

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
August 2004

Regional Conferences

Atlanta September 18
Charlotte September 25
Ann Arbor October 9
Seattle October 16
Kansas City October 30
Shreveport, LA January 22
Houston January 29

Conferences dates are still being set up for N. California, S. California, and Boston.

A Baker's Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Development of Initiative

For most of us our education offered few opportunities to exercise initiative. By the nature of our classrooms, teachers were trying to get everyone to finish their assignments in a timely fashion so the class could move onto the next task. Initiative was neither encouraged nor welcomed because a student's initiative would have required a whole different approach from the teacher plus a lot more work.

The philosophical construct of a Montessori environment not only fosters initiative but encourages it. Student's do not wait around for the teacher. Student's have been taught the general principles and approaches to the material

and have been freed to explore and delve into learning. The development of initiative is one of the main differences between being driven to learn and being led, encouraged and excited to learn.

The student who begins to use initiative also begins to experience the heady sensation of beginning a project (of choice) and seeing it through to the end. Many of our tasks in life are imposed on us – and not just in school. But the real passion in life for learning or anything else comes when we get to choose our own passion and pour all of our energies into its completion. We are all familiar with how children will work for hours on a project (we are not talking just about school). We see how they pour themselves into a task we may find trivial or even meaningless; and how much passion they give to it and how much joy they take from it.

They shepherd their project to a joyful completion because it is theirs. They are not hirelings.

Encouraging initiative creates the formation of character where action is active rather than reactive; where dreams become possible because you are not waiting for someone else to come along and hitch your wagon to a star.

Our environments are designed to encourage initiative, exploration and discovery. If a student becomes turned on to rockets how many books will he read? Far more than could ever be assigned. If a student reads about

rockets, writes about rockets, makes rockets, calculates miles and orbits, learns about fuel, planets and galaxies and their Creator what part of learning haven't we touched? Oh, yes, he will draw rockets too. Not a bad outcome for the teacher's investment of a little guidance and encouragement for a student's initiative.

What about our lesson plans? If the concepts we are trying to teach have been covered – writing, reading, math, science etc – we go with the spirit of the law of learning rather than the letter of the law. We learn to guide the initiative and support the passion. And because we champion their initiative we partner with them in learning. When they come to the educational pills they have to swallow the honey of their initiative will help make the medicine go down a whole lot smoother.

The great discoveries in life all come from people who exercise initiative and passion in their quest, be it for a better mouse trap, a better life or a better world.

Holidays

Labor Day

Work is God's idea. Work is not part of the curse. Yes we will "by the sweat of our brow eat our bread" because the earth is cursed (Genesis 3:17) but work itself was instituted by God in the garden before the fall. Adam had work to do – work God gave him to do - meaningful work - fulfilling work. In Genesis 2:15 we are told, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Work is God's idea and as we share that with our children hopefully we convey to them how it pleases God that we do work.

This is a major distinction to what we find in society where the ultimate goal seems to be to retire from work.

We need to share with our children that to find joy in our work is also to please God. Our work is much easier when we find it joyful – or is it the other way around - when we are joyful our work is easier? Either way we fulfill God's plan for us as we find the unique work that He has equipped each of us for. Interestingly in Montessori we find that "our work is our play" and that there is great joy in the process of discovery and mastery.

Labor day should be more than just a day off from school or work it should be a reminder to us and to our children of the purpose and dignity that God has given to us in the opportunity of work.

Jesus came to redeem, not only, our souls but our relationships, our struggles, our lives and our work.

Educational Principles

Of Montessori

5. Discovery

It is ironic that the seemingly most effective short term means of traditional teaching – lecturing – in the long run is far less effective than the Montessori principle of discovery.

By preparing the environment, by tilling the soil of the child's heart and mind you prepare the child to bring forth the fruit of learning with the great "aha" moments never to be forgotten. In a Christian environment the spiritual part of the child's life is open to discovery. Montessori learning is very much akin to this spiritual journey we are all on. We may be told all kinds of truths about God and Jesus but it is only information until we discover our place in Christ; until we

have our own personal “aha” moments when we discover who Jesus really is.

Discovery is never purely random. Discovery takes place in an environment set up by the teachers and guides. That which waits to be discovered is what the child is needing. The same thing can be said in spiritual discovery. God knows what we need and he prepares a whole world for us to discover Him. He does not lecture us from the skies but makes it possible for us when we seek to find Him.

And it is this discovery of God in all of the circumstances of our lives that puts us in awe of His care and concern for us. He prepares encouragement and grace along the way. And even though we know He cares for us it is these small discoveries (revelations) that speak louder than even words from the skies. And interesting quote from Stanley Hauerwas, in another context, that is very apropos here. “It is hard to remember that Jesus did not come to make us safe, but rather to make us disciples, citizens of a kingdom of surprise.”

If you walk with God long enough you almost get used to the surprises (and blessings) He showers on us. And you also get used to not telling God how to run His world because you’ve got it all figured out.

That is what I love about Montessori – you learn to treat each of God’s children as He would treat them. You don’t treat them by formula, or age or sex, or height – you treat them as the unique and beloved creations of our Heavenly Father.

There is a lot of discovery that goes on in a classroom and obviously it all doesn’t belong to the children.

The Secret of Childhood

Chapters 4-6 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition.

4. The Newborn Child

“Our attitude towards the newborn child should not be one of compassion but rather of reverence before the mystery of creation, that a spiritual being has been confined within the limits perceptible to us.” (24)

5. The Natural Instincts

“Nature’s protective instincts are rightly developed only when they are free from artificial constraints.” (27)

“Delicate care ... is lavished upon the physical welfare of a newborn child; attention should be paid to its psychic needs as well.” (28)

6. The Spiritual Embryo

Mystery – when a spirit enclosed in flesh comes to live in the world.

If we understand by ‘education’ a child’s psychic rather than its intellectual development, we may truly say ... that a child’s development should begin at birth.” (29)

The human spirit can be so profoundly hidden that it does not readily reveal itself like the instinct of animals. The very fact that a child is not subject to fixed and determined guiding instincts is an indication of its innate liberty and freedom of action.” (31)

“Every man has his own creative spirit that makes him a work of art.”

“This fashioning of human personality is a secret ‘incarnation.’ The child is an enigma. All that we know is that he has the highest potentialities, but we do not know what he will be. He must ‘become incarnate’ with the help of his own will.” (32)

“That which is commonly called ‘flesh’ is a complex of ‘voluntary muscles,’ which, as the name would indicate are moved by the will. Without these muscles, so intimately connected with man’s psychic life, the will could do nothing.”

“The muscles, as they grow strong, await a command of the will to coordinate them.” (33)

“But a man is capable of becoming anything, and his apparent helplessness as a child is the seedbed of his distinctive personality.”

“Making use of his own will in his contact with his environment, he develops his various faculties and thus becomes in a sense his own creator.”

“Adults have imagined that they were the molders of the child and the builders of his psychic life.”

“In so doing, adults, claim for themselves an almost divine power, making themselves gods to their children, and applying to themselves the words of Genesis: ‘I will make man in my image.’ Pride was man’s first sin; his attempts to replace God has been the

cause of the misery of all his descendants. (34)

“But if a child has within himself the key to his own personality, if he has a plan of development and laws to be observed, these must be delicate powers indeed, and an adult by his untimely interventions can prevent their secret realization. From time immemorial men, through their interference with these natural laws, have hindered the divine plan for children and, as a consequence, God’s plan for men themselves.”

“A child possesses an active psychic life even when he cannot manifest it, and that the child must secretly perfect this inner life over a long period of time.”

“The child becoming incarnate is a spiritual embryo which needs its own special environment.”

“A child’s incarnation is effected through hidden toil.” (35)

“No other creature experiences this tiring sensation of willing that which does not yet exist.”

“There is an interchange between the individual, the spiritual embryo, and its environment. It is through the environment that the individual is molded and brought to perfection. A child is forced to come to terms with his surroundings and the efforts entailed lead to an integration of his personality.”

“This slow and gradual activity brings about a continuous conquest of the instrument by the spirit The spirit must be in constant command so that

movements which are not under the direction of fixed instincts do not degenerate into chaos.”

“Just as the embryo becomes a child and a child becomes a man, so the human personality is formed through its own efforts.”

“We should regard this secret effort of the child as something sacred. We should welcome its arduous manifestations since it is in this creative period that an individual’s future personality is determined.” (36)

Grace and Courtesy Learning how to vomit politely

You read that right. I laughed as I typed it. I don’t know if I laugh when I clean it up though. Maria Hager, director of Children First, Christian Montessori School in Metuchen, NJ shared this at our recent regional conference. You teach children that when their stomachs are upset and they feel that they are going to vomit to go to the rest room, if they can’t make the rest room, to look for a trash can or to go to a tiled area or the hall way.

I thought it was a good concept to help prepare children for that eventuality otherwise they have no idea what to do when the time comes. Who’d have thought this was also Grace and Courtesy?

The 10 P’s of Ministry Pressure

Pressure is normal and even needed to sustain life. Without atmospheric pressure we would not survive. Pressure

affects our performance and health. When you go high in the mountains the change of pressure impacts our bodies – it also impacts our cooking and baking. The deeper you go under water, the greater the pressure and the greater the danger. Yet there are rules and guidelines that tell you what is safe or tolerable. We need to be aware of our own daily guidelines for dealing with pressure.

There are five pressures we commonly face in school (and in life): emotional, ethical, financial, relationships and spiritual. Balancing them is a work of major effort. Remember in management (as in life) you rarely “solve” problems, you basically manage them so you can function at an optimum level.

How do we deal with the emotional pressures we face in the classroom? First, by recognizing that there are emotional pressures, we are not taken by surprise by our emotions. Emotional pressures can either start internally or externally but they ultimately come to a focus internally. Internal pressures include being over-tired, being impacted by the barometer and the weather, time of month (for both men and women), unresolved issues outside of the classroom and even your own character contributes to the pressures (perfectionism, impatience and negativity are just a few).

If that weren’t enough there are time pressures (even in a Montessori school), expectations from your co-workers, director, parents and even the children – and don’t forget the field trip, the Christmas program, open house and your review. I think that is enough to get started.

How do you deal with the pressure? One at a time. Start by putting them into categories: things I can affect, things I can't, things that will go away and things that will bite me if I don't deal with them first. Recognizing the pressures is always the first step in dealing with it. There would be mornings that I would just stay (or is that hide) in my office so I didn't transfer my pressures and stresses to the staff.

Often prayer releases our pressures just enough so we can continue to function. Prayer and throwing ourselves on God's ever present mercy is a lot like the safety valve on a pressure cooker. The safety valve lets just enough steam off to keep the pot from exploding. Many younger people will have no idea what a pressure cooker is or does. "It is an airtight pot for quick cooking or preserving of foods by means of super heated steam under pressure."

God promises never to put on us more than we can bear. It is a good thing to remember when we are surrounded by all of our emotional pressures.

Regional Seminar Agenda

9:00 A.M. -5:00 P.M.

What is Christian Montessori?

Dorothy Sayres noted novelist of the 20th century stated "The only Christian work is work well done." Therefore a definition of Christian Montessori must emphasize excellence in Montessori teaching before we seek to label it Christian. This 22 point discussion details the Christian nature of Montessori education as it reflects Biblical and spiritual truths. You don't have to teach in a Christian school to be a Christian Montessori teacher.

Grace and Courtesy

No one was ever won to Christ by bad manners. But grace and courtesy go further than just manners. Grace and courtesy is a way of looking at life. It is a way of dealing with people as God would have us do. We will explore, not only the practices of grace and courtesy, as should be found in the environment but look at the rationale for grace and courtesy. We will look at the ramifications of their use on the environment as well as the individual.

Hands on Bible

Touching the word of God helps children internalize the eternal truths God has for us. It is more than just hearing the story. It is taking it in with every fiber of your being. It is a multi-dimensional experience, not only for the here and now but for eternity. What great joy belongs to the child when he discovers for himself who is the Good Shepherd.

Practical Life

The cornerstone of Montessori is found in the exercises of practical life. The foundations of academic success are found in the mastery of practical life. The beginnings of coherence for the learner and the learning process are rooted in this area that too often parents (and some teachers) want to get over quickly so they can get to the "good stuff". Understanding practical life changes the guide's attitude for this preparation for all that is to come.

Spiritual Life in the Classroom

The spiritual development of the child is not limited to Bible stories and Christian songs. The environment offers multiple opportunities to build the spiritual life of the child. Every activity - from snack time, playground, circle time and even the work itself is full of moments of grace available to build up the child.

Parenting

The most important, and often least utilized, assistant for the classroom is the parent. A new look at fostering this partnership will bring great dividends not only to the environment but to the child's development as well. Every effort spent on parents results in multiple blessings.

Classroom Management

There are three elements of classroom management: the environment, the guide and the students themselves. Classroom management is not really a free for all. Montessori counsels us to be careful not to destroy that which is good but also not to tolerate that which is detrimental. How do you learn the difference? From experience. And you gain experience from observation.

Directory

Next month we will be publishing a directory of our membership and of all of the schools that we have found that use Montessori and are concerned with the Christian spiritual formation of their children. To make our directory as complete as possible we would like to ask that each Christian Montessori school send us a list of their teachers with addresses, phone and email so we can send them their own copy of the Cobbler. Many of you working in secular schools also know people who share this spiritual dimension in their lives and would be interested in the fellowship.

Would each of you take just a moment to update your information for

our files: name, address, phone, email and school. Email those to us at Fidellow@swbell.net. Or call 210-698-1911

Set up a school visit in conjunction with the regional conference.

Regional Conference locations

Atlanta September 18

Alpharetta International Academy
4772 Webb Bridge Rd.
Alpharetta, GA 30005
770-475-0558

Charlotte September 25

Lake Norman Day School
14101 Stumptown Rd
Huntersville, NC
704-400-8150

Ann Arbor October 9

Go Like the Wind Montessori
3540 Dixboro Lane
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
734-747-7422

Seattle October 16

Miracle Ranch
15999 Sidney Rd. SW
Port Orchard, WA 98367
2353-851-4410

Kansas City October 30

Overland Park Montessori
8029 Overland Park Dr.
Overland Park, KS 66204

Membership

Your membership is vital to the work of the fellowship. Please join today for the 2004 – 2005 school year.

www.Christianmontessorifellowship.com

Regional Conference Cost and Registration

Seminar Fee **\$150**
Early Registration **\$125**
(Three weeks before
Seminar)
Membership discount **\$25**

Name _____
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School _____

Registration may be paid by check or
credit card.

Order Form

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