
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-DISCIPLINE – PART THREE

By Christina Nagey

A student begins the Elementary program as a small child, and leaves it as a young adult. The knowledge and skills the children gain are incredible, but it is their growing sense of responsibility and self-discipline that signals their readiness to tackle the challenges of adolescence and eventually of adult life. The Elementary program provides myriad opportunities for students to practice decision-making, and the Going Out program is one of the most exciting.

Dr. Montessori recognized the incredible intellectual curiosity of the Elementary child, and knew that no classroom could contain everything necessary to completely satisfy their interest. The prepared environment provides the keys to enter the universe of human knowledge, but as the information they gain opens new lines of inquiry, they find themselves using more and more sophisticated resources, and eventually they must venture beyond the classroom and “go out”.

In order to experience a successful “Going Out”, students must translate their desire for knowledge into a concrete plan and take responsibility for all aspects of their trip. To be able to act in accordance with one’s own plans, to carefully and thoroughly follow up on an idea in order to bring it to fruition is self-discipline.

Before any trip planning begins, the students involved are responsible for being sure they will be free to go on a trip; (their basic class work must be caught up to allow them the free time required). They also must check with their teacher and the school administrator to find an available date. Then the research begins. Students read everything available in the class Going Out file, visit websites, write letters, and make phone calls to answer all the necessary questions: When can we go? What do we wear and take? How do we get there? What do we do to get ready? Who will go with us? All of these questions are the children’s responsibility, and they truly are responsible, for if they are not prepared, the trip cannot take place. They are given any help they need, but in the end, it is they who plan the trip.

It is not enough to be curious; to gain knowledge, one must be careful, persistent, thorough, and sometimes tenacious. The Elementary class prepares the child to tackle a challenge with vigor—If a solution does not present itself easily, they do not become apathetic; they persevere. They even develop an active dislike for being spoon-fed information—“Let me learn it myself! Let me think for myself!” And they are not merely thinkers but doers, with the self-discipline to seek out anything and everything that interests them.

