

# The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

**October – November 2006**

**National Conference  
July 26-28, 2007  
San Antonio, Texas  
“Celebrate the Inspiration  
Continue the commitment”**

## **The Art of the Science The Science of the Art**

The unique irony of Montessori education is that Dr. Montessori succeeded in bringing science to bear on the art of education. Her science was that of the doctor – observation. And the more she applied her science to education, the deeper the insights grew and the greater the art became.

However, much of the contemporary educational world has followed in turning education into a science (that which is “observable and repeatable” by tests and programs) but have lost the art.

The ultimate difference in the educational systems is between the concrete and the abstract. Most modern education is focused on the curriculum – that which is concrete, that which can be tested, while Montessori philosophically is looking at the abstract, is looking at learning (but learning through the child’s eyes). And looking at the child.

Two and two still makes four and H<sub>2</sub>O is still the formula for water but that is not education. That is knowledge and facts. Montessori elicits a higher calling from both its children and its

guides. It is the calling to wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to apply correctly (and morally) facts and knowledge to the choices that confront us. Montessori education is way beyond putting the correct answer in the correct box – it is about successfully becoming the person that God intended for us to be. That goal cannot be achieved by ignorant people. So the acquisition of knowledge is essential as a means of discovery of who we are and who we are meant to be. And essential for assuming our place in the society around us.

Montessori is not just an educational philosophy but a life philosophy (arising from its Christian roots) of training the child (and the adult) to operate wisely in the areas of intellectual, physical emotional, social and spiritual development.

The challenge for Montessorians is to approach this work using the best “science” to make the best art. Traditional science is verifiable and repeatable. The science experiment turning out the same way time after time – like widgets coming off an assembly line.

A number of years ago a Montessori teacher related the experience of a child in her environment. The child, the son of an astrophysicist, never touched any of the equipment but seemingly worked it all out in his head. My first reaction was –he’s got to touch it. This is Montessori; it’s a hands on way of learning. That was my first introduction to the real world of

Montessori. **Montessori is not a formula but a relationship.** When we insist that we follow the “canon” of Montessori, we need to make sure we know which are the immutable principles and not the operating principles.

The first immutable principle is God. (He gave her the method.) The second principle is that we are stewards of what God the Creator has made. We are stewards of our gifts, opportunities and the children entrusted to us. The third immutable principle is respect for the child. If we fail this principle, the rest of the Montessori canon is undermined. What most traditional educators miss about Montessori is that “Follow the Child” is not an invitation to anarchy, indiscipline, slothfulness or chaos. “Follow the Child” is a preeminent demonstration of ultimate respect for who God made the child to be. And it is on this respect that all of the wonderful blessings of Montessori rest.

The science is the observation. The art is the unique application of that science to the child in front of you. Once upon a time I was under the impression (another one of those “Montessori” (?) commandments) that a child could touch nothing in the environment for which he had not been given a presentation. Experience teaches you that children are also observers, learning at a distance and absorbing. And further children also teach each other. Recordkeeping, not withstanding, our observation needs to be whether the child has mastered the fundamentals of the presentation or if he needs to have the material re-presented.

Montessori is not “formulaic” it is based on a relationship between the guide and the student and the student and the environment. And it is a relationship of respect.

## **The Purpose of Education: To Find Your God-Given Personality**

In Genesis we read that man was created in God’s image. And we make the assumption that it is in the physical image of God. However, God is revealed to us in scripture as a personality. He loves, He hates, He cares for, He broods over, He is tender, He is creative. And it is in this personality facet of God that we are created. Like a diamond, the brilliance shows from the various facets.

The child’s personality is present at conception. It is not given or created by the adults. It is given by God. Whether you read in Jeremiah (1:4-5) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart: I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Or in Isaiah (49:5) “He who formed me in the womb to be His servant...” or in Psalms (139:13-16) “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

God is the author of personality. Otherwise who taught Shakespeare to write, Michelangelo to sculpt, Da Vinci to paint, Mozart to compose, Chopin to play, Edison to invent, Caruso to sing or Einstein to do math?

The poet, William Butler Yates said, “Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.” That is the essence

of helping the child find “the fire” of his personality. It is helping the child (following the child) as he makes this transformation from unconscious power (the power of his personality) to the conscious power of using his gifts and attributes. It is this transformation that is the incarnation of God’s image into flesh.

Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Transformation is at the heart of Montessori. Transformation is a total change – heart, mind and soul. And the Montessori environment (and philosophy) leads the child to this transformation which we call “normalization”. Dr. Montessori wrote that normalization had been likened to a conversion; being converted back to the original state of what we were meant to be at the creation

Nature gives us two great examples of transformation – the frog and the butterfly. From their beginnings, neither one offers a clue as to what their end result will be, but deeply hidden within their DNA is their God-given destiny. This same phenomenon is at play in the child’s life.

When Montessori talks of “following the child” she is referencing being present “at the creation”. The work of the child is to produce the adult; to discover and develop the personality that God gave them. And only the child can do this work. “The first duty of the educator is to recognize the human personality of the young being and respect it.” (Child in the Family pg. 51)

“The newborn child should be seen as a ‘spiritual embryo’ – a spirit enclosed in flesh in order to come into the world.” (pg.29) “The process by which the

human personality is formed is the hidden work of incarnation.” (pg. 32)

## Thanksgiving

“He who has a thankful heart will have a continuous feast.”

Thanksgiving is for more than a day, it is for a lifetime. And for those of us who have spent a lifetime or a good portion of a lifetime in Montessori, there can be no better way to live or to serve. That is what the fellowship seeks to do – to serve.

Each of you are busy just keeping your environment going and there is not a lot of time to look at the rest of the world. That is what the Fellowship is doing, connecting you to the broader Montessori community, especially the Montessori community of faith. Since September we’ve had calls from SC, GA, FL and Latvia wanting help to start Christian Montessori schools. We’ve had calls from parents and teachers looking for schools. We’ve been there for advice and counsel. We’ve spoken at Christian school conferences to share the good news about Montessori. We’ve held regional conferences in Chicago, Charlotte, St. Paul, Houston and Ann Arbor. And we will be going to Los Angeles this month and then to Honolulu, Corpus Christi, Shreveport, Seattle, Amarillo and South Carolina in the new year.

Our purpose is to encourage the great work that is being done all over the country and the world. But we need your help. I’ve asked directors why they think we have only 4 or 5% of the mailing list who have responded with memberships. “You give them the newsletter for free, so they feel they get the major value for free. You need to send the newsletter to only those who take a membership.”

We've pondered that. But that is not the purpose of the ministry. The purpose is to give and encourage and help. The purpose is to network, to be there to help spread this wonderful way of teaching and living. But we need your help to do it.

Maybe we need to re-explain what we are doing. We are your hands extended to the world. Even though you receive encouragement from the fellowship, the fellowship also exists for you to be able to give, to give back and to help encourage others. Your membership and donations help fund the spread of Christian Montessori education all over the world.

I'd like to ask you to make a contribution this Thanksgiving to the fellowship in gratitude that someone shared Montessori with you. And your gift will help share it with others.

I'm also including a follow up letter from Kristina Vecpuise in Latvia. Is there anyone with extra Montessori books who would like to send them to Kristina to help her education along? Let us know.

### **Letter from Latvia**

Dear Mrs. Barbara and Mr. Edward,

I finally read your book *Getting Your Money's Worth*.

It really is an inspiring book. I read it with a very great interest. I had to use a dictionary to understand every detail. That's why it took so long for me. Actually it was a harvesting time too. We all were quite busy. Have I told you that children and I take care of the house and 30 goats while my husband is working at the 100 ha big farm 5 km away? The farm belongs to his mom.

Once you asked me if I have any

other books. No, I do not have any but the one that is written by German teacher Helen Helming. I would say that that is an introductory book as well as yours. These books supplement each other. Due to my financial situation I would be really really! happy to get another book the same way I got this one from you – by e-mail. Is it still possible?

I was hoping to start my studies at the Montessori International in London, but it still is very expensive for my family. I just can't afford it. It is 1/6 of our 7 member family incomes. At the same time I really want to get more and more knowledge in Montessori methods and philosophy. I would be happy to go on in discovering this method for me and my children.

Some of the Montessori principles I have already implemented in my family life. For a great surprise very soon I found out that they work. For example my older son Varis /10 years old/ now has started to read books a lot. He wakes up and reads in the bed for at least an hour, he reads at the day time and again at nighttime in the bed. He does it without any verbal inducement from my side. Today he was reading a fairytale in English by Enid Blyton. He said that the stories by her are far more fascinating. My 7 years old autistic son Adam has started to show an interest about books too. 4 years old Julia Ann comes and asks for materials to study so often that she makes me nervous, because we do not have a learning area and shelves yet. We do not have so many learning supplies and ideas too. The life definitely has become more interesting in our family.

Thank you for publishing my letter in your News Letter. It is nice to know that despite my comical English I can be inspiring for someone else too.

My children are growing fast and I wish them very much to get this very good education. Unfortunately home schooling /only with the standard curriculum/ in Latvia is allowed only for children with diagnoses. It means - my daughters will have to attend a regular school . My older son hates to think about it. He loves home schooling. I think he would really love the Montessori school too.

I haven't yet found any Christian in Latvia who understands my new love to Montessori. People use to think that Montessori is a method for mentally retarded children. It is easier for them to send a child to the regular school. They use to think it is the only way your child can become a needed member for the society. That's why your prayers and emotional encouragement is very much needed. I thank God He let me to find you.

How far is your university program for training new Montessori educators? I would be happy to be your first student.

With love  
Sister in Christ from Latvia Kristina  
Vecpuse

### **Regional Seminars**

November 18 Southern California  
January 13 Honolulu  
January 27 Shreveport, LA  
February 3 Corpus Christi, TX  
February 10 Seattle WA  
February 17 Amarillo, TX  
February 24 Rock Hill, SC

Undetermined yet  
NJ, DC, Atlanta, Cleveland and Phoenix

Does anyone want to host a regional conference?

### **Celebrating 100 Years of Discovery**

To celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Montessori school, we have created a number of items. These can be used as gifts for the children, teachers or parents or they can be used as a fundraiser to help send your staff to conferences and training.

The items can be ordered on the website [www.crossmountainpress.com](http://www.crossmountainpress.com) Or you can call us 210-698-1911 for more information.

We have a great banner 34"x64" printed on the finest Salvadorian cotton. And after the celebration you can take it to the pool or the beach (and tell everybody you're working by advertising the school.)

We have T-shirts, mugs and a special Teddy Bear – Monty to help celebrate this great year.

### **Humor**

While working for an organization that delivers lunches to elderly shut-ins, I used to take my 4-year-old daughter on my afternoon rounds. She was unfailingly intrigued by the various appliances of old age, particularly the canes, walkers and wheelchairs. One day I found her staring at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass. As I braced myself for the inevitable barrage of questions, she merely turned and whispered, "The tooth fairy will never believe this!"