

## "GUIDED BY THE CHILD: A HUMANIZED UNDERSTANDING OF MONTESSORI'S DEVELOPMENTAL PLANES"

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### **Introduction**

Human development is not a linear path of steady progress; it is a series of transformations, much like the metamorphosis of insects. Though subtler in appearance, the evolution of a child's inner world unfolds through distinct, powerful shifts that Montessori described as "rebirths." Each phase carries its own logic, needs, and beauty. To truly educate is not to mold, but to accompany this unfolding — to stand beside the child as they become who they already are meant to be.

In this reflection, I seek not only to explain Maria Montessori's vision of child development but also to breathe life into her vision — to feel what she saw in the child, to honor the quiet dignity of early growth, and to contemplate how such insights might not only educate the child, but renew the spirit of our adult world.

### **The Nature of Growth: Cycles, Not Straight Lines**

Montessori's central insight is that growth does not occur at a steady, uniform pace. Instead, it is marked by qualitative leaps — by transformations that are both biological and spiritual in nature. From birth to around six years, the child experiences what Montessori called the first plane of development. This is not merely a time of physical growth, but of self-construction. In these early years, the child is not simply learning — they are becoming. Their task is nothing less than the formation of the human personality.

This formative stage, so often misunderstood, is marked by an internal vitality. The child is driven not by instruction, but by *needs* — for movement, for independence, for meaningful activity. And perhaps most importantly, for freedom within limits. Freedom not to do "whatever I want," but to do "what I can" — to act independently, without unnecessary help.

### **"Help Me to Do It by Myself"**

These words, spoken by a child, summarize the Montessori philosophy more profoundly than any textbook ever could. The adult's role is not to intervene or interfere, but to observe, to prepare, and to respond. To help without helping — unless it is truly needed. Montessori's famous dictum, "Every unnecessary help is an obstacle to development," forces us to reflect not just on our educational systems, but on our relationship with children at home, in society, and within ourselves.

To see a small child sweep, pour water, arrange flowers, or dress himself is to witness a quiet miracle. It is not the task itself that matters, but the inner formation it enables — the child builds willpower, order, self-respect, and a sense of belonging. In such a prepared environment — one designed with beauty, proportion, and purpose — the child becomes the architect of their own development.

### **The Social Soul of the Child**

What Montessori observed was more than academic learning. It was a flowering of the human spirit. In environments where children are free to act meaningfully and independently, they also become socially conscious — helping one another with care, showing manners, appreciating beauty, and even expanding their prayer to include family members, friends, animals, and angels. This is not taught. It is *lived*. In this sense, the child becomes our moral teacher.

Montessori noted that some saw in this transformation a glimpse of the “Kingdom of Heaven” — not as a distant dream, but as a real, observable phenomenon. Calm, joyful, respectful children, at peace with themselves and their surroundings — this is no fantasy. It is the natural result of an education aligned with the needs of the child.

### **A Child-Centered Civilization**

What if we did more than educate children this way? What if we shaped our adult lives with the same wisdom? Montessori hints at a civilization reborn: one in which homes and workplaces echo the peace, order, and beauty of the Children’s House. Where adults, like children, live with dignity, work with purpose, and care for the world around them — where spiritual strength and social grace coexist.

This is not naïve idealism. It is a profound, almost prophetic vision. For if education is preparation for life, then our treatment of children is a mirror of our hopes for humanity.

### **Conclusion: The Second Plane and Beyond**

At the age of seven, the child changes. Physically, the signs are clear — new teeth, leaner bodies, stronger bones. Psychologically, too, a harder, more questioning phase begins — what Montessori called the “age of rudeness.” But this change, like all others, must be welcomed and prepared for. Just as the first plane requires an environment of love, beauty, and independence, the second calls for new challenges — moral questions, intellectual exploration, and social connection.

Each phase demands its own kind of response. The child leads; we follow. And in doing so, we do more than educate — we *witness* the mystery of becoming human.