

An Overview of the Sensitive Periods

The Sensitive Periods of the First Plane of Development (0-6)

- **Order:** appears in the first year of life, with significant influence through the age of 4, and waning in the 5th year. At this stage the child has a profound sensitivity to external order, craving routine, consistency, and repetition. Disorder is deeply disturbing, while the child displays great joy in finding things in their place.
- **Movement:** birth to 1½ years old the infant delights in moving his body. He grasps, rolls over, scoots, crawls, stands, and walks. His first movements are random, but soon become conscious and directed. This sensitive period continues until approximately age 4 with the child working to gain control and refine his movements. He is sensitive to precise and exact movements and is developing muscular strength and coordination.
- **Exploration and Refinement of Senses:** ages 2 to 3½ strong for exploration; 3½ - 6 refinement of the senses. The child is spontaneously drawn to and fascinated by sound, color, shape, and texture. She may be sensitive to smells and have strong reactions (positive or negative) to new tastes. The child's sensorial interests and exploration will lead to the development of increasingly refined sensory discrimination in all sensory dimensions.
- **Small Details and Tiny Objects:** approximately 1½ - 4+ is a time of wonder. The child notices things of small detail that could be said to be on the fringe of consciousness, such as tiny insects in the cracks of a sidewalk. He is also attracted to small objects and will delight in handling them. The child will sometimes carry some little treasure for an extended period of time, or show great concentration in observation of some tiny detail.
- **Meaningful Activity:** ages 2½ - 5 the child prefers real work that is worth while, over made-up work. Even the play activities at this stage tend to focus on real life tasks such as taking care of the baby or driving a truck.
- **Language Development:** one of the longest sensitive periods, begins in the early months of the first year and continues until the child is almost 6. This sensitive period encompasses several areas of language development, as the child shows interest in, and strives toward mastery of all means of communication used within his culture.
Development of Speech: The child is spontaneously able to focus on human speech and draw from his observations what he needs to initiate the first words. The child picks up the nuances of his language developing the appropriate

accent and speech patterns. In this period the child easily builds a vocabulary of over 15000 words.

Writing Development: ages 3½ - 5 the child who is exposed to letter and number symbols and has access to writing tools will become fascinated with attempts to reproduce these symbols. During this period the child will often work tirelessly and repetitively to master the task of writing.

Reading Development: ages 4 - 6 the child who has sufficiently developed spoken language skills begins to show interest in letters and responds to sounds and how they fit in words. The child at this stage will begin to recognize words by sight and will respond positively to reading instruction.

- **Music:** The child of 2-6 who is exposed to music and has opportunities to both listen and explore, will develop an ear for pitch, rhythm, and melody.
- **Mathematics:** ages 4 – 6 the child is interested in counting and numbers. She begins to count everything, the steps, acorns, cookies, cars, etc. She begins to form her conception of quantity and mathematical operations. She is sensitive to logical processes, sequence, and cause and effect, all of which form the basis for mathematical thinking.
- **Spatial Relationships:** ages 4 – 8 the child begins to understand relationship to space. He can find his way from one place to another, begins to see how things fit together, and is increasingly able to work more complex puzzles. The child is interested in maps, puzzles, and taking things apart and putting them back together.
- **Grace and Manners:** 2½ - 6 the child shows concern and is interested in the rights of others. If exposed to polite and considerate behavior she will readily imitate and internalizes it within her personality. She is interested in ground – rules and will sometimes test them to make sure of her understanding.

The Sensitive Periods of the Second Plane of Development (6 –12)

- **Justice and Moral Judgments:** the child is very concerned about right and wrong. He could almost be called obsessed with fair treatment and justice. At this stage the child is willing to engage in lengthy discussions on moral concepts and ethics. If handled carefully the child will emerge from this period with a deep sense of compassion, conscience, and ethics.
- **Social Relationships:** the 6 – 12 year old is engaged in developing friendships and exploring relationships. It is common for this age child to form cliques and clubs with their own code of ethics and pecking order. It is important to be aware of unhealthy manifestations of this behavior, but at the same time provide ways for students to

positively explore relationships. Montessori planned for this by making group process and cooperative learning an important part of the elementary class experience.

- **Money and Economic Value:** the 6-12 year old is highly interested in the value of money. At this stage it is not clearly understood, but the child loves to count money and is fascinated by how it is earned and what it will buy.
- **The Abstract Use of the Imagination:** the child at this stage is firmly grounded in reality and thus can allow her imagination to soar to the abstract. She is capable of tremendous learning through the use of imagination.
- **The Use of Tools and Machines:** often there is an interest in learning how to use tools and machinery, as well as learning how and why machines work.
- **A Sense of History and Time:** The child's ability to understand concepts of time increases at this stage, beginning with the recent past and present. With the use of the imagination the child is able to further explore the concepts of distant past and future.
- **A Sense of Human Culture and Membership in the Human Family:** The child is interested in other cultures and easily forms positive or prejudiced attitudes toward them. The child is fascinated by the common needs of all humans and the diverse means by which these needs are met.
- **A Sense of How the World Works:** The child at this stage loves to explore the world and its scientific principles. He experiments and asks questions. If presented with opportunities to explore and the basics of sound scientific laws, he will form an inner picture of a logical universe. Otherwise, he may act as if basic physical laws can be suspended at will, and will remain fixed on fantasy and magic.