

March 23, 1998

Dear Roeper Board:

I am sending you a short outline of the philosophy of Annemarie and George Roeper and its implementation.

From the very beginning, George and I were aware of how different our approach was from the traditional ideas of education. We all lived the philosophy and were always aware that we had to check to what extent we were translating it into reality. In the years that George and I were running the school, the world outside changed almost beyond recognition. And, of course, the internal experience of the school reflected these changes. However, we never varied from the fundamental philosophy, or, if we lost track of it, we and other members of the community would quickly become aware of it and attempt to rectify it. We did this mostly by making a point, from time to time, to re-evaluate to what extent we had been faithful to our own philosophy. We were also aware, of course, that such an ideal could not be fully achieved. We also knew that the basic concepts grow and change as time passes. This was actually a reason to keep the basic mission constantly in mind. Realizing that, change was built into that mission.

It has been more than eighteen years since George's retirement and seventeen years since I retired from the school. It has been very impressive to me how many of the fundamental features are still living in the daily life of the school. Whenever I visit, I am impressed with the quality and type of relationships among members of the community and the evident love for the children. I've been present at the Martin Luther King event not long ago and was deeply touched by the feelings expressed by all involved.

There are other areas which have changed because of the difference in style and at the changing of the times. There are also some basic differences which seem to be stemming from a philosophical point of view. All of this is understandable to me.

However, now is the time to take another look at the purpose for which the school was founded and to see to what extent we are committed to it. If there is a difference, it is important to clarify this and to decide to what extent the Roeper philosophy is still the school philosophy. The philosophy has been expressed in many written documents. But I also know that it is vague in some people's minds. The following material is an attempt to review some of these principles and their application.

I will leave this with you at this meeting. I am hoping to be present at the next meeting in June. At that occasion, I hope that we can find ways to reaffirm the philosophy in general and develop a plan to examine the present approaches from that point of view possibly within the upcoming ISACS evaluation. From there we might develop a structure for examining the existing concepts in the light of the basic philosophy.

Many fond greetings,
Annemarie Roeper, Ed.D.

Philosophy of George and Annemarie Roeper

by Annemarie Roeper, March 1998

I would like to be able to convey to you the feeling, the emotional background, the dream, as well as the understanding of the philosophy and the psychology which is the foundation of the Roeper School and how our approach to children is central to our philosophy.

I would like to paint a picture which lets you look beyond the specific task, as members of the board, teachers, parents, and students, to the history, the changes, the tremendous passion which lie behind our life's work and that of my parents before us. This school was much more than a school to us; it was conceived not just as an education institution: It was the concrete result of our dream, it was an expression of our hopes for the world. It grew from our awareness of the soul of the individual. We were aware of the enormous creativity of human beings as well as the ongoing difficulties of coping with the need for sharing the planet. We wanted to help human beings with fulfilling their own destiny and make a positive impact on the world. After living through the Holocaust, it became of utmost importance to help develop human beings to grow up to create a better world.

We had a vision and this vision is the framework for all we did. This vision found expression in the creation of an environment for the young person who is trying to find his place in this confusing world. To allow the freedom for growth and learning within the emotionally and intellectually supportive community structure. It was education for life in its totality which included education for college as one of the options but never allowing it to inhibit the personal dream and pattern of the child's growth. It includes a vision of the world outside of us and how we can incorporate it and make an impact on the world. This was the overarching purpose consistently pursued in all our endeavors.

This vision has grown and adapted itself to new insights, experiences and the changing times, but it remains unchanged in its fundamentals. It is this vision, which is the foundation of all our actions down to the daily details.

Humanity has made two promises to its children. The first is to prepare a world which accepts them and provides them with opportunities to live, grow, and create in safety. The other is to help them develop their whole beings to the fullest in every respect.

(Taken from the chapter, "The Dilemma of Modern Education")

This we believe:

- All of us have the responsibility to keep these promises each in their own way.
- A philosophy is only as good as its implementation. It is only valid if it pervades all aspects of life.
- As guardians of the future, we must be committed to the individual as well as the world.
- Education is the vehicle to keep this promise.

This philosophy is based on the belief of SAI (Self-Actualization and Interdependence), respecting the rights, growth and uniqueness of each member of the community, as well as the reality of mutual interdependence. *(Roughly taken from the introduction of "Educating Children for Life.")*

This concept combines a focus in two directions, SA, self-actualization, and I, interdependence. It requires a simultaneous perception of the soul or self of the individual and the world outside.

It is a concept of self-actualization for all, as opposed to the concept of education for outside success. In the latter case, the primary focus is on what one can do rather than who one is as a human being. Self-actualization is education for growth. It is based on a growth model rather than a success model. It begins with the child rather than the curriculum. Therefore, it must be understood that our concept of education is in actual opposition to the general model of education, which ignores the self in favor of success. Interestingly enough, many gifted children become academically self-actualized which creates the freedom to succeed if the focus of the environment is on the self.

Self-actualization is based on a different view of life. The traditional view often ignores and contradicts the needs of the individual self. The conflict of the needs of the self and the expectations of society results in a dichotomy which leads to problems for the individual as well as humankind. The philosophy expresses itself most clearly when the

needs of the self contradict the expectations of the educational system. Our purpose, therefore, was to articulate and incorporate this philosophy in the life of the school. All this may sound esoteric and theoretical, but it has the most practical implications and applications. It created a difference in attitude from other communities, as well as visible organizational differences.

Any system of education consists of three basic components. The first sets forth the goals, the philosophy of education: What are we trying to achieve? Where are we trying to go? The second component examines the characteristics of those to be educated, in other words: Whom are we educating? What does the child bring to the educational process? How will this student use the educational situation? Out of the first two components comes the third: the process of education. How are we going to achieve the stated goals given the characteristics of the student to be educated?

How does this look in terms of SAI?

This philosophy presupposes an attitude that fundamentally differs from a traditional one. The implementation of the stated Roeper philosophy requires deep and careful planning in every aspect of life.

Built into this philosophy is the need for awareness of the fundamental difference between SAI and traditional education. At the same time, we need to realize that it is necessary to accommodate the prevailing concepts without injuring the self.

- A. What does this approach require from the adults – parents and staff – and curriculum?
- B. What is the role of community in this model?

Self-Actualization

The self-actualization model requires a specific approach to understanding the psychology of all human beings in general, and children and gifted children, specifically. The priority of the self is the curriculum of growth. The priority of society is the learning of skills and knowledge. These contradictions are often the underlying cause of conflicts, perceived learning disabilities, depression, and other difficulties. **In order to implement this philosophy, it is important for administration, faculty, and parents to make a commitment to the curriculum of growth.**

All of this relates to the following tasks:

- To develop the psychological understanding of the child as being human and gifted

- To understand the complexity of this human being, the differences of motivation for action between adults and children, the impact of the unconscious on the child's behavior
- To understand the developmental phases children go through
- To welcome the diversity of spirit and inner agenda of the growing gifted child and not limit this perception to preconceived notions of what is normal
- To view our educational expectations through the lens of the individual child rather than the lens of expected educational requirements
- To put the emphasis on learning rather than teaching
- To make growth a priority rather than achievement
- To realize that both growth and achievement will be jeopardized if the needs of the self are ignored
- To look at our relationship to the child
- To look at the relationship between the specific child and learning

Interdependence

The concept of interdependence is the opposite of the concept of survival of the fittest. It says that we, and all living things, can only survive if we understand that we depend on each other. It means realizing that there is not one cause and effect but many, that every action has many reactions, and that our past, present, future, our thoughts and actions are all interdependent with every facet of the world around us. *(Taken from, "Global Education: Education Towards Self-actualization and Interdependence," Roeper Review. Vol. 15, No. 4)*

The concept of interdependence requires different attitudes and patterns of behavior than the concept of power and dependency. The implementation of this concept requires that a community accept the concept and learn how to live within it.

In the past we developed the structures which would support this approach. The basic difference is that it is based on cooperation and not hierarchy. It is based on participation of all who are able to participate. This led to the participatory model which differs from the philosophy as well as implementation from the traditional hierarchical model. This was based on the principle of basic human rights for all, even though each had a different task and journey. We built our administrative and governmental structures on this principle. We tried to develop a community structure which was a world in miniature, one that created positive patterns of cooperation. For example,

The role of the community as a world in miniature is:

- To foster awareness of universal, global, and spiritual interdependence in all daily interactions, in social actions as well as curriculum
- To see the immense complexity created by this fact
- To create an environment in the school community which
 - Makes the individual feel supported
 - Makes the individual identify with other selves which both support and limit the rights and the power of the individual
- To understand the impact of power and resulting patterns of behavior

The following is an example of how this philosophy expressed itself in the administrative structure.

Staff participated in a majority of decisions concerning the functioning of the school. This was implemented by a number of committees, often ad hoc committees, when the need arose. Administrative council consisted of administrators, teachers, support staff, etc. in each division. In upper school, it included also students. Parents participated occasionally. It was open to all. Usually people who attended were concerned with the subject.

We, the Roepers, had veto powers. It was determined what areas were in the jurisdiction of the staff. Permanent members were the heads of the school, stage or division coordinators. One standing committee was a benefits committee concerned with any kind of issue, such as sick pay, etc.

Much energy was used to educate people to live in this kind of structure which differed fundamentally from the hierarchical one. Students needed to learn how to use their decision-making power wisely in student government. The structures were all devoted to this.

The information about this structure, which is fundamental to the Roeper philosophy, which is one way of expressing the Roeper philosophy should be available in the archives and in many people's memories. It is also available in much of our published and unpublished writings and will be experienced in our upcoming movie, "Across Time and Space."

This point of view, over time, impacted every aspect of the school community. It was because of that the ungraded structure of the lower school evolved, as well as changes in the board, such as including student and staff representatives officially on the board. The board sanctioned the evolving administrative structure (This must be available in some board minutes from the early to mid-1970s.) The board saw itself as the guardian of the philosophy.