

*The Development of the
brain of a 6 to 12 year child*

MONTESSORI MATERIALS



Addla Montessori Training Center

Understanding the Development of the Brain

Maria Montessori understood much about how the child's brain developed long before we had the information to verify her findings. Observation is powerful. That was her tool and we shall delve into this a lot later on.

Our goal in this lesson is to look at the brain and the influences that affects development positively and negatively.



“Human development is a blend of nature and nurture, genes and environment...There is no cognitive, perceptual, emotional, or motor skill that is not influenced by both of these factors.

We can't do much about the genes we are born with -- or the genes we transfer to our children, but we do influence environment.

We know the effect of environment on early experience is to actually change the structure of individual brain cells and neurons...

Understanding the Development of the Brain

We know from 50 years of research in neuroscience that an infant's experience can have

permanent effects on the wiring of the brain."

by

Dr. Lise Eliot, (2003) "Brain Science, Children and the Future of Learning"

What does this mean for us as Montessorians working with children?

1. Understand how the child brain develops at different stages, so you can understand their behaviour, sometimes they need guidance and not frustration and punishment, expecting them to deliver what their brain has not learnt yet is not possible. It will only lead to frustration on both sides.
2. Once you understand how the brain of your child develops in the 6 and 12 age group, then help your teachers and parents to do so too.
3. Create the right environment to help influence optimal brain development in the children within your environment.

Positive Development

The brain of a 6 to 12 year old undergoes a lot of growth during this span of time, it is rapid and incredible, but we must always remember that this development is a work in progress. As much as they may have a large capacity to take in information be aware that emotional development in the brain is so limited. Do not expect too much!

Understanding the Development of the Brain

Children require a lot of help at this stage to encourage a healthy brain development. Two things you can do as a school is to encourage learning music and being active children, in other words physical exercises.

Include a few of the suggestions below as a class and school, but most importantly encourage your parents to do the same as some of these thing can only really be done at the family level.



Negative Development

Just as there are positive influences in the environment that will affect a child's brain development it is important to note that there are many negative influences as well. I will start with the one that is most dear to my heart:

Physical Abuse - Never under estimate the danger and ill effects of using the cane to discipline the child. This simply does not work, creates fear and emotional disturbances that have far reaching effects.

Understanding the Development of the Brain

Verbal Abuse - What we say to children can make or break them, they do take it very seriously. Warn your teachers, be aware. Be positive, there are some thoughts in our heads that should just stay there, try and see the good in others, stir the child away from bad behaviour instead of emphasizing their wrong deeds and telling them that they are bad, don't know anything or will never do well.

I was talking to someone recently, who told me that as a child, she was told constantly by her teacher that she doesn't deserve to be in the school as she was at that time was the only black child in the class, this was in Nigeria, she still remembers her with no positive feelings!

Today she realizes that she is still smarting in a bad way over the comments of her teacher. Her defense mechanism was to read, study hard and pass all her exams. Everyone around her therefore thought she was the star student, but the pain and feeling of inadequacy has silently followed her into adulthood and she is now trying to sort out herself as an adult.

The consequences of verbal abuse can be really very far reaching:

Lack of self confidence

Lack of motivation to do well

Inability to build strong social skills and great relationships

Distrust of others

The thing is all these abuse factors cause the brain to malfunction, and result in behavioural changes and challenges, anger, depression and inability to regulate emotions. We must be careful. They are not adults!

Understanding the Development of the Brain



It is important to continue to expand our understanding of the developmental process of the brain.

A Few Key Factors:

1. The brain develops continuously from birth into adulthood, from back to front.
2. Change, growth and learning is easier in early childhood, the brain has less plasticity as we get older! Meaning we have less ability to truly take on new skills as we age. Start them on this journey early!
3. The pruning of the brain cells has already started, we must do our part to help children at this stage of development to continue to make meaningful connections of their experiences. If they do not use it, the experiences they have to move forward to the next level, they will lose it. We have lots of work to do!

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