

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
September 2003

Mark your calendar
National Conference
San Antonio
June 24-26, 2004

That's a good question.

Second in a series of questions often asked about what is Montessori.

Montessori, isn't that where children can do anything they want?

Remember, in answering the questions about Montessori be sure to reframe the question in order to answer the real question that people often don't know to ask. "Can children do anything they want?" really means, "Do children have choices?" Because the answer to their question is "No". Children cannot do "anything" they want. They cannot hit. They cannot run and scream. They cannot break windows. In fact there are lots of things they cannot do. But what they can do and what they are trained to do is to make "wise choices".

That is the real answer to their question because it does appear that they can do anything they want. The second part to this answer that inquirers don't know is that children may only do what they have been shown to do. Children are trained and have to be trained to make good (and wise) choices.

Montessori said that children have unlimited freedom – to do right. That is

a significant difference than what prompts the question "Can children do anything they want?" In being able to make choices children begin to assume greater responsibility for their actions – because they chose the actions.

Many people respond to Montessori the same way they do to faith. They have heard both good and bad things. If they are seeking (God or a good education) they ask their questions hoping that the answers will be positive. If they are hoping the answers are unsatisfactory – so they can reject it – then giving them solid answers both about faith and Montessori may begin a process of discovery for them.

Our opportunities in life to share what God means to us and does for us come in all kinds of situations. The ability to give a testimony of the transforming power of God is certainly heightened by the "miracles" we see in our children's development. Parents may want a spiritual environment for their children (even if they don't want it for themselves). And what happens in a Montessori environment (especially if you can share the Gospel) is a door for parents to see another dimension of life that they may have been too quick to dismiss or were never invited to appreciate.

We used to say that they may not appropriate God's love for themselves but they could never doubt God's love through us to their children.

Holidays **Columbus Day**

We need to take the opportunity to celebrate every occasion with our children and to use those opportunities to celebrate the heritage, privilege and responsibility that is ours as we live in our great land. Columbus day has fallen out of favor under the onslaught of the “politically correct” who deem it another tragedy of oppression by western man. (God please give the revisionists something else to do.)

The part that has not been taught about Columbus was his spiritual motivation and inspiration. Christopher – cross bearer - had a profound mission given to him by God. Peter Marshall in “The Light and the Glory” records these words from Columbus’ own hand: “It was the Lord who put it into my mind (I could feel His hand upon me) the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indies. All who heard of my project rejected it with laughter, ridiculing me. There is no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because He comforted me with rays of marvelous inspiration from the Holy Scriptures...

I am a most unworthy sinner, but I have cried out to the Lord for grace and mercy, and they have covered me completely. I have found the sweetest consolation since I made it my whole purpose to enjoy His marvelous presence. For the journey to the Indies, I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps. It is simply the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied...

No one should fear to undertake any task in the name of our Saviour, if it is just and if the intention is purely for His holy service. The working out of all things has been assigned to each person

by our Lord, but it all happens according to His sovereign will, even though He gives advice. He lacks nothing that is in the power of men to give Him. Oh, what a gracious Lord, who desires that people should perform for Him those things for which He holds Himself responsible! Day and night, moment by moment, everyone should express their most devoted gratitude to Him.”

May your Columbus Day celebration be far more meaningful and enlightening for your children.

A Baker’s Dozen **Of Montessori benefits for the child**

Success

If there were only one outcome to be highlighted from a Montessori environment that everyone would be envious of it would be “success”. Not every one thinks important or wants the many other benefits – discovery, spontaneity, freedom etc – that we come to expect naturally as an outworking of the child’s experience in the environment. Ironically, when it comes to success they would give their eye-teeth for what we take for granted. Traditional schools tend to be so focused on success that their children miss so many of the real benefits of a real-life education.

Our lack of “focus” on success is not because we do not care about such things (if we were not successful we would have no students) but we take it as a natural by-product of focusing on the child’s needs and the God-given natural rhythm and makeup of children.

So what is it that unleashes this tremendous success drive (and accomplishment) of Montessori children? It is both a conscious and

unconscious element that is present in the child **and** in the environment. In the environment it is conscious decision to create a coherent learning experience where everything leads to the next step in incremental ways and with the fixed idea that there is no “fixed” time schedule for the apprehension of the ideas presented. What concerns traditionalists about this approach is that they are concerned that children will not learn unless made to and held “accountable”. The difference in Montessori is that the confidence of the teacher is matched and often exceeded by the inevitable confidence (and success) of the child.

Every child **will** succeed is an underlying presupposition of the teacher and the environment (and of the history). Then, does every child succeed? Yes, with an asterisk**** because we choose to define success differently. I think we've earned the privilege of the asterisk because so many of our students learn at such phenomenal speed and depth that there just must be something about the system that does work. But what about the students who don't succeed according to standard success measurements (and maybe even our own measurements)?

During the twenty-nine years that we ran a school we took in all kinds of children who were not the “mythical norm”. We had a blind student, we had Down's children, we had emotionally disturbed children among others. Obviously they weren't going to “succeed” according to the norm but they succeeded in our environment beyond what they might have in a less encouraging, cohesive and loving classroom.

We succeeded in meeting many needs – some better than others. And we

succeeded in meeting some needs (and not meeting other needs) at great cost to our staff and school emotionally. It was always a challenge to see what God could do through us. We eventually succeeded in learning that we were not always equipped to handle some challenges but for whatever time those challenges were with us we helped them reach higher planes than they might have without our help.

Success cannot always be measured by the finish line but in the distance from the start. So in one measure success comes because the teachers, the school and the philosophy are all aligned to create the environment for that success. In Montessori success is not having everyone to have the same outcome at the same time.

Now the second distinguishing feature of Montessori “success” comes because we work with the child's natural sensitive periods and interests. It is here, in the unconscious, that we help set the child's path for future conscious success. Pop psychologists might call it being in “the zone” or “the groove” where the challenges take on a seemingly effortless air of accomplishment. By not fighting against the nature of the child we do not make success harder or more laborious than it needs to be. You can never undo the toil that is required to accomplish goals but you can make the hard work less toilsome.

One definition of success is certainly to reach the goal. And by the classroom's goal of mastery (finishing what we start) we do not engender an attitude of completing seventy percent and quitting. This emphasis on mastery changes the paradigm for the child learner. Since he is no longer “worried” about “passing” he devotes his energy to

succeeding. This is at first an exterior expectation.

Let us take an aside here and talk about the structure of Montessori expectations. We will eventually discuss this topic in greater detail in the “That’s a good question.” series but for now we need to be reminded that there are givens and expectations in a Montessori classroom that are external to the child. In one sense everything does not arise out of the child but arises out of the child’s needs. The environment is a prescribed given. It is set up in a prescribed manner. The materials are “just so”. There are behavioral expectations – inside voice, walking, etc. The child is faced with basic expectations. As he masters these he begins to have the self-control to go beyond these elementary “expectations” to create higher and grander expectations of his own. And this is when success becomes his lodestar. This is when the child moves from unconscious to conscious actions promoting his own success. The self-application of character, discipline, work habits etc to the task at hand naturally results in success.

There is one other significant detail of Montessori engendered success. Success becomes a habit – a delightful habit. One that is filled with good feelings of well being and tremendous inner satisfaction, which also results in an enhanced feeling of self-confidence. Montessori success is not the accumulation of easy victories but of difficult, time consuming, mind engaging but satisfying activities. The difference in the Montessori student is that the accumulation and application of knowledge has become personal and delivers a profound satisfaction.

Children in traditional settings start off their education with excitement but soon (by third or fourth grade) the joy of learning is replaced with a fear of failure. Failure is not considered an option (or an outcome) that is acceptable or expected in a Montessori setting because the structure of the learning environment – working until you master the subject – makes failure an irrelevant concept.

Ultimately the signal difference has to be the concept of variables and constants in the classroom. In traditional classrooms time is the constant and learning is the variable. We will study this for a week and take a test. Some will master sixty percent, others will master eighty and some will master a hundred percent. In a Montessori environment learning is the constant and time is the variable. If Johnny can learn the material in two days and master it, he moves on. If Suzy masters the material in four days she moves on. If Billy needs two weeks to master the material – he is given two weeks. In the end all of succeeded, all have mastered and all have moved on without boredom or frustration.

Success in a Montessori environment is a unique educational phenomenon. Unique because it approaches what the “real” world is like. No manager is satisfied if seventy percent of letters written or widgets manufactured are correct (even if they leave the factory on time). In real life you do it until you get it right – or you wind up having to do it again. It is a tremendous lesson to learn well. It is a tremendous lesson to learn young.

Practical Life

Bread Sticks

One of the all time favorite lessons in the classroom was breadstick making. It was a mark of advanced mastery of multiple disciplines. Breadstick making involved reading, math, practical life, socialization, teamwork and grace and courtesy. In many ways breadstick making became a right of passage because most participants were older fours and fives.

Breadstick making starts off as a team learning experience where two children will spend most of the morning working together. (Note each of the types of activities that are involved.) Children begin by washing their hands (practical life). Then one child washes the table on which they will be making breadsticks while the other child goes to get the melted butter. They then assemble all the ingredients (recipe below) at the table. They read the recipe and measure the ingredients into the mixing bowl.

Once the dough is mixed properly it is rolled out on the floured table and cut into sticks (enough to serve all the classmates). Once cut they dip each stick into the melted butter and place on the cookie sheet. When finished they then wash their hands with soap. (This keeps butter from being everywhere.) With the teacher's assistance the cookie sheet is taken to the oven.

Meanwhile back at the ranch our two little chefs begin the clean up. One washes the utensils while the other washes the table. They will also have to sweep the floor (and mop it if necessary). And return all materials to their designated place.

When the breadsticks are done they will get two baskets with napkin inlays to place the baked breadsticks in to serve to their classmates.

As you can see there are multiple disciplines involved in this one exercise. You start and continue with practical life. You are dealing with teamwork the whole time. You have to be able to read the recipe and do the math. You have to follow directions, be independent and responsible. And in the end you have to exercise grace and courtesy (and charity, after all you're giving away "your" breadsticks to a hungry world). "Excuse me, would you like a breadstick?" "Yes, please. Thank you." "You're welcome." It is a wonderful satisfying exercise for the children (and it tastes good too).

What's needed

Mixing bowl
Measuring spoons
Measuring cups – both dry and liquid
Container for flour
Small container for salt
Small container for baking powder
Wooden spoon
Rolling pin
Small flat bowl for melted butter
Table knife
Cookie sheet
Aprons
Chef's hats

Recipe

Melt $\frac{1}{4}$ stick of butter
1-cup flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of baking powder
Mix flour, salt and baking powder in mixing bowl
Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water
Stir
Roll dough out on table
Cut into strips
Dip in melted butter
Bake at 350 degrees for 10 – 15 minutes

The 10 P's of Ministry

Problems

Last December we visited briefly about problems and promised to return and discuss the seven types of problems that are found in all ministries and in life in general. You don't have to be an administrator to appreciate (actually nobody appreciates problems) the need for dealing with problems. Problems make all of our lives more difficult. The more effective we are in recognizing problem situations (and heading them off) the less stress we will have and the more effective we will become.

One of the axioms of life is that each of us needs to learn how to manage our bosses. I know that sounds backwards but the truth is the better you manage your boss (that's manage – not manipulate) the smoother your relationship will be. So how do you manage the boss? Find out what she wants and beat her to the punch. I know this sounds like a boss speaking but the truth is the more proactive you are in managing yourself the more leeway you will be given, the more respect you will earn and the greater freedom you will have to do what you really want to do.

Good bosses are looking for a "team" to manage and coach. I can hear some of you say "But you don't know my boss. There's no pleasing her. Etc, etc etc." If that is really the case (and you have tried to manage the situation unsuccessfully) then the first problem to deal with is why you are staying in an untenable situation? Most every body will say, "I need the job." But as a friend used to tell me, "I was looking for a job when I found this one." Unless you have a clear call from God to stay where you are (for a multitude of reasons) God does not call us to be masochists – there are already enough people to give you a headache without hitting yourself in the head with a

hammer. Life is too wonderful to be lived overwhelmed by problems that might be solved by a change of position. Of course sometimes we might change our position to our knees to see if we might be contributing to our own problems.

Now I am not advocating running away from problems because "no matter where you go there you are". Problems have answers. The challenge of life is to apply wisdom and understanding to resolve them. However if you are faced with impossibilities (for which God has not given you a clear command to stay) then you need to look up and look out and then look around and then vamoose (that's a good Texas term).

What are impossibilities? Immoral situations, dishonesty, unrestrained jealousy and tension so thick you can cut with a knife (and then even some of these God can resolve). However most of our problems are not so nearly monumental and there are many good bosses and situations where you deal with the problems that arise (and prevent others from arising) and move on effectively doing the job that God has called you to.

The number one problem to deal with is **communications**. It's number one, not because it is the most severe, but because if it is handled well it helps mitigate and eliminate so many of the other problems. Some bosses are good at communications. Some schools have been excellent at keeping the channels open and productive. If you are in a situation where the communication is not what it could be (which creates the possibility for so many other problems) you might take the initiative to create those channels of communication if they have not already been created. Or you might increase your personal use of

those channels. Remember, any problem that you resolve before it becomes a problem lessens the stress and tension and increases the satisfaction of a job well done.

When we ran our school we would have a monthly all staff meeting. We would have weekly department meetings. We would publish a weekly newsletter. And we would talk as often as was possible. Communications is not a one-time thing. It is an ongoing process. And it is up to each of us to make sure we understand and we are understood. I had one staff member who would come to visit with me every three or four months just to sit and talk – building the relationship – so we could hear (and understand) each other's heart.

Communications is about a relationship. And if you don't communicate (that goes for husbands and wives and children too) you invite the problems that arise from both lack of communication and miscommunication. We can't read other people's minds and they certainly can't read ours (thank goodness on many occasions). So it is wisdom to learn and to practice communication in order to resolve this problem before it becomes one.

Next month we will talk about the problem of **disagreements**.

Cross Mountain Forum

www.crossmountainforum.com

We would like to extend an invitation to heads of schools to consider attending a Cross Mountain forum especially set up for Montessori schools. The forums are designed to deal with the challenges of running a school. More information can be found on our web site. However what cannot be found on the web site is a special forum and price for CMF

members. We have set the Forum of October 30th – November 2nd as a Montessori forum and we have reduced the price to \$675. Ask the Lord if this might not be an excellent investment in your continued ministry.

Membership

We continue to ask you to join with us in supporting the work of the Christian Montessori Fellowship by becoming a member. Membership includes the following benefits:

- 1. Discounts at conferences, seminars and forums.**
- 2. Discounts on tapes and literature**
- 3. Membership directory**
- 4. Membership certificate**
- 5. Reduced advertising costs in the Cobbler**
- 6. Discounts from selected vendors**
- 7. A nice warm feeling knowing you are not alone and are not the only one seeking to return to the true spiritual roots of this unique education.**
- 8. Your membership will help you, and others, to better serve your children in Christ's name by providing opportunities for fellowship, learning and encouragement.**
- 9. We have found a "pearl of great price" and your support of the Fellowship will help spread this "good news" so many more children might truly be nurtured intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually and come to know the Good Shepherd personally.**

Time for Action

_____ Yes, I want to still receive the newsletter.

Yes, you may include me in the directory.

Yes, I want to support the work of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

You may join and support the fellowship by making your check for \$50 payable to The Christian Montessori Fellowship or use your Visa, Master Card, Discover or American Express.

Credit card number_____

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Signature_____

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We want to continue to make the newsletter available without charge but we need to hear from you if you are still interested in receiving the newsletter. Please fill out and return the survey from last month's Cobbler. Thank you so much for your prayers for this ministry as we encourage each other in the wonderful ministry to our children.

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