

Archive for June, 2012

June 7th, 2012

Rookie Mistakes Part Two

"It doesn't work!" says the rookie. "After all of the training I've had, Montessori just doesn't work." And then the rookie resorts to the kind of teaching and actions that are common to traditional education because – "Montessori just doesn't work."

The first rookie mistake (and the last thing you want to do) is to go back to traditional controls because traditional controls will never bring about a Montessori environment. If Montessori isn't "working" we need to first look at what we are doing – not what the children are doing.

There is a magic to Montessori. The rookies see experienced teachers do it. A classroom is transformed and the children are normalized and are highly functioning individualized learners. The rookies step up to the plate wave the magic wand of Montessori and it doesn't work. And they wave the wand again – and it still doesn't work. After they get tired of waving the wand they shake their heads and conclude – they can't make it work.

They "it" that they can't make work is the hard work behind the magic. Tough classrooms and challenging children are not just presented to rookies, experienced teachers are also handed the same situation. Experienced teachers, instead of resorting to traditional methods, resort to traditional Montessori methods. The number one tradition is presentation. The number two tradition is re-presentation. The number three tradition is re-re-presentation. And number four is re-re – I think you get it. You start over and over again – if you must. And you often must!

Montessori doesn't work unless the children are trained. And the magic that traditional educators miss is that children can be trained to be independent and self-guided just as they can be trained to be dependent and teacher guided. The magic is in believing that it can happen. This ability to train is a talent that must be developed, practiced, nurtured and practiced some more.

The teacher difference in traditional and Montessori is that the traditional teacher learns

a few basic techniques and slots the children into those techniques. Whereas, the Montessori teacher is constantly learning new techniques as each child presents a new training paradigm. Some things work with a lot of children, some things work with only a few children – and some things don't work at all. Experience lets you run through your list of options and your training gives you creative permission to try new ones.

If Montessori isn't working it is time to go back to basics. Present, re-present and re-present again. The magic is in the practice, and the practice is in the training.

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Rookie Mistakes Part One

I couldn't believe I made them again! There I was in a parent conference with an upset mother. Half of what she was upset about was my own fault (then again you know the teacher is always at fault when the child does not produce, perform or progress as the parent expects.) But this was my fault. I had violated at least two classroom principles that every rookie should know. What made it worse is I'm not supposed to be a rookie – and I know better.

I had a prospective intern in the classroom and I was sharing the dynamics of my student's abilities. I thought I was being quiet and discrete in my conversation but a child heard a comment and took it to heart and took it home. It does not matter what I said. It does not matter what the child heard (and misinterpreted.) And it does not matter that the parent came loaded for bear. It was my fault. Rookie mistake – NEVER discuss a student's ability, progress, behavior etc in the classroom in the hearing of the student or the other students or of parents. NEVER! It always comes back to bite you.

Second rookie mistake I made – and it came back to bite me in the same conference. (You'd think I'd learn.) Never discuss a student's progress, character, or performance with the parent of another student. Even by way of illustration pointing out good or bad comparisons the potential of what you say to

do damage to the relationship is always present.

"But I thought this case and this parent was different." is what all the rookies say. Take it to heart from the new rookie here – don't! No matter how mature the parent is, no matter how close your relationship, no matter how seemingly appropriate it is – Don't! When push comes to shove the typical parent somehow feels that it must be your fault and not the child's. Let me share with you an historical (if not hysterical) conversation. A child had been guilty of hitting several of his classmates. When the parent was brought in to conference her response was to ask what the other children were doing to her son. Her second response was, "He doesn't hit at home." said the mother of an only child.

The ultimate damage of this rookie mistake is to undermine the parent's confidence in you. When you share information about other children with a non-parent, even though they might feel that they have entered in the inner circle of the classroom, they have a hidden worry about what you might say to other parents about their child if you talk so freely about other children with them.

Rookie mistakes we need to avoid.