

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
October 2004

National Conference San Antonio June 23 -25, 2005

Regional Seminars

Ann Arbor October 9
Seattle October 16
Kansas City October 30
Chicago, November 6
Boston, November 20
Shreveport, LA January 22
Houston January 29

The Purpose of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

Support for the Christian Montessori Fellowship is more than a commitment of membership or attendance. It is an encouragement to brothers and sisters who have been blessed and chosen to live and serve God in the context of a Montessori ministry. This “ministry” is not contingent on whether our school is “Christian” or secular. This ministry is to the children that God entrusts to our care. And it is vital that we encourage each other.

When we “chose” to follow Montessori, we were set on a very narrow (yet wonderful) path that most people were not following. And when the spiritual dimensions of the treasure we were entrusted with became apparent, many chose to incorporate this totally

into our lives by starting Christian Montessori schools or transforming existing schools or looking to partner with people who were making this change.

And so we’ve traveled from the broad context of general education to the narrower path of Montessori and now we are beginning to make a new roadway, one that is not envisioned by either traditional educators or traditional Montessorians.

I laugh as I think about the Bible story from 2 Kings 7. Samaria was besieged and in famine and they were going to die. There were four lepers at the gate of the city. “If we stay here we are going to die. If we go to the Aramean camp and surrender, they may spare us but if they kill us we are going to die anyway.” The lepers went to the camp and found it deserted – the Lord had driven the enemy away. They entered a tent and ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes. Then they said to each other, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves.” So they returned immediately and reported the good news.

The reason I laugh about this story is how often have we felt like lepers – outcasts from both traditional Christian schools and traditional Montessori schools? Yet, God has chosen to reveal this ‘good news’ to us. Christian Montessori in one sense is a remnant

group. We often feel like Elijah telling God, "I'm the only one left." And God reminds Elijah "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal."

There is encouragement in knowing that God does have Montessorians all over the country – and the world – who are vitally interested in the integration of faith and learning. The Christian Montessori Fellowship is your bridge to sharing this encouragement and then sharing this 'good news' with many who just know there has to be a better way to teach. They just don't know that it is called Montessori.

Your continued support by your membership and attendance at conferences and seminars will strengthen our ability so share this God inspired way to teach and learn.

The Secret of Childhood

Chapters 9-12 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition

9. Intelligence

"Our educational system esteems a child's environment so highly that it makes it the center of instruction. We also have a higher and more rational esteem for a child's sensations...." We insist upon the child's inner sensibility. A child has a sensitive period ... which enables him to assimilate images from his environment in a truly prodigious fashion." (60) It is the inner impulses which make a child choose his images.

"It is the child's reason about which the sensitive periods revolve. The reasoning process ... gains strength at the expense of the images it receives from its

surroundings. The reason provides the initial force and energy. The various images are ordered to serve the reason, and a child absorbs his first images to assist the reason."

"The child's mind (is) in the process of organizing itself by recognizing pictures and fixing them in his memory and thus happily and peacefully carrying out the work of inner construction ..." (63)

"It is only through the clarity of these impressions (images) and the distinctions that he makes among them that he can mold his own intellect."

The child becomes interested in tiny objects and small details. (64)

"The fact that a strong, external stimulus catches a child's attention is merely incidental and has no real relation with the inner life of the child which is responsible for his development." (68)

"There is an intelligible reason behind a child's activities."

10. Obstacles to Growth

The conflict between child and adult begins when the child reaches a stage in his development where he can act independently." (71)

Obstacles: Too much sleep.
Not being able to touch objects.
Not having a suitable environment.

"A child has need of simple things, and complicated objects are frequently more of a hindrance than a help to his development." (74)

“If he (the child) is to develop his personality, it is necessary that the adult should hold himself in check and follow the lead given by the child.” (75)

11. Walking

“Man learns to walk through personal, voluntary effort.” (77)

“His first step is a conquest of nature.”

“Learning to walk is for the child a kind of second birth, when he passes from a helpless to an active being.”

“A child is driven on by an irresistible impulse in his attempts to walk.”

“An infant walks to perfect his own proper functions, and consequently his goal is something creative within himself.” (78)

12. The Hand

“The two bodily movements most intimately connected with man’s intelligence are those of the tongue which he uses for speaking, and those of his hands which he employs for work.” (80)

“His upper limbs become instruments of his intelligence rather than means of locomotion.” (81)

“Man takes possession of his environment with his hands. His hands under the guidance of his intellect transform this environment and thus enable him to fulfill his mission in the world.”

“The hands are symbolically employed in rituals where there is a strong expression of the ego.”

“In order to develop his mind a child must have objects in his environment which he can hear and see. Since he must develop himself through his movements, through the work of his hands, he has need of objects with which he can work that provide motivation for his activity.” (82)

“A child’s movements are not due to chance. Under the direction of his ego he builds up the necessary coordination for organized movement.”

“His constructive movements take their cue from the actions of others. He strives to imitate them in the way they use or handle something.” (83)

“A child’s constructive movements have a psychic origin and are of an intellectual nature. Knowledge always precedes movement. When a child wishes to do something, he knows before hand what it is.”

“In his use of words the child is not like a parrot. He does not simply imitate a sound but makes use of knowledge that has been stored up. A child’s imitation is never purely mechanical. We must realize this if we would appreciate more intimately a child’s activities and his relations with adults.”

Elementary Actions

“Such elementary actions as these, which have no external finality, can be regarded as the first feeble efforts of the human worker.” (85)

Montessori warns of the “stinginess with respect to a child” that rises from a desire to protect one’s own possessions. “The solution to this conflict is to be found in preparing a suitable environment for the child where he may manifest his higher tendencies.”

“The work of tiny hands, which are the first stammerings of a man at work, require ‘incentives to activity’ in the form of objects which correspond to his desire to work.”

The 10’ps of Ministry Pressure Financial

Of all of the pressures we face in ministry, I don’t think that finances are any greater than the others. However, we tend to think they must be because we always seem to be faced with them. Finances always seem to be critical, both for us personally and our schools. So how can they not be the major pressure?

I say this because we are less likely to do wrong where money is concerned than we are with the other pressures we face.

Our failures in the face of pressure are more often failures to do what is right rather than the failures of consciously choosing to do what is wrong. When we fail in the face of pressure, yes we have done wrong but our motives and actions are often of a protective nature rather than being malicious and hurtful.

An example of this would be that few of us would steal or would even think about stealing (Except for committing the perfect crime – and then we’d give the money back.) no matter what the money pressure would be. On the other

hand, sometimes ethical, relationship or spiritual pressures might cause us NOT to do what we need to do. There might be situations where we wouldn’t want to hurt someone’s feelings and we would refrain from sharing the truth that was needed or we might let someone slide from fulfilling their responsibilities because we don’t want to deal with the fallout of confrontation. The pressures of finances don’t cause us to act in that manner. Financial pressure keeps us from seeing our objective clearly as our focus is shifted to the means and not the end. One insidious part of financial pressure is that we begin to equate our value and significance to a dollar sign. This happens both corporately and personally. As teachers, our spiritual, social, and personal value and the lasting good we do is not reflected at all in our economic value. If it were, the starting salary for teachers and ball players would not have a differential of 40 or 50 times. If there were no ball players (but I am glad there are) our society would still progress and achieve. If there were no teachers (nurses, sanitation workers etc) our society would not be healthy or progressing.

Economic pressure can cause us to doubt not only our personal value but the value of the ministry of service that we provide.

The same kind of economic pressures also impact us institutionally. Most Montessori schools deal with preschoolers. It is not considered at the same level of sophistication and “importance” as a university position. Since we don’t get the same kind of funding and attention, the economic pressures can tend to make us doubt the value of our service.

Character is formed in children in the early years (as is much of self-confidence and self-esteem). And teaching our children to read IS the foundation of what they will be able to learn when they get to college.

We need to consider, personally and corporately, that the financial pressures we face have no eternal significance on our value and service to God through our ministry to our children.

God has not forsaken us even when (especially when) we don't get the funding we want or feel we need. God uses all of these pressures to bring forth in us that joyful acceptance of His powerful plan for our lives. This doesn't preclude us from creatively looking to create financial wealth and blessings. In fact, it enhances our motivation to look to Him for strength, guidance and blessings. For whatever reason, God allows financial pressures to remain. Yes, maybe His work could be carried on more rapidly if we had all the money we "needed" but would we know if His work would be carried on more effectively? You see, His work is not only what we do – we are His handiwork. Though He is wonderfully interested in the lives of our children He is just as interested in His "teacher-children" too. Whatever pressures He uses are the ones He knows that will bring about the work He is trying to accomplish in us – long before He is concerned about the work that He will accomplish through us.

The financial pressures you feel personally in your family are often magnified through the family of the school. As the head of a school, I was concerned about what I was able to do for my staff financially. My staff was always worth far more than I could ever

pay. It was always an agony – and a pressure – to create a budget where you could meet the payroll needs and have sufficient money to run the program effectively.

As an example, I used to have to share with my staff (in self-defense it seems) that when all four divisions of the school would ask for a hundred dollars and all I had was twenty five dollars total – no matter who I gave it to everyone was going to be mad: those that didn't get anything and the one that was expecting a hundred and only got twenty five. The pressure was on for all of us to gracefully acknowledge the situation that was not to our liking and to acknowledge that God was still in control. And for what He seemingly didn't provide financially He would provide in other ways or means.

Finances are one of God's ways He uses to create the pressure that creates the diamonds of our character and personality. Financial pressures should never be mistaken for the value that he ascribes to each one of us. He says we are worth far more than rubies and diamonds.

A Baker's Dozen of Montessori benefits for the child Consequences

There are two parts to consequences that need to be present for our children to get the best from their experience.

First, consequences need to be such that they invite a change of behavior. There is the old joke about the man who kept hitting himself in the head with a hammer and when he was asked why he did it, he replied "Because it feels so good when I stop."

Leaving the top off the toothpaste or failing to buy milk doesn't have nearly

the same consequences as failing to buy gas for the car. For a consequence to engender behavioral change, it requires that the pain or pleasure of the consequence has to be greater than the pain or pleasure of the action that precedes the consequence.

There is a cartoon of a dog eating a roast off the table with the caption “A good roast is worth a couple of swats with a newspaper any day.” What happens to our children in a traditional setting if they turn in a paper that is marginal or don’t pass a test? They get a poor grade and they move on. So what is the consequence of not doing your best? A lot like a few swats with a newspaper. The consequence of bad actions or bad grades, may not be felt until “later” whenever later is

Consequences in Montessori are immediate and positive. Even negative consequences become positive when they are dealt with in a timely manner. If a student does not finish a project in Montessori the consequence isn’t later – it is now. We finish. If a student does not do a project to mastery we don’t move on, we revisit the project now, encouraging and challenging the student to achieve.

As children mature they become smarter than us but they don’t become wiser until they learn the value that comes from consequences. Children are smart. They will figure every way to beat any system – that is any system that does not have meaningful, consistent and timely consequences.

Non-Montessorians misunderstand the educational and character value of consequences where you have to do a project or test over. They assume that the student won’t do their best because the student knows he can take the test

over again. Experientially, this is not true. Given a choice of doing it once right or twice over most students will opt to do it right the first time. We all like to save time and it is the knowledge that we will have to do it over that makes us put the effort into completing it well the first time.

Second, consequences need to lead to a building of character. We tend to make the word consequence equal something negative (and often they are). But consequence is a natural progression. You plant seeds and the consequence is plants grow. You go to work every day and the consequence is they pay you money. Children learn early about cause and effect. They drop a spoon from their high chair someone will pick it up. They drop it again; someone will pick it up again. Consequence is a far more sophisticated cause and effect. After you have dropped the spoon five or six times the adults no longer pick it up, they now take it away.

Consequences become more subtle and are not just related to the physical world. Consequences enter into the intellectual, social and spiritual world. Character training is very much a part of what transpires when we consistently follow through with consequences. Being able to do what you have to do when you have to do it is a beginning entry into the adult world. And further, realizing that if you don’t get it right the first time you have to do it over again is the beginning of taking responsibility for not only your actions but for your production. All of this is certainly part of forming character and is enhanced by the early introduction of consequences into the children’s lives.

Regional Seminar Agenda
9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

1. What is Christian Montessori?
2. Grace and Courtesy
3. Spiritual life in the classroom
4. Hands on Bible
5. Practical life
6. Parenting
7. Classroom management

Regional Conference locations

Ann Arbor October 9

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

Seattle October 16

Miracle Ranch
15999 Sidney Rd. SW
Port Orchard, WA 98367
253-851-4410
Cindy Hawkins
360-779-2345

Kansas City October 30

Covenant Montessori School
300 NE 58th Terrace
Gladstone, MO 64118
816-454-0192
Rosemary Brandis

Chicago, November 6

New Beginnings Christian Montessori
151 E. Briarcliff Rd
Bolingbrook, IL 60440-3070
(630) 783-9174
Patty Stephens

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

Membership

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

www.Christianmontessorifellowship.com

Directory

A directory is now available of people and schools who are interested in the Christian spiritual formation of their children.

There are schools all across the country that are using “Godly Play”, “Good Shepherd” and other avenues to share the Good News with their children. And I am sure there are still many more schools and individuals out there who share our passion.

Next Month’s Topics

The Montessori educational principle of the environment.

The pressures that come from relationships.

Regional Conference Cost and Registration

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

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credit card.

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