

# **Needs and Characteristics of the Elementary Child**

This is a good time of the year to remind parents of the special psychological characteristics that are exhibited by elementary aged children and how they relate to the need to bridge home and school so that learning is lived, not simply a product of school.

We all know that children learn by doing. They want and need to participate in all areas of family life and living. They are physically tough, gregarious and quite capable of responsibility at this age, and it is our duty to assist them.

We also know that education is a continuous process. Therefore, it is important that children have the continued opportunity in the home to assume responsibility, endure natural consequences, manage time and choose activities wisely from a carefully prepared selection. The child needs a "prepared environment" at home as much as at school.

For this reason we provide for your review the key ways in which the elementary child grows and changes.

## **SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY**

This takes place as the child gains his full capabilities in caring for himself and developing emotional independence. This is a necessary step in growth where the child broadens his base of reference and follows his peers. He has a strong need to identify with children of his own age and in these experiences he gains a heartiness of character.

## **PHYSICAL STAMINA**

This is a period where the child is the healthiest he will ever be in his life and his energy and endurance know no bounds. He has a "can-do" attitude when it comes to physical challenges and his achievements promote his sense of self worth and independence.

## **HERD INSTINCT**

The child at this age feels an identity and attraction to his peers which creates a unique social bonding during this plane. The so called herd instinct is manifest in the child as a special social closeness and affection for others. What fascinated the young child in physical details now is directed towards relationships. Social awareness is keen.

## **MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

There is a strong urge in this plane for clarification of values and an intelligent understanding of the rules of which must be conformed to. There is so much questioning and emotional involvement in this process, the child actively engages socially with his peers in the same enthusiastic way he did in the Casa with individual activities.

## **DEVELOPING IMAGINATION**

At this stage of development the child finds the most useful tool to enter into society is the use of his imagination. Given a rich and varied perceptual experience in the first plane, the

child now capitalizes on his wealth of memory and relates these basic concepts to the wider world. The educational method for this plane stimulates the imagination and allows it to bring out the child's mental prowess.

### **HERO WORSHIP**

The child at this stage focuses in on key personalities and engages them with a fervor which has been called hero worship. In fact, the child is adopting models for social behavior and his imagination is encouraged by these experiences. They are a healthy sign of natural growth.

### **DEVELOPING INTELLECT AND THE POWERS OF ABSTRACTION**

The key characteristic of the second plane child is the high level of independent thinking and the rapid growth of his powers to reason and go beyond his own reactions. This vast power of the intellect makes him able to be especially receptive to intellectual learning and abstract thought. The powers of logic develop as he relates his imagination to the relationship of things and predicates outcomes without physical evidence. The final abstraction of his cognitive skills is evidenced in his mastery of language and especially communication. Through reading and writing he learns the way to preserve and communicate his thoughts for history, and this strikes a chord and engages his intellect.

### **GREAT WORK**

Due to the unique powers of the intellect and the vigor of health, the child in the second plane of development engages in tireless work of enormous proportions. It is the quality of BIG that he likes, and he is called to activity that develops into greatness. The child gives his maximum exertion and effort to these formative activities.

### **DEVELOPING A SENSE OF RESPONSIBLE INDEPENDENCE**

A fundamental challenge of the second plane is to gain control and coordination of the personality so that it may fit in to the social conditions the child encounters. To do this the child explores the emotional and spiritual values of his peers and heroes, gaining valuable insight and promoting healthy personality growth. His actions must now be responsible not only to himself, but must contribute to the larger group he lives with. He discovers interdependency, and seeks to fulfill his social potential by constructively contributing to the community.