

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
November 2004

National Conference

**San Antonio
June 23 -25, 2005**

Regional Seminars

Boston, November 20
Shreveport, LA January 22
Houston January 29

The Purpose of the Gift Given to Maria Montessori

Montessori's biographer, E.M. Standing, writes in the foreword of "The Child in the Church", "Montessori herself admitted to the present writer on more than one occasion that in the working out of her own educational ideas she learned much from what she called the "pedagogical method" of the Church. Furthermore, she put on record that – as one of the results of her experiments, particularly in Barcelona - her own method could only find its fullest expression when applied to the teaching of the Catholic faith. In fact, she was convinced that this new method was, by a peculiar and providential concatenation of circumstances placed in her hands for the advancement of the Kingdom of God through its application to teaching the truths of the Catholic faith."

**Your membership
is vital to the ministry
of the fellowship**

The Vision for Christian Montessori

The delight that Barbara and I have as we travel and do seminars is that we get to meet some of the most wonderful people in the world. We get to visit extraordinary schools and to meet some of the most dedicated Christians and teachers.

Over the last months we've been reminded over and over, and nudged by God and His people to remember the vision He gave for the Christian Montessori Fellowship many years ago. The vision is to spread this wonderful way of teaching in order to bless multitudes of children and to empower His kingdom with transformed lives.

There are three parts to this vision. First, to empower every Christian Montessori school to be not only the finest Montessori school but to be about the Father's business of spiritual transformation and dedication.

The second part of this vision is to train teachers to be a part of this renaissance of learning and spiritual life.

And the third part of this vision is the Great Commission of taking Jesus to the whole world.

Like most of you, when I ran a school, I was challenged and blessed everyday with just the task at hand. For years we thought (and wished) about how wonderful it would be to have trained Christian Montessori teachers readily available. As most of you know

just finding Montessori teachers alone is a challenge. Finding a Christian Montessori teacher is looking for a Pearl of Great Price. And then to find a Christian Montessori teacher who is good, trained, and seasoned (and able to work for what we pay) comes close to being an absolute miracle.

The miracle is – we actually do find them from time to time. Our vision for the Christian Montessori Fellowship is to make those miracles happen far more often. But even more importantly – is to make those miracles happen more often for more children all around the world.

There are three ways we can make that happen. First, again, is to make every existing Montessori school a model, second is to challenge Christians to start more Montessori schools, convert existing Montessori schools and convert existing Christian Schools. And ultimately, to create mission schools around the world.

If we are going to be able to do this we are going to need to train thousands of Montessori teachers. I know, just trying to find one or two, let alone thousands, is a daunting task. And that is why it hasn't been done yet.

Training! So why reinvent the wheel? There are many wonderful training centers that do an excellent job. Why start all over again? Because Christian Montessori teachers need to be trained **with** all of the spiritual and Biblical insights that permeate and saturate Montessori's original writings and teaching.

Many wonderful secular Montessorians train and equip Montessori teachers but they don't have the same purpose as Christian Montessorians – and that is to proclaim the Gospel through this life giving way

of teaching. Many Montessorians give their life in a wonderful way to nurture children for life; Christian Montessorians want to also nurture for eternity.

Can the Christian Montessori community create a training program that will honor Christ; be true to the original Montessori and lower the financial and program threshold that bars so many from entering this vocation? Of course, the answer is yes. But the threshold to do this is high.

Many in our Christian Montessori community already are involved in training, formally and informally. We need to gather this expertise and commitment, come together and pray and seek God's guidance how we might best fulfill this mission to preach the Gospel through Montessori education.

Please let me know of your interest in being part of this **task force** so we might proceed to a definite time and place to begin this new work.

A Plan for Christian Montessori

The vision is to create a training program that has both a classroom and video component. We need to take advantage of the technology that can make us more efficient and effective.

Video, by itself, is not the total answer. But we need to look at what we can put on video. Might not demonstrations of materials on video actually be more effective? A video camera can focus in, from a foot or two away, on the precise, slow, deliberate movements that constitute a presentation. The student would not miss the tiniest nuance and movement. The student could play it back over and over again to indelibly impress on themselves the precise presentation.

Imagine, both the confidence and the competence that would arise out of such presentations.

And certainly lectures could be put on tape. The student could go back over and over again to mine the riches that are presented. We've all experienced the classroom phenomena of being so intent on taking notes that occasionally we've even missed the major points. Video would allow this new corps of teachers to have some of the finest trainers from around the world available to them hour after hour.

The only thing that you cannot put on video are the specific questions that arise when each of us are confronted, challenged and thrilled with what we are hearing. It is these questions that need to be answered live. That is why there needs to be a consideration for a week or two week boot camp at the beginning and end of each learning cycle. The other consideration is that each school becomes a training center, walking along side the students to encourage, answer their questions and to model the philosophy and training up close and personal. The internship of each student then becomes a very personal commitment for each director and each school.

A video training course can lower the financial and family responsibility threshold that hinders so many from embarking on this wonderful way to serve.

Ultimately our goal is to be able to provide this training and program to missionaries all over the world to better proclaim the Gospel.

It is a daunting vision. It is one I've nurtured and harbored and longed for, for over twenty years. It is one that has been shared and encouraged by many

people. And now seems the time for the vision to come to fruition. When we ran a school full time our focus was near at hand on the children we were serving. There was little energy, time or finances to more than just glance at the fields white with harvest. It is now that time for each of us to be able to contribute our "handfuls of purpose" (Ruth 2:16). And in so doing we will not only reach the mission fields but will better be able to serve our little ones at home.

Please keep us in your prayers as we move forward. Please communicate with us your interest, encouragement and support.

God's Timing?

I had just finished typing about the plan for CMF when I received a call from Signe Schield in Massachusetts. She was asking about information on the Boston seminar and I asked her how she was involved in Montessori and she began to relate how God was leading her. You could feel the shadow of the wings of the almighty.

Signe asked if it would be appropriate to ask attendees if they had unused materials that they would like to donate. Yes, of course. Then I asked her to write a letter to share with all of you. God often uses incredible timing to encourage us (as well as using incredible timing to teach us patience.)

Hello, fellow Christian Montessorians! God is blessing me with the unique opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream of helping children in Africa. For over forty years I had longed to go to Kenya, and five years ago God inspired me to get my degree so that I could bring Montessori to the children orphaned by AIDS there. This fall I spent over a month there, visiting orphanages and schools, and networking with other Christians who were devoting their lives to

these precious children. While there I met a man who had planned for years to build a school and orphanage, so we are partnering up to build the first Montessori school for the very poor. We are offering you a chance to be a part of this mission by donating any materials that you no longer use in your classrooms. We will refurbish when necessary, and assure you that these children will be delighted with your contributions. I have never seen children who are so eager to learn! Please e-mail me at wolf lady@myexcel.com, and we will arrange shipping with you. Our school will be located just southwest of Nairobi, and you are welcome to visit us any time! If you haven't yet been to Kenya, we can guarantee you will love the people there. Thank you so much in advance for your help with our mission.

Signe Schield, M.A., M.Ed. Phone: 413/253-3752
(Montessori Training Center of Minnesota and Loyola College in Baltimore)

The Secret of Childhood

Chapters 13-15 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition

13. Rhythm

“An adult who does not understand that a child needs to use his hands and does not recognize this as the first manifestation of an instinct to work can be an obstacle to the child’s development.” (88)

Adults use “the law of minimal effort.” They do not appreciate the child’s enthusiasm for trivial or useless things and activities. Nor do they appreciate the child’s ‘slower’ rhythm but rather try to substitute their rhythm for the child’s and thus become an obstacle to the child’s natural development.

“Who would ever imagine that the needless assistance given to a child is the first of the various repressions which he

will experience and one which can have serious consequences in later life?” (90)

14. The Substitution of the Personality

“An adult can substitute himself for a child by acting in his place, but also by subtly imposing his own will, substituting it for that of the child.” (91)

“If we show a child how to do something with too much enthusiasm or exaggerated movements, the child’s capacity to think and judge for himself is repressed.”

“A child’s susceptibility to suggestion can be understood as an exaggeration of an inner sensibility which assists with his psychic growth and which may be called ‘the love of the environment.’ A child is an eager observer and is particularly attracted by the actions of adults and wants to imitate them. In this regard an adult can have a kind of mission. He can be an inspiration for the child’s actions, a kind of open book wherein a child can learn how to direct his own movements. But an adult if he is to afford the proper guidance, must always be calm and act slowly so that the child who is watching him can clearly see his actions in all their particulars.” (93)

“If an adult does not do this but yields instead to his own natural tendencies, then, instead of inspiring the child and instructing him, he will impart his own rapid rhythms upon the soul of the child and substitute himself for the child through the power of suggestion.”

“Calm and measured movement accompanied by thoughtful

consideration are the marks of a normal child.” (94)

“A normal child ... is slow and reflective but (his) movements are controlled by (his) ego and guided by reason. Such a child is stimulated by the objects it sees, but masters these impressions and as a consequence can make full use of them. (95)

“Self-control and not ceaseless activity is what counts. It is important that a child should master his motor organs and not simply move about in any manner whatever.”

“The ability to move about under the guidance of reason and not simply in response to sensible stimuli leads to concentration. And this fixation of the mind and activity upon a single object is a phenomenon of inner origin.”

“The ability to move oneself in a deliberate and thoughtful manner is actually normal to the individual. It is the mark of an inner discipline which manifests itself in orderly, external acts.”

“When this inner will is lacking, an individual’s activity can escape his personal control and be directed by the will of another or becomes a prey to external influences like a ship adrift.”

“The will of another produces disciplined actions only with difficulty since such an external influence does not create the organization necessary for such activity.”

15. Movement

“The importance of physical activity or movement in psychic development should be emphasized.” (96)

“The benefits ... from engaging in sports ... are not only conducive to physical health, but they also inspire courage and self-confidence. They can have a moral influence in raising one’s ideals ... these various psychic effects are of a much higher level than those of purely physical order.”

“A child develops through personal effort and engagement. His growth, therefore, depends upon psychic as well as physical factors.”

“It is of utmost importance that a child be able to recall the impressions he has received and be able to keep them clear and distinct, since the ego builds up his intelligence through the strength of the sense impressions which it has received. It is through this hidden labor that a child’s reason is developed.”

“A man is one who can make a reasoned judgment and then, through an act of the will, decide his own course and action.” (97)

“Movement ... is the functional incarnation of the creative energy which brings man to the perfection of his species. Through movement he acts upon his external environment and thus carries out his own personal mission in the world.”

“Movement is not only an impression of the ego but it is an indispensable factor in the development of consciousness, since it is the only real means which places the ego in a clearly defined relationship with external reality.”

“Intellectual growth depends upon the impressions received from outside. Through movement we come in contact with external reality, and it is through

these contacts that we eventually acquire even abstract ideas. Physical activity connects the spirit with the world, but the spirit has need of action in a twofold sense, to acquire concepts and to express itself exteriorly.”

“If the muscles in general are not sufficiently used, one’s vital energies are sapped.”

“If muscles which should normally be functioning are dormant, there is not only a physical, but a psychic depression as well. This is why action can have an influence also upon one’s spiritual energies.” (98)

“A knowledge of the direct connection that exists between physical activity and the will can make us appreciate more fully the importance of physical motion.”

“An individual’s muscles should be free and quick to respond to every command of the will. Ready obedience is only acquired through prolonged exercise and practice.

“Since it is through movement that the will realizes itself, we should assist a child in his attempts to put his will into act. A child has a natural desire to master the voluntary use of his organs of movement. If he fails to do so, he cannot externalize the fruit of his intelligence.”

Note the love and diligence with which children who act on their own carry out their tasks. “A child who is free to act not only seeks to gather sensible impressions from his environment but he also shows a love for exactitude in the carrying out of his actions.”

“His spirit then seems to be suspended between existence and self-realization.

A child is a discoverer. He is an amorphous, splendid being in search of his own proper form.”

Starting a Christian Montessori School!

A number of people over the last year have expressed a desire to start their own Christian Montessori School. If you have an interest in this please let us know so we can plan a seminar related to this topic.

The 10’ps of Ministry Pressure Relationships Negative

We often don’t consider that the most wonderful part of our life – relationships – bring their own pressures and stress. When we talk about stress, we usually have a negative impression but even good things bring stress – birth, marriage, promotion etc. And so it is also with our relationships.

Negative relationships squeeze the joy out of life. You have to analyze why they are negative. If you caused the negativity then it becomes your responsibility to fix it. If the other person caused it, it is your responsibility to fix* it. It doesn’t seem fair does it? Jesus says (Matthew 5:23-24)

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

Now this is where the * comes in. What happens if your brother chooses not to be reconciled? If you have done your part you can’t do any more. Well, that is not totally true. You cannot

directly control the actions of others (that includes husbands, wives, parents children, teachers, administrators and everyone else). What you can do is, again, to follow the hard teachings of Jesus when He says (Matthew 5:44) “Love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you.” Most situations aren’t with enemies – so how much more should we pray for those with whom we just disagree or can’t seem to get along with?

There is a third part of negative relationships that need to be looked at. That is when disappointment enters the relationship because of unmet needs or unspoken expectations. This often happens with parents. Johnny is three and brilliant (ask Grandma), he has been with you three months and he is not reading YET. Once again, pro-active communication is needed. In fact it is needed in all the relationships – good, bad or indifferent. Often relationships are both healed and nurtured with the oil of caring conversation and concern.

Now having said all of this, there still may be times when relationships will not be healed; there will be no reconciliation and tension will remain. You are then faced with the choice of accepting the situation and living in peace with it or taking major steps to remove, either yourself from the situation or the other party. If you are the director you have to consider the impact of negative relationships not just on the parties involved but on the whole school. Negative relationships are never self-contained. They spill out, they spill over, they contaminate and they ultimately destroy peace and harmony. There are no easy or simple relationship “problems”: a new teacher that doesn’t fit in, a long time staff member who isn’t

growing, or who is even regressing, a parent who is unrealistic, negative or aggressive or over demanding all will create pressure for you and the school. The toughest decisions to make are to sever negative relationships. It always feels like a defeat for grace, mercy and love. And yet, sometimes the amputation is the only way to save the body. It is this pressure on relationships, and of relationships that make this one of the hardest pressures to effectively deal with. You do everything you can to salvage the relationship but you do not let the relationship destroy the health of the school.

Regional Seminars

Boston, November 20

Westgate Christian Academy
90 Oak St.
Natick, MA 01760
508-315-3152
Joanne Juraschek

Shreveport, LA January 22

Christian Center School
207 Idema
Shreveport, LA 71106
(318) 688-9858
Mary Cook

Houston, January 29

Bay Area Montessori House
2508 Sawyer Dr.
Seabrook, TX 77586
Tommie Jean Hebert
(281) 480-7022

Contact us:

Fidellow@swbell.net
210-698-1911

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