

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
September 2004

Regional Conferences

Atlanta September 18
Charlotte September 25
Ann Arbor October 9
Seattle October 16
Kansas City October 30
Boston, November 20
Shreveport, LA January 22
Houston January 29

A Baker's Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Confidence

Of all the traits we try to build into our children, confidence is one of the most misunderstood. Confidence is not about self-esteem. Confidence is defined as a feeling or consciousness of one's powers. Even in this definition we come to the great divide of the contemporary world – feelings versus consciousness (or thought).

“How do you feel about (fill in the blank)?” has become not only an educational mantra but a societal fixation as if my feelings about $2 + 2$ have any bearing on the reality of the answer. It's a little like the student who tells his friend “I sure hope $7 \times 7 = 48$.” “Why?” “Because that is the answer I put down.” This kind of “wishful” thinking has nothing to do with setting dreams and goals and accomplishment because it is not based on reality.

One of the criticisms of Montessori made by well-meaning people is that the normalized child (and therefore the normalized environment) is not possible. They feel it is impossible for children to self-regulate and self-educate given the adult's perception of “reality”.

So what gives us confidence that this “seeming impossibility” is attainable? It is the empirical evidence in front of us. We actually see it happen. We can actually help make it happen. And we can make it happen over and over again. Interestingly this challenge is something that the new teacher shares with the new student. Both see about them a new “reality” and wonder if they can actually make it happen for themselves.

One of the benefits of a team-teaching approach and internship is that the new teacher can be present at the creation of a “new world” and observe first hand its genesis.

This same kind of experience is available to the student where they go from no experience and no power to being able to first, control them self and then second, to control the outcome of their activities.

Experience, successful experience, builds confidence. We need to be careful that we do not equate just “success” with building confidence. Success, of a certain kind, does build confidence but easy success is not a confidence builder. Have I muddied the waters enough? Which is it then, success or something else that builds

confidence? Yes! (If I go on like this I could become a famous college professor whose writing no one understands – but that is not the point.) Confidence does come from the student's actual success but it also comes from the student's feeling of success. Here we are back to this divide between the student's feelings and the external realities of accomplishment.

On one hand the student does need to accomplish something real and tangible to begin to have a feeling of success but what the student accomplishes must have validity in his own eyes. It must be a challenge that he has risen to. It does no good for us to praise accomplishment for which the student feels no success nor pride; nor to praise lack luster attempts because in Montessori we tend to minimize praise in order that the motivation might arise internally for the child and not be externally driven or motivated. Yet the child's feelings of confidence, the child's consciousness of power comes from appropriate challenges undertaken and mastered. However, for us to express no emotion or pleasure in the student's accomplishments (and attempts) removes us from the joy they want to share in the discovery of their new powers and accomplishments.

If we were to grade, an A for one student would offer little in the way of confidence given what that student might feel about his abilities; whereas a B for another student might be Mt. Everest of accomplishment and confidence. This is why intelligence alone is no guarantee of the building of confidence in the individual.

The joy of Montessori is to be able to treat each child as the individual that God created them to be and that the

building of confidence is as individual as the individuals are.

The confidence each child takes from the environment is a consciousness of their new found powers as they apply them over and over again to new and different situations. Confidence is also defined as faith. And what better way to look at confidence than as faith in God who gave me gifts, talents, powers and opportunities to honor Him with my "successes".

The Secret of Childhood

Chapters 7-8 Outlined

Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers from Ballentine Books edition.

7. Psychic Development The Sensitive Periods

"In an infant there is a creative instinct, an active potency for building up a psychic world at the expense of his environment." (37)

"A sensitive period refers to a special sensibility which a creature acquires in its infantile state, while it is still in process of evolution. It is a transient disposition and limited to the acquisition of a particular trait. Once this trait or characteristic, has been acquired, the special sensibility disappears. Every specific characteristic of a living creature is thus attained through the help of a passing impulse or potency." (38)

"These (instincts) give direction by furnishing an impulse towards a determined kind of activity that can differ notably from that of the adult "

"If a child has not been able to act according to the directives of his

sensitive period, the opportunity of a natural conquest is lost, and is lost for good.” (39)

“It is this sensibility which enables a child to come into contact with the external world in a particularly intense manner. At such a time everything is easy; all is life and enthusiasm. Every effort marks an increase in power. Only when the goal has been obtained does fatigue and the weight of indifference come on. (40)

“When one of these psychic passions is exhausted, another is kindled. Childhood thus passes from conquest to conquest in a constant rhythm that constitutes its joy and happiness. It is within this fair fire of the soul, which burns without consuming, that the creative work of man’s spiritual world is brought to completion.”

“If during his sensitive stage a child is confronted with an obstacle to his toil, he suffers a disturbance or even warping of his being, a spiritual martyrdom....”

“The tantrums of the sensitive periods are external manifestations of an unsatisfied need, expressions of alarm over a danger, or of something being out of place.” (41)

Examining the Sensitive Periods

“(Sensitive periods) show us that a child’s psychic development does not take place by chance, that it does not originate in external stimuli but is guided by transient sensibilities Although this takes place within an external environment, the environment is more of an occasion than a cause.” (42)

“We might picture this wonderful creative activity as a series of lively emotions rising up from the subconscious which, when they come into contact with their environment, build up one’s consciousness. They begin in confusion and then move on to the making of distinctions and ultimately, to creative activity”

“It is a life concentrated upon the present. The future glory of the being remains unknown.” (43)

“The child is passing through a sensitive period: a divine command is breathing upon this helpless being and animating it with its spirit. This inner drama of the child is a drama of love. It is a great reality unfolding within the secret areas of his soul and at times completely absorbing it. These marvelous activities wrought in humble silence cannot take place without leaving behind ennobling qualities that will accompany the child through life. All of this happens quietly and unnoticed as long as the child’s environment adequately corresponds to his inner needs.”

Negative proofs of sensitive periods.

“These become manifest when some obstacle impedes a child’s inner functioning. A sensitive period can reveal itself in the child’s violent reaction. We look upon this as a kind of senseless desperation calling it a ‘tantrum.’ But in reality it is the expression of an inner disturbance or of an unsatisfied need that has created a degree of tension. It represents an effort of the soul to ask a question or to defend itself.” (44)

“(Tantrums) can be a violent agitation rising from a child’s exceptional sensibility without a proportionate external cause.”

“A child’s first tantrums are the first ills of his soul.”

“It is never peace that poses a problem and demands reflection, but trouble and disorder. It is not nature’s laws but the deviations from her laws that are most obvious.”

8. Order

“Order is one of the needs of life which, when satisfied, produces a real happiness.” (52)

“Order consists in recognizing the place for each object in relation to its environment and in remembering where each thing should be. This implies that one is able to orient one’s self within one’s environment and to dominate it in all its details.” (53)

“Order provides an adult with a certain amount of external pleasure.” But for children the delight is not in finding the object but in finding it in its proper place.

“In their first year they derive their principles of orientation from their environment which they must later master. And since a child is formed by his environment he has need of precise and determined guides”

“It is in childhood that man learns to guide and direct himself on the way of life.”

“Man’s intelligence does not come from nothing; rather it is built upon the foundation laid by a child during his sensitive periods.”

The Inner Order

“A child has a twofold sense of order. One of these is external and pertains to his perception of his relations with his environment. The second is internal and makes him aware of the different parts of his own body and their relative position.” (56)

In Memoriam

I am grateful for Montessori in so many ways. Chief among them is the people God has let me know because of Montessori. Carolyn Thornton came into our lives in 1990. Carolyn had been in the financial field and was then in retail. She was looking for a school for her two and a half year old daughter Jade. When Barbara interviewed Carolyn there was something about the spark in her eyes and the love of the Lord in her heart that reached out and spoke to Barbara.

The interview was far more consequential than either Barbara or Carolyn had anticipated. Jade not only became enrolled but Carolyn joined our staff. And for the next ten years God was actively using Montessori in both Carolyn’s life and ours.

Montessori is a transforming process – not just for the children but for the adults who will let God change them. Montessori gave Carolyn a focus for her gifts and talents. She became one of the finest Montessori toddler teachers we’ve ever known. She and her co-teacher, Yvonne LaJesse (who passed away last

year) became a dynamic duo in training and nurturing the precious lives that God entrusted them with. It was a delight to watch them lead praise and worship with their toddlers as the little ones would raise their hands and sing their praises to God. It was an amazing experience to watch Carolyn and Yvonne at lunch, each with seven toddlers, training them to use their napkins and enabling them to make the passage from fingers to spoons and forks all the while enjoying the challenge of new tastes and textures.

To observe their classroom was to become a believer in the absolute miracle of Montessori under the guidance of not only trained teachers but spiritually attuned teachers.

We helped Carolyn nurture her daughter Jade in Montessori from Toddlers through elementary and supported building Carolyn's passionate love for Jesus into her daughter.

"I want to be just like you when I grow up." Carolyn would tell Barbara. And often she would come by the office and say "Hey, Chief, do you have a few minutes?" And we would sit and talk about our spiritual journey, our Montessori heritage, our school and her life. She became very much an adopted daughter and Jade a granddaughter.

Carolyn's battle with cancer did not last very long and neither did her life. Carolyn was only forty when she went to be with Jesus last month. Jade who is 16 will be living with her aunt and uncle in Dallas. Many of you never had the pleasure of meeting Carolyn but if you would like to honor "a good and faithful" servant of God (and a great practitioner of Montessori) we are setting up a scholarship fund for Jade who will be attending American Heritage Christian School in the fall.

Your tax-deductible contribution will be forwarded.

Barbara, in pondering the mystery of how God chooses His saints to come home has mused that her two great toddler teachers were both called home within a year of each other. "God must need them to love and nurture all of the babies that have been aborted."

Each of us touches lives within our classrooms – it is not just the children who become transformed. Carolyn, rest in peace good and faithful servant.

The 10 P's of Ministry

Pressure

Ethical

We all face ethical pressures in whatever we do. We tend to think that ethical pressures are always some kind of monumental life and death issues – stealing millions, killing people and such. Ethics is defined as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation." That is quite a mouthful and yet we don't always recognize the ethical pressures that surround us. It's a lot like the air pressure that sustains life that we don't pay much attention to until we get to the mountains and we feel its differing effect on us. So it is with daily ethics. I define this ethics as the lines between the laws. I think Jesus put it effectively with the Golden Rule, "Do unto others ..."

So often we define ethics as not doing something bad when in reality Jesus calls us to a higher ethical plane by "requiring" us (out of love for Him) to do something good. Ethics is choosing to do good; to let life be full of grace and even mercy and to go well beyond duty and obligation. We daily find

opportunities to exercise this choice of good. And when faced with the opportunity understanding the pressures that might make us shy away from fulfilling the challenge.

Thankfully, few of us have to deal with the negative pressures of ethics – the positive ones are a challenge all of their own.

Brighten the corner ...

Barbara's great nephew has been spending days with Barbara's sister Betty and had taken to calling her mom. "Branton, I'm not your mom, I'm your granny. So call me granny." Branton looked at her puzzled but went off to play. He returned shortly and said "Mom" to which Betty replied "Yes." "See, I knew you were mom."

Columbus Day

A good visual object lesson for Columbus Day would be to make representations of the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria out of walnut shells. Take a half of walnut shell, a tiny dab of clay, a tooth pick and a tiny piece of paper to be a sail. These will make very tiny boats that you can "sail" in a basin or tub. "They really are small." Your children will agree. "And the ships Columbus sailed in were very small too. It took great courage to sail across the ocean but God gave Columbus a vision to share the Gospel. And so he sailed the ocean. When God gives you a vision to share the Gospel, He will also give you the courage to share it."

Educational Principles Of Montessori

6. Order

It would seem that order would be a given in any system of life or learning but it seems that Montessori is the one that has taken order to heart. There are two parts of order – placement and sequence. And as we observe our Montessori environment we see the interplay of both facets.

First, everything has its place. That is one of the major givens within the environment. We save so much time because we can find things where they are supposed to be and we reduce so much psychic stress because the environment contributes a peacefulness that comes from this order.

Second, the sequence of learning – the order – is of extreme importance because introducing concepts and activities in a coherent manner increases not only the efficiency of the learning but the enjoyment as well.

Developing orderly patterns of thinking and acting in our children contributes to all of their successes and to their enjoyment of the tasks that lay before them.

Creation and the Great Lessons

We would like to hear from you about how you approach the Great Lessons. Many Christians are uncomfortable with the evolutionistic materials presented both in training and in secular schools.

Are there schools out there that have developed or adapted materials for the Montessori classroom that are more in keeping with traditional Creation teaching? Or are there other approaches

to this topic? Please write and let us know as there are many people who have a great interest.

A lot of interesting work has been done with Intelligent Design (ID). Has anyone adapted any of that to the classroom?

Regional Seminar Agenda

9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

- 1. What is Christian Montessori?**
- 2. Grace and Courtesy**
- 3. Spiritual life in the classroom**
- 4. Hands on Bible**
- 5. Practical life**
- 6. Parenting**
- 7. Classroom management**

Regional Conference locations

Atlanta September 18

Alpharetta International Academy
4772 Webb Bridge Rd.
Alpharetta, GA 30005
770-475-0558
Dixie Oliver

Charlotte September 25

Lake Norman Day School
14101 Stumptown Rd
Huntersville, NC
704-400-8150
Sonya Curry

Ann Arbor October 9

Go Like the Wind Montessori
3540 Dixboro Lane
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
734-747-7422
Doug Collier

Seattle October 16

Miracle Ranch
15999 Sidney Rd. SW
Port Orchard, WA 98367
253-851-4410
Cindy Hawkins
360-779-2345

Kansas City October 30

Covenant Montessori School
300 NE 58th Terrace
Gladstone, MO 64118
816-454-0192
Rosemary Brandis

Boston, November 20

Westgate Christian Academy
90 Oak St.
Natick, MA 01760
508-315-3152
Joanne Juraschek

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 that we've discovered 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.

Regional Conference Cost and Registration

Seminar Fee **\$150**
Early Registration **\$125**
(Three weeks before
Seminar)
Membership discount **\$25**

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Registration may be paid by check or
credit card.

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