

THE FOUR PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT

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The Bulb's image is adapted, colored and translated by July Henze, Metamorphosis, Transforming Growth Possibilities and revised by Alan Evans.

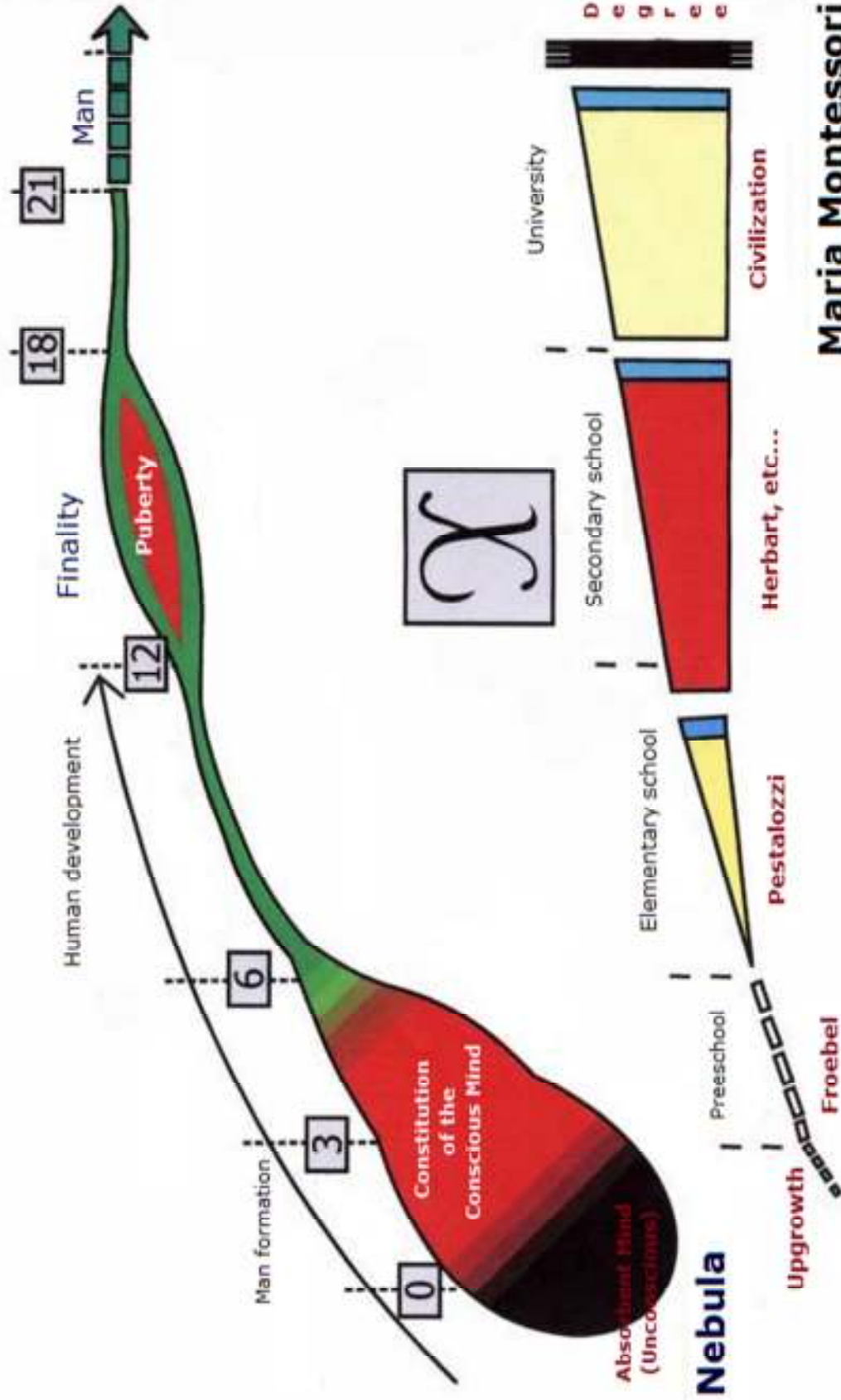
GREETINGS

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July Henze

Four stages of development

The Bulb



Maria Montessori
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Our method has been based on the fact that we have guided by the manifestations of children at different phases of growth. Each of these may be considered at level or a plane. On each different level of life there are different needs and there are different manifestations. I am not alone in saying this. The same has been stated by many educationalists.

The child does not grow in a uniform way day by day, at the same rate. In growth there are crises, somewhat like the metamorphosis of the insects. In the child the changes are not so obvious but the process is similar. If in an educational approach one takes the child as a guide, it is obvious that the educator is led by the child instead of by preconceptions and prejudices. In fact it is the child himself who will be the guide of education.

As I mentioned, I have found that in his development, the child passes through certain phases, each of which has its own particular needs. The characteristics of each are so different that the passage from one phase to the other has been described by certain psychologists as "rebirths."

It is something similar to passing to the larval to nymph-stage in insects. The two stages are completely different. Each lasts a period of time; each has its own needs and mode of behavior.

With regard to the child, education should correspond to them, so that instead of dividing the schools into nursery, primary, secondary, and university, we should divide education in planes and each of these should correspond to the phase the developing individual goes through.

Let us go into details. The first phase of the child's development goes from birth to, let us say, six years of age. At this stage the child is partly at home, partly in school. The plane of education should take both situations into consideration. Towards three years the child is admitted in an educational institution. He is the pink cheeked, curly haired gentle child that we know so well. He is a being who needs love and protection. On the part of the adult there is no need of any special pedagogical knowledge. By his very grace the child asks and obtains this help. But it must be realized that beyond this, children must achieve their growth and that they do this by fulfilling certain vital needs. The child is passing through a formative period, physiologically formative from the biological point of view. Our study has

allowed us to see certain facts that previously had not been observed. For instance, that the child "valorizes" his personality. So, even when they are so much younger than three years old, children need social life and a certain amount of independence. These are serious needs in their lives.

This generally had not been understood; but the children have shown it. It is to correspond to these needs that we have prepared an environment proportionate to the size and intelligence of the children, where they could work and achieve independence. As one studies them in this environment, one sees that their need for activity and work is something fundamental. The child realizes that through his own efforts he can be independent and achieve things he has set his mind to. And gradually we educators are confronted with a simple but important fact: that to help is an impediment to the child. Therefore he must be allowed to act freely on his own initiative in this free environment.

This statement must not be misunderstood however; liberty is not to be free to do anything one likes, it is to be able to act without help. What is this special environment? Those who visit our schools see that they are like a furnished house, a "children's house." And what do the children do? It is what one does in one's house. They carry out work which has a practical aim, they sweep, dust, dress themselves, etc. In this house each one carries out his own work independently from the others; but if something occurs to one of them like knocking over a cup full of beads, or when there is any need for help in similar accidents, the other children are quick to assist.

In this a great wisdom is shown. It is an example for us, because adults generally run to help when it is not needed, but if there is a real need that would require sacrifice on their part, they are not so quick to respond. Repeatedly the children have given us this example. When they have chosen a task and adults go to help them thinking it is too hard, the children defend themselves against this useless help. This is easily understood because the child, in order to grow, must be active in tasks, his intelligence tells him he can do it and if people go to help the child, they act instead of him.

We can recount this in two sentences, the first actually said by a child to his teacher: "Help me to do it by myself." The other is one we gave: "Every useless help is an obstacle to development."

Children at this stage are spontaneously active. It is curious to notice that while active in a practical way, not only their movements but also their intelligence develops greatly; they learn things that were considered beyond the possibility of their age. The longer we experiment, the more we see that always at a younger age the child can learn that which was considered possible only for older children. For example, in the beginning we saw that children wrote at 4 1/2 years and read at 5 years, that at 4 1/2 they begin to learn arithmetic. We considered this an extraordinary fact, but later experiments have shown that the child can write and read even earlier and that at 5 he can carry out the four arithmetical operations.

This has proved that given the possibility of being active, that child even can do work that was considered suited for older children.

Besides these facts that are merely scholastic there are others connected with social behavior. Generally children are timid, recalcitrant when asked to greet people. In this environment of free activity these children are kind and well-mannered. It is not only a sentiment; they like to learn all the courtesies of social life. If one teaches them, they are interested to know how to greet, how to excuse themselves when they pass in front of other people, etc. Clothes are of interest to them, they like to see well-dressed people around them, they like to be well dressed and tidy themselves. It is because we realized this, that we have given them this possibility by providing brushes, combs, low mirrors, etc. The beauty of the environment also affects them, so they like to arrange flowers, etc.

All this occurs because they feel - as it were - owners of a little house. Then they are calm they have dignity and independence. This calm of the children is a striking characteristic. It was so impressive when it first appeared that adults, who had suffered a loss and were innerly agitated, went to observe them in order to restore themselves. In these new conditions the love of the children seems to expand. In Italy, where these phenomena first

occurred, this was noticed by mothers when the children said their prayers. Repeating after mother, they prayed for all the members of their own family. There the mother stopped, but the children continued to include their friends, the servants who assisted in the house and even their dog and cat. Also, children for themselves feel the need of protection. This enters into the local religious education. They need to feel protected, that there are forces - beyond those they are aware of in the world - that protect them, such as a particular guardian angel that cares for each child.

These facts witnessed in the life of small children, led many to say that this was an expression of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and that adult society would be bettered if it were modeled on this pattern. There are many such people in adult society. They are the people who like to be beautiful themselves and to live in a pleasant well-ordered house. They enjoy social life and have always present in their minds the needs and lives of those around them. Such persons are cultured, calm and active. If they are religious, they rely very greatly on the power of God. They, like the child, will pray that others may have the peace and protection that they themselves enjoy.

Perhaps it is true; perhaps a reform of humanity will begin thus. Perhaps one might conceive for adults such an environment somewhere beautiful, peaceful and quiet. But the form of existence lived would be that corresponding to the development of a child less than 6 years. I believe that the child must pass the first period of life in this way in order that all the next periods may be passed perfectly. But this is not the final achievement of human development, for the child at 7 years of age changes completely. The one that follows may be called the second phase of childhood. To correspond to it, education should pass to another plane.

At 7 years begins a physical and psychological change. The child of 7 years has a different psychic attitude. Physically nature puts a sign that is obvious. The pearly teeth of the little child fall out, they are replaced by large, strong, deeply rooted teeth; the curly hair becomes straighter and darker; the fat chubby body becomes gawky and thinner. The sweetness of character gives way to certain hardness, so much so, that this phase of life which continues till adolescence, has been called the age of rudeness.

As I said, the psychological plane also changes. Let me give an example that illustrates this change clearly. In a school we were carrying out experiments in biology; there was an aquarium that was accessible to children from 3-9 years. One morning the fishes were all dead. The little ones struck by this fact, ran to every newcomer to announce that "the fishes are dead," and then ran back to their former occupation. The older children stood quietly around the aquarium saying: "Why are the fishes dead?" "Why? Why do this happen, how do they come about?"

Their independence is in a different field and their aspirations have different goals. They want to know many things that, without widening their activity, their mind actually would not be able to hold. I do not say that the child becomes a philosopher, but he develops feelings toward the abstract, just as in the first phase, he had feelings towards the concrete.

We might say that the younger children take in things sensorially. The child of 7 enters the abstract field; he wishes to know the reasons. It is curious to notice that one of the things which preoccupies them is what is ethical in life: what is good, what is bad. If you tell the little child that he is bad or good, he just accepts it. Whereas the 7-year-old wants to know why he is bad, and what is to be bad, etc.

An example of this was given by a teacher who had a child who was always coming to her, telling what naughty things other children had done: "Is that good or bad?" "Telling on others is not right," she answered finally. But he persisted in coming. Other times he referred to something positive, always asking the same question. It was only later that the teacher realized that this child was seeking to establish in his mind, as a guide to his own behavior, what was good and what was bad in the class. For when he had done so, he stopped telling on others.

Another peculiarity of this phase is the attitude of detachment from home environment. They like to have it pleasant but this is far from the vital need it was in the earlier phase. Neither does the child worry whether his is neat and clean. What he likes is to go out. The limitation of home and its protection become irksome. This urge is so great that we think that at this age they should have part of their life out of home and school. The previous phase's environment, a house full of small furniture and beautiful things, is no longer

adequate or satisfying. The effort he made in the first phase to avoid help, to do things by himself, is no longer enough. He needs a different and greater effort. The contacts with the school which, in the previous phase completed the experiences he found at home are not enough. He needs the feel of something different; a more rigid environment with far wider social contacts.

One of the experiments which seem to be a social response to the needs of the child during this phase is seen in the Boy Scouts: What are Boy Scouts if not persons seeking for themselves a more exacting environment, wider social contact, wider experiences and independence from their families? At this stage the child no longer requires an environment on the same model as in the previous, only more perfect. He requires going out into the world to make wider contacts with both nature and human society.

I think this instinctive form of exploration has to be used by the school for furthering the cultural development of the child. It is not enough to provide material for the child to work in school. He demands to go out into the world. Besides material the school should provide also guides so that the child can go and find the material for him. We have provided schools and material; they are not enough, he requires exploring the physical world and society. He no longer wants to be petted; he wants simple life, independence out of the family circle and physical effort.

If a boy in this phase that leads to adolescence can say, "I can walk carrying my pack on my shoulders and I can sleep in the open," it shows that his personality has undergone a transformation from the dainty, delicate child of the previous phase.

If the tendencies of this transformation were conformed with and added to this, there were a guide to culture, so that the child could absorb culture in this vaster environment, it would be a very great contribution. That is why fostering mental development in this phase is very important.

From my experience I believe that the culture given today in orthodox primary schools should be vastly expanded. This outgrowth of culture in our primary schools is one of the impressive facts that the child has revealed to us. Indeed we have come to the conclusion that the basis of all culture should be given in this period from 7 years to adolescence.

It is mentioned the fact that on this educational plane, giving material was not enough, but material is none the less essential. On the previous plane of education the material helped to build the essentials of the individual personality; on this the educational material helps the acquisition of culture. The children's lack of response in orthodox schools is perhaps due to this, for it is difficult to give culture to those who want to become conscious of the reasons of things by their own efforts. Everyone knows the difficulty of trying to teach the 7-year-old. Either he pays no attention or he does his best to remove himself from the room. For in it he is a passive receiver, there is nothing for him to do which gives him satisfaction. But the picture changes when a material is given. The children then work indefatigably for they will persist in order to find the causes, reasons and consequences which he seeks. The children's mental efforts are always accompanied by the activity of the hand which serves to fix the attention on the task. If helped by the material many abstract studies such as algebra are possible at this age, because at this level the mentality is on an abstract plane.

In the same way many other subjects generally taught in secondary schools can, with great advantage, be brought down to the primary school. Our experience has shown that when material is available, the children work, otherwise they seek to escape from the school.

What do we see in the ethical field? It is their conscience that stands out most and is of great interest: what is good, just or unjust. They have a keen feeling towards injustice. When the adult demands from the very young child something that he cannot give, it is always the 7-year-old that comes to his defense. This rebellion towards injustice is general; it extends even to animals. One could give many examples. I, for instance, had an interesting experience with a small goat that we have in the garden of the school. I loved to look at it standing on its hind legs to reach leaves of trees. One day I was giving it grass, holding it in the air to see how high the animal could stretch. A 7-year-old child came along to support its forequarters so it may reach its food without fatigue, remarking meanwhile how cruel I was. One might say that the child in this second phase of growth shows more admirable traits than the child of the earlier period.

There are some adults who have the same traits and one prefers them to those who reflect the traits of the first phase. The former may not be so well-mannered and well-dressed, but they have more character; they have a great sense of honesty, they cannot see an injustice without intervening, they study seriously, they take long walks and enter into sport with zest. There are certainly many such adults. Admirable yes, but they reflect the psychology of the child who has not yet reached adolescence. There is something higher than this. For always, after having reached some lofty plane, there are loftier ones that can be reached from the level achieved by having lived through the former. Each plane must be lived through fully in order to pass masterly to the next. I believe that psycho-analysis has similar conceptions, for it states that those who have not lived through any plane return to it later. For example the young man who has lacked maternal love and finds satisfaction when he marries a woman older than he.

The third phase begins with adolescence and it requires a third plane of education. Only a passing reference can be given and I shall limit myself to the social sentiments that come in this phase. The children pass from sentiment towards the numerous individuals that surround him in this second vaster environment, in which he witnessed how the physical world and the human society functioned, to an abstract social sentiment for man in general. They may feel and demonstrate for the class of depressed people for instance, but generally they try to understand man's behavior in the world as a whole, including the past. A totally different psychology now distinguishes the individual. He passes from feeling for himself in relation with those with whom he is in contact, to feeling for others whom he has never seen. It is an abstract love. It is love without retribution because it is directed towards those never seen and whom he will never see because they are too numerous.

It is in this stage that vocation and militancy occur.

These children want to give their direct contribution to society and have it recognized. It is something new.

Everyone realizes that at this stage children have a great interest in history. But it is not the study by assimilation one gets in orthodox schools. At this stage they no longer assimilate as they did earlier. They want to investigate and experience on their own. They

are orientating and valorizing themselves in society. Assimilating study which ties them to a school program should not be given at this stage.

Perhaps the failure of the secondary school is due to the fact that it uses methods of assimilation that are no longer suited to the development of the child. The child should be no longer restricted to the environment of the school, to the vaster environment in which he learned and understood the how and the why, nor be so close to the family from which he depends financially; he wants to live society. He should go further away.

I believe that because at this stage he becomes a prone to tuberculosis, etc. as in the first stage, he should work a great deal on the land, etc. as well as continue with studies guides.

I think that adolescents should not only work but also get money by their work. This may sound scandalous because money is considered as something sordid. But self-respect should be gained for the seriousness of work done and a realization of what work and money mean. For, to gain money by one's own effort is a sign that one has done something useful, otherwise money is just something that the family gives them and they become parasites. And which self-respecting person wants to be a parasite? In the working class there are and there were innumerable adolescents who worked. This may be interpreted that they did it because they had to, but I have seen the desire to become financially independent in other kinds of children of this age and how greatly they appreciate the money that they have earned. There was the son of a millionaire in America who ran away from home to earn his own living. When he was eventually found he was working in a jazz-band. Previously he had lived in marvelous conditions, he had cars and all the money he wanted, but how and immensely satisfied he was to be earning \$8 from which he had to live. Why? That happened because he had acquired and felt the value of his own personality. Did he continue in the jazz-band? No. But in this phase he required to produce on an experimental basis, social and experimental.

This is but one example. I and most people could give others. But it must be realized that at this stage the child must continue his cultural development by living the experiences of whatever aspect of society attracts him through methods of production, work and

experiment. He must be able to create and orientate himself. Just as we called these children in the first stage the furniture children - because it was the furniture built to their proportion that enabled them to reveal themselves – we might call these the world children. The corresponding types of adults -once they have become involved in their mission -are those who occupy themselves with international politics, production and commerce. Such men are not really the perfect types of humanity. As one might think, they are transitional and their traits belong to this stage of development.

We can think of a man bearing a great burden, who still has love for his home, who is fond of philosophical exploration, of production and of creation. To my view he is not yet an adult man, he is only adolescent.

Beyond this phase there is one that should correspond to orthodox university. The individual should be the man who knows how to make his own choice of action, having passed to perfection the preceding phases.

He should be as a live spark and aware of the open gate to the potentialities of prospective human life and of the own possibilities and responsibilities. The aspiration of such a man cannot limit itself to personal advantage. The self becomes secondary. The tendency must be for the whole of humanity. He has passed through the different phases and problems of development and education. Now he has reached the problems of the final stage. Culture and education have no bounds or limits; now man is in a phase in which he must decide for himself how far he can proceed in the culture that belongs to the whole of humanity. No matter what he chooses he must realize that culture never finishes. He should realize this fact at this stage, so as to keep up with evolving humanity. Education should continue throughout life.

It is very necessary for the needs of humanity that there be such men conscious of their powers and who have gone through all the experiences and phases of development. All desire that humanity be joined by mutual understanding, but this does not come easily. To achieve this we must raise a step further and attain a higher level of moral conscience and responsibility. To have attained it when one enters one's own mission in social life,

there must have been a long moral preparation. It is not merely by study and science that one can reach this level. All the good of all ages must have been absorbed and surpassed.

We might finish with the vision of what is needed in our times and symbolize it by the figure of Christ in the desert before he took on his public life. We must realize that Christ did not meet God in the desert, he met the evil one. He faced that which is evil, he knew evil and he overcame its temptations. This is the last stage prior to the fourth plane of education. Love of power, love of possession, love of an easy life must be overcome. This is impossible to attain unless man has gone through all these experiences, for this detachment is something that can occur only in a fully developed man. It is not enough to say that inhumanity there must be mutual understanding. Conditions must be provided, so that man can develop in such a way that he is capable of mutual understanding.

We must take man himself; take him with patience and confidence, across all the planes of education. We must put everything before him, the school, culture, religion, the world itself. We must help him to develop within himself that which will make him capable of understanding. It is not merely words; it is a labor of education. This will be a preparation for peace, for peace cannot exist without justice and without men endowed with a strong conscience and personality.

Metamorphosis