

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
December 2003 – January 2004

National Conference
June 24 – 26, 2004
San Antonio
Conference theme:
“The Absorbent Mind;
The Absorbent Heart.”

Regional Seminar
Shreveport, LA
January 31, 2004

That’s a Good Question.

Fifth in a series of questions often asked about what is Montessori?

Isn’t Montessori too unstructured?

The real question that people are asking is “Montessori isn’t rigid enough is it?” What they are responding to is the tremendous freedom found in a Montessori environment. The problem for most people is that they have a tendency to equate freedom with disorder because they have no experience (educationally or otherwise) with the fact that real freedom requires a high sense of discipline.

The purpose of the structure in Montessori (if you remember our discussion last time – Montessori is too rigid) is to give form to our freedom. Most of us were raised in educational settings where no matter how well you did, behaved, learned, deported yourself etc – you were still treated as someone who could not handle “freedom”.

In the Montessori environment and philosophy the whole purpose of the

structure (coherent, “rigid”, given) is to empower the child to act for themselves in their own best interest – which isn’t a bad definition of freedom.

Freedom, as God sees it, isn’t just doing what you want but doing what brings honor to God and ultimately fulfillment to yourself. Man has been known to use his “freedom” in self-destructive ways – pornography, drugs, sex etc. Whereas, real freedom brings the highest blessings both temporal and eternal.

An “unstructured” Montessori environment is a laboratory for the development of responsible freedom. How will children learn to use their freedom wisely? By being given opportunities, day after day, to exercise and practice that freedom in an environment that is supportive and non-threatening to the making of mistakes. Making mistakes is part of the learning process and certainly a major part of the living process.

If children cannot safely make mistakes (and correct them) on their way to mastery we’ve added considerably to their burden of growing up. And we may even make it impossible for some to truly learn to use their God-given abilities (freedom among them) because they are burdened with the unreasonable expectation of not being allowed to make mistakes (and correcting them).

Brighten the Corner
Where you are.

Lydia Banome has written a delightful book entitled “My Three Lives” (First Books Library, ISBN: 1-4033-4283-0). Lydia’s career started as a professional dancer. Mid career she became a nun and her career culminated by becoming a Montessori teacher.

Lydia relates “I remember one time when I found several of the sandpaper tablets on the “thinking chair”. This was a small chair isolated from the group activity where children were asked to sit to think about breaking a rule. I had been teaching that each letter has its own sound but some of them break the rule and steal a sound from another letter, such as soft and hard c, g, and k. In the child’s concept these letters were relegated to the thinking chair to think about it!”

“My Three Lives” is a wonderful book on God’s guidance and plan for our lives. And where could it better end up than in a Montessori classroom.

In Memoriam

Many people in the Christian Montessori community had the pleasure of meeting Yvonne LaJesse over the years as they attended Christian Montessori conferences in Dallas. During conferences Yvonne had hosted numerous people in her home.

Yvonne was a superb Toddler teacher. In our fifteen years of working together it was amazing to see her abilities to draw out her toddlers, meet their needs and love them through potty training, learning to communicate and becoming independent learners. Her preschool co-workers were always delighted to get her “normalized” students into their environment as they

already knew how to work, to interact and to be independent.

Lunch time was an amazing experience to watch Yvonne with seven children at the lunch table. They learned to put their napkins in their laps, to pray, to wait until all had been served and to enjoy the food served. Learning to use silverware was a rite of passage for the 18 month old. They would go from fingers to spoons to forks – aided by all the practical life in the classroom.

They would also learn the adventure of new foods – new tastes, new textures. And they always surprised their parents (who thought of them just as babies and not capable of the remarkable learning they were able to do under Yvonne’s tutelage).

Yvonne’s dependence on Jesus, even beyond her training and gifts, was a constant reminder of the precious ministry we all have to God’s favorite people – our children. She taught her children to love and worship God which was her most enduring gift to them.

Yvonne fought a long battle with cancer and went to be with Jesus January 4, 2004. She was 56. We miss her and are a little bit jealous that she gets to enjoy God’s wonderful, prepared eternal environment. But of all the people I know she is one who is truly enjoying the presence of God and hearing “Well done good and faithful servant.” Rest in peace.

Valentines

Valentine’s Day is a great opportunity to share with our children not only the love we have for each other but the love that God has for us. Two ideas to use for this special time. First let the children decorate their own “mailboxes”. These can be shoe boxes or special bags to receive their

valentine's cards. This allows a special creativity as they can color and paste to their hearts content (a little pun intended). We would make it easy on the parents (and the children) by asking them to send one unaddressed card for each child in the class signed with their child's name. This alleviated them of having to use lists and would insure that everyone received cards.

A second idea is to have a "Valentine's Tree" (surely you didn't take your Christmas tree down already). You can use any kind of "tree" or object for the children to hang hearts on with the names of people they love. Obviously Mom and Dad get their own hearts. There can be hearts for Grandma and Grandpa, brothers, sisters, friends and pets. There might even be a few hearts for you too.

For those that have mastered their writing skills this gives them a wonderful opportunity to put into practice what they have learned. These can also be decorated and sent home as treasured keepsakes. Learning to express love in tangible ways is a wonderful lifetime gift. Nurturing this in our children can be one of our many blessings to them.

A Baker's Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Encouragement

Of all of the gifts we receive in life encouragement seems to be one of the greatest. Ponder the question of why adults give up on dreams, on projects, on marriages, on relationships and even on God.

Do people accept failure because they do not have talent? Do they give up on dreams because they don't have

abilities? Do they give up on marriages because there was no love? Do they give up on God because He doesn't love them? No. No. No. And definitely No.

So what is the difference between success in any of these areas (or any others) and failure? It often comes down to what you find in Proverbs 25:11 "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Words of encouragement, like water in the desert, refresh and sustain. All of us have experiences where one word of encouragement meant the difference between quitting and continuing.

Now encouragement for children is the difference between starting with joy and continuing to mastery versus procrastinating, stutter-stepping, having over-whelming fears and ultimately failing to reach their God-given potential. Those really sound like severe consequences for what seems like an innocuous failure to encourage. The real loss of joy and achievement are immeasurable.

The concept of "discouraged learners" has begun to be explored in education. The difference of what is offered in a Montessori environment is substantial because it is not just the achievement of learning but of the transformation of the learner into a proactive, joyful participant in the discovery of life. Life is learning and learning IS life. When we stop learning, stop growing; stop changing we stop the becoming of who God intends for us to be. There is a saying that "People who think they have arrived have because it means they are not going any further."

The encouragement that a child receives is not limited to the acquisition of math or language but is a well-spring from which the child can draw from all their life.

The advantage of a Montessori environment is the emphasis not on how many wrong did you get (passing) but on how many right (mastery) and the encouragement to keep working and mastering without the traditional attendant comparison and competition with your peers.

Is this the real world? Not the way the world operates but the way God intended for the world to be. So in a better sense it is the “real” world. With encouragement we achieve, we continue, and we grow.

Again, remembering that one of the most significant hallmarks of Montessori is not the tremendous learning power released in the children but the tremendous power of encouragement released in each child to become all that God intended for them to be.

In Montessori you’ve been given the gift of a methodology that embraces encouragement. Use the gift liberally.

The 10 P’s of Ministry Problems

The problem of **finances** impacts every area of ministry and life. No matter how spiritual we are finances remain a challenge. In a school the challenges are certainly different if you have all you need versus money being in short supply. I laugh when I write about money being in short supply because it seems that no matter how much money we have it is always in short supply.

Let’s look at the challenges when money seems plentiful. I know for many schools that seems more than a dream but there are times and seasons when money seems to be adequate – maybe not plentiful but adequate. Then the challenge for an administrator is where to put the money. Do you put it into

salaries? (Yes, say the teachers.) Or do you put it into new materials? (Yes, say the teachers.) Or do you put it into new support staff? (Yes, say the teachers.) I think you get the idea. We want it all because we want to do a good job. But the reality is money always creates a problem of priorities. More correctly “excess” money always creates priority problems. If you are short on money the priorities sort themselves out – food, shelter, transportation.

Our challenge in school is when there is excess money and the priorities for spending it don’t match ours. How we go about making our thoughts known, how we deal with our attitudes (and sometimes disappointments) says a lot about our trust in God and our maturity.

Now administrators will like it when I encourage you to be a team player and when I share with you the thought that administrators have to look at the whole school while you have the luxury of looking only at your area.

Now they may not be as happy when I counsel you that if your disappointment and disagreement is too great for you to accept – then it may be time for you to move on. In fact sometimes it is the disagreements that encourage and propel good teachers to go out and start their own schools. Also there are times when we learn to bear our disappointments knowing that in time we will return to an acceptable emotional equilibrium and continue to successfully meet the needs of our children in our present situation.

However problems that cause us to look for a new school are usually not just about money but philosophy. Yes the philosophy of money is part of it and may be the tipping point but ultimately we may need to move on if we can’t resolve our differences.

Now on the other hand what do you do when money is in short, short supply? We all know the first thing that doesn't get funded – salary increases. Interestingly, everything else being equal, that doesn't cause the same problems as excess money. We tend to feel that we are all in the same boat and we man the oars and pull together because we believe in our mission and what we do.

Communications has to be the priority when dealing with finances. Expectations and assumptions create far more difficulties than the lack of money. I used to explain to my staff that if each of our schools' four divisions (toddlers, preschool, elementary and high school) asked for a \$100 and all I had was \$25, no matter who I gave the \$25 to, they all would be mad – the three who received nothing and the one who didn't receive the whole hundred. Again communications is the only way to deal with financial challenges. And earned credibility and openness go a long way to diffuse the problems caused by the challenges of money.

Educational Principles Of Montessori

Principles are defined as “A comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption; a rule or code of conduct” (Merriam Webster 10th edition) As we explore and study our Montessori roots we are continually blessed by the structure of principles that Montessori discovered. It is these principles that give a coherent structure not only to the classroom but to our approach to the children and their learning. It is these principles that make it possible for us to

consistently do good for our children and keep us on track.

It is amazing how many and varied are the principles we discover. In future months we'll explore the common and well known principles (hands on, individualized etc) and how they form our approach but today I would like to offer you a different look at a bedrock Montessori principle – Montessori is **Christ-centered**. Now I know most of us never heard anything like that in our training. We haven't heard it at conferences or seminars but it is the overarching principle of Montessori and the principle that infuses every Montessori school. I can see some brows furrowed as you ponder how can that be because my training, my environment and my school are all secular. Remember “secular” only keeps out religion – not truth and not the spirit of truth. Montessori's early writings are full of scripture and spiritual insight. She wrote from and lived in a society that basically accepted a Christian world view. Now whether they lived it or not was not essential for the propagation of a “new” manifestation of truth. For those of a spiritual nature (Christian in that society) there resonated something of the eternal in what she revealed. And there still is something eternal in Montessori that resonates with people of a spiritual nature.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus. “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?” was their response later. They had this tremendous spiritual experience without being able to identify its author. Was the experience any less real because they could not “name” or credit the source?

Children face a similar “educational” challenge. They don’t know what things are in life until they experience them (tactile) – a chair, a table. They still don’t “know” what they are until given a name - a table. When they see the table they are able to name it. It is only later after they have experienced the table, and the word that they can be able to give a definition to what table means. And then make the leap from their particular limited experience to a universal understanding of what may constitute a table.

Life really is a three period lesson: This is ...; Show me the ...; What is this? And it is only at that point that we are empowered to go beyond our sense experience and enter into the wider world of intellect and spirit where we can conceptualize that which is not material – hope, love and faith.

Montessori discovered the child – as God made him. And the success we have in following her discoveries is the releasing of the potential and power that God created in each individual.

Montessori is Christ-centered because “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” John 1:3-4.

Can there be anything more full of life and light than a Montessori classroom with children functioning as their creator intended.

Many may not call it by its name – they may not know its name but the power of its truth lives in the environment waiting to be discovered, named and embraced.

A Management Seminar for Montessori Directors

www.crossmountainforum.com

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Christian Montessori Fellowship

Membership Application

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How long have you taught? _____

Level you teach

: _____

Are you a: teacher _____

(Mark all that apply.)

administrator _____

owner _____

other _____

What is your church affiliation

Interests

What is your interest in Christian Montessori?

To teach in a Christian Montessori school _____

To start a Christian Montessori school _____

To transform an existing school _____

To be a better teacher where you are now _____

Not sure at this time _____

Are you familiar with hands on Bible curriculums (Godly play, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd)? Yes _____ No _____

Is there a need for training from a Christian viewpoint? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have an interest in attending CMF seminars near you? Yes _____ No _____

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5. Reduced advertising costs in the Cobbler

6. Discounts from selected vendors

7. A nice warm feeling knowing you are not alone and are not the only one seeking to return to the true spiritual roots of this unique education.

8. Your membership will help you, and many others, to better serve your children in Christ's name by providing opportunities for fellowship, learning and encouragement.

9. We have found a "pearl of great price" and your support of the Christian Montessori Fellowship will help spread this "good news" so many more children might truly be nurtured intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually and come to know the Good Shepherd personally.

Join and support the fellowship by making your check for \$50 payable to: The Christian Montessori Fellowship or use your Visa, Master Card, Discover or American Express.

Credit card number _____

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Regional Seminar

Saturday January 31st
9 A.M. – 3 P.M.

Christian Center School

207 Idema Street

Shreveport, LA 71106

318-688-9858

Seminar Cost \$125

Register by January 24 cost \$100

Additional \$25 CMF

Membership discount

Topics

Montessori Principles

Hands on Bible

Parenting

Classroom Management

The Normalized Child

Christian Montessori Fellowship

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