

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
September 2007

National Conference 2008 July 31st – August 2nd, 2008 Plan Now to attend

Addicted to Adulation

We all love it, crave it at times and maybe even need it. Adulation takes many forms and has many synonyms – praise, approval, acceptance, approbation, regard, worship. Each word has its own intensity starting with acceptance and moving through praise to adulation to worship. While most of us would be uneasy with the concept of being worshipped we often hang on one rung down the ladder and settle for adulation. “Do you know who I am?” is a phrase used by people who are addicted to adulation and deference – rock stars, athletes, politicians – people who seem to get their value from the validation and adulation of others.

Montessori’s insight about being careful with praise is a major factor in helping children develop their own sense of value and sense of worth. She insisted that the value the child places on himself arise out of who the child is and not just on what he does. And that what he does meets an interior need of his own spiritual and emotional development and is not done solely for the approval of the adult.

The challenge at this point is to separate what the child does from who he is and who he is becoming. The

question of praise was also part of Montessori’s insight that the adult not substitute her will for the will of the child. This led her to be careful with praise so as not to overly influence the child’s actions (behaviors are another matter.) The direct influence on the child by the adult comes mainly from the adults influence and actions on the environment. We also must remember that the environment is not solely physical. It is an emotional environment, a spiritual environment and a social environment. The direct influence on the child is through this preparation.

Montessori also noted that much learning was not accomplished or accompanied by much talk. It was the doing that created the learning.

Our challenge is to keep all of this in balance. Remember that a vice is a virtue taken too far. Being frugal can lead to being miserly; being generous can lead to being a spendthrift. Balance! This calls for a measured balance of both words and praise in a healthy environment. The guide does need to measure their words – both of instruction and praise. Measured too scantily leads to mausoleum classrooms where no words are allowed. This creates an unhealthy (and unrealistic) environment. The child’s joy is expressed in words. The shouts of discovery are expressed in words. The thrill of accomplishment is expressed verbally. The whole purpose of language is to communicate.

Occasionally our zeal to do Montessori “right” leads us to look at the “rules” and to miss the child. The irony of withholding all praise from the child leads to the exact opposite of what Montessori saw as being vital in not overdoing praise. When praise is indiscriminately broadcast the child’s motivations become corrupted and his actions become geared to seeking the approval of the adult. His eye is on the adult and not on his own goal of creating himself.

However, if there is no praise given, the child can become just as addicted to seeking adult approval. Approval becomes a Holy Grail, something elusive, something to be sought.

Measured praise turns the child’s motivations inward instead of outward. The child’s motivations must ultimately come from the pure created ego of the child. “I do this because this is what I was intended to do, impelled to do, called to do, created to do.”

Therefore, it is only in the balance with a well-adjusted adult (confident in their knowledge and in their observations; knowing when, how and what to praise) that a child can gain a healthy self-image.

When praise is done right, the child is on his way to becoming independent – independent of negative peer pressure and negative expectations. His actions will arise out of his storehouse of virtues and not be overly influenced by those around him. He will truly march to the drum beat of Heaven, the drum beat that was created specifically for him.

Those who fail to become independent become dependent on others for their sense of approval. They become addicted to adulation. They have not grown the character strength required

to do what is best or what is right. They become hostages and influenced by “political correctness” of all kinds of stripes. They will find it difficult to do what God asks because what God asks is often difficult and often not popular or current.

Measured praise helps bring independence.

Continuing Education Continuing Enlightenment Continuing Encouragement

The purpose of the fellowship is to provide opportunity to the Christian Montessori community to continue to excel. Montessori is a wonderful way to nurture children but the motivation to continue this ministry to children comes to us from the very heart of God. And this motivation requires us to be the very best that we can be and to do the very best that we can do. There is a good reason that Paul writes in Galatians 6:9 “Be not weary in well doing.” Well doing is wearying. And you are doing the greatest work in the world. That is why you must make time to be renewed, refreshed and re-inspired.

Re-reading Montessori books – even just five pages a day will stir up the “gift” in you. I have come to see Montessori as a tremendous gift, not only to the children that we teach, but to us as well. Montessori is transforming! And when you see it in its full spiritual incarnation the power is amazing. God breathed such a dynamic inspiration into Dr. Montessori that we are still reaping benefits of the revealed insights. And the unique part of this is that that same inspiration is available to each of us. We are continuing to build on that foundation. That is why I encourage you

to read, to attend conferences and workshops and to continue to learn from the children. It has been said “It is what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

The Method

We often talk about the Montessori Method - hands-on, individualized, multi-aged classrooms etc. And there is a tendency to identify the practices with the method. It is similar to our understanding of Christianity. Asked for a definition we begin with “It is a religion ...” yes we’ve begun a definition but we’ve missed its essence. Christianity in its purest understanding is a personal relationship with Jesus. Everything else, though necessary, misses the essence. You can embrace theology, liturgy, texts and practices and miss the heart of what Christianity is – it is that relationship with Jesus.

We have this same challenge in our definition and practice of Montessori. It is easy to miss, overlook, forget or ignore the heart of Montessori education. We become taken up with red rods, table washing, golden beads, maps, culture and language – and all of it is necessary but it is not the essence.

This is a challenge to every new teacher and every new school. We want to be like baby bear and “do it just right.” Not even Dr. Montessori did it “just right” to start. It is a learning process for both children and adults. When we start new schools we want to have all the materials so we can feel like a bona fide Montessori program. And eventually we need to. But what is most important is that we do Montessori “right”. This doesn’t mean the way we present the broad stairs or the order of

presentations (though both are important) etc. What is most significant is the relationship between guide and student. A substitute coming into a classroom is only a substitute, one who knows how to manipulate the materials, make presentations, keep order and maintain the environment. They do not have the relationship with the child which is at the heart of the method.

In the Secret of Childhood (Ballentin edition pg. 136) Dr. Montessori says in the chapter on The Method, “**There was no method to be seen, what was seen was a child.**” Everything comes down to this focus. Yes, you start with your knowledge of the materials, you add to that your knowledge of children, and you add to that your knowledge of this child. Then you bring it into focus with your observation of this child, at this moment, with this need and then you are ready to be the guide. It is an art based on a relationship based on your motivation and knowledge to bless one of God’s special people.

It is a transforming experience for both child and adult.

Regional Conference Schedule

September 29 **Denver**
Adventure Montessori Learning
Center
12121 Pennsylvania St.
Thornton, CO 80241
(303) 255-8151
Wendy Charles

October 12-14 **Irvine, CA**
AMS conference

October 20 **Seattle**
Kidus Montessori School
834 18th Ave.
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 720-0523
Dee Stephens

November 3 **Rock Hill, SC**
Freedom Montessori
215 East Main Street
Rock Hill, SC 29730
(803) 327-7885
Jamie Laymon

November 10 **Metuchen, NJ**
Children First
Christian Montessori School
10 Jersey Ave
Metuchen, NJ 08840
(732) 635-1300
Maria Hager

November 17 **Dallas**
Apostles Day School
322 S. MacArthur Blvd
Coppell, TX 75019
(972) 393-0655
Diana Smith

Membership

Please join the fellowship. Your support helps us to continue the great work of sharing about Christian Montessori.

CD's Available

There are a number of cd's available that will provide for Continuing Education, Continuing Enlightenment and Continuing Encouragement. Titles include:

Personalities of Children
Stress

Public Relations
Grace and Courage
Purpose of Christian Education

Visit the website
www.crossmountainpress.com

Training Program

We will be hosting the first Christian Montessori training program this summer here in San Antonio. This will be the initial step in creating a world-wide internet based training program for Christian Montessori schools. The calls continue to come in from Europe and Africa and the US wanting help in setting up Christian Montessori schools – which includes the training. If you have new staff who are looking to be trained and you want them trained with the spiritual fullness that Christ inspired Montessori with then consider having them train in this new dynamic program.

We also need your prayers. This is a major spiritual undertaking which is always met with negative spiritual resistance. There are multitudes of children who are waiting for this great way of being nurtured – intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Quotes

“Education has for its object the formation of character”

Herbert Spencer

“The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should be given the wish to learn.”

John Lubbock