

THE FOUR PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT

The four Planes (or phases) of development is an overall vision of Montessori's developmental psychology from infancy to adulthood. Her vision of the whole of development provides a holistic view of the developing human being and explains the constant Montessori idea of the importance of education as a "help to life".

Maria Montessori's "Four Plane's of Education" was a lecture given in 1938 by her at the Seventh International Montessori Congress.

It is this cosmic view of development, this understanding of the cyclical and non-repeatable nature of 'the seasons of developing life that constitutes one of the great distinguishing features of Montessori's work.

Montessori identifies the four Planes as

- Infancy 0 - 6 years
- 6 - 12 years
- Adolescence 12 - 18 years
- Maturity 18-24 years

INFANCY (0 - 6)

This is the Plane of fundamental importance for the formation of the individual. The infant from 0-3 is identified by Montessori as a "**Spiritual Embryo**", as the infant has, within him/herself "potentials", which determine his or her development. There exists within this inert being, a global power, a human creative essence, which drives her or him to form a human being of his or time, civilisation and associated culture. The newborn child has to perform formative work, which corresponds in the psychological sphere, to the one just done by the embryo in the physical sphere.

In this psycho-embryonic period, various powers develop separately and independently of each other i.e. arm and leg movements, sensory movements, language etc. At this stage, there is no unity in the personality. Montessori called the infant from 0-3 the "**unconscious creator**".

At the age of three, a new consciousness appears clearly and fully. It is as though the child's life is beginning again, but this time as a "**conscious creator**". The child now wants to master his or her environment and exercise his/her will. The child is always busy doing something with his/her hands, guided by intelligence. The child's play is really work - the child works for his/her own development. All the separate embryonic developments, which occurred from 0-3 years, must in the end, function together and become integrated so as to serve the individual personality. This is what is happening in the period for 3-6, when the hands are working, guided by the mind. When the environment offers motives for constructive activity, all energies concentrate together. With freedom to develop normally, we see the true personality of the child emerge. This is what Montessori called the 'Normalised' child. During, and as a result of the process of normalisation, the child develops character quite spontaneously. Montessori identifies the period from three to six years of age as the 'embryonic period for the formation of character'.

CHILDHOOD (6 - 12)

This is a "calm phase of uniform growth" in which the abstract mind is organised. The child's mental and physical horizons open up and there is no limit to what the child can explore if the opportunities are there and conditions are favourable. For this plane of development, Montessori emphasised an expansive education, a vastness of culture, wider social contacts and the open environment. This child wants to explore the whole question of morality, and can, together with other children, build social groups that are organised with rules to be

governed by and work to be done.

The child of the second plane is eager for knowledge and understanding of the world built by Nature and mankind. He/She is endowed with the power of imagination, abstract thought and reasoning and physical strength.

ADOLESCENCE (12 - 18)

This plane of creation is the creation of the adult. Physically, the transition from childhood to the adult state is given by puberty; psychologically there is a transition from the child who has lived in the family, to the adult who has to live in society. From the psychological point of view, this is also a critical age where there are doubts and hesitations and violent emotions. Maria Montessori said that this is the time: *"when the social man is created, but has not yet reached full development."*

MATURITY (18 - 24)

Providing that all has gone well before, this becomes the time when the individual develops the spiritual strength and independence for his or her personal mission in life. This individual becomes a human being who has attained a high level of moral conscience and responsibility, and can work for the good of humanity.

Thus the developmental life of a human being is a sequence of births. An earlier plane always prepares the one that follows, forms its basis, nurtures the energies, which urge the individual towards the succeeding period of life. If the child is allowed to unfold according to its natural development, and is provided with the right environment, he/she can offer his/her gifts to the rest of humanity.

In her book *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori states: *"We know how to find pearls in the shells of oysters, gold in the mountains, and coal in the bowels of the earth, but we are unaware of the spiritual germs, the creative nebulae, that the child hides in himself when he enters this world to renew mankind."*