

1                   **PHILOSOPHY OF ROEPER CITY AND COUNTRY SCHOOL**  
2                   **GEORGE & ANNEMARIE ROEPER, APRIL 1981**

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5                   • Making equal human rights for all people a priority.  
6                   • A complete commitment to justice rather than power.  
7                   • A willingness to allow the child to participate in the shaping of his own  
8                    destiny and to consciously prepare him for it.  
9                   • To prepare this future generation to deal with the unknown.  
10                  • To view the needs of each child independently.

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12  
13                  **OUR PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION IS A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE**

14                  We are concerned with the whole impact of life on the young person and the impact he  
15                  will make on society. Ours is a philosophy of basic human rights for all. We expect him  
16                  to learn to control and direct himself rather than depend on adults only. As he develops  
17                  controls from within, outer controls must recede. He must learn the process of decision-  
18                  making along with the academic skills and concepts. We cannot teach subject matter  
19                  separate from life.

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21                  **THE PHILOSOPHY IS A WAY OF LIFE**

22                  This philosophy is a universal one. It is a way of life. It is not limited to the school or the  
23                  children in it. It is based on a concept of human rights, not in theory only, but in daily  
24                  living. It embraces a principle of responsibility and support for each other, a principle of  
25                  helping those who are in need because they are entitled to it, not because of charity. It  
26                  includes the notion that even a little bit more love and mercy would make this world a  
27                  better place to live in. It is a goal, which although it can never be quite realized, is only  
28                  as good and as real as its honest attempts at implementation. It does not exist for the  
29                  school only, but the school exists because of it. It is the framework for living and learning  
30                  within the school.

31  
32                  **IT REPRESENTS A BASIC DEPARTURE FROM THE USUAL**

33                  If we look at it carefully, we find that it represents a basic departure from the usual view of  
34                  human interaction and the approach that usually governs human affairs, yet it is not at all  
35                  unique to this school. Examples of it and striving toward it can be found in many  
36                  institutions and theories in history and in the present. There are a number of schools,  
37                  colleges, and other organizations, which today function under the same principle.

38  
39                  **IT ORIGINATES FROM A COMBINATION OF IDEALISM AND REALISM**

40                  This philosophy originates from a combination of an idealistic commitment to justice and  
41                  a realistic view of the limitation of power by our mutual interdependence. It provides a  
42                  unifying principle. It is based on the following realization: there is neither absolute power  
43                  nor complete dependence or independence. The moment a child is born, he becomes  
44                  part of the network of interdependence. Although it appears as though children are

45 powerless, they bring with them power over our lives; they change it. And of course we  
46 have power over theirs. As they grow, they continue to be part of this network forever.  
47 We are all caught in it, although it is invisible and easy to forget.

48

49 Actually, the fact of interdependence, of human ecology, becomes more and more  
50 apparent in today's world. All parts of the globe depend on each other economically,  
51 culturally, and emotionally. All this, if followed through logically, translates into the  
52 compelling need for cooperative action. Yet most of our skills and beliefs are based on  
53 confrontation and competition. Most people function as though there were a hierarchy of  
54 human rights and human life-structures. There is a top to be reached by the few, built on  
55 a hierarchy supported by the many. Therefore, people feel justified and safe to use each  
56 other as stepping stones to success. Their value is measured in terms of their usefulness to  
57 those in apparent power. This state of affairs soon becomes intolerable to those at the  
58 bottom and they become aware of the bottom power of the many as opposed to the tower  
59 power of the few. And so the battle never ends.

60

61 We live in a dog-eat-dog world, where might makes right. It is obvious to all that this has  
62 brought us to the brink of destruction. We are teetering at the edge of it and yet we  
63 continue to teach children to live in the same way. We are raising children to function in  
64 a manner that has created our present state of life. Why? Because we use our real ability  
65 of cooperation only in certain areas of endeavor. We have not yet incorporated in our  
66 emotions and thoughts a belief in mutual responsibility or a concept of human  
67 interdependence or ecology. We believe in victory and our perceptions are short term.  
68 We are aware of the consequences of the moment, not the long-range chain reaction of  
69 our behavior. We do not remember that if we accept stealing as a way of life we have to  
70 guard against others stealing from us. If we kill, we create the possibility of being killed,  
71 even if we do it for justice or revenge. All of this is obvious and yet we have not found  
72 other methods of dealing with each other.

73

74 A philosophy which tries to develop the skills of cooperation and looks at this as the  
75 ultimate moral and realistic, not illusionary, goal, may be the only true approach that  
76 might keep the world from destruction. Of course, we are aware that we will not be able  
77 to change the world but we might make a slight impact and at least help the members of  
78 this community to live a different life. It may also serve as a model for others. It shows  
79 that it can be done.

80

### 81 **ITS IMPLEMENTATION REQUIRES AN APPROPRIATE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE**

82 To implement this philosophy in our school community, which is a society in microcosm,  
83 requires the creation of a living and learning environment, which proves both that it is  
84 possible and also teaches how to do it.

85

86 It requires a structure of administration, an educational program and attitude which is in  
87 every respect based on the philosophy, not separate from it. It requires a structure which

88 protects the rights of each individual, a structure which is truly based on a concept of  
89 justice and interdependence. It requires a structure which tries to pursue the  
90 following goals:

91

## 92 **SPECIFIC GOALS**

93 1. To protect the equal rights of each member within our specific community: children,  
94 maintenance and all support persons, teachers, administrators, parents, board, etc.  
95 To find ways to do this in times of conflict, in times of change, in times of stress and in the  
96 face of human frailty. To find ways to do this even in the face of failure and guilt of the  
97 individual. To find ways to protect the rights of those who have no spokesman and those  
98 who are no longer useful to the community. To accept this as our mutual responsibility  
99 and to find a balance to all rights which is just and acceptable.

100

101 2. To create opportunities to develop the skills, attitudes, techniques and emotional  
102 acceptance of the concepts of cooperation and interdependence. To realize that these are  
103 radically different from those of competition and power to which we are accustomed. To  
104 make this part of the process of education.

105

106 3. To keep the unspoken promise made by teachers and parents to their children and to  
107 fulfill their unspoken expectations of us. And in order to do this, to create a living and  
108 learning environment which supports their inner strength to cope with the world and to  
109 make an impact on it.

110

## 111 **SPECIFIC SKILLS AND ATTITUDES**

112 What are the attitudes and skills required?

- 113 • To develop a vision of the whole, not just a part of it.
- 114 • To develop an understanding of one's rights and obligations within the community.
- 115 • To see the community as a circle of interdependence rather than a hierarchy of  
116 dependency.
- 117 • To see peers and other community members as cooperators rather than  
118 competitors.
- 119 • This includes trusting and supporting the expertise of others.
- 120 • To see one's self as a member of the community in four important ways:
  - 121 ○ to have a stake,
  - 122 ○ to have a voice,
  - 123 ○ to have responsibility,
  - 124 ○ and to fulfill a specific task: to see the participation in the community as a  
125 whole, indeed, as a part of this task.
- 126 • To see one's self as a valuable and valued member of the community.

127

128 This also means an obligation to make responsible judgment openly and honestly, not  
129 secretly and anonymously. Anonymous opinions tend to be irresponsible because they  
130 do not have to be defended. It means on the one hand an identification with the needs of  
131 others, an expectation of mutual goodwill, and on the other hand a realization of human

132 limitations and that even though one should strive for it, there can be no perfection of  
133 judgment, expertise, behavior, and action.  
134 It means a realization that the individual's protection becomes increased by cooperation,  
135 but also that no individual or community can provide absolute protection without risk.  
136 One attraction of the hierarchical structure is the illusion of absolute protection to be  
137 given by those in power to those under them.

- 138
- 139 • It means daring to take risks for one's own convictions.
- 140
- 141 • It means that the concept of obedience is replaced by a concept of responsibility.
- 142
- 143 • It means that the end does not justify the means.
- 144
- 145 • It means a commitment to trust in others, rather than distrust.
- 146
- 147 • It means the realization that we can go far in learning these skills and attitudes but  
148 that we will never be perfect, and therefore never be satisfied.
- 149

150 It means an understanding that the processes of cooperation are complex and difficult,  
151 time-consuming, emotionally taxing, but allows the individual more freedom to grow in  
152 all directions, and at the same time have more real awareness and commitment to his  
153 immediate community and the world community of people.

154

### 155 **THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP**

156 Within this structure not only the role of the members of the community by also that of the  
157 leadership (board of trustees, administrators) becomes differently defined. The trustees are  
158 the guardians of the philosophy, the administrators its chief implementers. This also  
159 requires different types of skills and attitudes on the part of the leadership. For this  
160 leadership is not based on the authority vested in the power on the top of the hierarchy  
161 but rather on the confidence of the community in the expertise and goodwill of the  
162 leaders. It requires the skills to establish open communication and respect in the  
163 constituency, as well as their legitimate participation in decision-making. Only those who  
164 are affected by a decision experience its consequences and therefore should participate in  
165 reaching it in some form and to the extent that they are able. It includes the obligation to  
166 be continually aware of the rights of each individual and maintain a balance between all  
167 of those individual rights.

168

169 It requires leadership which sees the members of the community as models for the  
170 children and sees the living environment and the overall atmosphere as part of the  
171 educational program for the child. It includes a commitment to mutual responsibility and  
172 therefore a realistic system of mutual accountability and evaluation. Such a philosophy  
173 can only function if it is expressed in the attitudes and feelings of the members of the  
174 community. These can only grow and develop if the governmental structure represents  
175 the philosophy. It includes a commitment to a pluralistic society, which means that the

176 constituency, the leadership and the staff represent all racial, religious, and economic  
177 groups. It means carefully working toward a goal, which diminishes economic  
178 restrictions as far as realistically possible.

179

## 180 **OUR PROMISE TO CHILDREN**

181 The philosophy is a universal one but in our community it is applied specifically to the  
182 education of children and among them the gifted. What are the reasons for this?

183

184 A. Children are in many ways underprivileged because they are not able to speak  
185 for themselves and therefore need advocates. Such advocacy is an integral part of  
186 the philosophy of the school. This means a concern for the unconscious misuse of  
187 children by society, by certain educational approaches and within this imposed  
188 structure, by teachers and parents. In other words, society's expectations of  
189 children are not prompted by the child's real abilities and needs but by arbitrary  
190 goals set by the outside. Our school tries to set goals appropriate to the individual.  
191 Advocacy also includes awareness that the child is not an island, that bridges and  
192 connections need to be rebuilt without hurting his/her individuality.

193

194 B. It is even easier to misunderstand gifted children and to take advantage of them.

195

196 C. Children are our only hope for a brighter future and the future depends on them.  
197 Gifted children, who have a global point of view, might make even more of an  
198 impact on the future.

199

200 Every educator, every parent makes an unspoken promise to children and every child has  
201 unspoken expectations. The promise and the expectations are to give and receive the  
202 help to learn to cope with life, to learn to support and respect their environment and to  
203 enter a world which supports and respects them. Yet, as we look at the child and the  
204 world, we wonder about the future of both. How can they help each other survive? And  
205 the outlook is overwhelming for each is too complex for us to really understand. Do we  
206 leave to fate the unpredictable happenings of life? How can we prepare them for the  
207 unknown future? The future which will not be anything like the future which is now our  
208 present and past and for which we were so woefully unprepared in many ways.

209

## 210 **FULFILLING THE PROMISE**

211 How can we really fulfill our promise? How can we keep it when confronted with such  
212 complexity? We must be aware that all we can do is to make the honest attempt to give it  
213 the best we can and never to forget either the complexities or the extent of our promise.  
214 That promise means that we can never separate education and life; that we are always  
215 aware of their interdependence.

216

217 This then is a basic departure from the usual goal of education. Even though they profess  
218 otherwise, in most educational institutions life and education are considered two  
219 completely different things. This has limited the goals of education. Parents educate for

220 entrance into school, first grade teachers educate for second grade, high school for  
221 college, and colleges for careers. In order to do this, educators have long ago created a  
222 curriculum separate from life. As the child moves through school, certain aspects of this  
223 curriculum have been designated to be appropriate for preparation for the “next step.”  
224 These have been lifted out and taught and tested and the child becomes defined in terms  
225 of his achievement in these areas. We are aware of his learning. Yet, while he learns he  
226 lives and life becomes the hidden curriculum.

227

228 Does traditional education help him deal with these dilemmas? No. The priorities are  
229 elsewhere and in the meantime we break our promises and truly disappoint the children.  
230 How can we keep the promise? By taking the curriculum of life out of hiding.

231

232 The best preparation for life is living. Therefore the child should live in an environment  
233 where he can learn the skills of cooperation; where he can participate in decision-making  
234 and become aware of his complexities, where his point of view is respected, where he can  
235 take a risk, where there are channels of interaction, where he becomes aware of his power  
236 within the chain of interdependence. He also needs to be able to trust in the goodwill and  
237 expertise of the adults. He needs adults who can be his models and show him how to live  
238 in the world. And again, in order to do this the adults around him need to provide him  
239 with a well thought out philosophy of life and a living-learning environment which reflects  
240 it.

241

242 The child also needs adults who are experts in their field; who know how to help him  
243 learn the skills necessary to live in this world and stimulate him to develop his potential  
244 and interest in any direction for his future. They need a flexible learning environment  
245 which allows them to grow in their own style and manner within a framework of  
246 expectations adequate to their individual needs; they need open communications with the  
247 adults. Children need adults who are sensitive to the needs and interests of the individual,  
248 who value creative expression and physical development as much as academic and  
249 intellectual pursuits, adults who are informed and knowledgeable about child  
250 developmental phases, adults who help him cope with the world as it is and equip him  
251 with skills, self-esteem, and motivation to change it.

252

253 Among many other typical traits, many gifted children have a strong sense of justice.  
254 They often have an unexpectedly accurate perception of life situations, but great  
255 difficulties dealing with them. They react to limitations, secretiveness, and deception.  
256 They need to learn in an atmosphere which is open and supportive. This means a  
257 realization of the fact that the individual teacher does not educate the child only, but by  
258 the impact of the whole environment. It can be called milieu education.

259

## 260 **THE PHILOSOPHY REFLECTED IN THE PROGRAM**

261 A. By the creation of the opportunities for the child to participate in his destiny to  
262 the extent he is developmentally able.

263

- 264 B. Seeing the child as a valid member of the community and respecting his rights  
265 and responsibilities, perceptions and thoughts.  
266
- 267 C. Emphasizing all aspects of learning and growing, by not lifting out certain areas  
268 as more important and thus making others less important. If, for example,  
269 evaluation is indicated, all areas of growth should be evaluated, not only  
270 academic, because that immediately gives them priority, for they are being  
271 measured.  
272
- 273 D. By creating a program rich in opportunities for all kinds of growth: academic,  
274 creative, physical, social, moral, and opportunities for joy.  
275
- 276 E. By using an approach which stresses a global point of view and mutual  
277 responsibilities.  
278
- 279 F. By building into all subject matters an emphasis on complexities of life and the  
280 fact that every experience, every action, every perception has many causes and  
281 many effects; that in truth life is not a linear progression but an all-encompassing  
282 development in all directions.  
283
- 284 G. By including in all subject matter confrontations with moral decisions which  
285 grow out of out increased technical knowledge and our commitment to humanism.  
286
- 287 H. By emphasizing that the future is theirs to create.  
288
- 289 I. By emphasizing all areas of communication: openness, mutual understanding,  
290 verbal (language, literature, writing), non-verbal (dance, art, music), first-hand  
291 experience (travel, contact with people from different walks of life, off-campus jobs  
292 and instruction for older students, etc.). By involvement in the events of the  
293 moment: political, social, and cultural.  
294
- 295 J. By looking at the school as the world in microcosm where all of the conflicts,  
296 problems, solutions, interdependence, and chain reactions exist in a small way that  
297 one finds in the world at large. To use these opportunities to create learning  
298 experiences for the children and to enhance the scope of the community by letting  
299 students make an impact through student government structures and other  
300 channels.  
301
- 302 One might argue that living in our community does not prepare for the so-called real  
303 world which is in most part competitive and not cooperative. However, a person who  
304 grows up in a cooperative world where he or she feels supported and respected develops  
305 a positive self-image and an understanding of who he is and his own strengths and  
306 potential as well as weaknesses. He develops an understanding that even though he lives  
307 in a competitive world he will not be defined by it. This person will be able to cope with

308 it better, bring with him more internal resources than anyone who has never had a chance  
309 to make an impact and whose self-image depends only on climbing the ladder of success.

310

311 **IN CONCLUSION**

312 This philosophy is not a vague and sentimental idea of warmth and understanding. It  
313 represents not just a desire for happiness and a good life, although in a much broader  
314 sense these hopes are part of it. It actually is a relentlessly demanding concept, for its  
315 consequences are most complex, intellectually, emotionally, and practically. One is  
316 always in danger of contradicting it or losing it altogether without realizing it, by making  
317 small compromises which have a tendency to grow and yet may only solve the problem  
318 apparent at the moment. They may exclude more difficult solutions within the philosophy  
319 which are not found because they are not looked for. Built into this philosophy are both  
320 constancy and change. Its inherent goals remain constant while the implementation may  
321 change as life and times require. If constancy is not maintained or change is not  
322 occurring, it will result in a philosophy that is either mere lip service, irrelevant, or non-  
323 existent.

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April 1981

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