



In the Meadow

Where the sheep gather

A newsletter for the Organization Members of CGSUSA



Greetings!

This month we lift up Gianna Gobbi's beautiful words about work from *Listening to God with Children*:

It is important to note that this atmosphere of work and concentration is not dependent on the presence of the teacher or supervising adult. In fact, once the children are engaged in their work, they barely recognize the presence of the adult! This is indicative of a level of order and organization which is not like an external order or an order which is imposed on the child from outside; rather, it corresponds to the internal order which exists within each child. (p 101-102)

The atrium session allows children time to work with the materials at their own pace and cultivates their concentration. Allowing time for them to concentrate through the work of their hands is vital for their absorption of the Christian proclamations they hear in the scripture or liturgical presentations. Perhaps you may have already observed patterns in the work cycle of the children while in the atrium that reveals the engagement between the child and God. It is seen when a child is quietly absorbed with a diorama and figures of proclaiming a scripture passage or when a child is practicing a gesture of the Eucharist, for example. Sometimes a catechist's best action in the atrium is to step back and observe the children as they are engaged with the atrium materials.

- Did you recognize any patterns when observing the work cycle of the child?
- When did you notice moments of concentration and happy work?
- Concentration is an individual activity. How is that realized in your atrium environment?
- It is part of our poverty as catechists to use as few words as possible and also not interrupt the work of the child. How have you grown in those skills?

Peace,
Mary Heinrich,
Membership Coordinator

The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The 32 Points of Reflection

What are the principal points which distinguish this catechesis and because of which it is called the "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?" The following characteristics are intended to represent the principal aspects of the catechesis as they have emerged after more than fifty years of work with children of different countries, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. These characteristics are reflective of the constants which have presented themselves in this work and are presented here with the invitation to go deeper into them for further reflection.

8. The weekly atrium gatherings should last at least two hours, of which a small part is often dedicated to the catechist's presentation and the majority of the time is reserved for the personal work of the child.

For the Parishioner: The work of the adult can be exhausting and burdensome. The work of the child is different. One of the reasons the child is compelled to work is to interact with his or her environment. Have you visited the Atrium environment in your community to observe the work of the child?

For the Parent: The materials in the Atrium are designed for the child's use rather than as a teaching tool for the adult. Have you visited the Atrium environment in your community to observe the work of the child?

For the Catechist: Gift yourself with an opportunity to be in the Atrium for a two hour session this summer. Refrain from cleaning, repairing materials, or other adult work. Use this time to work as a child in the Atrium: pick up a material and work with it, enjoy this time of absorbing and internalizing the Word being proclaimed or the Christian message shared. Enter into the rhythm of being a child in the Atrium.

For Parents: All About the Atrium, a CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

This information may be included in your communication with parents.

This month our focus is on "[BE NOT AFRAID.](#)"



All About the Atrium
CGSUSA Parent Newsletter
Be Not Afraid

Children love to sing. It is important for our children to learn about music expression, to

BE NOT AFRAID
Fear is a normal part of life and can be

For the Catechist

The Two Hour Atrium Gatherings

Dr. Montessori taught the importance of allowing children a lengthy period of uninterrupted work time. She determined that this amount of time allowed a child to progress to the most in depth concentration and intellectual exploration, which then

resulted in the most significant growth. Dr. Montessori taught that this lengthy, uninterrupted time led to the most intellectual growth, and at its conclusion, leaves the child with a feeling of peace and calm satisfaction.

At the beginning of the work cycle a child will choose (or the child may wander until something strikes his or her attention) and work with a material for a shorter period of time. They may work with several materials during this shorter amount of time. Montessori taught that as the work cycle continues, the child displays a false sense of fatigue. At this point the adult may question the cycle and often ends the cycle in order to change activities, which ends the work time. Montessori taught that this false fatigue is instrumental in allowing the child to move to the most important work that would follow. It is after the false fatigue that the child will find the work that he or she will delve into with great concentration and focus. It was as if everything prior to this was a warm up for the work to come.

This usually happens at the latter part of our Atrium session. It is at this point they have found *the work* - the work that they are so focused on, using so much creativity and attention that they are immersed in it. Dr. Montessori observed at the conclusion of the cycle the child is at peace with a calm satisfaction and content, as if he or she is rested.

- Do your children enjoy a two hour Atrium session?
- If not, what steps does your community need to take to allow that to be realized?
- What have you observed about the work cycle of the children in your Atrium?

For the Catechist and the Children

This month we share a song for the older child from catechist Paula Rush on Kindness.



Kindness

For Reflection...for the Catechist in the Atrium
Our CGS Sources: *from Sofia and Gianna (and Maria!)*

From Maria Montessori -

From *The Child in the Family* (Page 32)

I observed these same manifestations many more times. When the children had completed an absorbing bit of work, they appeared rested and deeply pleased. It almost seemed as if a road had opened up within their souls that led to all their latent powers, revealing the better part of themselves. They exhibited a great affability to everyone, put themselves out to help others and seemed full of good will.

It was clear to me that the concept of order and the development of character, of the intellectual and emotional life, must derive from this veiled source. Thereafter, I set out to find experimental objects that would make this concentration possible, and carefully worked out an environment that would present the most favorable external conditions for this concentration. And that is how my method began.

From Gianna Gobbi -

From *Listening To God With Children* (Page 114-115)

The child carries out this form of work according to his or her own rhythm. Unlike the adult, the child is not interested in utilizing his or her energies for maximum results. High efficiency is not an issue for the child. Rather, the child works more for the pleasure of the work itself. He or she works largely without the praise or recognition and in an orderly way, often refusing the help of the adult. Indeed, the child will often say, "I want to do it myself."

What observations did you make about the work of the child this year?

When was the last time you observed in an Atrium?

When was the last time you observed in a Montessori environment?

If you have not observed outside your own Atrium environment since your CGS formation, make plans to do so this year. You can find an Observation form [here](#).

The black and white version of some of the elements that you would like to copy and paste to your parish bulletin or catechist communication can be found [here](#). We look forward to [hearing from you](#). Please let us know what resources may be helpful to you as an Organization Member.

Ask for artwork and pearls - permission form

In the Shepherd's Care,

Mary Heinrich
Membership Coordinator,
The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
cgsusa.org

