Concepts from Montessori Theory and Practice for Godly Play Teachers

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Introduction

Godly Play teachers usually know that Jerome Berryman's work draws on the work of Maria Montessori. It is drawn directly from her ideas on religious education and her overall ideas for her early childhood and elementary education. In addition, Dr. Berryman made use of the ideas of E. M. Standing and Sofia Cavaletti, two Montessorians who expanded Montessori's ideas on religious education and added their own. In the Godly Play Core training, participants will have learned a number of ideas with roots in Montessori education. They will also have learned some Godly Play stories, and information on how to set up a room, the use of specialized Godly Play materials, and how to help children participate in a session. In this article, I want to expand some of the Godly Play concepts, going back to Montessori's ideas that have not been able to be covered in detail in GP training experiences.

The Montessori teacher education program that Dr. Berryman took was a year-long, intensive course in Bergamo in northern Italy, for working with children ages 6-12 years. This is the same course I was able to take in 1970-71. The course involved over 400 hours of Montessori philosophy, child development, use of materials, and so on, and included observations at a local Montessori elementary school. There were also a variety of assessments, such as written examinations, hands-on exams in which one demonstrated the use of the materials, materials making, and so on. The biggest task was the writing one's "albums" in which detailed notes for every presentation were written down. This course was felt by many of us to be at least as intellectually challenging as other graduate education we have taken. My albums were 625 pages of single spaced typing! Since the usual introductory Godly Play training experience, now called the Core, is 18 hours in length, a good deal of Montessori content can't be covered. I would like to highlight some of the most relevant parts here, as an experienced Montessori educator and teacher educator, and a very junior GP storyteller.

One preliminary point I need to make concerns the transmission of information in Montessori teacher education programs: this is still an oral transmission model, rather than a modern University model based primarily on text. The presentations of all the materials, quite a bit of Montessori philosophy and child development theory, and all of the vitally important parts of how one actually "does" Montessori in a classroom are all given orally as a

part of a Montessori teacher education program. While we were required to read Montessori's books and were tested on the contents, this was only really a minor part of what was learned. A second part of becoming a Montessori teacher is the work in the classroom with students. The Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) which is the primary training organization in Europe, requires many hours of observation in a carefully selected class with a master teacher. The American Montessori Society requires a full school year as an intern teacher. It is important in understanding Montessori to realize how the preparation of teachers differs from University or other postsecondary education programs to prepare traditional teachers. Cossentino (2009) has suggested that the unique Montessori teacher preparation method is one important reason why it has survived as a distinct educational movement for more than 100 years.

In the context of this paper, it is also important to note that Godly Play as well has an oral transmission component. That is, not everything important about Godly Play is contained in the books written by Dr. Berryman. For example, the calm way in which the storyteller works; the responses that are appropriate for disruptions, and so on. In addition, it is generally accepted that a Godly Play storyteller needs years of experience with children before she is ready to become a trainer. Thus, in both Montessori and Godly Play, oral transmission and years of practical experience with children are essential parts of the development of practitioners.

This makes sense, since Montessori's philosophical orientation, I would argue, is phenomenological, despite the fact that she is presented as a naturalist or nativist (like Rousseau) by some authors. She focuses on the <u>experiences</u> of children, not on their essential goodness, or the need to separate them from evil influences in society. This can be seen all over the world at this time of year, as Montessori teachers, preparing their classrooms, can be seen kneeling down in the doorways of their classrooms to see the room as their children will see it.

Finally, I feel I need to formally state that this is not a theological article. Further, I wish to assert that the discipline of theology should not be the only, or perhaps even the primary, academic discipline we use to better our understanding and our practice of Godly Play. Theology informs the content of Godly Play, of course, and it vital adapting it to new faith communities and new cultural settings. But to ignore how the content is delivered to the children, how the circle is built and managed, how we prepare adults for the radically new role we ask our Godly Play practitioners to assume—all of these are questions for which other disciplines are needed. There is a small but vocal group of critics in the United States that feel most of the problems we face in education are caused by University based teacher education programs. This group feels that only content knowledge is needed to teach successfully, and teachers learn nothing in teacher education programs, except the biases assumed to exist in liberal Universities. We in Godly Play mustn't make this same mistake.

There are, certainly, some areas where theological and pedagogical ideas must work together. In considering the words of a Godly Play story, we must make sure that we feel that we can offer what is said to our faith community as representing our beliefs. But we must also understand Montessori's idea that

the young child, especially before 6 or so, wants to focus on the objects and actions in front of them. Too much language, too much insertion of the teacher's personality into the story will distract them, pull them out of the concentration we want them to achieve. Montessori uses the word "lapidary" to describe the ideal speech of a teacher giving a presentation to a young child. That is, each word much be chosen as carefully as if you were going to carve it in stone.

Response Time

The first concept I would like to discuss concerns the relative importance of two of the parts of the Godly Play experience of the child: the story and the child's response time. I hear from Godly Play teachers and administrators how difficult it is for them to fit what they want for their ideal program into the time that is available to them at their church. What I hear from some of them is that it is the child's response time and the feast which are most likely to be truncated or even eliminated. In a way, it's easy to see how this can happen. The people who are involved in Godly Play, typically mostly volunteers, are proud of the materials they have gathered, and of the stories they have learned to tell "by heart." The experience of the children sitting rapt with attention as the story unfolds must surely be the heart of the GP experience.

In contrast, in the Montessori classroom, there is a very strong focus on the children's work with the materials. Teachers have typically worked hard over several years to be able to use fluently the vast wealth of Montessori materials and presentations. This experience can reshape one's thinking about the content and means of education. But these presentations are considered to be only an introduction to the real learning that will go on when the child uses the materials on her own. In fact, this emphasis is the only way a Montessori classroom can work. There are typically two adults and twenty-some children, and only the teacher (usually) knows the presentations. Short lessons, given individually or to a small group, are followed by hours, days or weeks of work before another presentation is needed in that sequence of materials. If this were not the case, the individualization of learning that is a central premise of Montessori education would be impossible to achieve.

So storytellers who are also Montessori teachers are surprised to think of cutting down or eliminating the child's work time. They are also sometimes surprised at the difference in the level of quality and care shown between the beautiful materials for the stories, all orderly and complete on their shelves, and the organization and number of appropriate choices for the art materials.

The child's response time is the part of the Godly Play session in which the child takes the story told to the circle and makes it his own. The work with the storytelling materials, the art response, the sitting in silence, and other response choices are central, not peripheral. This is where her own work on the story (and the big concepts in that story) takes place.

Most storytellers have learned the hard way (or through someone else's bad experiences) how important it is to check the materials before starting a story. The tales of missing items, odd things buried in the desert box, and so

on are numerous when Godly Play teachers gather! A problem like this can drop some children or adults out of the story, and so it is seen as serious, and checking story materials before starting is considered a necessary part of the storyteller role.

But when a child is inspired by the story to undertake a particular response—a watercolor with a lot of green, for the Good Shepherd, for example—it's not seen as an equally important problem if there's no organization to the art materials, brushes are dirty, there is no place to let her work dry, and so on.

The variety, quality, and attractiveness of the art response materials will put a limit on the quality and depth of the child's art response. The art response is one of the unique aspects of Godly Play, and one which is more important now than ever, when time for individual processing and free choice art has almost vanished from the lives of many children. I would also note that protecting the child's choice of silence is crucial and an "endangered species" of activity choice in the lives of many children. (See Elkind, 1987, 1998, and 2001; Louv, 2008; Crain, 2004)

In thinking about the response time, I want to include the role of the doorkeeper in our discussion. In a typical U.S. classroom, the responsibility for response time falls to the greeter/door-person, since the storyteller remains at the circle. I think, in general, we undervalue and under-prepare people for this critical role. These people need more information and preparation for working appropriately with children who are unable to remain in the circle, and on making the art response area as high quality as the Godly Play materials shelves.

A second way in which Montessori classroom environments are strongly different from other educational settings is the amount of respect that adults (ideally) show for the children's work. This shown by the care with which the environment is laid out to allow children work space which is appropriate to the work they want to do—enough space, close to the things they will need, and as free as possible from the threat of someone blundering into them and disrupting their concentration.

For example, think of a child who chooses to work with clay. The ideal that Montessori sets us is that everything the child would need is there and <u>is laid out in a way to make it clear to the child what is needed.</u> It's easiest to see what this means when it is not done. Picture a child going to get what she needs to work with clay: she goes and gets a small ball of clay out of the container, assuming that the container has been carefully chosen to keep the clay moist but also able to be opened by a child. There she is, clay in hand and no place to put it down—now what? Rather, the trays, any clay tools, etc. should be just to the left of the clay, on the same shelf. Cleanup materials should be to the right of the clay. Only if we as the designers of the environment have done our work properly, can we expect on the self direction and concentration that the child is capable of. How many barriers will the child have to get through before she gives up on her art idea?

In Montessori's understanding of children's development, it is the concentration on self chosen work that leads to the development of attention, and other positive developmental changes. That is why Montessori puts a very

high value on children's self-chosen work, and the concentration that the child develops when engaged in this work. One of the most important responsibilities of a Montessori teacher is to guard children's concentration from other children, from loud or distracting things in the environment (visual or auditory inputs so large as to make concentration difficult), and even from the interference of adults wishing to "help." I would like to suggest that we include the idea of the minimal intervention in the training of Godly Play practitioners. Two quotes from Montessori apply here: "Help me to do it by myself" and "Every unnecessary help is a hindrance to the child." (Coulter, Gobbi, Montanaro, and Cavaletti, 2007; Standing, 1984)

To teach new Montessori teachers about too much helping, I use an analogy: a research supervisor in a lab of scientists. Everyone is quietly working on their experiments, at microscopes, computers, and so on. How well received would it be if the supervisor was constantly going from person to person, patting them on the back, asking them what they are doing now, and telling them what a great job they are doing? The scientists might say that they could do a better job if he would leave them to their work!

This idea of the importance of the child's work applies equally to work that has no final product. Much of the work of the child is process work, especially with children below age 6. Even older children will sometimes labor intently over a piece of art, then finish with perhaps a sigh of satisfaction, and calmly throw their work away. We adults tend to be product oriented; we often want to have the child create something to show the parents. But Montessori wants the classroom to serve the needs of the child, which means that process work must be just as valued and protected as work with a product at the end. It may also be the case that the child does not want to share the art response with his parents. Respect for the child should guide our ideas on the importance of art responses, which often have products, versus work with the Godly Play materials, which typically do not.

The other great destroyer of children's concentration and immersion in work is the schedule. Particularly in public Montessori schools, teachers must constantly fight and often accept compromises to schedules for recess, lunch, assemblies, and specialist teachers in art, music, physical education, and sometimes other areas as well. Many classrooms struggle to have a single uninterrupted hour of work time each day. The Montessori goal is two to three hours of uninterrupted work time every day. I don't have to tell Godly Play practitioners how hard it is for us to get the time we need for the children to get the full experience we want for them. In addition to the problem of the "ever-shrinking hour," there is the frequency in many parish settings of special events for which the children are required to sing, take part in a pageant, or otherwise perform for the parish. It is important to distinguish the occasion when older children decide to put on a play, a pageant, or a concert from a decision made by the parish leadership that this will happen. The question must be asked whether the activity is benefitting the children and if it will take place in a developmentally appropriate fashion, in service to the circle of children. Or is this a case of, "Oh the children are so darling! Of course they love the _____!"

In closing this section on the importance of the work children do after the story, I want to have you consider the needs of the children in your classrooms today. Do you feel that most of these children have a place where their choices of what to do (within safe limits) will be accepted? Where they have access to good quality art materials and time to use them? Where they are confident that their work will not be disturbed by others, and that it will not be judged? I think today's overscheduled, over-tested children have plenty of demands on their time, in school and in their activities, from sports to music and so on. They have, perhaps too much time with computers, video games, and TV, but too little silence, reflection, and work which serves their inner needs. The response time is one of the most important gifts we can give them and we must not let it be compromised.

The Environment: Room Organization and Order on the Shelves

I want to begin with a quote from Maria Montessori:

From Lecture 1 (Given April 5th, 1921) by Dr. Maria Montessori, in an International Montessori Course. These notes by E. M. Standing. © by the Estate of E. M. Standing, Seattle University

To liberate the child we must reform the environment, and reform the world. This is a necessity if we are to have life at its highest development. A fine work of research and observation is required in order to give that which is necessary to the development of life.

Liberty does not consist solely in the breaking of chains, but in creating a new form of life. Thus, if we desire to liberate the child it is not enough to remove the pressure of the teacher. The child is not merely enslaved by a position or a person, he is held in bondage by an unsuitable environment. The new school must be absolutely suitable to the minutest detail, to the developing soul.

Not only is it desirable that a new pedagogy be developed, but a new science. Under these changed conditions, not only will the child be liberated from his ills, but he will reveal to us those secrets of his nature which before were unknown.

We shall learn that discipline develops spontaneously, force and strength of character will show itself as a natural development, and the love of work will spring up and manifest itself as a natural consequence of free development.

Than shall we behold the new man, more strong, more industrious, more sure of himself than his predecessors.

The child, developing in freedom, gives us promise of the strong man of whom we have need, and for whom we wait. Then will come forth the truly free man, who works harder than the

> *slave works, who is free and yet more disciplined than the slave, one who is guided by his intelligence, one guarded by his reason.*
>
> *Liberty is not synonymous with the mere bursting of bonds, but, represents a power to reconstruct and to solve the manifold problems which confront mankind today.*

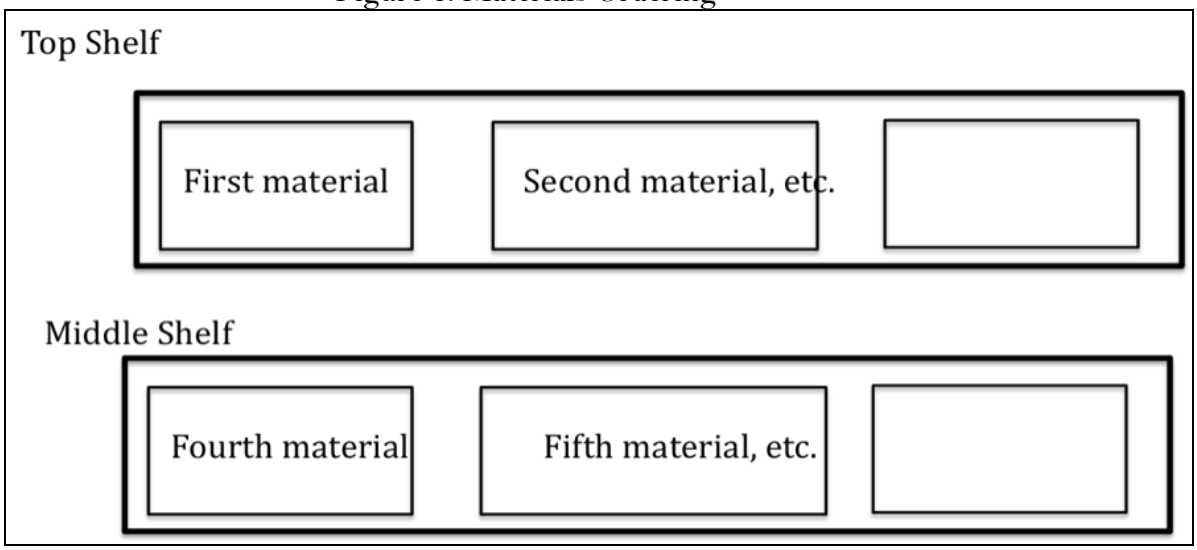
The organization of the Godly Play materials on the shelves follows Montessori principles, but these are not typically made explicit during our training. This organization of the materials on the shelves is the environment, more important to the child's learning than décor or many other aspects of the environment that we notice as adults. In most of the classrooms I have seen, the organization of the room follows the diagrams published by Dr. Berryman as closely as the room and the budget will allow. That's a good start, but a little more knowledge of the principles Dr. Berryman's layout was based on could help, especially when dealing with situations far from the standard classroom. Many Godly Play settings require serious adaptation, so that the model setup cannot be followed: travelling, temporary classrooms, hospital settings, settings for various sorts of adults, shared spaces, and so on. As I indicated in the first section, the materials for the children's response should be organized with the same amount of care and attention as the Godly Play materials shelves. And finally, there is the matter of adaptation of the environment to the particular children and for the particular faith community of which the children are a part. For example, how might the standard arrangement be adapted for a child with mobility differences, or a child unable to carry materials? In this area, we must look to our German colleagues, who have had to make immediate adjustments to respond to the needs of special needs children. I hope that we can see some of their work in English to help us with the same issues.

Perhaps the most important principle to share here is Montessori's dictum: follow the child. In the weeks before school starts, Montessori teachers are constantly moving shelves, desks, and so on around in the classrooms. Then you see a strange thing: they get down on their knees, in the entry doorway of their classroom and look at what they see. You also see them "coming in from recess" and modeling taking work from various areas of the classroom, "having snack" and cleaning it up, and so on. To translate this into Godly Play terms, what do you see when you enter the room? Is it the most important thing for the child to see? If your space constraints make this difficult, or the view from that door shows a lot of things, what might be done to shift the emphasis? A storyteller with Montessori training emphasized the focal shelf by placing a dramatic cloth behind it, which could be changed to match the liturgical colors. My point here is to free teachers from following the sketch in the book when that arrangement does not work for your space. The goal is emphasis and clarity for the child, and that is what should be maximized, not exact duplication of the sketch.

The shelf space in Montessori environments is organized on several levels, which are exemplified in the "standard" layout in Dr. Berryman's books. First, the different subject areas have the materials grouped together. In Godly Play, these subject areas, instead of Mathematics, Geography, or Language, are Sacred Story, Parables, Liturgy, and response materials. One may also consider

a Reference area, with a variety of books besides the Bible, especially in classrooms that serve older or more advanced children or adults. Within each of these subject areas, the typical order of presentation is arranged left to right, top shelf to bottom shelf, as seen in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Materials Ordering



The left-to-right organization is an example of the Montessori principle of indirect aims or indirect preparation. In this case, the left to right orientation represents the order for reading in European languages. Schools in Japan, in Israel, and elsewhere would have different orders. This principle of indirect aim is everywhere in the Montessori curriculum; it is hidden in plain sight. For example, the Montessori puzzle maps are used by children, typically beginning at age four years. They begin with a globe, then a world map, and finally progress to a continent map. Each country is a separate piece. Imagine the European puzzle map, and the child carefully picking up Finland with the knob in the puzzle piece. Here is a picture:

Do you see how the puzzle piece will feel awkward, since the knob is not in the center of the piece? (The puzzle piece of the U.S. in the North America map is even more awkward; it's a larger piece with the knob at the extreme eastern end of the puzzle.) At some point, the child will ask about this, and the teacher will explain why the knob is there: knobs are in the location of the capital city. In addition, the knob is exactly the same diameter as a pencil. There is a good deal of this Montessori idea of indirect preparation in Godly Play. You see it more clearly when you present the synthesis stories to older children. I can't go into this in depth in this article; my point here is that the arrangement of materials on the shelves is an active, carefully designed part of the child's learning experience. It lets her learn things by the way the materials and shelves are organized; it is more than just "disorder makes it hard for the child to find things."

Here is a second quote from Montessori:

From Lecture 14 (May 5, 1921) by Dr. Maria Montessori, in an International Montessori Course. These notes by E. M. Standing. © by the Estate of E. M. Standing, Seattle University

> *I will sum up briefly what I have said regarding the use of the material. First of all, let us consider the presentation of the material, which consists in using it in the precise way when placed for the first time in front of the child. In this particular case it consists in the displacing and replacing of certain objects. Sometimes the correct presentation of material requires the preparation of the individual. For instance, the preparation of the fingers for the tactile exercise, or the temporary impeding of some other sense, such as the sight, may be required. Sometimes it is necessary to demonstrate a certain mode of procedure in the presentation, such as the lightness of the hand in*

> *touching surfaces and the almost imperceptible movement of the hands when weighing the baric tablets.*
>
> *All this is in relation to the mode of presentation of the material, and now what shall we call the presentation itself? It would not be suitable to call it a lesson, especially as we have said that we must avoid teaching as commonly understood, so that the child will not have the idea that he must merely imitate that which the teacher is doing. But as it is necessary to give this presentation a name, we will call it an initiation.*
>
> *So the teacher initiates the child, and it is almost as though she gives him a key to the secret of this modification or development of himself of which he is in need. We do not in effect teach him anything in the presentation; we are merely placing his feet upon the path which will lead him to his goal, which is perfection. In order that this material will have the desired effect, that the child shall be stimulated to the exercise, it is necessary that the teacher should know the technique of correct presentation.*

For the last area, I want to bring forward some ideas Montessori has proposed on the nature of the child's mind.

Montessori's Ideas on the Mind of the Child

In this short paper, I can't give the full richness of her ideas, some of which seem not to have been written down, but are only given out in training courses. Remember that she wrote over several decades, but all of this writing was done in the very early decades of psychology and child development. She and Piaget were perhaps the two people most responsible for making clear the power, the tremendous learning that is going on in children in infancy and early childhood. In this section, I have used parts of the early chapters of *The Montessori Controversy* (Chattin-McNichols, 1992); more detailed discussion is given there.

One preliminary and very basic idea concerns the nature of children's motivation in learning. Modern behaviorist theory, which dominates classroom in the U.S. and many other countries at this time, is very focused on extrinsic motivation, and thus children are showered with praise and trinkets as a supposedly necessary part of getting them to attend and learn. Montessori is, of course, a champion, like Piaget, of the power of children's intrinsic motivation.

I have chosen three areas of Montessori thought to examine for relevance to Godly Play. First I will discuss some basic child development ideas, including Montessori's idea of sensitive periods. After sensitive periods, I discuss Montessori's idea of the subconscious part of the mind, and Montessori's term horme´ and the implications of these ideas for learning. Finally, I outline some other Montessori areas that it might be useful to explore

later and some links with other theorists. For most of this, I can only provide my training albums (McNichols, 1971) as a reference.

Some of Montessori's contributions have become such a part of our understanding of children that they sound like truisms today. When she first presented them, however, they were a radical departure from the ideas of both the public and the experts. For example, the notion that the mind of the child is quite different from that of the adult, and that the child will go through a predictable series of changes, is something that almost all child psychologists, educators, and lay persons would accept today. (There are still a few radical behaviorists out there who would disagree, of course.) Montessori's observations of these changes led her to a description of these stages that is remarkably similar to Jean Piaget's. But she went on to suggest that, since the mind of the child was different from time to time in the child's life, the educational system must respond to these differences. That is, the structure and content of education should be determined by the child's needs, not by what society thinks is appropriate for children to know, and that this will change through the course of childhood. That suggestion remains controversial to the present day.

To get started on Montessori's ideas on child development, on which her educational model is based, we can begin with the concept of the Four Planes of Development. These ideas were first laid out in detail in her *Absorbent Mind* (1967) Montessori divided the years from birth through age 24 into four six-year periods. Two of the periods are active periods of tremendous growth; these are early childhood (0-6) and adolescence (12-18). The other two periods are relatively calm periods of consolidation: middle childhood (6-12) and early adulthood (18-24). Like any other stage theorist, Montessori stressed that these ages are approximate; only the sequence of the stages remains invariant.

The period of infancy and early childhood was a period of such great and diverse learning that the powers of the infant astonished Montessori, as they have done so many students of the young child. Montessori felt that this was the period of the greatest learning potential in the entire human developmental cycle. This was the time of the "absorbent mind." She uses the example of the absorption of language or languages in the home to show the power of the child.

A sensitive period is a time limited opportunity in the development of the person. It is a genetic component, available to all humans regardless of cultural background. The use of the sensitive period is what will vary from culture to culture, family to family, even child to child within the same family. The sensitive period for language is a potential for language acquisition. The language or languages acquired will depend on the child's experiences with her environment.

Many other sensitive periods are described by Montessori, the majority of them coming in the 3-6 period. For example, there is a sensitivity to order in the environment, beginning at or a little before age two. Montessori observed children becoming upset when things were moved from their accustomed places. She also commented on the child's love at this time of tiny objects. As is the case with each of these sensitive periods, Montessori was not content merely to observe characteristics like this in children. Everything that she saw

was used to modify the environment or the teacher's behavior in the Montessori classroom.

> *Horme:´ The leading force of the great intelligence which is pushing all matter, living and nonliving, toward their final goal. She describes this force as moving things, from chemical reactions to living beings, towards a final state. It is thus a teleological force, moving towards a goal or end. She unites in horme´ things which we typically see as separate: the force in a chemical reaction, the force that motivates a toddler to walk up and down stairs are she learns this new skill, and the force of evolution, are all the action of horme´. Montessori on occasion described this force as "unconscious"; it is unclear whether she meant that the force acted on us at a level below our consciousness, or that the force itself was unconscious. It is also unclear what the relationship of this force (in Montessori's thought) might be to the source of the similar push in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's thought , the Christian God.*
>
> *Horme´ extends over a vast field. Certain actions of children are the result of powerful forces acting on them, independent of their wills. Often a child, asked the reason he has done something, will reply, "I don't know."*
>
> *Montessori says that we must work to defend the child against the negative aspects of types of these forces. The human being must be understood from birth, and his conscious will developed. This is what education should do, and it is one of the most important aims of the new education.*
>
> *Horme´ is the force that powers the spontaneous work of the child; it is what makes them repeat an exercise until they are satisfied. In small children, this drive or push is on the unconscious level, like the drive to eat. In older children, it becomes a voluntary factor. This vital force can be either a conscious or an unconscious biological force; the unconscious part is much greater.*

Montessori also wrote about sensitive periods in the older child. For example, the child in the 6-12 period is sensitive to imagination. The child in the second plane of development, 6-12 years is no longer as strongly driven toward his own development by the teleological force Montessori called horme´. In contrast, any lesson that strikes his imagination will strongly motivate him. The child in the 3-6 period is primarily concerned with the development of her own skills, her own self. Thus, she will spend a good deal of time in the Sensorial and Practical Life curriculum areas, learning how to order things in various sense dimensions and how to manage many things about her own life. She is thus content for the most part to remain in the classroom: her focus is inward. The typically developing elementary child has finished that stage of development and now wants to absorb the particular

culture of his own group. This is the time in the Montessori curriculum for a great number of lessons and experiences in History, Geography, and the Sciences, which Montessori grouped together as the Cultural Subjects.

In Montessori's later writings, particularly in a book titled *From Childhood to Adolescence* and two pamphlets, *Erdkinder* and *Functions of the University*, Montessori set out her ideas on the later two periods. (Note that these two short works are included in the 1994 edition of *From Childhood to Adolescence)* Montessori's ideas for the adolescent are very interesting, and should be considered by Godly Play practitioners serving this age range.

To summarize the four planes of education: Montessori saw dramatic differences in the growing person, and organized these into four stages. In addition, she saw special "windows of opportunity" for growth, the sensitive periods. Her educational method is built on the idea that education must be developed to meet the specific needs and sensitivities of each age.

Montessori also hypothesized a subconscious layer to the human mind. This was a layer in which all sense experiences are stored. She used the since-discarded term *engram* to describe a "memory trace," laid down in the subconscious by each sensory experience. These subconscious memory traces are not always able to be called up into consciousness; otherwise we would all have a perfect memory. But a number of pieces of evidence seem to indicate that some model like Montessori's may be needed to explain the complexity of human memory. For example, numerous studies in human memory have shown that many kinds of information, once forgotten, are re-learned in a shorter period of time the second time. Also, the ability of people to remember things in great detail under hypnosis suggests that more is remembered than can be easily recalled by the conscious mind.

For Montessori, the memory traces stored in the subconscious are active, constantly being processed. The way our mind can come up with new answers after a period when the conscious mind is turned off (as in sleep) was proof of this for Montessori.

This idea--that experiences are retained deep in the mind, that these experiences are "put together," and that the resulting new idea can emerge into the conscious mind--is behind several aspects of the Montessori model. The focus on having the child experience the material, rather than on weekly tests, is an example. The whole concept of indirect preparation, the preparing of the child for later skills and concepts, is based on this notion of the subconscious mind.

In Berryman's *Teaching Godly Play*, he writes about the way in which the response time choice meet a child's (often unconscious) needs. The small details of the stories and the sparse language are stored in children's subconscious as Montessori described, if we accept her ideas. Certainly, many of us have seen or heard about how these details emerge in children's language and behavior, sometimes months or even years later. If children are given a generous response time in a rich environment, we will witness children whose needs have been met. This might show up in synthesis work that they do, for example.

Here is a last quote from an early Montessori training course:

From Lecture 26 (Given June 23rd) by Dr. Maria Montessori, in the International Montessori Course given in 1913 . These notes by E. M. Standing.

...Before passing on to the practical work I should like to sum up some of the ideas which we have been discussing. In the natural psychic development one finds two periods, the first which is the primitive period, and which is also the creative period. I will give an example: the very young child begins to walk; he feels an irresistible impulse which impels him to do so. We could not hold back the child from walking, and if we did it would be a form of violence and would have serious effects on his motor development.

The child begins to speak because his development leads him to do so. The child does not develop because he wishes to utilize these developments. The child does not reason in this way; "Because I wish to walk from here to there I will begin to develop my capacity for walking in order to do so." He does not say, "I wish to develop language so that I shall be able to ask for food when I am hungry." No. We have first the development, and it is only in a subsequent period that the human individual utilizes this development.

Thus when the child has developed the power of walking where he pleases, and when he has developed the power of speaking, he says that which he desires to utter. There is then a whole period when the child does exercises without any purpose except the purpose of the doing of the exercises in themselves; and this form of exercise requires great effort on the part of the child. One sees that the child is very active when he wishes to begin to walk himself. We must consider this principle not only in connection with these primitive activities of the child, but we must consider it as a general principle underlying all development during the whole of childhood.

One of the errors of the established method of education is that it only takes into consideration the utilization of the things which are developed. For instance, it is considered useless to develop writing in the child before the child is able to utilize this accomplishment, and it seems only necessary to develop it when he is about to use it. When, in my method of education, I laid down this principle of the development in itself as the fundamental basis of all, an objection was raised that there would be difficulty in making the social application of these things which have been developed, because man must develop these capacities for utilization. For instance, it was said ,"If you merely think of the development itself, how will these children be able to pass their

examinations and do their required work"; because it would seem that they should in some way be prepared directly for this utilization.

Objectors spoke as though the two principles, the one of development and the other of utilization were entirely separate one from the other, as though it were necessary to make a choice between the two. Whereas, the more perfect the development, the better it can be utilized. If one examines this idea profoundly, experimenting with the children, one will find that the whole question of utilization lies in this fact of development.

Once we have studied the question in this way, we immediately see the logic of it. Looking back to the very first development in the child, we have the proof in nature herself. It is evident that the child in order to be able to utilize his capacity of walking must first develop the power to walk; and before he can utilize his language, before he can use it to express his feelings and ideas, he must develop his language. There is no dualism in the first periods.

That first primitive activity, that almost irresistible activity, is due to the impulse of development. Thus, little by little, as the child develops his reasoning power he also develops the capacity for the utilization of this development: the two things go along side by side; he utilizes this development of the power of reasoning as his reasoning power develops.

The fact of culture or learning must always be acquired with a certain technique, that is, they have to be given in a certain way. For instance, if the older children of seven or eight are to write compositions, it is absolutely essential that they should first learn to write. Thus, we feel the necessity of developing what we call the elements of culture or learning. The ordinary methods recognize this principle of development in relation to learning. But instead of recognizing the development of the child, they take into consideration the development of the period of culture, during the period when it cannot really be recognized. For instance, when they taught children these little strokes or lines for writing it was evident that these marks would not be used for writing, but they served to prepare for this future learning. Progress in development was considered in regard to the cultural subject matter rather than with regard to the child himself.

It would appear that ordinary methods consider it sufficient to have these graded periods for learning the different subjects, in order to teach certain subjects to the children. If, instead, we consider the development of the child himself and if in considering this development we do not take into consideration the purpose of this development of culture, but only the development of the child himself, then we shall find ourselves facing a very radical change in the concepts of education. This

> *change would not be noted externally, perhaps, because we also teach the same things; we teach the alphabet, reading and writing, arithmetic and grammar; therefore it might seem as if this were the same as any other method. But we use all this apparatus merely as a means for the development of the child himself and not in order to teach him certain things. Here we have come to this fundamental difference between the two concepts.*
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> *We may say that the great difference lies in the life, vivacity, interest and joy which the child shows in doing the work and also in the facility and precocity with which he learns. To enable us to follow the development of the child we try to find and follow the impulse of the child. We are trying to cultivate and give exercises which strengthen these inner energies. For this reason, instead of logically teaching certain things, we expose in the adapted environment certain stimuli and allow the child to choose.*

In this section, I would like to suggest areas in Montessori thought that could be explored next for their possible relevance to Godly Play. These are offered in no particular order.

We could examine Montessori's idea of intrinsic motivation for work, and how this plays out with today's children and youth. In Montessori classrooms, for example, a distinction is made between feedback and praise. I am especially concerned about how children whose school experience has been filled with extrinsic reinforcements for all activities: grades and stars on a chart.. This also needs to be understood within the framework of developmental differences from early childhood through adolescence.

A related area to be studied across age ranges is the role of the child's imagination in both learning and motivation. As far as I am aware, very little has been done in the way of research on the uses of imagination for children's understanding of religious ideas, or for making progress in spiritual development.

Could we take some of the content given to Montessori teachers in training about the basic nature of a presentation—which is the foundation on which Dr. Berryman made his storytelling sessions? This would include the importance of the teacher's demeanor, voice, position, the need for clarity and considering the child's point of view in the use of materials, even the elimination of distractions such as shiny or noisy bracelets.

What can we do to help beginning Godly Play practitioners? I am thinking in particular of the practices that are so countercultural, such as holding silence in the wondering questions, and not praising children's work too much. Could we make some videos and have trainers comment on them?

What ideas from elementary and adolescent Montessori classrooms and from service learning could be adapted to make a new category of response: a service activity in the community, perhaps with a social justice focus?

I am sure that as people more familiar with Godly Play than I am become familiar with Montessori's work, other and better ideas will emerge.

In this final section, I want to mention some of the many theorists whose ideas interlock with Montessori's, giving us new insights. These include Abraham Maslow, whose classic book *Towards A Psychology of Being* (1998) is the primary source for his model of the hierarchy of human needs. This concept is one of the foundational ideas in the humanistic school of psychology. It is clear that children in many Godly Play programs cannot make adequate progress in their development because of needs such as food, safety, social acceptance, and so on. It is likely that the parish community as a whole, rather than simply the Godly Play practitioners, would be needed to address these issues properly.

Professor Keiran Egan, in his book *The Educated Mind* (1998) has proposed a series of "modes of understanding" that serve as a critique of a number of the ideas of constructivist educators, although not of Piaget's ideas themselves. He isolates a mode for 5-7 year olds, and more complex modes for 8-12 and 14-16 year olds. His Mythic mode for 5-7 year olds focuses on learning through storytelling, and he notes that traditional fairy tales and fables have characteristics that make them a very suitable way of both engaging and teaching children in this age range. He notes that storytelling has been an almost universal method of teaching in traditional cultures over a very long period of time.

The Romantic mode of understanding of the 8-12's has a variety of characteristics, which include a focus on facts and details in the real world. These children are no longer satisfied to learn about the giant in Jack and the Beanstalk: they want to know about Andre the Giant, or basketball players like Yao Min. In stories, they now want a focus on real characters and the emotions that motivate them, compared to the flat, stock characters like Jack and the giant. This is also, Egan asserts, the great time for hero worship and for collections of things, from rock and baseball collections to Magic or Pokemon cards.

The Philosophic understanding of the 14-16's leads them from simple facts to theories; the primary mode for these children is debate or argument.

My last theorist, Professor Christopher Alexander, is little known inside Montessori or even within general educational circles, since his primary field is architecture. But his classic 1977 work, *A Pattern Language*, is an amazing and encyclopedic work with direct relevance for educators and Godly Play practitioners alike. In it, he seeks to find and describe universal human patterns. These patterns which are the answers to design problems, at the level of interior design, architecture, and city planning. The most relevant for our purposes are those at the interior design level, although there are revolutionary ideas at all levels. Here are the short descriptions of a few patterns:

Pattern 18: ***Network of Learning****: In a society which emphasizes teaching, children and students--and adults--become passive and unable to think or act for themselves. Creative, active individuals can only grow up in a society which emphasizes learning instead of teaching.*

Pattern 57: ***Children in the City****: If children are not able to explore the whole of the adult world around them, they cannot become adults. But modern cities are so dangerous that children cannot be allowed to explore them freely.*

Pattern 68: ***Connected Play****: If children don't play enough with other children during the first five years of life, there is a great chance that they will have some kind of mental illness later in their lives.*

Pattern 73: ***Adventure Playground****: A castle, made of cartons, rocks and old branches, by a group of children for themselves, is worth a thousand perfectly detailed, exactly finished castles, made for them in a factory.*

Pattern 85: ***Shopfront Schools****: Around the age of 6 or 7, children develop a great need to learn by doing, to make their mark on a community outside the home. If the setting is right, these needs lead children directly to basic skills and habits of learning.*

Pattern 86: ***Children's Home****: In every neighborhood, build a children's home--a second home for children--large rambling house or workplace--a place where children can stay for an hour or two, or a week. At least one of the people who run it must live on the premises; it must be open 24 hours a day; open to children of all ages; and it must be clear, from the way it is run, that it is a second family for the children--not just a place where baby-sitting is available.*

Pattern 129: ***Common Areas at the Heart****: No social group--whether a family, a work group, or a school group--can survive without constant informal contact among its members*

Other theorists, certainly Piaget and Vygotsky, Robert Coles, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Carol Gilligan, have other perspectives for us to consider. I hope that this is just the start of a fruitful conversation.

In summary, I have tried to discuss a Montessori educator's perspective on Godly Play, focusing on the importance of the response time, the role of the environment, and some ideas from Montessori on the development of the child. While I have referred to Montessori's thought, I have tried to organize this article so that Godly Play practitioners and trainers will be able to make changes in their practices if they should wish to do so. The practical suggestions I have are:

- See the response time as central to the child's experience of Godly Play, not as play time.
- Understand the limiting effect of art shelves that offer few choices or are incomplete or difficult to use.
- Begin to see the richness available in Montessori ideas for making our Godly Play environments and programs more responsive to the developmental needs of children at different ages. Other theorists who could also assist in this process are mentioned.

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Appendix One: Sample of a Montessori Album Write Up

First Presentation of the Noun (Noun Game)

Age: 4 & up

Prerequisites: Good oral language background; most sandpaper letters; understanding of what a word is; some decoding of three letter phonetic words (pink level), including some word building with movable alphabets, ideally labeling of the farm objects.

Materials: Paper (either small slips or a roll of adding machine paper tape in a holder to allow slips to be torn off) and black felt marking pen; the farm or another small set of small, well-known objects. Montessori never intended that the farm would be the only set like this ever to be used in Montessori classrooms. Also, there are certainly less expensive farm sets available than the one from Nienhuis.

Presentation: (Individual or small group)

1. Invite the child(ren)
2. Recall the name of the set--the farm or whatever set you are using.
3. Ask the child(ren) the names of 5 to 9 objects in the sets. As each one is named, write the name down carefully on the slip of paper with the pen. Use the same letters as the sandpaper letters and movable alphabets that the child has been exposed to.
4. Each child is allowed to "read" the word from the paper after they have told you what to write. Give the slip to the child, ask him what it says, and then ask him to put it next to the object it names.
5. As you proceed, begin to refer to the slip as a <u>noun</u>. Say things such as, *"Now John, what is this? Yes, a pig. Let me write the noun for you."* and "*Where will you put this noun?*"
6. When you have finished labeling all of the objects, gather the slips together as a column. Say,"*These words are all names of things on the farm. These words are nouns. Can you say the word noun?"*
7. Offer the children the opportunity to read and re-place the slips, or to copy them down on a chalkboard or their own slips of paper.

Variations: Later lessons will extend this concept with the "Bring me--" game, and the introduction of the noun symbol.

Extensions: The making of classroom noun lists, use of the noun symbol, noun family chart, etc., are not usually introduced until later in the sequence.

Points of Interest: 1) Seeing the familiar objects' names turned into written words 2) The first idea of word classes (parts of speech)

Control of Error: The teacher checks to be sure of correct matching of words to objects. If for some reason a child with poor initial sounds background gets included in the lesson, choose objects which have all different initial sounds.

Direct Aims: Introduction to the noun; the idea that words are in groups by functions, and that name words are nouns.

Indirect Aims: Additional experience with the relation between oral and written language; preparation for further work with the noun, and other parts of speech.

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