

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
July – August 2003

Conference dates set for 2004
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That's a good question.

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

1. Montessori is humanistic isn't it?

The scriptures tell us to be ready “in season and out of season” to give an answer for our faith. We need to hold that same readiness for this wonderful tool we use called Montessori.

In dealing with objections to Montessori be quick to reframe the question so you can help the inquirer to better understand what he is really asking about. How the question is asked does frame the discussion. (Try answering, “Have you quit beating your wife (husband) yet?” satisfactorily.) Reframing the question starts you on the road to being able to give a satisfying answer to your questioner.

Rephrasing “Montessori is humanistic isn't it?” into “Do you mean humanists have taken it over?”, helps put a totally different perspective on the question (let alone the answer).

Asking if they mean that the humanists have taken over Montessori just as they have the movies, television, magazines, book publishing etc. gives them pause to realize that is what their real question is.

We live in a world of shorthand where we label everything in order to

make quick decisions and judgments. And this is what happens to Montessori in a broad Christian context – it is judged to be humanistic. More specifically and correctly what is being judged as Montessori is seen as a “Secular Humanistic” philosophy.

For our own clarity we need to define secular humanism as a philosophy that rejects the supernatural and focuses solely on man and his ability and capacity for self-realization (through reason). This definition helps me understand why some might consider Montessori humanistic.

If it were possible to perfect man with out God, Montessori would come the closest to succeeding. That “**If**” is in bold because that **IS** the dividing line between a secular and Christian approach, not just to Montessori, but to all of life – the need for God.

Ironically it is the more spiritual people (Christian and non-Christian) who are drawn to this way of teaching.

Again, ironically, Montessori's earlier books are full of scripture and spiritual insights that were shared with her and illuminated for her by the Creator of the children whom she blessed by pursuing this fantastic way of teaching.

If it appears that the humanists have taken over this way of teaching it might be because this way of teaching actually works. God's principles in action work no matter who wields them.

Humanism makes man the center of everything in distinction to Christianity

where Jesus is the center – and it is He who holds all things together. Colossians 1:17

Most people who have real objections to Montessori have not studied it and are relying on word of mouth and an occasional poor example. It is a privilege to share with people the wonderful truth of how Montessori works.

In future newsletters we will continue to pursue the questions of Montessori including: Children can do anything they want; there is no discipline; it is too structured; it does not have enough structure; how can you say you are Christian and Montessori; how do you bring Christianity into the classroom; what is different about a Montessori education; and any other questions that you have been asked and would like to send in.

Holidays

Labor Day

Work is God's idea. Work is not part of the curse. Yes we will "by the sweat of our brow eat our bread" because the earth is cursed (Genesis 3:17) but work itself was instituted by God in the garden before the fall. Adam had work to do – work God gave him to do - meaningful work - fulfilling work. In Genesis 2:15 we are told, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." Work is God's idea and as we share that with our children hopefully we convey to them how it pleases God that we do work. This is a major distinction to what we find in society where the ultimate goal seems to be to retire from work.

Sharing with our children that to find joy in our work is also to please God. Our work is much easier when we find it joyful – or is it the other way around - when we are joyful our work is easier?

Either way we fulfill God's plan for us as we find the unique work that He has equipped each of us for. Interestingly in Montessori we find that "our work is our play" and that there is great joy in the process of discovery and mastery.

Labor day should be more than just a day off from school or work it should be a reminder to us and to our children of the purpose and dignity that God has given to us in the opportunity of work.

Jesus came to redeem, not only, our souls but our relationships, our struggles, our lives and our work.

Practical Life

Life cycles

The emphasis on practical life is one of the most significant educational developments in Montessori. The preparation for learning is also a learning in and of itself. However our children will miss a significant benefit if we try too quickly to pass over practical life to get to "the good stuff". This is why you will have to invest time in parent education so your parents will stop (if possible) pressuring you and their child to achieve quickly all these wonderful academic goals that are possible to be accomplished in a Montessori environment if the child is given enough time to establish a sure foundation for learning.

The key may lie in sharing with parents that this practical life exercise – whatever it might be – is a key element in preparing their child to read. The magic word for parents is "reading". That is what they are paying for not realizing how much more they and their child are receiving through all the preparation that is truly needed for mastery and not just for mediocre attainment.

A note for parent education is to ask them if they know at which corner one starts washing a table. Often they look at you blank because they have no idea that washing a table, let alone which corner to begin with, is even an academic concern. Your answer to them would be “If we were a Chinese school we would start in the upper right hand corner because Chinese is read from right to left. So obviously we start in the upper left hand corner to help establish reading patterns for our children.”

All of a sudden parents will look at you (and Montessori) in a new light; one because you’ve given them an insight they did not possess and two, they will begin to understand that there is logic behind all of the “play”.

Practical life is a key difference that makes Montessori so successful as an educational process. And there are many things we can do to enhance practical life. One of these we call “practical life cycles” which is the logical process where one practical life exercise leads to another.

Let’s explore snacks as a beginning point. Now many of you may not do snacks this way but this may be an occasion to consider change. If you have an independent snack table – where children are free to go get their snacks when they are ready (yes, they can be trained to take only one snack) – you can set it up with plates and napkins for snacks. We used a tablecloth; others use place mats to define the snack table setting. If a child is going to have a snack he will first wash his hands then he will proceed to the snack table. There he will find a plate and a napkin ready for his use. The child places the napkin in his lap, says the blessing and enjoys his snack. When he is finished he places his plate in the basin for dirty plates so

they may be washed in the dishwashing exercise. He places his napkin in a basin or basket so it may be washed in the clothes washing exercise. And then he resets the table for the next child to have snacks. Now is a good time to note that using paper napkins does make it hard to wash them in the clothes washing exercise. There are five good reasons to use cloth napkins - economics, ecology, grace and courtesy, to have something to wash and to have something to iron.

The ironing of the napkins is a great exercise and responsibility. The use of a small travel iron meets this need rather well. The ironing exercise is set up with a stand for the iron, a small tabletop ironing board, the travel iron and a wristband. The whole secret of safety (which is a concern for many) is in the wristband. Before a child begins the ironing exercise he puts the wristband on the left hand if he is right handed. The wristband is to remind him that that wrist goes behind his back when he picks up the iron. You use both hands to put the napkin on the ironing board. You put one hand behind your back and then you pick up the iron and iron. When you have finished the first pass with the iron, you put the iron on its stand and use both hands to fold the napkin in half. You then place your hand behind your back and then iron the half folded napkin. When you have completed the half napkin ironing you place the iron on its stand, use both hands to fold the napkin into half again and then repeat the process. You stack the napkins in their appropriate place.

Many child welfare departments have great concern over the plates being washed. To satisfy them you would take the stack of washed plates and run them through whatever process you use after the children have left for the day.

So what have we strung together for our children?

1. Hand washing
2. Snack time
3. Table setting
4. Dish washing
5. Clothes washing
6. Ironing

The significance of this cycle (to share with parents of course) is that we are helping to develop not only large motor skills which are essential to writing but the ability to follow through step by step procedures to completion which is a skill essential to reading writing and to life. Not a bad day's work for just "playing".

Conference tapes

If you weren't able to make it to the conference the next best thing is to be inspired by the encouragement offered by our speakers.

Barbara Fidellow

How Jesus comes to your classroom: an overview of the many ways (other than Bible stories) that Jesus makes himself felt in your classroom.

Celebrating Holidays: Holidays are more than just days off from school. They are tremendous teaching tools and tremendously important in the development of our children's lives.

Real physical education: A Montessori environment offers a real education physically to our children. We've come to associate PE with games only but it is helping children to take care of themselves.

Cindy Creel

What you need to know about toddlers.

A delightful introduction to the toddler world – full of surprises and mystery - shared from a teacher's heart.

Edward Fidellow

That's a good question: If you can't wait for the next eight month's newsletters you can get a quick overview of the major questions (and some great answers) often asked about Montessori.

Discipline: A totally different approach to help your thinking about what discipline really is (and should be). Try "Discipline is a positive force" to begin with.

The prepared environment: A refreshing look and reminder at what contributes to the success of a Montessori education. This talk helps keep the importance of the environment in view.

Independence: Developing independence has long been a Montessori tradition and success factor. Understanding what independence means for and to the child will better help you to develop it in the child.

Tapes are \$8.00 each.

Hurry up and slow down.

The Secret of Childhood

Maria Montessori

Chapter 14

"A child is an eager observer and is particularly attracted by the actions of adults and wants to imitate them. In this regard an adult can have a kind of mission. He can be an inspiration for a child's actions, a kind of open book wherein a child can learn how to direct his own movements. But an adult, if he is to afford the proper guidance, must always be calm and act slowly so that the child who is watching him can clearly see his actions in all their particulars.

If an adult does not do this but yields instead to his own natural tendencies, then, instead of inspiring the child and instructing him, he will impart his own rapid rhythms upon the soul of the child and substitute himself for the child through the power of suggestion.”

A Baker’s Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Movement

You might think that the eleventh commandment in traditional education is “Sit still.” It is probably heard more often than all of the other ten. And yet these “innocuous” two words are one of the major dividing lines between education that works with the child rather than education that works against the child’s nature.

God made children to move. God created their movement to aid the child’s learning. Most of us were educated with the concept of movement being prohibited instead of movement being channeled to its beneficial ends.

Children have become accustomed to understanding that “movement is bad and stillness is good”. However in God’s creation He has designed the child to move and in that movement to add to, accumulate and experience the learning that helps create the child and the adult.

Montessori holds that it is in movement that the intellect develops. “Through movement he(the child) acts upon his external environment and thus carries out his own personal mission in the world. Movement is not only an impression of the ego but it is an indispensable factor in the development of consciousness, since it is the only real means which places the ego in a clearly

defined relationship with external reality.”

Membership

In the last two months we have received letters and calls from people we’ve not met before who have encouraged us to consider having membership dues to support the work of the fellowship. When this encouragement came from many sources unsolicited you have to wonder if God is speaking. We have wanted to keep the fellowship open and available to all but there is a financial reality that confronts all of us. For us to be able to serve the Christian Montessori community (and to introduce Montessori to the Christian education community) funds are needed for mailings and meetings etc.

We want to continue to be available to encourage Christian Montessorians in their ministries. Many Christian Montessorians don’t work in “Christian” Montessori schools but never the less have a strong spiritual impact on their children. On the other hand every couple of months someone calls or writes us and shares how they are being led to transform their secular Montessori school into a Christian Montessori school so they can freely share and build the spiritual life of their children. And we are actively working toward the day when traditional Christian schools will embrace this wonderfully spiritual way of teaching.

Therefore we will continue for now to offer the newsletter **without charge** to anyone who has an interest in the fellowship but we will ask those of you who have an interest in furthering this work and who have been blessed by “The Cobbler” and the fellowship to become dues paying members at an

become dues paying members at an annual fee of \$50. For your membership fee we will offer the following benefits.

- 1. Discounts at conferences, seminars and forums.**
- 2. Discounts on CMF 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 many 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 Christian Montessori 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.**

Survey

Your help in filling out this survey will better help us to know you and what your needs are. Please, "pretty please", take the few minutes this requires and send it back to us.

Personal

Name _____
Address _____
State, Zip _____
Email _____

Telephone _____

How long have you taught? _____

Level you teach :

0-3 _____

3-6 _____

6-9 _____

9-12 _____

12-15 _____

15-18 _____

Are you a: teacher _____

administrator _____

teacher/administrator _____

assistant _____

aid _____

parent _____

owner _____

What is your church affiliation

Schools

Name of your school

Location

How large is your school?

In what kind of school do you teach:

Secular Montessori _____

Montessori School with Christian principles _____

Christian Montessori school _____

Is the school affiliated with a church?

Which Church _____

Is your school:

Non-profit _____

A proprietorship _____

Training

Who trained you:

AMI _____

AMS _____

NCME _____

MIA _____

IMS _____
St. Nicholas _____
Other _____

What year did you take your training?

What was the major strength of your training?

What would you have liked to see strengthened in your training?

What do you need for continued growth and excellence in your own teaching?

Interest

What is your interest in Christian Montessori?

To teach in a Christian Montessori school _____

To start a Christian Montessori school _____

To transform an existing school _____

To be a better teacher where you are now _____

Not sure at this time _____

Are you familiar with hands on Bible curriculums (Godly play, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd)? Yes _____

No _____

Is there a need for training from a Christian viewpoint? Yes _____

No _____

Do you have an interest in attending CMF seminars near you? Yes _____
No _____

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 _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Christian Montessori Fellowship

Cross Mountain Forum

22630 East Range

San Antonio, TX 78255

210-698-1911

Fidellow@swbell.net

www.crossmountainforum.com

Additional Website

www.christianmontessorifellowship.com

We are in the process of constructing a separate website for CMF. You will be able to order materials, check on seminars, pay dues, get past newsletters and more.

Quotes from the 2003 Conference

“The fellowship of other believers almost surpassed the Montessori presentations.”

“I felt valued, (you took good care of us.) The speakers were excellent. I will use what I learned. I am inspired to keep doing better.”

“I just feel so refreshed after each conference and it is good to be able to share with others who face the same problems as I do each day through the year.”

“This year’s conference was so much more in depth. I came away with so many ideas that I can use immediately.”

“I came discouraged and left focused and encouraged.”

“I had no expectations when I arrived. I spent the first day feeling sorry for myself that others can openly acknowledge Christ but I can’t. So what was given to me – I may not be able to plant seeds at the moment but I am preparing the soil. Thank you for a jewel of a conference.”

“Christian Montessori has opened a whole new world for me. I can hardly wait to put these ideas into practice. My students will be blessed and God will smile. This is the way God ordained our children should be taught.”

Christian Montessori Fellowship
22630 East Range
San Antonio, Texas 78255

Help for the challenges
Of Administrating
Attend a Cross Mountain Forum
Check out the website