian Montessori Fellowship
for the 2004 -2005 School Year**