

# Child of the Second Plane

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We have come to know that the second plane child is very different compared to the child of the first plane. In fact, we could say that we see the emergence of a New Child. Even physically, the cute chubby cheeks and curly hair are replaced with course hair and a toothless, then later, big tooth grin, often requiring braces. It is a period of stable physical health and strength, with many growth spurts, especially in height.

Let us go beyond physical characteristics. We know that the second plane is marked by social, moral, and cognitive development. Montessori suggested that a cosmic education was the answer to the developing second plane child's needs and capacities. What do we mean by a cosmic education? Looking at its Greek origins, *cosmic* means order as opposed to the disorder of chaos. In this sense, *cosmic* is seen in the interdependence and collaboration of all of creation. In looking at the development of the second plane child, we see that even social, moral, and cognitive development are intertwined and connected. A strong

desire for social interaction allows children to explore the workings of society, both their own and also extending to greater, widening spheres.

Recently, when we returned to school after summer vacation, our class set to work weeding our garden. We have a huge garden with many types of flora: trees, shrubs, herbs, vegetables, and flowers. We had lots of rain that summer and consequently, many weeds to pull. It was so interesting to watch and work with the children in clearing our expansive garden of the summer growth.

At any given time, over the course of the week, many children assisted in clearing the garden. The children would all clump together in a huddle of sorts, to pull weeds, and sometimes a child would run out of weeds in his little space. I suggested several times that we should all spread out, that the garden was big and that we had enough weeds to go around. The children would briefly separate and follow my suggestion, but in no time at all, they would be clumped together again, moving in tandem.



Jennifer, age 9

St. Anne's

Gilbert, Arizona

"Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches. We will always be with him, he with us and we with him. He will stay with us if we do the same for him."

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Eventually, this seemingly inefficient method of weeding accomplished our goal.

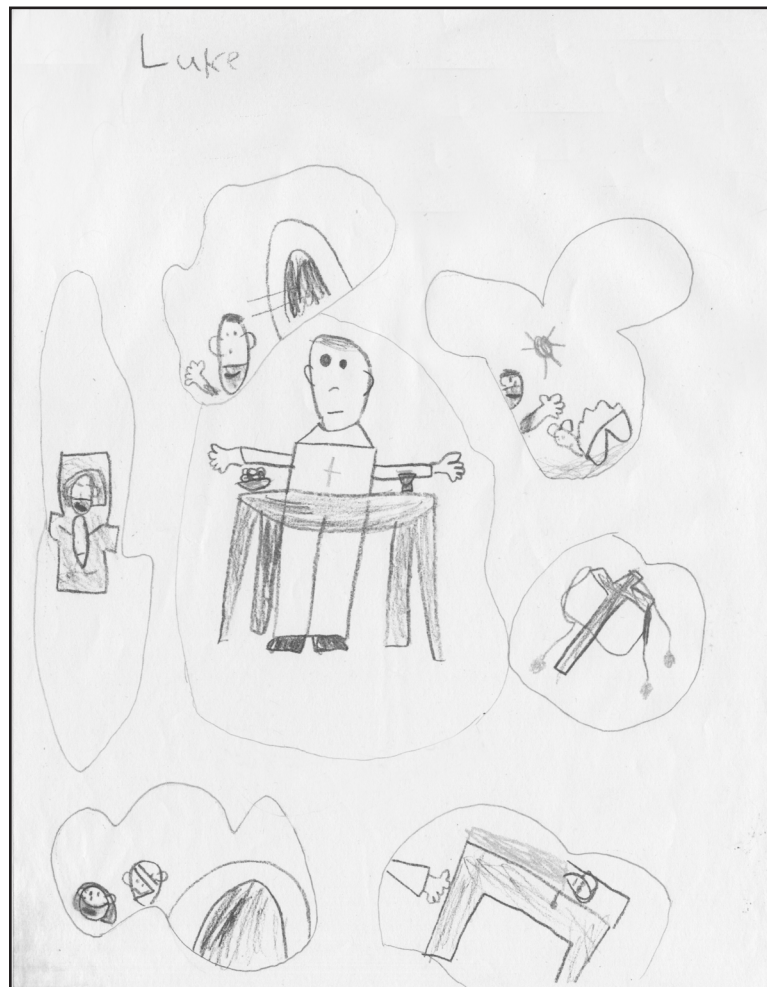
It occurred to me that maybe something more important than weeding was taking place. The children were doing their work of social development in the context of their gardening work. The phenomenon that Dr. Montessori coined, the “herding instinct,” was in action and could not be denied.

Collaboration and cooperation are skills that are nurtured and honed during the second plane. Will you work with me? May I work with you? Sometimes the work partners may be more important than the work itself. Over and over, I have seen children bond over a love of working together. Creating and writing in a secret code is common and great fun!

Socially, we see the child making relationships outside of the family, thus widening his or her social sphere. Montessori

phrased the desirable social outcome of the second plane as a question: Do we merely live here for ourselves, or is there something more for us to do? In *To Educate the Human Potential*, Montessori answers this question: God has sent you upon the earth to work and to do your duty.

What is the work of the second plane child? What is his or her duty? Montessori suggested that the work of the child was the need to explore and understand the part that they play in the work of the cosmic plan. In the Montessori classroom as well as in the atrium, impressionistic lessons, great stories, allow the child to see beyond his own experience to what has happened in history and what is yet to come, to be discovered. Thus, social development is grounded in a sense of love of humanity. The result of practicing social interaction combined with a love of humanity leads to a call to serve, to the cosmic task, to writing the blank page.



*Luke, age 7*

*Lakewood Catholic Academy Atrium  
Lakewood, Ohio*

*A priest at the altar with the Eucharist.*

*Other elements (clockwise from top right):  
Jesus, the Good Shepherd, The True Vine,  
Jesus' hand healing Jairus' daughter, Jesus  
with Lazarus at the tomb, Jesus crucified,  
Jesus raised outside of the tomb.*

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Moral development is closely intertwined with social development. Working with others is not always easy. Feelings may be hurt, people may be excluded, and there are many opportunities for growth, for moral development. Certain graces and courtesies are exercised; certain rules are established within the group.

We have come to know that a child this age is concerned with matters of justice and fairness, especially at the beginning of the plane. The child is honest to a fault, causing Montessori to call this plane the age of rudeness, or the age of lost manners. It is not as if the child has suddenly become fresh or disrespectful, quite the contrary, the child is simply telling the truth without the acquired art of tactfulness.

We wear photo ID name tags at our school. A child caught sight of my picture, took it in his hands, looked at it carefully, and asked, "Ms. Anna, when was this picture made?" I answered, "At the beginning of the year, a few months ago." Well, the child, could have said, "Oh, okay, just wondering," but instead replied, "Wow, that's hard to believe, you have aged so much since then." I was okay with it because I recognized this as a child truthfully sharing his observation.

In working with children of the second plane, we experience tattling. We experience so much tattling that we are tempted to say, "stop tattling!" or we react by trying to solve the problem for the child. We know that the child of the second plane is trying to figure out the rules and the norms, first of the immediate environment, and later of the greater world.

The child seeks to evolve his sense of justice from the clearly defined black and white, clear-cut, it's right or it's wrong world, into a world of nuance, of context, etc. When the little girl is telling me that her friend is bothering her, is she asking me to intervene, to tell him to stop, or even more, to give out a consequence or a punishment?

While the well-meaning adult is tempted to assist by acting on the infraction, what the child really wants to know is, "Is this okay? Are we allowed to say this? Was this a good thing to do? Was the person being mean, or just kidding?" For this reason, children of the second plane love coming up with the rules and norms for the group. How will we be with each other? What are the consequences? Usually without some adult facilitation in this process, children will create for themselves a long laundry list of rules with consequences that make the Code of Hammurabi seem positively soft, which is all part of moral development.

As the child ages, the great existential questions, such as "Where did I come from? Who made the earth? Who made God? How do we know what we know?" change. They start to ask questions less about what has happened, and more about what is to become, such as "What makes me think? What is my purpose? Who will I be?"

Recently, when giving the first great lesson to my lower elementary class, we were discussing how humans begin to wonder about the big questions "Where did I come from?" and "Who created the earth?" Even though I teach in a secular public Montessori school, the children echoed, "God." Telling the great story, *God with No Hands*, I added that indeed, wise people answered that it was God. And then I added the question, "Has anyone actually seen God? How could a God who has no hands create and make things and people?" Children often answer, "Our hands are the hands of God." Six-year-old Alex added, "and I know WHY God made us. God had so much love in his heart that he had to make people to share it with."

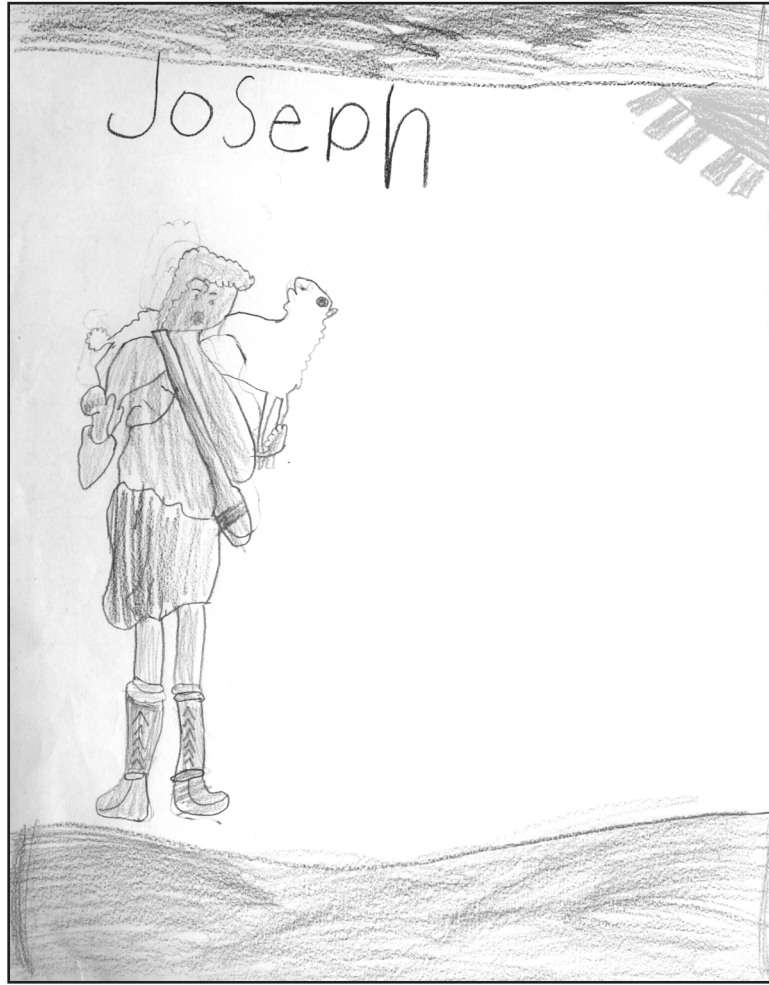
While cognitive growth is taking place in all of the planes of development, it is especially evident in the second plane. We know that this child no longer has an absorbent mind but a reasoning mind, a sharp intellect that is no longer satisfied to know the facts, but needs to explore how these facts are related in their importance and meaning. A great imagination allows an older child to explore the world beyond their immediate circumstances of space and time.

As catechists, we have come to know that the child of the second plane develops a new spiritual and religious capacity, the ability to explore the mystery of time. The mystery of what has happened and what has yet to come.

Everything that is given to the child in the elementary Montessori class is given within a context of cosmic education. We can take an example from math, the concept of ratio. It would be really simple to teach the formula for finding ratio, and then allow the child to practice solving problems until the concept is learned, but how fun is that?

What if we told the story of Thales who wanted to measure the Great Pyramid, but it was too tall and he had no way of doing it. One day Thales noticed his own shadow and that it was smaller than his actual self. So he measured his shadow and he measured his own height. Hmm, but he also noticed that the shadow size changed according to the time of day. Let's say

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*Joseph, age 6  
The child said, "Jesus says,  
I am the Good Shepherd.  
The sheep follow wherever I go.  
They will never go with a stranger.  
They know me by heart."*

Thales was four cubits tall and that his shadow was two cubits long every morning at the same exact time. By measuring the shadow of the pyramid at the same time of day and doubling the length of the shadow, Thales was able to correctly calculate the height of the pyramid.

After hearing that story, of course, the child wants to test it out, maybe measuring her own shadow and comparing it with her height. In doing so, the child has participated in a much more meaningful way of learning to calculate ratio, but even more importantly, the child has relived the experience and discovery of Thales. When a child makes a scientific discovery or derives a mathematical formula for the first time, she is recapitulating the original discovery, because, for the child, it is for the first time.

Recalling the Plan of God, if we were to compare the second plane child with the progression of human thought, discovery, and invention, where would the child be on the timeline? The 6-year-old has learned to write letters and numbers, as did the Egyptians and the Sumerians. The children are coming up with rules and norms as they learn to work and play together in their minicivilizations. This exercise in recapitulation is fascinating, and we can see other parallels and similarities in our observation of the children.

Does the Plan of God contain its own eureka moments to be discovered? Can we present it in such a way as to allow the social, moral, and intelligent second plane child to have, say, an Abraham experience? To hear the voice of God and to respond? To laugh the laugh of Abraham? To count the stars? All as if it was for the very first time.