

Independence

Independence is a very important concept in Montessori and is one of the key outcomes of the educational philosophy (along with maturity and interdependence) - which is about supporting the developing human being, not a method imposed on the child as a receiver of information, but aiding a psychic being driven to master their environment and create themselves toward successful adaptation. Our role as an adult is to prepare an environment that can foster and develop this natural process of independence.

Independence at each plane of development looks different, and is dependent on the needs and characteristics of the child at that plane. In the first plane, the child is working towards functional independence; in the second plane, moral and mental independence; in the third plane, social and economic independence; and in the fourth plane, spiritual and moral independence (although less has been written about this plane).

The mantra for each plane is as follows:

- First plane "help me to do it myself"
- Second plane "help me think for myself"
- Third plane "help me make a contribution to the social organisation"
- Fourth plane "I can get it myself"

"Growing is a succession of acquisitions of independence. At first they are physical acquisitions – teeth, walking, language – each comes at the right time if the child is allowed to live naturally, for nature has assigned a definite order for these acquisitions." (Maria Montessori, *The 1946 London Lectures*, 114)

"The child has to acquire physical independence by being self-sufficient; he must become of independent will by using in freedom his own power of choice; he must become capable of independent thought by working alone without interruption. The child's development follows a path of successive stages of independence, and our knowledge of this must guide us in our behaviour towards him. We have to help the child to act, will and think for himself. This is the art of serving the spirit, an art which can be practised to perfection only when working among children." (Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 257)

Application of the Planes of Development in the Third Plane:

Montessori spoke of the role of the adult in preparing the environment for the third plane child and that the goal in this phase is social and economic independence:

"Let us therefore unite our efforts to construct an environment that will allow the child and the adolescent to live an independent, individual life in order to fulfil the goal that all of us are pursuing - the development of personality, the formation of a supernatural order, and the creation of a better society." (Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 102)

"Independence on another level is required at this age, for independence is necessary in social life as well. Young people must perform social functions independently, work, and earn a living." (Montessori, *Education and Peace*, 105)

"...economic independence...would result in a "valorization" of his personality, in making him feel himself capable of succeeding in life by his own efforts and on his own merits, and at the same time it would put him in direct contact with the supreme reality of social life. We speak therefore of letting him earn money by his own work." (Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 65)