

# Glossary of Montessori Terms

## ***The Absorbent Mind***

From birth to six years the child takes in information from the environment without effort. He absorbs knowledge, language and culture through the senses. During the first three years of life the child moves from one interest to another randomly and absorbs much information unconsciously, not aware that he is learning. Intelligence is directed toward self construction. From ages three to six the conscious absorbent mind begins to develop and the child begins to show preferences and focus on particular objects or activities. Now intelligence is directed outwardly towards increasing knowledge and understanding the world.

## ***The Planes of Development***

There are four universal stages of human development. Each plane is characterized by specific sensitive periods for learning. Those stages are defined by the following ages:

First Plane of Development 0-6 years. This is the period of the “absorbent mind” and is characterized by a need for sensorial experiences, a love of order, and an intense curiosity about the real world.

Second Plane of Development (6-12 years)

During this period the child becomes more rational and logical and is better able to think abstractly. The child develops a greater sense of justice and morality as he becomes more interested in collaborating with others.

Third Plane of Development (12-18years)

The child becomes more self-aware and questions how he fits into the larger social structure. This plane marks the end of childhood.

Fourth Plane of Development (18-24 years)

This stage marks physical maturation and a focus on furthering education, obtaining economic independence, and balancing one’s needs with those of society.

## ***Sensitive Periods***

There are certain times when a child becomes intensely interested in a given subject or activity and it is during this time that the child learns most easily. The Montessori directress is trained to observe these periods and knows to “direct” the child to the appropriate resources. Common sensitive periods found in the First Plane of Development are language, movement, a sense of order, fascination with small objects, exploration of the senses, spatial relationships, music, writing, reading, and math. The same sensitive periods occur among children everywhere at about the same age, they reveal themselves quietly at first, build in intensity, and then are gone. Children may experience a sensitive period for more than one thing at a time.

## ***The Multiage Classroom***

Children learn from each other. By grouping them according to the Planes of Development the younger children learn from the older children and the older children reinforce their own skills by helping the younger children. Each group in the preprimary and elementary environments stays together for three years, so that, ideally, one third of the class is new to the environment each year. The directresses get to know their students well, and there is a greater sense of community than there would be if the children moved to different classes each year.

### ***The Prepared Environment***

A Montessori environment is designed to encourage a child to function and learn independently, to move freely and with purpose. The environment is calm, orderly, and beautiful. The materials and activities are created to attract the child's interest and meet the child's developmental needs. Resources and supplies are immediately accessible to help the child to help himself.

### ***Normalization***

Children thrive when they are allowed to move and work freely in a prepared environment. When they are able to choose their own work and focus on that work for a long period of time they develop a level of concentration that actually leaves them refreshed and happy. They begin to show characteristics of love of work, attachment to reality, pleasure in working alone, inner discipline and peacefulness. Montessori describes this as the "normalized" child.

### ***Control of Error***

Mistakes are part of the learning process. When children can self correct rather than rely on an adult to monitor them they build self confidence. Montessori materials have built in means for enabling the child to determine when a mistake has been made and allow the child to experiment independently until he has achieved success.