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| **The Four Planes of Development****Written by Sonia T. Kelly, M. Ed.** |

Based on her own observations and the observations of other psychologists, Dr. Montessori believed that "growth is a succession of births," and that each birth starts a new plane of development.  Each plane is built on the formation of the previous plane, and if the child fulfills his/her needs at each plane, he/she will be prepared to experience healthy and successful growth and brain development at the next plane.

The first and third planes of development are times of dramatic transformation, and the second and fourth planes are relatively calm and stable.  Roughly speaking, the first plane occurs before and during preschool (birth to 6 years), the second plane occurs during elementary school (6 years to 12 years), the third plane occurs during the teenage years (12 years to 18 years), and the fourth plane occurs during the college years (18 years to 24 years).

**The First Plane (Construction of Self):**  During the first plane, the child is concerned with self-construction and forming a basis for the human personality.  This is a self-centered time of development.  Birth through age six is the most active time for brain development; dendrites in the brain continue to form. Will, the ability to make choices, and self-discipline are slowly beginning to develop.  Dr. Montessori called the child's mind during this plane, **the absorbent mind**, likening it to a sponge, when a child can learn subconsciously and effortlessly through observation and exploration.  We, as adults, must maintain an orderly and consistent environment and schedule to allow the child to feel secure so that he/she can classify newly acquired information, necessary for brain development.  We must also provide opportunities for independence, rich language, and a variety of sensorial experiences to speak to the child's sensitivities.  Experiences provided during this time of brain development become a part of the child's brain.

**The Second Plane (Exploration of the World):**  During the second plane, the child is no longer self-absorbed. Dr. Montessori called this time "the birth of the social being."  The child wants to understand the society in which he/she lives and wants to participate in it.  The child is no longer dependent on external order because he/she has internalized it.  This is also a plane of responsibility, and the power to reason develops. We, as adults, must understand that no classroom is large enough.  We must provide access to information and opportunities to explore the world, and allow for the child to take on responsibility.

**The Third Plane (My Impact in this World):**  The third plane is similar to the first plane.  Montessori refers to this child as "neonate," or new born.  This child has a lot of intellectual information about the world and now knows himself/herself, but is going through great physical and hormonal changes.  The child is consumed with contemplating and trying to merge knowledge gained through the first two planes by trying to find his/her place in the world.  During this time, the adult must step back and allow for the child to take care of his/her own needs and take part in community service activities.  The child must see that he/she will be able to impact the world.

**The Fourth Plane (Integration of the Personality):**  The fourth plane is the time when everything comes together.  If needs have been met in the other planes, we have an adult who can express himself/herself as a member of society.

Each plane is approximately six years and has two sub-phases, each three years long.  The greatest changes occur during the first three years, or first sub-phase, of each plane, when the foundation is laid out.  The second half of each plane, or second sub-phase, is the time to develop and crystallize experiences or impressions taken during the first sub-phase of the plane.  Dr. Montessori used sub-phases to group different ages of children to form a classroom.  This is why the preschool, or primary, Montessori classroom consists of children between the ages of three and six.

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