
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-DISCIPLINE – PART TWO

By Gail Guthery

When the child enters the Primary classroom around the age of two-and-a-half to three, he is becoming much more aware of himself and his surroundings and is able to make more conscious choices for his work and behavior. Within every child there is a life force that drives him to explore, manipulate, concentrate, create order, and to repeat activities to achieve perfection. An environment that is carefully prepared to meet these particular needs will aid the child's development of self-discipline through his own efforts.

The teacher gives each individual child specific presentations of a particular piece of material or work. These presentations are given in a variety of areas: practical life, sensorial, language, and then later, math. There are also lessons in art, geography, and the bells to add to the child's experience. Then the child is free to choose according to his interests. This is a very important part of the development of self-discipline and one that often concerns adults. How can we trust the child to choose that which is appropriate and challenging? Through the teacher's careful observation, knowledge of the child, and understanding of the sequence of materials and the appropriate age for each material, she is able to continue to offer new, interesting, and challenging work that appeals to the child. The child is free to repeat the activity until he has absorbed its value and is ready to move on. This time period is different for every child.

In order for self-discipline to occur, the teacher, through presentations, attaches the child to the environment and its materials rather than to her. Remember, self-discipline can only happen through the child's own work in the environment. Then the teacher steps back and allows the child complete freedom to work in the environment with interest and concentration. When a child is given this freedom, he is able to make choices for himself based on knowledge, not only of himself but also of what will deeply satisfy his needs.

The child has freedom to work, not to create chaos. Therefore, there are limits that go along with this freedom. The classroom is a community, and the needs of all must be met. The limits are few and consistent and allow for the smooth running of the entire class. For example, there is the freedom of where to work, with the limit that the work of another child is not disturbed or access to a shelf or other furniture is not obstructed. A child is free to choose work after he has received a presentation on it. However, since the materials are limited, he may not take it from another child, but must wait for it to return to the shelf. When the child wants a particular material and finds it in use, he

must then make another decision or choice of work, which also aids the development of self-discipline.

The child must make free, spontaneous choice of work, repeat as his interests dictate, and be continuously active in his environment in order for the conscious development of self-discipline to occur. Unlike the methods used in traditional settings, we cannot dictate to the young child what is to be learned, how and when it will be learned, and to apply outside discipline, and then expect the child to achieve self-discipline for himself. Inner discipline is growing continuously through the child's own freedom and activity in a carefully prepared environment.