

Archive for May, 2010

May 10th, 2010

What I wish I knew before I started Part 6

Going Deep Instead of Wide

There are so many parts to Montessori education that are so fascinating we often can miss the forest because of the trees. The first tree that arrests our attention is the multitude of materials. In fact, it is the materials that people often misconstrue as being "Montessori education." Yes, the materials are a big part of Montessori but they are not even the heart of it. (The heart of Montessori will be a topic for another day.) But we need to get the relationship of the materials to the learning in right perspective. One of the major underpinnings of Montessori philosophy is the foundational place of the "environment" in learning. The environment, itself, is a teaching tool. Traditional classrooms decorate the walls. A Montessori classroom fills shelves with materials for hands on, independent learning. But here is the challenge.

If hands on is good – then more hands on must be better! By that matrix we are going wide instead of deep. Significant (and efficient) learning (what happens in Montessori) occurs when the learning occupies no more or no less energy or time than is required to master the material. Children are neither bored nor frustrated; bored because they have to wait on others, or frustrated by being made to move on until they have mastered the material. Learning is accompanied by great joy.

We sabotage part of this process when we add layers of presentations to our shelves. We have been in multiple classrooms where we find "extra" lessons. We have seen matching cards for the pink tower and broad stair. We have seen matching cards (and design cards) for the knobless cylinders. "Interesting" variations but in some sense an abuse of the material. Pink towers have a specific purpose. By adding these variations (which do not enhance the educational function of the Pink Tower) we cause the student to go wide instead of deep. Of course the student is going to explore every variation you put on the shelf. If you have twenty puzzles – they will do all twenty puzzles. You see this particularly in the

variations of Alphabet puzzles – which they do as puzzles rather than meaningful acquisition of the alphabet.

The same is seen even in practical life – too many sorting exercises (all of them cute.) And because they are there the child is impelled to do all the variations – going wide instead of deep. How about carrot peeling which is followed by cucumber, potato and banana peeling. Window cleaning is followed by sun glass cleaning – all going wide instead of deep.

Once the child masters a concept – then the next concept – which is more advanced, needs to be presented. If you continue to present (and that is what full shelves do) multiple variations, the child's learning will continue to go wide instead of deep. The blessing of Montessori is that the child's own drive will compel him or her to go deeper into the learning if they are not distracted by all the pretty and interesting variations. However, you should note that there are times when some children will need extra variations and these are brought out for them. Some children – some time.

A major significance of practical life is the preparation for large and small motor coordination. A significance of sensorial is the use of the senses to enter into the intellectual realm. These two avenues combined begin to give the child access to writing and reading and the mathematical world which are two major keys to self-education. We don't advocate (and we don't need to) the rush to writing and reading and math (which parents are clamoring for) but at the same time we hinder children's ability to move deep by providing too wide a scope of repetitive exercises in the classroom.

Our challenge is to remove the fluff (as cute as it might be) and to allow the child's own drive for accomplishment and discovery to propel them to go deep – when they are ready. They love a challenge – and if you have twenty puzzles the challenge is to do them all – when what they really need is the challenge of going deep.

May 6th, 2010

Advancing the Kingdom of God

Dr. Montessori believed that she was given the inspiration for this method in order to advance the kingdom of God. We face the personal challenge of understanding that our vocation (and calling) as Montessori teachers is not solely (or even primarily) about education. When we define Montessori education as a "spiritual journey lived out in an educational setting" we can begin to see the immensity and life changing importance in what we do. Most of us would shun the title of "missionary" because we feel we haven't gone anywhere – except to work. Yet – you've gone out into the world – to change it, to make it a better place, to bless children and their families. Even if you don't carry an official title, you are carrying a God-ordained commission. (And look on the bright side – you are being paid like a missionary!) And you are doing God's work. The transformation that happens to your children under your daily care is a mark of the eternal value of your calling.

The purpose of the Christian Montessori Fellowship (CMF):

- Network those Montessorians and Montessori schools who share this goal of introducing children to Jesus.
- Provide encouragement and excellence in teaching.
- Create a Christian Montessori training program in order to take the Gospel around the world.

The first two goals have been addressed and now the third goal is coming on line – literally. The training program is going on line so schools all over the world can access the ability to train new Christian Montessori teachers. While we are actively involved teaching and training here the next phase of activity for CMF is being launched world wide.

With your help!

We look to establish a Christian Montessori training center on each continent within the next two years.

And within five years to establish a Christian Montessori training center in each country that wants one.

There are not many who will share the passion for this mission – except for people like you who love God and love Montessori. Your support, your prayers, your encouragement and your membership in CMF will help "Advance the Kingdom of God."

For the last nine years we have made our newsletters available without cost – and will continue to do so. But your membership is not just about what you receive but what you are able to give back. There is a whole world out there that needs to hear about Jesus and a world that wants to educate their children. We have this gift in our hands – help us give it to the children of the world.

Individual memberships are \$35 and school memberships are \$150. Each comes with an array of benefits. Please visit www.crossmountainpress.com and join today. Help us reach the children of the world.