

# The 3 - 6

# Child ESSORI ARY

Montessori Primary  
Module 1 : Lesson 1



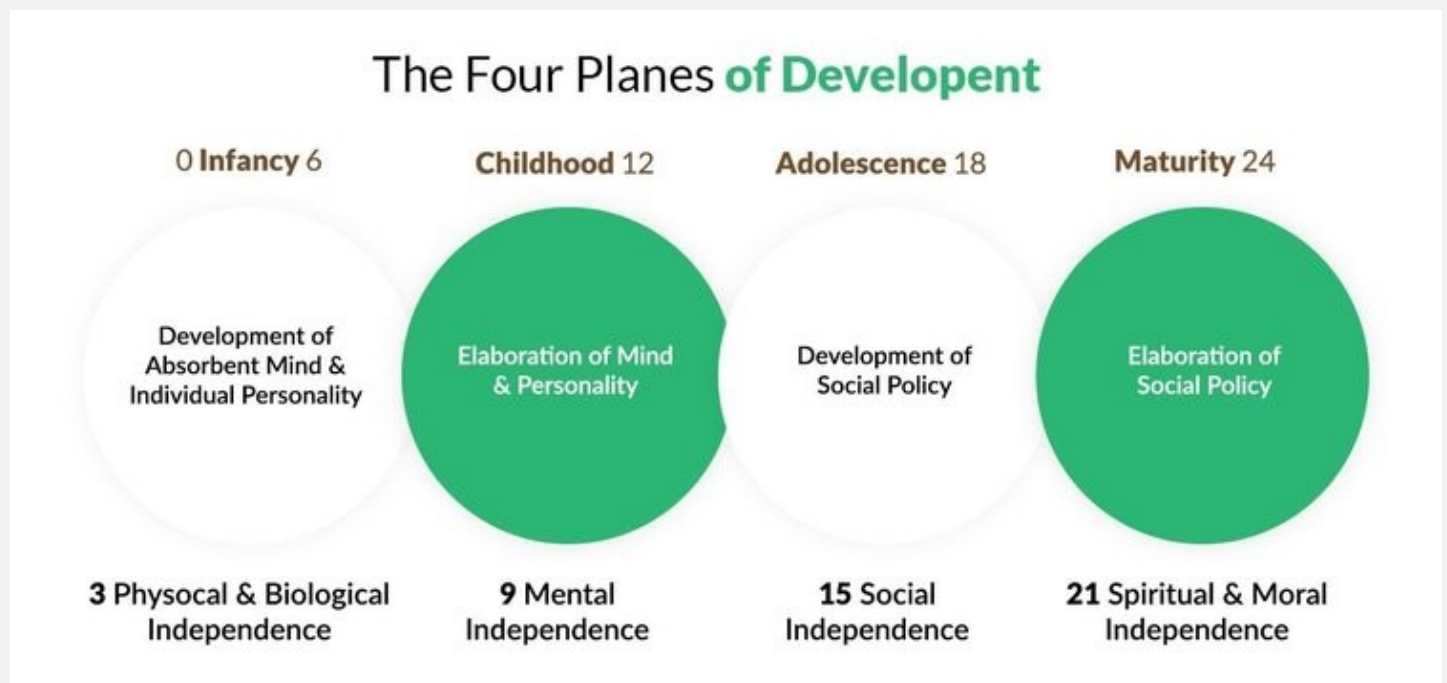
# Module 1: Child Development

## Lesson 1: A Review – The 3 – 6 Child

The aim of this course is to help the educator, be you the teacher, parent or school owner, understand the child's needs after the age of six.

We are aware that the Montessori way is based on the fundamental observations about the child made by Maria Montessori. She was able to study students with the most basic but important teachers' tool: Observation, and through this tool she was able to explain the development of the child from infancy to adulthood as a series of rebirths that happened over the years.

These are known as the 4 Developmental Planes, your previous study of Montessori would have taken you through the first plane, for some of us it would have been a 0 to 6 years study and for some it was a 3 to 6 study.



In this course we would be looking at the 6 to 12 year old, that is the child in the 2<sup>nd</sup> plane. But before we delve into the Primary aged child, please indulge me. I would like us to do a detailed review of the characteristics and philosophy that underpins the 3 to 6 year child and their specific developmental attributes. This is for two main reasons:

1. The way our classes are structured are so different from what Montessori considered would be ideal. So you may find children as young as 4 years old in your Primary school. It would be so unfair to expect a child who is still in the First Plane of life to be behaving like a child in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plane. So understanding is key. I prefer we go through the basics so you remember and know why some of your younger ones are still behaving the way they are.
2. The first plane is the building block on which the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plane builds upon. They are different. So let's recap and then move into studying our 6 to 12 year old.

### **The 0 to 6 year old child**

In brief, the child in the first plane is a sensorial learner, she learns through her senses, so we use activities and not lessons where we are talking non-stop to engage them. The child is trying to construct herself, she is therefore quite egocentric, self-centred, wants to do things on her own. All the child asks of us is to 'Show me how to do it.'

The child wants to work on her own so she can learn how to do the particular skill she is working on through repetition. Maria Montessori helped us to notice two important God given tools that enable the child to achieve her goal of self-construction:

1. The Absorbent Mind: This is the ability of the child to absorb information from the environment through her senses. She further recognise that the child does this in two stages:
2. The unconscious absorbent mind: when the child simply absorbs information without thought or effort. She is not aware of what she is doing, absorbing impressions from the environment and storing them in her mind. It simply happens. Her mind is not formed yet, at least she is not aware of herself as a person with a mind yet. This happens between 0 to 3 years of age
3. The conscious absorbent mind: This happens between 3 to 6 years, at this stage the child is consciously taking in information, asking questions and making choices. She has a memory and uses her hands to explore and makes connections as she continues to learn and construct herself.
4. The Sensitive Periods: This is a period of time when the child has a laser blade concentration on learning a specific skill. She will concentrate on that one skill repeating it over and over again until it is mastered. The time the child has this burning urge to learn the skill may vary between a couple of days, weeks or months depending on what it is.

Understanding these two abilities of the child was what lead Maria Montessori to come up with a specific method that helped to direct the method, philosophy and teaching method that today maps out our 3 to 6 Early Years in the Montessori Setting.

Some of these characteristics that are so common in our Montessori Nursery classrooms include the following, which we will discuss briefly:

**Education:** This is not an adult forcing a child to learn whatever we think they should know. Education to Maria Montessori was an aid to life, where there was 'a natural unfolding of intelligence'. The goal is to follow the child and let the natural path of development for the child to unfold.

**The Prepared Environment:** Since the teacher understands the child, observes her and knows where she is at in her developmental journey, the job of the teacher or parent is to prepare the environment to meet her developmental needs so that she can continue to explore, take in new experiences, learn the skills she is ready to learn and continue to construct herself. If the environment is not prepared for the child then there will and may be obstacles that will stop the natural unfolding of the child's intelligence.

**The role of the Montessori Directress:** The teacher is a guide, not a controller of learning, the main job is to prepare the environment, to remove obstacles and provide enriching experiences which will help the unfolding of the child. It is very important for the Montessori Teacher to know the children, learn to observe understand their developmental capabilities and know the curriculum, the materials and lessons, so that she can match these to each child.

**The Child's Psychic development:** Maria Montessori believed that the child when born is a psychic embryo, one whose mind is now developing. This involves her theories on the importance of the first plane of development and the brain and how connections are made between the hand, environment and the child's brain.

**The use of the hand and its importance to the mind and intelligence:** One of Maria Montessori's well known quotes:

**Never introduce to the mind what you have not introduced first to the hands...**

**The hands are the instruments of intelligence...**

The hands are considered a very important tool in the development of the mind and brain of the child. We know they are sensorial learners and the main sensory tool that is used for learning is the hand, but we explore all the senses so that the child can be attune with her environment and this also ensures that all learning styles are covered because Maria Montessori already built this into the method via the Montessori materials and lessons that have developed within the Montessori curriculum

**The importance of movement:** The freedom of movement is a very strong fundamental characteristic of the 3 to 6 year setting: in fact it is an important feature in the Montessori Philosophy from birth. A lack of freedom to move is an obstacle that could impede the child's growth and development. Without movement, brain development will be negatively affected.

**Independence:** The goal of the child from the minute they are born is to develop some form of independence, it is a fundamental need of humans, big or small, young or old we all want to have some control over our lives. The child is born a baby dependent on the adults around her, but bit by bit the child learns to open her eyes, suck at her mums breast, grasp her rattle, sit up , roll on her back and stomach, stand up and walk... She develops skills over time that makes her more independent. Maria Montessori says the cry of the child at this stage is:

**Show me how to do it myself...**

and by the end of the First Plane she can proudly say:

**I can do it myself.**

Children need to learn to be independent. One of the reasons why Montessori works so well is that this need when met removes a lot of misbehaviour the child is happy and content. When the need is not met the child is unhappy and throws tantrums.

It also important to remember that this is one of the reasons why your 3 to 6 year old spends time trying to construct herself, and it does not make sense to force her to work with others or force her to share when she really just wants to get on with the job and learn how to do things for herself.



**The control of error:** This is the concept within the Montessori workspace that ensures that the work the child does is self-corrective, there is instant feedback from the activity or materials, so the child can see for herself if she has done things correctly. If not she can correct it herself and does not need us butting in and disturbing her concentration. It builds critical thinking, self-reliance, self-esteem, self-motivation and self-confidence all at once. This also feeds into the concept of building independence.

**Freedom of choice with limits:** The child is allowed freedom in the Montessori setting. Freedom to choose the work she wants to do, freedom of movement, freedom to speak, but all these freedoms are based on basic ground rules which the children have already been taught. They need to be mindful of the environment and others around them. The limits help to keep things in order and help the child understand what is expected of her. There is no confusion and it has been found to work better this way. People are scared that when you give a child freedom, they will misbehave; no they will not do that, if you have laid the right ground rules.

**Concentration:** This is a skill needed for learning, especially by the time the child gets to the Primary years it is hoped that the concentration skills of the child would have really grown. The concentration span of 3 to 4 year olds are very short, but when they are doing work they have chosen and are really interested in they tend to concentrate for much more longer periods. This is why the Montessori classroom and lessons are structured in such a way that the concentration levels of the children continue to grow. They have activities that are concrete, can choose what they want to do, they can work on each activity as long as they want to, they are not interrupted by adults... all these help to develop a longer concentration span.

**The development of the will:** The child is born in an unfinished state, there is a lot of work to get a child from the state of infancy to adulthood, one of the greatest tasks is the development of the will. By providing the child with a freedom to choose within limits we are equipping the child with the ability to develop a will of their own, an independent mind that will not be afraid to make decisions. This feeds also into good and bad behaviour choices. The child who is given the freedom to choose what to do, when to do it and learns from mistakes because of natural consequences is more likely to develop a will of their own that makes good choices. On the other hand if a child is always forced to do the right thing because an adult says so, when the adult is no longer available to control the child, then she will do as she wills, the choices they make may not be the best. The will of the child will develop whether we like it or not, so let's make it a positive will that sets them up for successful adults.



**Responsibility:** With independence comes responsibility. Character development is very important in the Montessori Philosophy. We are looking out for the development of the whole child. The child through the whole process of making choices of work to do, doing it, learning the place of order in life and her environment, now begins to build up a sense of responsibility for herself.

**Discipline:** One of the main areas of teaching is to help the child acquire great discipline habits. Some people erroneously think that shouting, yelling flogging will help the child to acquire great discipline, or even the reward and punishment approach. Montessori's answer to this skill set is the Prepared Environment, the Grace and Courtesy lessons, Freedom with limits, Development of Concentration, Independence and the Will. These all gradually build up the child to produce a disciplined, self-confident child with high self-esteem.

**Mixed –aged classes:** This is a feature of the Montessori setting most people find difficult to understand. Our children are usually placed in the 3 year age span classes, like 3 to 6 classrooms. Why? This is simply because to start with children learn better from each other, they are also able to see the big picture of why they are learning what they are doing at the moment as they watch the older children do something a stage higher than they are. There also the fact that as adults we need to work and live in a social entity with different people. So why keep children in a classified box set throughout their education and then send them off to the real world with little understanding of how to be a social being.

**The Three Period Lessons:** This is a simple concept of teaching a child new vocabulary and ensuring that they actually know it. By telling them the name... **This is**...asking them to identify the concept, item etc... **Show me**.. and finally asking them to recall the information... **What is this?** Lots of repetition is needed in the first two stages but this works.

**The 3 hour Work cycle:** Children in the Montessori setting have the freedom to choose their work and are also given a long stretch of time to do their activity, there are no confining time periods, no bells, no breaks in concentration if it can be helped. A good hallmark of running a pristine Montessori classroom is the 3 hour work cycle. The 3 hour work cycle gives the child adequate time to get engaged in work and they love it. It helps build their concentration and feeds into their sensitive periods where they need to really work on those skills repeatedly to get it.

**Normalisation:** This is the ultimate result of the Montessori Method on the child: normalisation. A state of complete harmony of body and mind achieved through the environment and freedoms within limits provided. As the child works to construct himself and develops concentration, independence, self-construction, responsibility, discipline and will, she becomes a happy, joyful child content with herself and the world. There are several characteristics that tell you if the child is normalized, they include the following: love of work, love of order, ability to concentrate, attached to reality, ability to make choices, obedient, self-disciplined, great self-esteem independent, confident and joyful.

**In the next lesson we will be delving into the Changes that occur in the Second Plane of Development as we take a detailed look at the main characteristics of the 6 to 12 year old.**



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