

Four Planes of Development - Overview

Maria Montessori was a great observer and researcher of children. She observed that all children, regardless of race, culture, or location, tend to experience the same stages of development at nearly the same age. Children as they grow, continue to experience similar developments in stages that last about 6 years.

In the past, adults viewed children very differently, they were either viewed as miniature adults (examples of this can be found in the art that depicted babies as tiny versions of mature adults), were merely not considered “real” until they were about age 7, or were viewed as “tabularose” (empty vessels)! Children were often considered the property of their guardians. After age seven, there was a very short childhood period before they were simply considered adults (after puberty) and put to work.

Nowadays, we acknowledge that children are not merely miniature adults, but are humans that are in their own unique period of development. After the period of infancy and childhood, we know that there is a period of adolescence (a relatively new concept), and that the fact that a young human is able to reproduce does not mean that they are at the same level of development as mature adults.

From her many observations, Dr. Montessori recognized that there are 4 main planes of development, with each plane consisting of two 3-year sub-planes.

- The first plane of development is infancy, lasting from birth to age 6, marked by the blossoming of the Absorbent Mind, the growth of an individual personality, and both physical and biological independence.
- The second plane of development is childhood, lasting from around age 6 to age 12, often referred to as the Reasoning Mind stage, is marked by the further development of the child’s mental independence, and the elaboration of their mind and personality.
- The third plane of development is adolescence, lasting from around age 12 to age 18, marked by the development and ever-growing need for social independence.
- The fourth and final plane is maturity, lasting from about age 18 to age 24 and beyond. This final stage is marked by spiritual and moral independence, along with further social development.

The four planes/stages of development are not strict rules, all children are unique and so their movement through these stages is unique as well. There are transitions period, but in many cases, it may seem as though a child has moved from one stage to the next overnight.

References

Age of Montessori. (n.d.). *Stages of Development and How Children Learn*. Retrieved from Age of Montessori: <http://ageofmontessori.org/stages-of-development-how-children-learn/>
Loew, M. (2018, October 4). Four Planes of Development - Overview (Lecture). Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Four Planes of Development - Details

First Plane (Age 0 – Age 6) – Infancy (The Absorbent Mind)

The first sub-plane of the first plane is often referred to as the Unconscious Absorbent Mind period. The first sub-plane lasts from around age 0 to age 3. This sub-plane is marked by a lot of growth and the most vulnerability, both emotionally and physically. The child is extremely sensitive to their environment and need security, love, and a sense of belonging. The child's care giver(s) need to reassure the infant that they are the center of their universe, and provide them with everything they require, such as healthy food, a loving environment, and clear direction (to name a few needs).

The child in this sub-plane interacts and absorbs everything around them, starting in the home, the neighborhood, and maybe a toddler community. In their environments they need the freedom to move, touch, and experience everything. A prepared environment in this sub-plane would include a small number of stimulating objects that the child can manipulate and interact with, as well as ample space for the child to move and crawl about. The space should not be crowded and physical obstacles need to be removed. In this sub-plane the child should already begin to spend time outside with nature, another environment in which they can explore.

In this first sub-plane, communication is beginning to develop through first gestures, facial expression, cries, and later the introduction of spoken language. Adults working with children in this sub-plane should communicate and use language to help the child develop.

In the home, children in this sub-plane want to belong and feel they can contribute to the home, this may manifest itself in the want to help with household chores such as sweeping, dusting, and washing. Adults should let the child contribute when they can, even if the adult will need to re-do the activity when the child is done.

The second sub-plane of the first plane is often referred to as the (Conscious) Absorbent Mind period. The second sub-plane lasts from around age 3 to age 6. This sub-plane is marked by the further development of physical coordination, especially with the use of the hand. Dr. Montessori often said that hand is the instrument of the mind. Because of this development of the hand, the child should be provided developmentally appropriate manipulative activities. The child continues to sensorially explore their environment, while growing their social and physical independence. A prepared environment in this sub-plane would be orderly, attractive, but also limiting, providing only well-intentioned activities. The activities are limited in scope and number, there are no duplicate activities. In this sub-plane the child is very independent and likes to work alone, the child is allowed to work with their work for as long as they want, until they have finished. This teaches patience to the rest of the children and lets the child know that their work is respected. As the child develops further, there is some collaborate work.

Communication is much more developed in this sub-plane, especially spoken language. The child has increased their vocabulary, discovers reading and writing, and discovers mathematics.

Four Planes of Development - Details

Second Plane (Age 6 – Age 12) – Childhood (The Reasoning Mind)

The second plane of development is often referred to as the Reasoning Mind period. This plane lasts from around age 6 to age 12. This plane is marked by the large growth of the reasoning mind; it is a very powerful time in the life of a child. The child has an awareness that they live in a world with other people; prior to this stage they were very focused on self-construction but they now pay more attention to other members of their peer society. The child prefers to collaborate in their work and they have a psychological attraction to others (herd instinct). The child becomes a social being and often wants to look like, dress like, and act like their peers.

The mind and body begins to work different in this stage. The child's body changes, they look different and act different. Long term memories began to form (many people do not have memories from before the age of 5). The child's body is much sturdier at this point, and they have lost their "baby fat" and their baby teeth. They have more stamina along with more physical vulnerability, though they are often able to brush off small amounts of pain.

The child in this stage begins to assert himself in new ways, sometimes through rude and argumentative behavior. They are beginning to exercise their mental thought and develop their logic, though it is still in a very immature phase and adults need to help them develop this further. They are also growing an awareness of morality and a conscious, what is good and what is bad and why? They need order and when the order is disrupted they start to "tattle tale" on one another – fairness is important!

The environment in the home and school no longer satisfies the growing need for exploration. A prepared environment for this stage consists of both the classroom and non-classroom excursions, often referred to as "going-out". Children go out and explore the world, they may visit museums, post offices, or any place where they can learn about how things in the world work. They themselves want to learn about how they fit into the big picture of the world!

Third Plane (Age 12 – Age 18) – Adolescence

The third plane of development is often referred to as the period of the Social Newborn. This plane lasts from around age 12 to age 18. This plane is marked by the transition from childhood into adolescence and adulthood, primarily through puberty. Physically, the child is vulnerable to illness and require much more sleep. Psychologically, the child is vulnerable in other ways – this is a very awkward stage for the child. They are constantly pushing back against authority and their parents, rebelling as a way to assert themselves as unique individuals. They need a special environment away from their parents where they can be interact with in their peer group, away from over stimulation.

The child in this stage is learn more about themselves and their personality. They realize that they have the ability to create and do useful things in society. They realize that they have value, they belong in the world, and that they are worthwhile human beings. They are often so

Four Planes of Development - Details

emotional, they need different ways of communicating their feelings. This expression of feels often manifests itself in different forms of art, such as poetry, drama, and art. Because of their overwhelming amount of emotion, they need an outlet or risk becoming self-absorbed. A child in this stage of development needs a safe, loving, and caring environment, with sensitive adults who understand their needs.

Fourth Plane (Age 18 – Age 24 + Beyond) – Maturity

The fourth plane of development lasts from around age 18 to age 24 and beyond. This plane is marked by the formation of a confident and secure human being. The child is now an adult, with a mentally mature mind and body. They are now able to be a contributing member of society, and as such must explore the many different choices that they have for a “career.” If they have too many choices, they must ask themselves, what can I do and what do I want to do?

This is the end of a cycle of development, and often marks the beginning of a new cycle, as the adult chooses a partner and has a baby.

References

- Age of Montessori. (n.d.). *Stages of Development and How Children Learn*. Retrieved from Age of Montessori: <http://ageofmontessori.org/stages-of-development-how-children-learn/>
- Loew, M. (2018, October 8). Four Planes of Development - Details of Each Plane (Lecture). Albuquerque, New Mexico.
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Stages of Development and How Children Learn

Maria Montessori observed that **all children, regardless of culture or locale, experience the same stages of development at approximately the same age.** It is easy to see that children everywhere learn to walk and talk, lose baby teeth, etc., at approximately the same age.

Developmental milestones that take place in the minds of children are harder to see, but no less real or important. Maria Montessori divided these developmental stages into three main stages. She called the first of these stages 'The Construction of Individuality' or the Absorbent Mind Stage.



Birth to Age Six: The Construction of Individuality and the Absorbent Mind

From birth to around six years-of-age, children have an absorbent mind. This means that they learn effortlessly, soaking in huge amounts of information as easily as a sponge soaks up water. Montessori explains that during this stage, children are 'constructing their individuality.' She further breaks this stage into two sub-stages: the unconscious and conscious stage. Children under the age of three absorb information without conscious effort. He (or she) is developing his basic faculties through mimicry. Children in this phase will mimic just about everything they see:

"Impressions do not merely enter a child's mind; they form it." - Maria Montessori

Then, from three to around six-years-old, children pass into a more conscious stage of development. They still have sponge-like minds that absorb information easily, but now they will consciously seek certain experiences. Children in this phase are expanding their newly developed faculties and abilities. They will demonstrate an innate (and often intense) desire to make choices for themselves and to accomplish tasks independently. Maria Montessori referred to this as the *'help me do it myself' stage*.



Six to Twelve Years Old: Acquisition of Culture and The Cosmic Plan

At about six or seven years old, children make a huge transition from the Absorbent Mind Stage into the Reasoning Mind Stage. Children in this stage become group oriented and like to work collaboratively. The question “why” replaces the “what” of earlier stages as they become interested in moral questions. Children at this age begin to use their imaginations more, and to wonder what part they will play in the bigger scheme of life. Maria Montessori called this **The Cosmic Plan**.

“The child will develop a kind of philosophy which teaches this unity of the universe; this is the very thing to motivate his interest and to give him a better insight into his own place and task in the world and at the same time presenting a chance for the development of his creative energy.”

- Maria Montessori



Twelve to Eighteen Years Old: The Development of Personality and Earth Children

As children enter into adolescence, they develop what Montessori called a 'social consciousness.' This presents itself in the form of a new sense of self-awareness and a concern with his or her societal role in life. According to Montessori's curriculum for this age--which she called 'Erdkinder' or Earth-children--this is not the time for children to be at their academic prime. Instead, this is when children are developmentally ready to broaden their range of experience within a community. In other words, to learn skills for independent human living such as building, cooking, sewing, and maintaining a budget. This is a time for children to spend time discovering themselves and exploring their creative or artistic side.

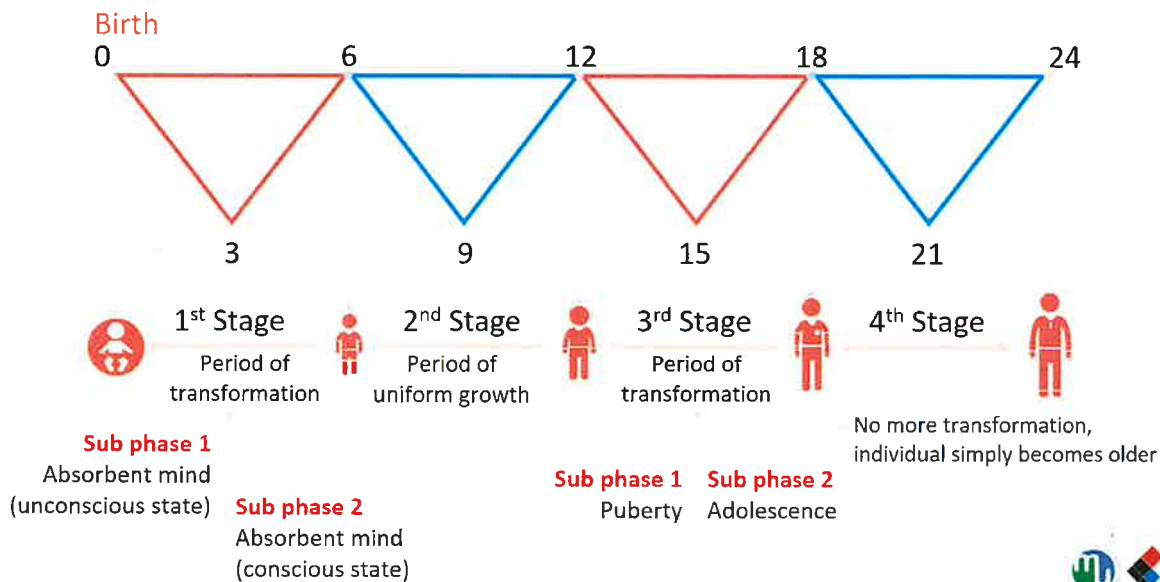
"If puberty is on the physical side a transition from an infantile to an adult state, there is also, on the psychological side, a transition from the child who has to live in a family, to the man who has to live in society . These two needs of the adolescent: for protection during the time of the difficult physical transition, and for an understanding of the society which he is about to enter to play his part as a man[.....]This means that there is an opportunity to learn both academically and through actual experience what are the elements of social life. We have called these children the 'Erdkinder' because they are learning about civilization through its origin[...]they are the "land-children."

- Maria Montessori

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Four Stages of Development



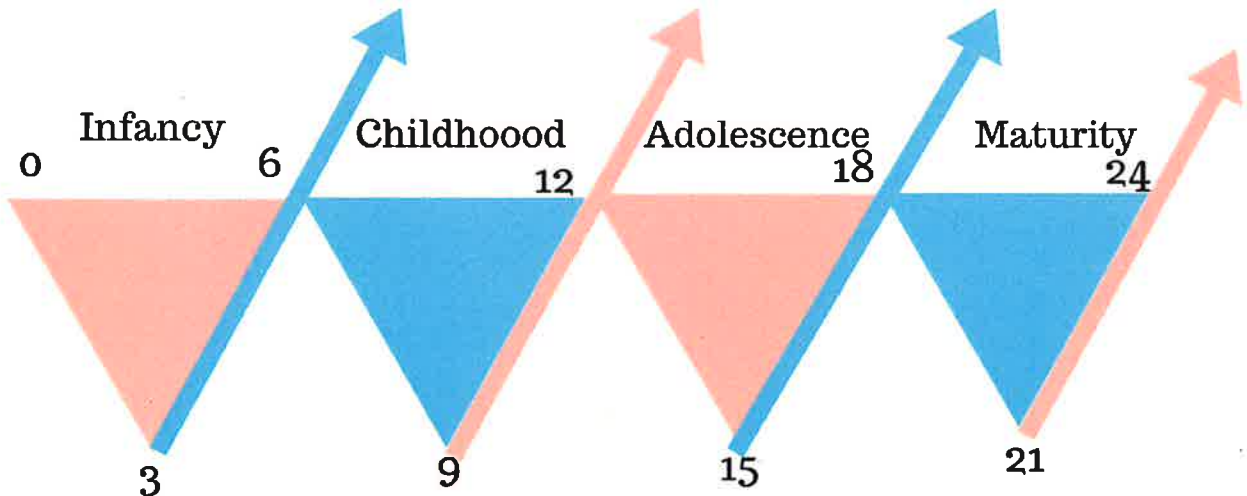
THE PERIODS (STAGES) OF GROWTH

INFANCY		CHILDHOOD		ADOLESCENCE		MATURITY		
0yrs	3yrs	6	9	12	15	18	21	24
Construction of the individual		Development Period		Construction of social personality		Development Period		
Creative Period		Development Period		Creative Period		Development Period		
Spiritual Embryo comprises:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorbent mind – horme, mneme and nebulae Sensitive phases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Order Refinement of the senses Language Movement Small Objects Socialisation 		Features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The why of things Moving from concrete to abstract Development of moral sense Further social development – love of the group to which he/she belongs Culture creativity 		Features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sensitive phase for sexual identity search for ideal model search for the society wants to belong to – morals are not an issue 		Features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to live fully and express self as a part of society contributes to society 		
STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT				STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT				
'The furniture children'		The age of serenity and rudeness		Earth Children		The age of happiness		

'DEVELOPMENT IS A SERIES OF REBIRTH' – The Absorbent Mind Dr. Maria Montessori

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The 4 planes of Development



Physical and Biological Independence

Absorbent Mind
Interested in the process.

Choose activities and refines perceptions

Mental Independence

Socialisation
Interest for group work
Interested by the end product
Rules and fairness are important

Social Independence

Puberty and hormones
Global socialisation, what is my place in the world
Interested by financial independence
Vocation and creativity at its peak.

Spiritual and Moral Independence

Having his/her adult's life
Responsibility and Purpose
Starting his/her family