

A RESTATEMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

excerpts from Mrs. Annemarie Roeper's speech at the Lower School PTFA meeting May 13, 1969

- Our Philosophy of Education is a Philosophy of Life. We do not limit our goals to education for college or to earn a living or to become a lawyer or a doctor; we are concerned with the whole impact of life on the young person and the impact he will make on society. Ours is a philosophy of basic human rights for all. It is a philosophy only if its implementation becomes the first priority in every decision we make either large or small. It means that we believe that institutions and traditions must be in the service of human rights and not vice versa. It means considering and protecting the rights of the individual, those in the minority as well as in the majority. It means responsible involvement with man kind.
- We must not sacrifice human rights to preserve our institutions. We must not substitute outside authority for inner confidence and responsible decision making. We must not build images that are not true to facts: Otherwise, 'might makes right' and personal success becomes the first priority. We seem to accept such a state of affairs until the turn of events brings to our attention the difference between our goals and reality. Then follows a struggle. Right now we are deeply immersed in such a struggle in our society.
- Those who participate are often the most intelligent, most aware and most idealistic of our young people. Why is this so? Why are they rebelling? They have grown up free from want, free from the pressures and responsibilities which have been basic to the existence of every generation before them. They are taking a good look at this world and they find it wanting. They find it dominated by the priorities of power and distrust rather than by those of mutual concern and trust. The adult world has become suspect and they want to change it. To do so they engage in another power struggle. The vicious cycle has begun all over again. Youth, therefore, is thrashing out against, yet motivated by the same distrust as that of its elders.
- What has caused the failure of previous generations to achieve their goals? It appears now to be partially the failure of developing a process through which to reach their goals. The end justifying the means brings with it an automatic reversal of goals. It is, for instance, the basis of the concept of "war to end war". This, I would say, is the situation in which we find ourselves today.

Perhaps a new knowledge of the learning process and an awareness of the methods of successful human interaction will open doors for the next generation to reach its goals. But what commitment does this require from the adult - both parent and teacher?

- 1) A complete commitment to reason rather than power.
- 2) making equal human rights for all people a priority.
- 3) A willingness to allow the child to participate in the shaping of his own destiny and to consciously prepare him for it.
- 4) To prepare this future generation to deal with the unknown, which includes learning basic academic skills, learning of concepts and motivation for learning.
- 5) To view the needs of each child independently from pre-conceived notions of educational methods.

In order to believe in reason the child must be raised with reason. In order to trust others he must be trusted. He must be expected to understand, not only to obey. As he develops controls from within, outer control must recede.

In order to be able to shape his own destiny, the child must learn the process of interaction with other people - a process based on reason, not power, and he must learn the process of decision making along with all academic skills and concepts.

Recent research into the process of learning points to the fact that the learner himself is the most important factor in this process . . . he will only do what he himself is motivated to do . . . we cannot coerce him and mold him, but we can guide the child and convince him . . . the child cooperates with us, not by virtue of the role of authority officially assigned to us, but by virtue of the fact that he trusts us and feels we are on his side . . . this is not permissiveness which expects nothing of the child . . . we expect him to learn to control and direct himself rather than depend on adults only - a hard task!

The realization that the process of learning constitutes learning itself, and that the child gains his techniques of interacting with others by understanding and experiencing this interaction has led us, as well as many social scientists, to look at the classroom and the school community as a community in microcosm. This RCCS community consisting of parents, teachers and children is a place where the child can actively learn these skills, and we, as adults, can learn them right along with him. You may ask what all this has to do with the education of a 3 yr. old child. My answer: Everything. For it is at this age that the foundation is laid for all future attitudes. This is something recognized by many but rarely considered a chief educational practice. This year however there has been more dialogue among all members of the community. We have learned to see each other less in assigned roles and more as different human beings who can bring different view points to bear on common concerns.

Thus I look on problems arising anywhere in the school as a source of learning and an opportunity for practicing problem solving rather than as an inconvenience.

Problems within our school community are the same as problems in families, in cities and in countries. The goal is not to have things run smoothly but to use everything constructively. I believe the program of the lower school PTFA this year was an attempt to promote this type of relationship. Joan Edwards, Doug White and our staff were more aware of cooperating as people than as representatives of groups.

- The faculty is becoming more involved in observing interpersonal relationships and has spent more time discussing different points of view and participating in making decisions that were previously made only by the administration. At the moment we are involved in dialogues concerning the basis on which children should be grouped. Parents' comments on this are also welcome.
- We cannot teach subject matter separate from life experiences. And this brings us to the role of the children. More than ever, problems concerning them have been discussed with them to create awareness and to seek solutions together. They are also learning to recognize where a problem exists and to become aware of ways to overcome it.
- This year we have been able to use the nongraded system in an even more flexible way than before because we listened to the children . . . several changes were initiated by individual children. They told either their teacher or me that they wanted to change. Their reasons were based on objective assessments of themselves - "I can work better on my own in a classroom where I do more independent work". - another felt he needed a stricter teacher, another one felt the work was too hard in one room - and so on - not one was concerned with the status symbol of wanting to be with a more advanced group. They related honestly to the problem itself and it resulted in increased growth both academically and socially.
- All through the school this year there has been more planning for individual needs, more relationships between different ages - and this in spite of the handicaps of our space limitations !

Out of this year's experiences many new opportunities and directions seem to be pointing to a future for which the domes will facilitate implementation.