

# The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship\  
October 2003

## Mark your Calendar

**National Conference**

**June 24-26, 2004**

**San Antonio**

**Regional Seminar**

**Shreveport, LA**

**January 31, 2004**

## Please Join

**The Christian Montessori Fellowship**

**We need your support.**

## That's a good question.

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

Is there discipline in Montessori?

The real question people are asking is in reference to the fact that they do not "see" any external discipline and therefore cannot recognize the inner discipline they don't "see".

However in fairness there have been Montessorians who have operated the philosophy in such a way that there has been neither external nor internal discipline. It reminds me of all of us Christians who sometimes don't act very Christianly and people legitimately question the transforming power of Christ in our lives. (Our life is always more than just about us.)

So where is the discipline and where does it come from in the environment? First it comes from the environment itself. The environment is a closed

world. It is prescribed. It has its limits. If we look at the word "discipline" in an academic context it means a focused field of study. In the "discipline" of literature you don't study chemistry you "focus" on literature. So the environment exerts a unique discipline where every exercise and presentation helps the child focus on the next step.

When we are first introduced to Montessori we tend to think that there are "no rules" and you just "follow the child". No and Yes. Yes you follow the child and no it is not a lawless society - there really are rules. The difference in Montessori is that the rules are made for the children and not for the teacher. "Sit down and be quiet" is a standard traditional classroom rule, which serves little purpose in a Montessori environment.

So what do you recognize as classroom rules that help lead the child to inner discipline? How about the classic "inside voice"? Instead of teaching the child denial (be quiet) you teach him self-control. Instead of teaching him to be immobile (sit down) we teach him an inside walk. Again we are calling out to the child to exercise this internal discipline.

And just like people are out of bounds for attack by the child so is the material in the environment. Respect for the materials is generated first by the careful, reverential presentation of the guide. It is in this modeling that the child is first introduced to how to

approach the materials. And if the child does not respect the materials he is removed from the materials. Now disrespect of the materials is not the same thing as doing a presentation wrong which calls for a different approach. Disrespect for the materials brings about a Montessori discipline which is a firm and quiet “no”.

Which brings us to the second discipline of the classroom which is the presence and model of the guide. The guide is an essential ingredient in the building of the “inner” discipline of the child. The guide’s constant modeling is a call to discipline. Children are imitators (they yell and lose their tempers exactly like we do, who do you think showed them how?). And since the discipline of the guide is not directed at them (sit down and be quiet) but is directed at creating and maintaining the emotional, educational, psychological, and social environment the response of the child is different. The child enjoys the environment and therefore helps maintain the environment by employing the inner disciplines that have been modeled (and expected).

So the child begins to speak with an inside voice, walk inside, respect the materials, put things back where he found them and cooperate with his classmates who represent the third aspect of discipline in the environment. “We don’t do that here”, is a common phrase heard spoken by the children to each other (God bless our normalized children). Classmates exercise a powerful positive discipline on each other. This is once where peer pressure has a beneficial outcome. It is one thing to ignore a teacher’s directives, it is a totally different matter to go against your peers.

Fourth, the call of the work exercises a profound impact on inner (and outer) discipline. As children become engrossed and enchanted by their work they begin to focus. They are not distracted. It is here where the inner discipline bears its fruit. They are able to work long stretches tirelessly engulfed in the joy of discovery and accomplishment (for which most adults would have to exercise great stores of discipline to be able to match).

They become used to accomplishment and they like the heady feeling. And they become positively addicted to using their inner strengths to assimilate not only knowledge but to create themselves. They begin this transformation and it is wise parents and guides who also lay the spiritual foundation in this clay so that when the children are finished (are we ever finished?) creating who they are they will have taken all of the gifts that God has given them and will create an adult who is a multi-faceted image of God’s Son.

2 Timothy 2:21 speaks about becoming a vessel unto honor (creating yourself) by purging oneself of sin and the things that beset us (which you can only do with God’s help). And that takes discipline – an inner discipline that sets you on a path that no rules, outward disciplines and laws can match.

The next time you hear that there is no discipline in a Montessori environment smile, take a deep breath and begin to share the extraordinary adventure of the inner discipline of the child.

**Holidays**  
**Veterans Day**

Most holidays have become holidays. That isn't a profound statement except when we consider that we have removed the real reason for the holiday from the holiday. Do you think that the world would celebrate Christmas if it weren't for the economics and gift giving? On one hand that is to be expected from the secularization of a religious holiday but what do you do when we turn our civic holidays into just holidays? We have created three-day weekends out of Martin Luther King, President's Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day – not particularly to celebrate but to take off.

Maybe it is the dominance of television in the last fifty years that have made us observers of holidays instead of participants. In fact we are not even very good observers but we certainly enjoy our holidays. And if we are not in school the actual holiday might pass without a big recognition of the day.

This year you might consider making Veterans Day a unique celebration of all that is good in America (heaven knows the news won't do it). What is good in America is its people. Yes they have been blessed by God and have created a unique place in time and space. We have attempted (not always successfully but sincerely) to have justice and opportunity for all. And it will never be perfect because of sin. But we keep trying to do what is right. This year with soldiers fighting in different parts of the world we need to honor and pray for our soldiers and veterans who have answered the call of duty to defend or bring freedom to all parts of our world.

America and its soldiers have a different history than most of the world. After they march into a country they invariably march out always attempting to leave the peoples of the world better off than before they came. By and large

we have been successful because we have been a nation of citizen-soldiers answering the call when needed and then returning home.

We need to honor the long and courageous history of Americans who have fought for our lands and our ideals. We need to help our children truly be thankful for this wonderful heritage of brave men and women who have made our way of life possible.

## **Thanksgiving**

Make a Thanksgiving chain with yellow, orange and brown construction paper. Cut strips one inch by eight inches. Ask the children to tell you things they are thankful for and write them on the paper. They can help you glue the strips together or staple them. Hang up your chain in a prominent place and refer to it all month. In fact, as you talk about it everyday, you can also add new things to be thankful about. If you could only give your child one gift or virtue in life thankfulness would be the most valuable because it enhances everything else in life a hundredfold.

### **Headgear for the Thanksgiving feast**

Out of construction paper you can make both Indian headdresses and pilgrim hats for your children to wear at your feast. Both start with a band of construction paper two inches wide and long enough to go around the child's head. Brown for Indian headdresses and black for pilgrim hats. Indian headdresses get colored feathers. For the pilgrim hats attach the hat to the band in the middle so the hat stands out. The easiest way to make your buckles is to cut a white piece of construction paper in a rectangle 2 ½ x 3 and paste on

a smaller rectangle of black and attach it to the hat and to the headband. You are ready for the feast.



## **Thanksgiving Feast**

### **A Baker's Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child**

#### **Concentration**

Where will a child learn concentration? Certainly not in front of the TV, nor will it be well developed in a traditional classroom with the emphasis on group activity and having to move at the speed of the group.

God plants the seeds of concentration in each of us and we have to nurture those seeds along. By providing an environment where the child will have not only the opportunity but the inclination to follow a learning process to its conclusion will you be able to develop this wonderful power of concentration.

This is why long uninterrupted work periods have great value. If your work time is one to two hours long you will be able to observe some interesting phenomena. Obviously some children

will get right to work and others will take time to settle into learning. After a short time you will be able to "hear" concentration. It will be easy to see but it will be your ears that will tell you it is happening all over. The noise level will drop and remain quieter for a period of time and then it will slowly rise again as children leave their first lessons (and the concentration that goes with it) as they look about for what they will attack next. Then the noise level will drop again as children get into their next lessons.

This brings up an interesting philosophical point. There are Montessorians who do not believe there should be any talking in the environment as children need to be able to concentrate on their work. My wife ran her environment with talking for a number of reasons. First what good is an inside voice if you can't use the voice inside. Second, how will children learn to use their inside voice (and exercise self-control) unless they are given the opportunity. Third, many children are only children and one of their great needs is to socialize. Yes, I know they are there to work but the concept of Montessori is to meet all the needs of the child – and socializing is an important one. If you can walk and chew gum at the same time you can talk and work. If the talking becomes a detriment to the work you deal with it. To prohibit talking is to take us back to a traditional classroom education where no responsibility is given to those who would be willing to assume the responsibility. How can one exercise the responsibility for talking if you are not allowed to talk?

Talking does not destroy the environment for concentration. It

provides an opportunity to exercise self-control and social interaction.

## **The 10 P's of Ministry Problems**

This month we will discuss the problems that are created by **disagreements**. Amos 3:3 asks, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Disagreements are just a part of life, people seeing things from different perspectives. It is what you do, both spiritually and practically, with your disagreements that determine not only your effectiveness but your own growth.

I've heard people brag that they never fight in their marriage. It is a wonderful ideal but hardly realistic unless one party is a doormat and has no opinions of their own. My wife and I are extremely affectionate (I hold her close - that is the only way to keep from getting clobbered). And over the thirty-five plus years of our marriage we have certainly had our disagreements. At our twenty-fifth anniversary party someone asked if we ever fought because they had never seen anything except the affection. "Of course we do." Shocked, they asked, "When did you have your last fight?" I answered, "What time is it now?" One thing that we have learned in marriage and working together all these years is that making up (and asking for forgiveness - which I have a lot of practice at) is a very important part of marriage. Why there are some days now that we just skip the fighting and go directly to the making up.

What you have to learn about disagreements is that there is wisdom in always looking at the other side. My wife and I have different views of the world. She sees things as a woman, as a

mother. She sees things through the prism of her gifts and talents. And is she ever wrong? Of course not. (Hey, she proofreads this.) But what we have learned over the years of our marriage and working together is the truth of Proverbs where "There is wisdom in a multitude of counselors."

Now having said that, someone eventually has to make a decision even if all of the opinions don't line up. It is nice to have consensus but when you don't, a decision still has to be made. Interestingly in history, during the Russian revolution they wanted total equality and so they tried to run the army with no ranks, no officers. Their experience proved that it couldn't be done. Someone has to be in charge.

So what does this have to do with you? Well there is always someone making decisions that will affect your ability to teach and minister in your school. Some of the decisions you will applaud, others will appall you. And some you will be in downright disagreement with. So what do you do? You bite your lip. You ponder the situation. You analyze the decision and ask yourself the question, "How could someone make such a dumb decision?"

I have been on both sides of that situation. One where I disagreed with the decisions of superiors and one where subordinates have disagreed with decisions I've made. And it requires humility no matter which position you hold.

Let's start with the disagreement that is handed down to you. You have to determine whether this is a major and significant departure from your basic philosophy. For example there are two schools of thought in Montessori about shelves. Some hold to having natural wood shelves while others prefer shelves

that are painted white to make the materials stand out. What happens if someone wants to paint your natural wood shelves white? It may offend your senses, your philosophy and even your feelings of having your opinion not valued. Or if the schedule is changed and you feel that it is detrimental to the work time in the classroom. These can become “major” disagreements depending on how they are handled (both by you and your superior).

There are three ways to handle disagreements. Now if you have one of the good directors (that is someone who thinks exactly like you do) you can go to them and voice your concerns. Actually if you have a good director these concerns will be handled before the decision is handed down. However if a decision is made with which you disagree and you have made your voice heard you either accept the decision graciously and implement it effectively or you decide if this is a time to start your own school. That is only said half facetiously but it is a point worth keeping in mind.

Decisions with which you are unhappy shouldn't be discussed with the janitor, the cook, co-workers, parents etc. They should be discussed with the person that made the decision. So much “research” and “polling” in life is a thin veneer for gossip and murmuring which doesn't make God a happy camper.

Part of being an adult is living with decisions which we are not happy with while attempting to find the proper way to address them. Isn't this the lesson we try to teach our teenagers?

Now if you have a director who does not listen – now you have to know the difference between not listening and not doing what you ask, then you have a decision to make. Is the leadership

contributing to your sense of well-being and creating an overall atmosphere where you can effectively teach children. If the answer is yes then you learn to live with the occasional disagreement.

If the answer is no, then you are faced with the same decision you would be faced with if the director or administration were doing things that were immoral, illegal, unethical or destructive to the children. The decision would be to leave.

So when you come to a disagreement you do have those three choices. First attempt to ameliorate the decision. Second if you cannot change it, accept it and support it as wholeheartedly as you can. And third if you can't be successful with the first two the third step is to resign.

Now from a director's point of view if you are creating situations that are causing such discomfort for your staff you need to consider your approach to creating change with your decision-making. This is not to say you shouldn't make the hard decisions that have to be made but you can take steps to move your staff along the path of the new vision. People want to be a part of something fresh and alive and there is nothing as alive as a Montessori classroom. Being open to alternate ways of reaching your goal is a sign of flexibility. You have to know what the end result you are wanting is and not become married to a methodology. In a multitude of counselors there is wisdom and fresh ideas.

But what happens when you have decisions that have been made and you have reluctant followers? It is an important time to spend time with your staff sharing your goals for which these decisions have been made. Listening to

them (without defending yourself) often helps take the sting out of decisions for which they are not enthusiastic.

Now what happens if you have staff who in their disagreement choose to not do what you ask? Hopefully you will not ever get to that point but if you do you have to look at the situation if it is a one-time event or an ongoing scenario. Sometimes it is wise to back off. It galls me to say that because I believe when decisions are made they should be followed. However having learned to listen to my helpmate over the years has softened some of the hardheadedness and has lead me to learn to value constructive dissent and then to woo those who may not yet see the vision.

However (there are certainly a lot of howevers here) if you have a staff member who chooses to be in disagreement and continues to be in disagreement (it won't just be over one decision) then you are faced with the prospect of replacing them. One of the toughest things you will do as a director is to set someone free from your environment (that is a euphemism for being fired). However, (here we go again) it is often a great relief to them to be "set free". It takes great courage to leave a safe environment (even if you aren't happy there). And most people find that very difficult to do. Firing is often a kindness both to them and to your remaining staff.

Disagreements are part of life and they require us to handle them, not only as adults, but as Christians as well.

## **Cross Mountain Forum**

[www.crossmountainforum.com](http://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 30<sup>th</sup> – November 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

### **Regional Seminars**

Cost for regional seminars is \$125. There is a \$25 discount for early registration (three weeks before the seminar) and an additional \$25 discount for CMF members.

### **CMF membership**

Membership provides multiple benefits (check our web site for details) and makes possible the free distribution of The Cobbler.

### **Please Take 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\_\_\_\_\_

## **Consulting Services Available**

Do you need a fresh perspective on your program? Consider combining a parent meeting, in service training and a school consultation in one visit to give your program that added boost to reach the next level of excellence. Contact us today to set up a visit.

Christian Montessori Fellowship  
22630 East Range  
San Antonio, TX 78255

**Christian Montessori  
Fellowship  
Cross Mountain Forum**  
22630 East Range  
San Antonio, TX 78255  
210-698-1911  
[Fidellow@swbell.net](mailto:Fidellow@swbell.net)  
[www.crossmountainforum.com](http://www.crossmountainforum.com)