

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
January 2005

National Conference

San Antonio

June 23 – 25, 2005

Regional Seminars

Shreveport, LA January 22

Houston January 29

Corpus Christi February 12

Learning

“Sister Agnes Patricia was the most influential teacher I ever knew. What I will always remember about her is her statement that there is no such thing as teaching--only learning. She believed that no teacher could ever teach anyone anything. Her task as a teacher was to create an environment in which the student can learn. Knowledge, she told us, standing very straight in her long black habit, her face framed by her white wimple, pointed at the top like the spire of a cathedral, needs to be pulled into the brain by the student, not pushed into it by the teacher. Knowledge is not to be forced on anyone. The brain has to be receptive, malleable, and most important, hungry for that knowledge. To use the word “teach” implies an injection of knowledge. Like Sister Agnes Patricia, I came to agree that there is no such thing as teaching, only learning.”

Monty Roberts

(Submitted by John Lewis)

The 10' ps of Ministry

Pressure

Relationships

Positive

We tend to think that the only pressure from relationships comes from the negative – difficult personalities, confrontations, unreasonable expectations, demands etc. However, even our positive relationships create their own pressures.

People we like and love create pressure for us too. First, because we have a good relationship with people there are expectations on their part, if not for preferential treatment, something very close to it. It is very difficult, even in a professional environment, to treat everyone the same. You really do like some people better than others. Some people make your life easier than others. Some people contribute tremendously to the success of your endeavors. And because of these relationships, there are expectations. And expectations cause pressure.

Second, these relationships create pressure within us to treat people differently. It is very common for us not to confront people we love. We don't want to disturb the good relationship that we have so sometimes we allow behavior and performance to

slip. It is bad enough when we do it unknowingly but it even creates more pressure for us when we recognize our failure to confront those we love.

Every teacher knows (but many won't admit) the struggle to grade and treat students equally. It takes great effort to bend over backwards to make sure that the student's who aren't your favorites (for any of a dozen reasons) don't suffer discrimination or prejudice from your behavior or grading.

Most of us know prejudice in its negative context – having opinions or judgments formed without a basis in fact, knowledge or logic. It is ironic then to describe love as the greatest prejudice in the world because it has no rational basis – it just is. It is also ironic that this love we feel for our co-workers and students sometimes will create a pressure for us to go beyond what we might do for strangers. While this is natural, it can cause pressure if others around us perceive that this special relationship works to their detriment.

As my oldest daughter was growing up and finding her place as a leader, I shared with her that she would have to fight for her leadership positions three times. First, because all leaders have to exert this effort to lead. Second, unfairly, I told her she would have to fight for her leadership again because she was a girl. And third, she would have to fight for her leadership because she was my daughter.

There is always pressure to intervene on behalf of those you love. You have to be wise enough to know when not to give into that pressure.

A Baker's Dozen

of Montessori benefits for the child Choice

Quintessence (noun): The essence of a thing in its purest and most concentrated form. Quintessential (adjective). This describes the place of choice, not only in a Montessori environment but in life itself. Choice is the quintessential action of life. Start at any point in your day, your week, your year or your life and ponder the place of choice. Yes, some choices have more importance than others but all choices (and even non-choices) have one thing in common they cause something to happen.

The essence of Montessori life – of all life – is to teach our children to make wise choices. You are probably familiar with the story of the successful man who was asked about the secret of success. “Making wise choices.” He replied. “How did you learn to make wise choices?” “From experience.” “And where did you get this experience?” “From making poor choices.”

The challenge for parents and teachers is to allow children to make choices – and let them live with the consequence of their choices. This can only be done in an environment that is safe, accepting and encouraging to choice makers. The two environments should be home and school. Too often, the adults in life are more concerned about how they are perceived by other adults and therefore try to pre-determine the outcome of the child's choices.

The only way to successfully fly solo is to be trained to fly solo with the instructor intervening only when the choice is life threatening. The sad

reality of life is that so many people are incapable of making choices – wise or otherwise. They have never received adequate practice to give themselves the confidence to make wise choices. A major success principal of life is that when you make a choice and it proves to be a poor choice you can always make another choice. Yes, there are consequences to every choice – some more severe than others; but the principal of choice is to learn how to come to the right choice. And it is often by trial and error. It takes tremendous confidence in the first place to make a choice (this is in distinction to impulsive actions made without thought). Assess the consequences and if necessary make another choice – hopefully a better one.

Is there a cost to all of this? Of course. For youngsters it is mostly a cost of time, which they seem to have in abundance. As they get older, the costs become both monetary and social. Eventually, the cost becomes one of opportunity. Make the wrong choices and certain opportunities are not available to you – getting a job that requires a degree and you don't have one; not making a good first impression etc.

There is a classic story from Dear Abby. A man wrote, "I'm 36 years old and am considering going to medical school. By the time I'm finished with school and residency I'll be 43 years old. I'm wondering if I should do it?" Abby's reply, "How old will you be in 7 years if you don't do it?"

Life is full of choices. What will I eat? What will I wear? Where will I live? Where will I work? Who will I marry? And on and on. Being able to make wise choices takes time and practice. That is

what a Montessori environment offers its children.

There are many kinds of choices. Just doing what you want is one of them – which a lot of people think Montessori is all about. But wise choices very much has to do with priority. Learning how to choose to do what is important first is crucial. Learning that there are preference choices is part of our personality. Do I eat what I like first or save it until last?

Then there is the ultimate wise choice – when I don't have any choices – is to choose my attitude. The whole Montessori environment is a life laboratory for children to practice and learn how to make wise choices. The ultimate wise choice is learning to choose God. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The Secret of Childhood

Chapters 16 – 18 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition.

16. The Lack of Comprehension

"Since adults have no concept of the importance of physical activity for a child, they put a damper on it as a cause of disturbance." (100)

"Physical activity is of great importance for man's moral and intellectual development." (101)

"Physical activity ..is intimately connected with one's personality".

“It is through seeing and hearing that one’s personality is molded and developed”
(102)

“The same is brought about through movement.”

“A fundamental goal of education and of life itself is that a rational creature should so master his instruments of motion that his actions are not imply guided by an instinctive response to sense stimuli but also by reason itself.”

“If an individual cannot attain this goal, he fails to attain the unity of personality to be expected in a rational animal.”

17. The Intelligence of Love

“Every work which is done according to the laws of nature and creates a harmony among beings attains consciousness under a form of love.” (103)

“Love is not the cause but the effect.”

The moving force is instinct, the creative power of life; but in the process of creation it begets love, and this love fills the child’s consciousness and affects his self-realization.”

“That irresistible impulse which unites a child with the objects about him during the sensitive periods is actually a love for his environment.”

“It is not simply an emotional reaction, but an intellectual desire or love which enables a child to see and hear and thus develop.”

“Because he is in love with his environment and not indifferent to it, a child’s intelligence can see what is invisible to adults.”

“A child’s love of his surroundings appears to adults as the natural joy and vivacity of youth. But they do not recognize it as a spiritual energy, a moral beauty which accompanies creation.”

“A child’s love is by nature simple. He loves in order that he may receive impressions which will furnish him with means of growth.” (104)

“The special object of the child’s affection is the adult.”

“Through his actions an adult shows a child how men behave. A child begins to live his own life by imitating the adults with whom he comes in contact.”

“What an adult tells a child remains engraved on his mind as if it had been cut in marble.”

“A child readily obeys an adult. But when an adult asks him to renounce those instincts that favor his development, he cannot obey.”

18. The Education of the Child

“Every unusual response of a child furnishes us with a problem to be solved; and every tantrum is the exterior expression of some deep-rooted conflict which is not to be interpreted simply as a defensive mechanism against a hostile environment but a manifestation of a nobler trait seeking to reveal itself. A tantrum is like a

storm that prevents the soul of the child from coming out of its hidden retreat and showing itself to the world.” (109)

“It is obvious that all these camouflages conceal the true soul of the child. The whims, struggles and deformations hide his efforts to realize himself, and prevent him from revealing his true personality. Behind these disturbing, outward manifestations, there must be an individual spiritual embryo that is developing according to a definite plan. Beneath these outward manifestations an unknown child lies hidden who must be freed. The most urgent task facing educators is to come to know this unknown child and to free it from all entanglements.”

“To assist a child we must provide him with an environment which will enable him to develop freely.” (110)

“In an open environment ..a child’s psychic life should develop naturally and reveal its inner secret.”

“The new education has as its primary aim the discovery and freeing of the child.”

“Obstacles must be reduced to a minimum.”

“Since adults are also a part of a child’s environment, they should adapt themselves to his needs. They should not be an obstacle to a child’s independent activities, nor should they carry out for him those activities by means of which a child reaches maturity.”

“By (the teacher’s) passive attitude he removes from the children the obstacle created by his own activity and authority.” (111)

“A further characteristic of our system of teaching is respect for the child’s personality ...”

“When a normal child is attracted by an object he fixes his whole attention intently upon it and continues to work without a break in a remarkable state of concentration. After the child has finished his work, he appears satisfied, rested and happy.”

“I set to work at training the senses of the children..” (117)

Regional Seminars

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

Corpus Christi, February 12

[Incarnate Word Academy](#)
[405 Chamberlain](#)
[Corpus Christi, TX 78404](#)
[Sister Camelia Herlihy](#)
[Tel. \(361\) 883-0857](#)

7. The Environment

Contact us:

Fidellow@swbell.net

210-698-1911

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.

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.

Educational Principles Of Montessori

Montessori’s “discovery” of the environment as THE teaching tool with the greatest impact on children (adults?) and their learning is only now being considered by the educational establishment.

Current traditional educational practices have begun to catch on to **manipulatives**. But manipulatives by themselves do not make Montessori. Manipulatives allow and encourage advanced and ultimately efficient learning because they resonate with the child’s deep-seated needs and inclinations. But the use of maipulatives is only one part of what creates a Montessori environment.

Now, almost a century after Montessori started her first environment, **child sized furniture** is a “given”. If you have ever sat in a chair, where your feet didn’t reach the floor or if the chair was too deep and you could not sit back in it, you begin to have an idea about the negative effect that furniture plays in an environment.

Low shelves in the environment further enhance the learning experience when all of the materials are within reach of the children. We take this all for granted but these were developmental steps in Montessori’s discovery of the “teaching environment”.

A further factor involved in the creation of the environment was the acknowledgement of the place of **order**. Order is an integral part in meeting the needs of the child’s own psyche. **Color-coding** of material gives a rational external clue to the relationship of materials.

Colors are another factor playing a major role in the environment. And from colors, that call out to the children, we move into the concept of **aesthetics**. Even today, many traditional educators have no clue to the contribution that china, tablecloths, fine art, music etc make to the child's learning. Aesthetics, the beautiful, reaches deep into the child's soul. Real learning is not just mental. The joy of learning comes from a combination of all of the senses focused deep within the child. Aesthetics plays to this consonance (harmony or agreement among components) within the child. A well-ordered, aesthetically pleasing environment gives the same kind of emotional satisfaction that you receive on viewing a magnificent sunset, with one difference: you can fully enter into and touch this phenomenon.

Children are taught the respectful actions that are needed to handle crystal and glass and fine art. Contrary to popular thinking, children react profoundly different in the presence of objects of great beauty and fragility. If all of the objects in the environment are considered to be of marginal value by the adults, the children will react in the same way. Similarly, if broken objects, objects needing repair, or repainting are left in the environment the children take this as a sign of universal disrespect for the environment.

So far, we have discussed the physical elements that create the environment but equally important, if not primary, are the social, emotional and spiritual elements that profoundly teach the children throughout the environment.

From the daily news, we are familiar with the phrase 'hostile environment'.

A Montessori environment is the opposite of that. It is a positive encouraging place because of the spirit of the teacher. This spirit is as much a part of the environment as the materials. The spirit of the teacher permeates the learning process. The teacher offers encouragement without being a dominating force. "Benign" would be a great word to describe the teacher. Mostly, we are familiar with the word in regard to a benign tumor – non-threatening to health and life. However, benign has more powerful definitions: of a gentle disposition, gracious; showing kindness and gentleness; favorable and wholesome.

Without dominating the environment, the guide exercises gentle control to keep the integrity of the environment whole, while at the same time allowing the child to explore and receive every benefit possessed by the environment.

On one hand, the child, like a fish in water, is not aware of his environment – it is natural; it is as expected. But remove that child from the environment, and like the fish out of water, he longs for and needs the environment.

The environment is lovingly created with the child in mind. Like the womb and the family that God creates for each child, everything the child needs is ideally in place to meet not only his intellectual development but his emotional, physical, social and spiritual development as well. It is from this environment that the child breathes deeply of love and amazement and drinks deeply of knowledge and learning. All the while being safe to venture and discover – a veritable Garden of Eden.

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?

Starting a Christian Montessori School

We would like to know of your interest in starting a Christian Montessori school. We will be offering a seminar early this summer to help prepare you for the challenges involved in living out the dreams that God gives you.

Regional Conference Cost and Registration

Seminar Fee **\$150**

Early Registration **\$125**

(Three weeks before
Seminar)

Membership discount **\$25**

Name _____

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Email _____

School _____

Registration may be paid by check or credit card.

Christian Montessori Fellowship
22630 East Range
San Antonio, TX 78255

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