

## **The Second Plane of Education - Maria Montessori, London, 1939**

The passage from the first to the second plane can best be expressed by saying that the child passes from a material, sensorial plane to an abstract one. The first being essentially motor and sensorial; the second essentially moral and intellectual. The important thing in the first plane is to find the relations between objects and to observe, by means of the conscious keys given to the senses, the exterior world; while in the second plane there are parallel keys to what happens in another field. It is the beginning of an orientation to the moral field, because it is then that children begin to judge the actions of other people. One of the characteristics of this age is the child's preoccupation with his own actions and the desire to know if they are approved of or not. Consequently the problem of good and evil arises in his mind. This is all part of a special sensibility of the conscience of the child of this age and is quite natural.

I cannot dwell upon this topic, but I would like you to bear in mind that this age, being between 7 and 12, is of the utmost importance for the moral education of children. It is as if an elaboration took place in the soul of the child, which on the part of the adult requires refined treatment and also some knowledge of this psychological change.

We saw that in the first plane the teacher needed to have great tact in not interfering with the activity of the children, which at that time was particularly motor and sensorial. In the second period this refinement of treatment must be extended to the moral life of the children, for this is the problem of this age. This may sound surprising since many think the question of morality comes at a much later age. One might think it never comes, because one ignores the period in which nature gives this moral elaboration to formation of man's soul. If this development has not been helped during the period of sensitivity when this moral construction takes place, then at a later stage, situations will arise, difficult to deal with, which will require social adaptations to be enforced from the outside.

To make this clear let me give you an example. Let us take, for instance, something which is deeply rooted in the moral conception of human society: justice. This, the feeling of justice, is born in the soul of the child at this epoch together with the understanding of the link between actions and the needs of the children around him. This sense of justice is not inborn but becomes rooted in the human spirit and its evolution may be studied by following the development of the child. If this has not been done then a very different idea of justice arises.

The justice found in the home and school may be considered as 'distributive justice'; all things should be alike for everyone. The good things that certain children have in one class should be shared by all of the children. If punishment is given it must be uniform for all no matter who they are. Injustice is felt when one person receives different treatment from another, and this brings in the individual a conception of 'right'. What is this 'right' if not an affirmation of the individuality but in an egotistical and isolated sense? This development in the ordinary schools is not connected to inner development but to exterior things and this is quite different. Justice through exterior things and justice which arises from the soul of man are two different things, and the one which is not considered in the school is the second or inner education. And the 'distributive justice' which comes from exterior things demolishes the natural human sentiment which comes forth from the soul.

This question of morality is very obscure just because naturally it is attached to exterior rules instead of inner feelings.

As we have said, this moral question is one of the things which arises between 7 and 12. It is very complex and will need great development, so that we should talk about this question at the end rather than at the beginning. But I state it now because I wanted you to realize the importance of this fact.

At this period there is also another phenomenon: a great intellectual development, perhaps because the children pass from a material to an abstract phase.

There are the three points which serve to guide us: the child's need to get out of (1) the traditional impositions set by the narrow circle of family and the school; (2) the great intellectual development; (3) the building up of the moral constitution in the human soul. Getting out of the narrow circle means the need of a social experience which will enable the child to exercise and form the moral sensibility, and attached to this there is all the development of culture.

Upon this framework we can begin to trace certain particulars of education, and by observation one can find a correspondence between the different things that we took into consideration in the first period. There were exercises of practical life which led the child to go beyond the limits believed possible for children of that age. There were exercises for the coordination of movement which was brought to a refinement extraordinary for that age. These two things together brought independence to the child.

In the second period it is not enough merely to continue these exercises because now the child is already independent and all the actions for perfection of movement are no longer necessary because the coordination now exists. What would happen if we did go on developing these things? The child would merely become more and more perfect in - laying the table, for instance; or would become so perfect in their social behavior that they would become like people at court.

But let us suppose that this same social behavior is brought into another field; that is, to help people who are suffering. This is also social relationship between people but it is something different from knowing how to greet one another gracefully. If, in the first period it was of great importance not to bump into a person; in this other field it might be of great importance not to offend people. If in the first period it was a great tragedy for a child to drop and break something, so that the others tried to help and console him, in this second period there is the fact that the child has understood what is good, but even in trying to do good he is not successful - he has the sentiment within him that he has done something which is not good. This shows the relation between the two periods.

Yesterday I said that the Boy Scout movement was important at this age because it allows a wider field of social relations and at the time it sets out definite moral principles. It is this field that attracts the children; that they are gathered together around certain moral principles that are shared. One is to help the weak. Another is that all those belonging to this association pledge themselves not to do certain things. This brings a certain sentiment of moral responsibility and at the same time a sense of dignity, and this is what attracts the children of this age. At the same time it is a starting point to certain moral behavior which, on account of the effort it requires, is considered to be superior to the possibilities of this age.