

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

April 2007

**National Conference
July 26-28, 2007
San Antonio, Texas
“Celebrate the Inspiration
Continue the commitment”
100th
Anniversary of Montessori
25th Anniversary of the
Christian Montessori Fellowship**

**Pre-register by May 15th for
conference discount!**

Thirteen Reasons to Attend

- 1. There is no other conference like it.**
- 2. You will be challenged spiritually.**
- 3. You will be challenged intellectually.**
- 4. You will be encouraged for the great work that you are doing.**
- 5. You will learn new techniques for your classroom.**
- 6. You will be inspired.**
- 7. Your understanding of Montessori will be enhanced.**
- 8. You will meet great people who share your same passions – intellectually and spiritually.**
- 9. You will realize that you are not alone.**
- 10. You will better understand your calling.**

- 11. You will return home a different teacher and a different person.**
- 12. Your children will be blessed by your insights, enthusiasm, knowledge and love.**
- 13. You will be able to encourage other teachers with your experience and stories.**

The Foundation of Montessori Respect

When we're asked about Montessori education we always include terms such as hands-on, individualized, prepared environment, practical life, grace and courtesy. All are essentially true and necessary but there is an essence to Montessori education that if we miss it, we truly miss the heart of God's inspiration to Dr. Montessori.

When we are first attracted to this way of educating we notice the calmness of the children, the quietness of the environment, the purposeful activity and we assume it is because of the materials and methodology. However, there are three underlying principles that must be in place before we even get to the "methodology".

In our search for and practice of "authentic" Montessori we must start with the God-breathed inspiration. I wish I had understood this when I first started to teach. But I am comforted (somewhat)

by the fact that even Dr. Montessori didn't start with the fundamental principles that became her method. Like most of us she started in the middle of her method (hands-on, individualized etc) and ultimately worked her way back to the principles that are the foundation of Montessori education.

The most significant principle in all of Montessori education is – **Respect for the Child**. On one hand it should be self-evident but on the other it is revolutionary. Most of us, as children, never experienced (even in church) this profound principle of respect.

In Matthew 18 Jesus says that anyone who offends or causes one of the little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Dramatic! Over dramatic? Or under appreciated, under observed or misunderstood?

Respect for the child has to be built on the nature of the child that God created. Therefore, we have to understand that nature before we are able to appreciate it and cooperate with its development. The irony (and the “tragedy” of disrespecting the child) comes from the fact that our disrespect often grows out of good motivations and not bad intent. We tend to want to mold the child in our own image instead of the image that God created for that child from before the foundation of the world.

Respect is a form of reverence. We respect the Creator of the child by respecting His creation – the child. Montessori teaching is more than education. It is about entering into God's

plan for the universe. Sounds like hyperbole doesn't it? But every great enterprise hinges on something small. The redemption of the earth came through a virgin's child. And the continued redemption of the world will come through those children who have been redeemed by the Savior. The virgin's child was God incarnate. But we too become incarnated with God. Jesus tells us (John 14:20) “You are in Me, and I am in you.” We invite Jesus to live in our hearts. Jesus says that He and the Father will make their home with us. And He sends the Holy Spirit to be in us. God takes on flesh and lives within each of us. That calls for respect.

Respect for the child starts with our attitude. Humility is not a sought after virtue. There are no prizes (on earth) given for the most humble. And we most often relate humility to humiliating. Humility is not being “proud or haughty and not arrogant nor assertive.” The humility of respect is a “chosen” virtue. People and circumstances may humble you, may make you feel worthless or of lesser value but to “choose” humility is to consciously choose a heightened spiritual state. Jesus was also meek, (another virtue for which there are no earthly rewards.) Spiritually, meek does not mean being a doormat but having power that you do not have to flaunt or demonstrate.

Montessori, in the chapter “Spiritual Training of a Teacher” from *The Child in the Church* says, “A teacher must not imagine that he can prepare himself for his vocation simply by acquiring knowledge and culture. Above all else he must cultivate within himself a proper attitude toward the moral order.” She

also said, “A teacher must be able to see the child as Jesus saw him.” Given Jesus’ words and attitudes, He held the child (literally and figuratively) in high regard. And our entering into Montessori calls us to exercise this same high regard. As adults, we tend to think that we are going to teach the children but the reality is (if we allow it – with humility) that the child will be our spiritual teacher.

The paradox here is that while children are inexperienced, foolish, disruptive (fill in your own adjectives) they possess a fresh spirituality. They see with eyes that have not yet been opened to the “world” and it is from that perspective – if we respect it – we can learn.

Montessori calls us (through God’s insights) to **respect the nature of the child**. Our modern world is not made for children. The rhythms of our world are guided by clocks and goals – both necessary for “civilization” but not for life and of little consequence to the child. Our frustration with our children comes when neither the clock nor the goals motivate them. In this sense, they are “other” worldly. Reflect on your own recent frustrations – being late, missing a deadline, being in traffic etc. All of these have little bearing on the child’s world. True, we as adults assume responsibility so the child is freed from that burden. But our challenge is to break the cycle as spoken by Jeremiah (31:29) “The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” Kind of like, “If mama’s not happy no one is happy!”

The respect for the nature of the child is to allow that nature to unfold. And like all of nature – if you rush the process –

you distort, hinder and sometimes destroy. You cannot help the caterpillar out of his cocoon before his time without negative consequences. And so the child’s nature must be respected in the time frame that God ordains.

God also asks us **to respect the personality of the child**. The personality is God given. As much as we take credit for forming the child (or deforming) the child already is stamped with God’s design for that child. Our great assistance to the child (and their parents) is to **observe** who that child already is. The purpose of the environment is to allow the child to discover – not just math and science, language and culture – but who he is, who he is created to be. And that recognition for the child (and the guide observing) are those unique “aha!” moments in which the universe seems to stand still with the awesome realization of “This is what I was meant to do.”

Respecting the child’s personality is therefore to aid the child in creating and fulfilling that personality. As guides, most of our “hands on” activity therefore is to create the environment – physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual – so the child can discover himself and for himself. Our task is to strew the environment with diamonds (or emeralds, rubies or sapphires) for each child to uniquely “discover” his own treasure.

In respecting the child’s personality, you are also **respecting the calling of that child**. Each of us is called by God even before we were born to fulfill a part of His plan. We become pastors or teachers, apostles, prophets, servants,

mothers, doctors or Indian chiefs according to the plan of God. It is up to us to carefully cooperate with that plan.

God also calls us to **respect the joy of the child**. Do you see a low wall, a mud puddle, green grass or whatever; there you will find a child happily on in or about. The child will **live** in the moment. As adults we need to think about the future etc but we often fail to live and enjoy the moment. Children don't get caught up in the "someday syndrome". "I'll be happy someday when I have a better job, a new car, a girl friend etc." Respecting the joy of the child is also to enter into that joy.

"Unless you become like a little child you will never enter into the kingdom of God." Jesus also tells us (Luke 17:21) that the "kingdom of God is within you." I was going to write that children understand that the joy is within. They don't "understand" it – they experience it. It flows out of them; it flows out of Jesus in their hearts. Where is the kingdom? Wherever the king is! And if Jesus lives in your heart – there is the kingdom of joy.

We also respect the child when we help the child by not letting him do wrong. Montessori says that the child has unlimited freedom to do right. That requires discernment on our part to understand the motivations and actions of the child; to separate negative behaviors from curiosity and defensive behaviors. We give the child respect when we allow them the privilege of appropriate struggles for mastery.

One final note, as much as we hold the environment in regard and respect (as we

should), we must remember that the environment was created for the child – not the child for the environment (very much like "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.") The environment is a tool to show respect to the child. Its beauty, orderliness and aesthetics speak of our regard for those who live there.

As guides, we are faced with a great spiritual challenge – how to serve the spirit of the child while gently guiding the child into the transformation from tadpole to frog, from caterpillar to butterfly, from child to adult. Each is a "miracle". And miracles need to be respected.

National Conference Topics

Contemporary Montessori History
Following the Child to World Peace
Self-esteem – Help or Hindrance
Teaching the Heart of the Child
Toddler Bible
Learning Styles
"I'll Walk the Line"
Hands on Bible
Zoo Phonics
God's Purpose in Education
Selective Mutism
Listening to God's Stories
Care of our Temple
How Jesus comes to the Classroom
Our Favorite Lessons
Language
Lessons We've Learned
The Five Great Lessons
And More

first conference. The next year she brought her Director Mary Cook. And every year for the past 5 years, Mary has brought her whole staff of 11 or 12. Mary will tell you about how renewed and enthusiastic the conference makes her staff. And that same experience is available for everyone.

Conference cost: \$350

(\$325 if paid by May 15th)

An additional \$25 discount for CMF members.

Conference includes 3 lunches, morning and afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner.

Conference Location:

Menger Hotel

1-800-345-9285

www.historicmenger.com

Lodging costs \$127.26 (tax included) per night Double or Single rates good if you register by June 26th.

Go to

www.Christianmontessorifellowship.com

for registration form

or call (210) 698-1911

Need to raise funds to attend?

Visit www.crossmountainpress.com

Pioneers

It would be wonderful if every Christian Montessori school were represented at the 25th Anniversary conference. It is not just about what you receive but what you are able to give and to share. Each of you is a pioneer in this great adventure. And your experiences need to be shared and passed on. Please consider attending as a way to give back for all that you have received.

In 2000, Cindy Bussey from Christian Center School in Shreveport attended her