

WHEN MONTESSORI DOESN'T WORK

A quick search on the internet will bring up an array of posts and articles about Montessori, both good and bad. It is disheartening to come across ones that are disparaging about Montessori, especially those that are based on personal experience. Here are some of the fundamental reasons why Montessori may not work for some:

1. PARENTS NOT FULLY UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHY

Understanding the philosophy doesn't come easily to everyone, especially if you have been raised very differently. A lot of parents choose Montessori because they have done research or have heard from others that it is the best for the child, but don't research any further than the academic aspect. Parents who choose Montessori for their children often believe that sending them to a Montessori school is all it takes and it ends at the school doors. Many parents withdraw their children from Montessori schools because they had preconceived ideas and expectations that were not met. This is why some schools have a detailed enrollment process and requirements. They are trying to ensure that parents have an understanding of what lies ahead to avoid such misunderstandings. There are many myths and misconceptions around Montessori (too much structure, not enough structure, too much freedom, not enough freedom, not enough creativity, children get to do what ever they want, etc.) that if you as a parent come on board with some of these perceptions and do not take the time to learn more about the philosophy then Montessori education may not work for you.

2. THE CHILD HAS AN UN-DIAGNOSED CONDITION

Some children struggle, particularly at the elementary level, when there is an underlying undiagnosed condition. Some conditions are harder to recognize and teachers are not health professionals. While most teachers put a lot of time into professional development and understanding various special/additional needs in children, there are many conditions that present similarly or are difficult to recognize without intensive or formal training. A good Montessori teacher is also a good observer. Observation is one of the key functions of the Montessori classroom, and so over time the teacher may be able to build up a report of various things he/she has observed that may need further investigation. Unfortunately, not all parents are receptive to this type of information and this can put a strain on the parent-teacher relationship.

3. POOR TEACHER-PARENT RELATIONS

This is a hard one to admit, but teachers are not perfect - not even Montessori teachers. And sometimes parents are not always easy to approach. There can be many contributing factors to poor parent-teacher relations, but at the heart of most cases are two things that undermine the relationship: assumptions and judgements. Good communication is key to fostering a mutually respectful relationship between parents and teachers. Neither party can afford to assume to know what happens/doesn't happen (insert alternative scenarios here) in either environment, and it's really important to not make judgements about the other party as this will erode any good will that exists.

4. PARENTING STYLE

Directly related to #1. There are many parenting styles. Fundamentally, if your parenting style isn't somehow in-line with Montessori values and the child is not receiving consistent messages between home and school then there will be power struggles and other challenging behaviors that will lead to disharmony and dissatisfaction. If your approach to parenting is positive, pragmatic, revolves around intrinsic motivation and building your child's independence then you are more than half way there.

Ultimately, the method does work for most children, as the approach is based on universal points of development observed by Dr. Montessori, regardless of culture or geography. Each child should be met at their point of development, their needs, and their interests. If there is something not going right, the answer is most likely to be found in the prepared environment and it is up to the prepared adult(s) to observe and evaluate what it may be that needs to be adjusted.