

Archive for April, 2009

April 27th, 2009

The Educational Philosophy of your School

It would seem a rhetorical question to ask a Montessori school what is their educational philosophy. The immediate response would be Montessori of course. But there is such a wide latitude even in that application. The philosophical application starts with your definition of Montessori. The broadest definition would be – meeting the child's needs. That certainly encompasses hands on, experiential, intellectual, social etc. It is the emphasis and the accent that distinguishes one Montessori program from another.

Typically, all schools start with the intellectual emphasis. First it is the most dominant in the awakening mind of the child. (And it is what parents pay for.) To the child the whole world is new. New eyes are seeing new wonders. "Why?" and "What's that?" are the most prevalent questions. Second their need for motor skill development to serve them marks their physical needs. Social interaction (especially for only children) also rises to the top. And somewhere in their needs inventory is a spiritual quotient.

Most Montessori schools while non-parochial realize that "spirituality" is a need of the child. The nature of the child (the nature of all of us) has a spiritual bent. And in keeping with the broad definition of Montessori education to meet the needs of the child therefore requires the tipping of the hat to spirituality. But spirituality and spiritual are not the same thing. Our very nature finds its ultimate fulfillment in the world beyond the senses and beyond time. It is that "other worldly" fulfillment and goal that makes this world's actions directed and meaningful.

To acknowledge spirituality without empowering the fulfillment of the spiritual is to foster incompleteness. Spirituality is amorphous. Spiritual is focused. It is an action and a state of being and becoming. God is a spirit and the scriptures say that true worshippers will worship Him in spirit and truth. (John 4:24) Our very nature cries out to be connected to God. And we find our rest in Him.

You can have a Montessori school without a Christian spiritual emphasis and that is one educational philosophy. And you can have a Montessori school with varying emphasis on the spiritual dynamic. Five prototypes present themselves.

First a Christian Montessori program where the primary emphasis is on the intellectual needs of the child. Many of us start here because we are so enthralled with the fantastic program. Spiritual needs are a valid concern and are addressed within the general scope of the program.

Second, there are Montessori programs that address the spiritual nature of the child by chapel and story time.

Third, there are programs that create an "atrium" a special place for Bible and spiritual lessons outside of the classroom. The child may be presented lessons every week or several times a week. Programs such as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play are employed. There is also a subset of this approach where the guide is not involved at all and the spiritual teaching and lessons are provided by a Catechist/Bible specialist.

The fourth approach is where an atrium is built into the classroom and children have access to the Bible materials etc all day everyday. And the classroom guide is also the effective "pastor" of the children.

The fifth approach is where "juvenation" occurs. We are familiar with rejuvenation – to make new again and renaissance – to be reborn. Juvenation and naissance are the birthing of the spiritual being. As the child in the womb is already formed it is the birth experience that puts the child into a new dimension fulfilling the destiny and purpose of the womb to bring the child to "life." So it is with the spiritual birth of the child. The presentation of the prepared spiritual environment along with the nomenclature and the availability of spiritual experience also brings to new life this nascent spiritual life. When the spiritual becomes preeminent the intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs of the child serve the spiritual formation. The spiritual does not usurp the other valid

needs of the child but transcend those needs. And in transcending serves to meet them and fulfill them.

Some have voiced a concern that the introduction of "religion" into the environment will coerce the child and that you are imposing on the child. Realistically, what color is your pink tower? Is it not imposed on the environment? If religion and faith are not present in the environment how will a child be able to choose that which he needs to build himself into the man he is intended to become? How will the child be able to meet his needs without the presentation of faith?

Faith is not an option or among a choice of options. It is a vital part of who we are. Just as Dr. Montessori talks of deviations, fugues and barriers as hindrances to the full development of the child, so a lack of spiritual development and knowledge is a hindrance to the fulfilled and transformed life. E.M. Standing quotes Dr. Montessori as saying that God gave her this method in order to advance the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, not a warm and fuzzy spirituality but a vital faith in relationship with our Creator and our God.

By and large, we are paid by parents to produce intellectual excellence. Fortunately, Montessori education provides a splendid means to accomplish this. However, if we fail to provide spiritual excellence we fail our children not only for time but for eternity and we may certainly miss hearing the most significant evaluation of our earthly work – "Well done, good and faithful servant."

April 26th, 2009

On Becoming a Fellowship!

My eyes opened, I looked at my watch. It was three AM. I rolled over to go back to sleep. And I rolled over and I rolled over and over. I knew I wasn't going back to sleep. "God you must want to talk so I'll listen." I wish I could hear Him in the daytime – I often do. But many times He visits me when I'm asleep – or half awake – sharing His vision and His heart. But I wasn't half asleep – I was awake.

I've been talking to God lately about my need to listen. I talk to Him all the time. Often to breathe is to pray. Prayers escape all the time. Prayer is just talking to God. That is what we teach our kids. There don't have to be fancy

words or formulas – it's just talking. And it is! But there is also the listening. And I've asked God to help me with that. (My wife says I don't listen – at least I think that's what she said.) Listening! That's tough for someone whose gift is talking. And the conversation with God has to be listening as well.

Prayer is powerful – not just for what God can externally do through prayer but for what happens to us when we pray. It is not so much of what God does with our prayers – many of our prayers are supplications for help and aid – but the transformative power that is unleashed within us when we pray. The power to walk joyfully (and in peace) in situations that are not resolved in our petitions comes from the fact that in prayer we touch God's heart. And it is His heart that transforms us.

We ask God for many wonderful things so we can bless the children He sends to us. We ask for teachers, we ask for enrollment, we ask for materials – all good things which we need to fulfill the ministry He has called us to. And often they don't come in the timeframe we ask. ("Why can't you make it a little easier God to do this ministry?" is often our frustrated cry.) God has another ministry. I Peter 1:7 speaks about "the trial of our faith being much more precious than of gold." James 4:10 reminds us that the prophets are an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Patience! God can you hurry with the patience!

Prayer is not about us – even though most of my prayers are about me and my family, my friends, my ministry. Prayer is about God and what He wants – most of all what He wants is us: totally, simply, completely trusting Him.

So at three in the morning I'm still learning to listen for His voice. Sometimes it is clear. Sometimes I don't comprehend what I hear, or think or imagine. Each of us hear our Heavenly Father in different ways – but you have to have not only hearing ears but listening ears.

The preceding week we had decided to send out the directory of Christian Montessori schools to everyone who became a member. It would be good for the CMF community to network. At three in the morning what I heard was not a call to network but a call to fellowship. But wait, isn't that already the name of the organization – Christian Montessori Fellowship?

I Cor. 8:4 Paul relates that the Corinthians wanted to take on the "fellowship of ministering to the saints." Fellowship in Greek is translated Koinonia – communication, communion, contribution, distribution, and partaking are at the roots of fellowship. Galatians 6:5 tells us to "Bear each other's burdens."

I liked the clarity at three AM. To become a fellowship is to commune, partake, contribute and distribute. To become a fellowship is to lift each other's burdens in prayer otherwise we are just another educational organization. Who can better pray for a director who is challenged with finding a teacher than a director who has been challenged? Who can better pray for enrollment and finances and wisdom than someone who faced and faces the same daily challenge? "Bear each other's burdens."

On the website is a new page for prayer. There is also a prayer chart where everyday we can lift up schools from a different state and country. Copy the chart. Put it in your Bible. Make it a part of your devotions, staff meetings and chapel. Bear each other's burdens. And then pick one school from the list and email them. Tell them you've prayed for them. That you lifted up their needs to our heavenly Father. Encourage each other – fellowship.

April 16th, 2009

Summer Offerings

Cross Mountain forum June 8-10 management course for directors

Chrisitan Montessori training June 21-26 Philosophy course

National Conference July 30 – August 1st

Make plans now to attend!

April 13th, 2009

The Presentations that are not seen Part 1

Romans 12:1 "Present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God."

In all of our training we use the word "presentation" to describe how we show the child a path so he can learn for himself. Even though the materials are designed so the child can "educate" himself, it is what goes into the presentation before the child even gets there that facilitates the possibility of "helping me do it myself."

The preparation involved for the presentation is far greater (and unseen) because the preparation not only involves the lesson (and the many lessons that precede it) but the environment in which it is presented. And the greater work of preparation takes place within the guide herself. We need to be aware again that Montessori education is not just about the materials but the whole spirit in which it is presented.

Let's look at the word "presentation." When you go to an expensive restaurant they start with similar ingredients and food that you can find at home or in less costly establishments but their presentation is what decidedly enhances the value (and the price) of what you receive. Thirty or forty dollars a plate gets you an environment that is quiet, softly lit, with table cloths, comfortable chairs, china, good silverware and impeccable service – and that is just the prepared environment. Then they make the "presentation." Food is not served – it is presented. How it is placed on a plate, what it is garnished with, what it is drizzled with. It becomes an edible work of art. But we are not finished. When you raise your fork to your mouth you are "presented" with a culinary experience. "What is that taste (excellent of course)?" Your palate savors the experience, the nuances of flavor and texture. You have been served – and served well.

Let's look at the forms of "present." The word gives itself to multiple definitions and uses. To present means to introduce, as presenting one person to another. It also means to give, as to present an award. When they call the roll you are "present" – you are here. The present is now and not the past. And the present is also a gift. When we represent we stand in the place of. And when we re-present, we offer again. There is a tremendous spiritual lesson in just this one word.

Therefore "Present" means opening vistas of knowledge, creating relationships, living in the here and now and offering a gift of incalculable value as a representative of the One who gave

all for them. When we re-present we offer a second chance as in forgiveness. A good definition of a days work in a Christian Montessori environment.

April 13th, 2009

The Presentations that are not seen Part2

There is another presentation that is also not seen. And I venture to say this is the presentation that makes you a Christian Montessori school and a Christian Montessori teacher. Presenting Bible lessons and making spiritual applications are wonderful opportunities to nurture children spiritually. While they are tremendously important (and seen) they are not the distinguishing marks of being a Christian Montessori school.

The unseen presentation is when you present yourself to Jesus; when you present yourself and your work as your living sacrifice. We tend to look at the word sacrifice as a word that entails loss. But how can we look at our days in the environment as a loss with all the joy and wonder that is present about us? "Sacrifice" is as much a gift of love as ever a gift that entails loss. It is our attitude and motivation that create the context of the gift. "Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her." Gen. 29:20

The second unseen presentation that creates the Christian context of our service is that we present our children to God. As wonderful and as transforming as Montessori education is, it is the spiritual transformation that occurs in our children as we breathe their names to God in prayer. Yes, our days are filled with classroom prayers but it is our nights where we wrestle for their souls. The ultimate transformations occur in the spiritual realm for each of our children. And if they have no one else who is presenting them to God in prayer what a privilege and responsibility we are given. The whole world crowds in on them (it crowds in on us too!) And our environments are a safe, quiet, peaceful world where God is honored and honored again by our respect for the child. Presenting them in prayer is the greatest presentation we are privileged to give.