

The Cobbler Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

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National Conference

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New Series starting next month
“Insider” Montessori Myths

A Baker’s Dozen **of Montessori benefits for the child** **Respect**

As a Christian, you would think that respect would be a common occurrence in our lives toward all people. And for the most part, when we take our relationship with God seriously, we do embrace the concept of respecting each other and try to accomplish this.

At one time in our society respect was a cardinal virtue, not only taught to children, but taught over and over, encouraged, demanded and propounded (and pounded if need be.) Respect was given to elders, women, people of esteem or accomplishment, magistrates and a whole list more of worthy individuals. But seemingly, as we attempted to treat the whole world as our brothers (aren’t we all children of the Most High?) this respect never seemed to descend downward to the children.

It is not that we didn’t love our children but nowhere in our training for life – home, school, or church - did

anyone emphasize this respect downward. In our zeal to make sure our children got all of the training and virtues they needed for life – especially respect – did it ever dawn on us to model this respect to and toward the ones we were training.

Walking with Jesus isn’t enough. It is not just doing what He does but becoming what He is. We have to take on His very heart. And it is at its tenderest when faced with children. We all assume that when Jesus cleaned out the moneychangers in the Temple He was angry but the scriptures do not record that emotion. However when the disciples rebuked the parents for bringing their children to Jesus the scriptures record (Mark 10:14) that Jesus was “indignant”. And nowhere else is that word used.

Would the disciples have rebuked the Elders, the Sanhedrin, the rich, and the powerful? No. Just parents bringing their children to be blessed. And so it continues with the question of who is worthy of respect. Jesus constantly holds up children as a model for the humility needed and the simplicity of faith needed to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. And we tend to disrespect, sometimes intentionally, often unintentionally this icon of faith among us.

Mark 9:36-37 gives us a unique insight into the heart of Jesus. “He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in His arms, he said

to them 'Whoever welcomes one of these little ones in My name, welcomes Me; and whoever welcomes Me does not welcome Me but the one who sent Me.' "

I believe we can justly substitute the word respect for welcome and establish this concept for respect of the child. So, how do we go about giving this respect to the child?

First, let us never treat children (or adults) with the disrespect that comes from low expectations. Being dismissive – "Well, they're only children" – ranks along with any other stereotype of gender, race or class. Having the highest expectations for someone often does become a self-fulfilling prophecy because of the encouragement. Visitors are always surprised at what Montessori children can do.

The second sign of respect that children receive in the environment is the environment itself. Again, "They're only children and won't appreciate ____" (fill in the blank) is not a Montessori phrase or attitude. The quality of the environment and the care of the environment speak immeasurably of our esteem for the children.

Most of us share the common experience of dining on Grandmother's fine china only if it was a special occasion or someone important was invited. At our school, we dined every day on tablecloths with crystal and china starting from pre-school all the way up. Our High School dining room was carpeted and chandeliered. Guest would often ask if we thought our high school students really appreciated the dining experience. Our reply would be, we didn't do it for them to appreciate but for them to feel appreciated.

Let me give you an aside here. In our home, we only have one set of dishes – fine china, the kind that is thirty or forty dollars a plate. We have used them everyday for the last thirty-five years. And in that time eleven pieces have been broken – the adults broke eight. For those of you who have china, maybe you have Grandma's china (probably still brand new) take it out and use it for the most important people in your life. Today is a special occasion at your house because you are celebrating how much you love each other. Gee, then maybe everyday is a special occasion.

Children are very careful with fine things. They learn respect for them both from us and from the consequences that come when they are not careful. When you have plastic glasses and they fall to the floor there is no immediate consequence. Yes, they may be chipped or cracked but the child does not observe this. However, when you drop crystal there is an immediate consequence. Children learn to have respect for things that can be broken. It is also a good habit for adults to observe.

There are multiple venues of respect in the classroom. We respect the child's work because we understand that the major work of the child is to create the adult that God intends for him to be. By our respecting the child's work, the child begins to respect his work – and himself. We respect the child's need to finish what he has started. We respect the child's need for independence. We respect the child's need for mastery and closure. We respect the child's need for movement and freedom. We respect the child's need for order. And the list can go on and on of what we truly respect in and

for the child. Ultimately, we respect the child's need for independence. (Independence means self-government.)

By practicing and modeling this respect for the child, the child in turn learns not only to respect himself and his work but to respect others and their unique giftings and callings from God.

Educational Principles Of Montessori

8. Development of Self Control

There is a temptation in Montessori, as there is in much of life, to state that this – whatever we are addressing - is the most important factor in achieving success. I will resist that temptation here only by saying that the lack of development of self-control will make all success and achievement doubly hard if not at times impossible.

The purpose in the discussion of Montessori educational principles is to practice filtering all of our actions, words and presentations through this matrix.

Traditionalists and Montessorians often get similar educational outcomes – similar, not identical. The difference is more than just the educational methodology. The difference is in the outcome of the personality and life of the learner.

Pragmatists say, “If it works it is good.” Idealists say, “If it is good it will work.” Our temptation comes when we look at the situation for what “works”. Instead, our challenge is to look at the child and his needs and to be careful not to interpose our needs.

The child has a need for self-control. And this self-control cannot be imposed from the outside. It has to be built from within. So our presentations, actions, reactions and interventions need to be based on the question “Are we helping the child to develop this self-control?”

Self-control has at least two parameters – one real, one ideal. The “real” parameter of self-control involves the child in facing and dealing with consequences. As a child matures and is allowed to face real consequences, the child begins to exercise choice over their actions. Their experience begins to show them which actions produce which consequences. If the adults involved are consistent and do not intervene unnecessarily, the child will begin to exercise self-control to bring about the desired outcome (or to avoid an undesired outcome).

There is always one caveat to this. The reward or punishment of the consequence must be greater than the reward or punishment of doing or not doing the action. A classic cartoon shows one dog talking to another saying, “A few swats with a rolled up newspaper is worth a fresh roast off the table anytime.” Real self-control is developed in an atmosphere of real consequences.

An example, in traditional education the consequence of failing a test is an “F”, which may or may not motivate a child. In Montessori, the consequence of failing a test is the requirement of doing it over. Interestingly, you will find that in human nature we would rather do it once right than twice over. And this concept begins to create within the child the self-control to do what they must do.

Secondly, you will find that there is an “ideal” parameter that promotes self control within the child. The ideal parameter does not have immediate tangible, physical consequences. It lies within the emotional and spiritual realm. Children will develop self-control to please (or avoid displeasing) those that they love. The emotional component is directed at their families. The spiritual component is directed toward God. The more developed the relationships (hopefully to the positive side) the more influence they exercise on the internal development of self-control.

Ultimately, it will be love of God and family that will bring the greatest motivation to exercise self-control. Fear of God and family “works” but comes nowhere close to the ideal that makes this internalization effective.

“Perfect love casts out all fear.” And the child’s pure love for God, which cannot be engendered from the outside, only encouraged, will create this drive for self-control.

The 10’ ps of Ministry Pressure Spiritual

Of all the pressures we face in school and in life, it is the spiritual pressure that comes from within that often will give us the greatest struggles. We can avoid pressures and we can ignore pressures that come to us from exterior relationships and difficulties. It is the spiritual pressures that well-up within that require and demand action and resolution.

We find it hard to still the voice of God speaking within us. When our actions and attitudes, seemingly

justified on our part, begin to create this spiritual reaction within us the pressure rises.

If we choose to walk with God, we don’t always get to choose the way we want to handle problems, relationships and pressures. Our justifications pale in light of God’s grace and mercy. And we find that there is spiritual pressure to get rid of our annoyances, attitudes and actions that do not reflect Him. The pressure on us is for repentance. What makes this a pressure is that we are often the aggrieved party and we feel that others should make the first step to relieve the tensions that exist. But He calls us to repentances (for our attitudes and thoughts) and then calls us to actions of humility and grace. Or should that be grace and humility because sometimes we need a whole lot of grace to practice any kind of humility – especially when we think we are right.

It is these actions taken under spiritual pressure that truly reflect God’s grace acting through us because we would never exercise them if we weren’t truly trying to follow Him and please Him.

The Secret of Childhood

Chapter 19 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition.

19. Observations and Discoveries

Repetition of the exercise

“Similar events kept recurring, and every time children emerged from such an experience, they were like individuals who had rested. They were filled with

life and resembled those who have experienced some great joy.” (120)

“Though periods of concentration that made the children oblivious to the outer world **were not frequent**, I noted a strange behavior that was common to all and nearly constant in all their actions. This is what I later called “repetition of the exercise”. (120)

“I realized that they wished to put the objects back where they belonged. I let them do it, and this began a new kind of life for them; they were enthralled with putting things in order and straightening them up. If a glass of water slipped from a child’s hands, others would run up to collect the broken pieces and wipe the floor.” (120)

Free Choice

“They could now choose their own occupations according to their own particular preferences. From this time on we made use of low cupboards so that the children could take from them the materials that corresponded to their own inner needs. This principle of free choice was thus added to that of repetition of the exercise. (121)

The free choice made by the chairman enabled us to observe their psychic needs and tendencies.” (121)

“I then came to realize that everything about a child should not only be in order, but that it should be proportioned to the child’s use, and that interest and concentration arise specifically from the elimination of what is confusing and superfluous. (122)

Toys

“I realized that in the life of the child play is perhaps something of little importance which he undertakes for the lack of something better to do. (122)

“Because a child is constantly passing from a lower to a higher state, his every passing minute is precious. Since a child is constantly growing, he is fascinated by everything that contributes to his development and becomes indifferent to idle occupations.” (122)

Rewards and Punishments

“This single incident made us realize the futility of rewards and punishments.” (123)

“What was even more surprising was their frequent refusal of a reward. This marked an awakening in the conscience of a sense of dignity that had not previously existed. (123)

Silence

“I thus came to understand that children are not only sensitive to silence but also to a voice that calls them almost inaudibly out of that silence. They will come up slowly walking on tiptoes and taking care not to knock against anything that would make them heard.” (124)

“I later came to realize that every exercise involving movement where mistakes can be corrected, as in this case where noise was checked by silence, is of great assistance to a child. (124)

Repetition of such an exercise can lead a child to perform exterior acts with a perfection which it could never attain through mere instruction.” (125)

“Our children became agile and alert by learning how to walk around various objects without bumping into them and how to run lightly without making a sound. They rejoiced in the perfection with which they performed such actions. They were interested in discovering their potentialities and in exercising themselves in the mysterious world where their lives were unfolding.” (125)

Dignity

“But no one really teaches them how they should blow their noses. When I tried to do so, they felt compensated for past humiliations, and their applause indicated that I had not only treated them with justice but had enabled them to get a new standing in society.” (126)

“Long experience has taught me that this is a proper interpretation of the incident. I have come to appreciate the fact that children have a deep sense of personal dignity. Adults, as a rule, have no concept of how easily they are wounded and oppressed.” (127)

“When visitors came to the school, the children behaved with dignity and self-respect. They knew how to receive these visitors with warm enthusiasm and show them how they carried out their tasks.” (127)

“The children had acquired a sense of their own dignity. They respected their visitors and were proud to show them what they could do.” (128)

“These poised little children, full of charm and dignity, were always ready to receive visitors. They had lost their former timidity. There was now no

obstacle lying between their souls and their surroundings.” (128)

“Their self-possession could be attributed to their immediate and perfect adaptation to their environment.” (128)

Discipline

“Despite their easy freedom of manner, the children on the whole gave the impression of being extraordinarily disciplined.” (129)

“What particularly fascinated visitors was the order and discipline they managed to combine with spontaneity.” (130)

“What was the source of the perfect discipline that informed them even in periods of intense silence and of the obedience that almost anticipated the orders given?” (130)

“The peaceful atmosphere that pervaded the classroom as the children pursued their work was extremely touching. No one had provoked it, and no one could have obtained it by external means.” (130)

Writing and Reading

“What is phonetic spelling except a correspondence between sound and sign?” (131)

“Writing is a key to a double gain. It enables the hand to master a vital skill like that of speaking and to create a second means of communication that reflects the spoken words in all its details. Writing is thus dependent upon mind and hand.” (131)

“Writing was understood by the children simply as another way of expressing oneself, another form of speech which, like speech itself, was passed directly from one person to another.” (133)

“A premature insistence upon their reading words from books would have had a negative effect.” (134)

Physical effects

“During all this time nothing had been done to improve the children’s health. But now no one would have recognized in their rosy and vivacious countenances the undernourished, anemic children that had seemed to be so much in need of food, tonics and medical care.” (134)

“Indeed, if psychic impressions can have an influence on the metabolism and thus lower one’s vitality, the opposite can also happen: a stimulating psychic experience can increase the rate of metabolism and thus contribute to one’s physical well-being.” (135)

The Shamrock Tree Celebrating St. Patrick’s Day

St Patrick used the shamrock to teach the Irish the concept of the Trinity. The shamrock has come down to us as a lucky symbol – especially if you find a four-leaf clover. But we can use the shamrock to teach our children two very important truths. First, that all of our “luck” is really a blessing from God. If we acknowledge this, then we can practice one of the most significant virtues – thankfulness.

Without thankfulness, all of your “luck” and all of your blessings don’t

mean much because you are always saying, “Is that all there is?” or “I should have had more.” And the happiness that could fill our hearts is replaced with greed and ingratitude.

So for this St. Patrick’s Day create a tree (a stand-alone tree or on the bulletin board) where each child can write on a shamrock all of the things that they are thankful for. Having a thankful heart is a great gift. And it is more than “the luck of the Irish” it is a blessing straight from the heart of God.

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.

Director Wanted

Incarnate Word Academy in Corpus Christi Texas is looking for a Montessori Coordinator to direct their Montessori program of 141 students in three primary, three lower el and one upper el environments. Need to be degreed, certified, experienced and Catholic. Contact Sister Camelia Herlihy at 361-883-0857, sherlihy@iwacc.org.

Membership

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

www.Christianmontessorifellowship.com

National Conference

We are looking for topics and presenters for the National Conference. Are there topics you would like to see discussed? Were there topics presented in last month's newsletter that would be beneficial for you?

National Conference

June 23-25

**Respecting the Child
His spirit and his life**

The conference begins at 10:00 A.M. Thursday June 23rd and runs through Saturday evening.

Conference cost is \$325 (\$300 if paid by May 1st, plus an additional \$25 discount for CMF members) and includes 3 lunches, 2 full breakfasts, morning and afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner.

More details are available on our websites:

www.christianmontessorifellowship.com

www.crossmountainforum.com

Or call 210-698-1911

Send in your registration Now

Make your reservations at

The Crockett Hotel

Across from the Alamo

1-800-292-1050

Lodging costs \$98.28 (tax included)

Double or single

Rates are good if you register for the hotel by May 23rd

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