

Seminar by George Roeper with the Faculty of City and Country School

George held a seminar on February 7, 1963, in response to a request from faculty to learn more about the philosophy of the school. The Philosophy document that he is quoting from is an evolving draft of what became the 1965 Statement of Policies. This document was under development for a number of years and was finally approved by the Board of Advisors in 1965. This is a partial transcription by Marcia Ruff of selected portions of the talk.

George Roeper:

(0:44) Now I have spent last weekend (trying to describe the philosophy) and took some notes, but when I looked it over, I thought it sounded like any other school. Then Annemarie and I spoke on Monday night and wrote some questions and tried to answer them, and it was still difficult to describe. It is difficult to formulate in very condensed form the philosophy of the school without ending up in generalities. We educate for the future. We want children to grow up with a sense of responsibility. That's nothing new. And yet I hear from people who come through our school, who are open-minded, who have spent a little time there, that there is something distinctly different from what they have experienced before. They sense it, but we have difficulty to formulate it.

But we'll try. Maybe it would help if we do it together. Arrive at some answers. We have our own thoughts, and maybe I can summarize. Or maybe we'll just raise questions...There are too many questions relating to our time that nobody can answer yet.

(3:28) I'll start out with the very general statement that we have prepared for the catalog. It states something, I don't know how many of you know about this, but to

my horror I discovered we started already in 1958 the catalog and still don't have it up, although we have managed quite well...

Here is the statement: "City and Country School of Bloomfield Hills proposes a type of education which will enable the child to become a true member of the modern world society. Much is required of such a person." So you see, we speak of world society. "To be a realist and an idealist." You have heard Sen. Hart's speech at the dedication of the new building. I thought it was a very good one because he pointed out that in our modern times you cannot function...according to very definite principles. We have done that, our parents have done that, lived according to certain principles, certain patterns, that were good for at least for one generation. But we find now we are not sure of that anymore, that things we believe in now we will believe for one generation. Or even 10 years. I just told Annemarie tonight that in this five years since we started this catalog, I already have different ideas.

And to be a realist and an idealist points up that we are not any more one or the other. Modern man needs to be both.

(6:06) "To conform and to differ." This is also a statement that appears to be contradictory, and yet it is precisely that what we want to see our youngsters to do. We want them to be able to conform to certain values in society, and yet be free enough to differ. Our Bill of Rights, which again and again comes back to the basic concept of the individual and to freedom, is a most wonderful document. I have the feeling it will last as long as the statements of Plato or Aristotle and the Greek Philosophers will last. We already have today a somewhat different concept of freedom from what it was at the time of the Founding Fathers who wrote the Constitution, and yet it still expresses a society that can live in freedom. To conform as well as differ.

(7:50) "To know and to doubt." This also appears to be contradictory but it isn't. Of course, if you want to know, you also have to doubt. If we would not doubt, we wouldn't know. And this is what we want to see in our children, too. We want them to learn to know, and just at the same time to doubt. This becomes particularly of importance in rapidly changing times, in turbulent change when new discoveries are made about things that we thought yesterday, "they are absolute and cannot be changed," and they are changed. I am so impressed lately by the concept of existentialism, or by the ideas of the avant-garde who wrote the plays of *The Angry Young Man*, or the movies that I've seen, (*unclear*) (9:22) These changed my concept of what we are interested in, in honesty. These people of the avant-garde make a new, very fresh effort to understand what honesty is. It was, by the way, just said that this "*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*" represents a new honesty. You know we talked about the other night, when I mentioned this was a new kind of honesty. What is meant by that.....(*crosstalk*)

(10:15) The events of Monday night, in a very dirty basement in a hotel, and there was a band called the Stable and there was hardly 30 people there, there was a one-act play of Tennessee Williams and another one by Edward Albee, "*The American Dream*," and also Virginia Woolf. It is very difficult to explain what that really is. One must see the plays, see the movies to get after a while a taste of it. But I certainly felt, in this dirty place down in the basement, with about an audience of 30 people, that the future theater is not on the stage of the Fisher Theatre but it is down in this basement. The future ideas are growing there in that basement. And if you want to get an idea of what that is, these future concepts, of life, of human relationships, of values, that's where you will get to see it.

And in relationship to the statement "to know and to doubt," what I thought so far what honesty is, a fresh look, that you need to see these things, these stage plays. Take as an example, we saw the other day (*Note: unclear, but probably "The American Dream," by Edward Albee*) and some people gave their reactions. Some

said, oh, it was not so good at all. Others said it was good. (*unclear*) Others thought Benjamin Fine (*Note: the New York Times education editor whose articles about gifted education first caught George's attention to the subject*) was no good. I myself thought Benjamin Fine was not too good. But then I asked myself, is this sort of feeling really opinion or is it jealousy? Can I really free myself from the thought to compare myself with Benjamin Fine? Would I rather talk him down, pretending to myself as well as to everybody else that I am being objective about it, but really, in my innermost feelings, is jealousy coloring my opinion? This kind of being honest with oneself is very difficult, or even being honest to other people is very difficult. You really make a supreme effort to kind of watch your innermost judgments or feelings. We all are exposed to these experiences of jealousy. With that I want to point out there is a layer of honesty – as we think what honesty is – that we haven't maybe even discovered yet.... We cannot bring up children just by the idea that you learn to know, but that you also learn to know and to doubt.

(14:23) "To work hard and to take one's leisure." This is very elementary statement, with a future with more leisure time for everybody. And work. To both we have to adapt ourselves.

"To be tolerant and to be critical." We have to tolerate the whole world, various cultures, civilizations, religions, value systems by which societies live, and at the same time be critical, critical of ourselves, critical of the values of other societies, and yet appreciate them. Being appreciative as well as critical. No, "appreciative" is not right – appreciating.

"To be creatively involved in the world, yet stand distant enough to relax." We want our young to be involved in the world, to have responsibilities, to have a sense of service for society, not only for themselves. And yet, distant enough that one doesn't get wrapped up by subjective feelings, by prejudice, by wishful thinking and so forth.

These statements in themselves, written down by Annemarie, are not new. But they are given a different flavor when they are brought in this contradiction. ... It means we have to live by several principles and operate according to several principles.

(16:43) "In order to accomplish this, the individual personality of the child must be understood as a composite whole, with different intellectual, artistic, emotional and physical characteristics. These distinctive characteristics need to be recognized, encouraged, and continuously developed. The principle of supporting both the child's conscious and unconscious motivation toward self-realization underlies all of the school's educational endeavors." Supporting the child's conscious as well as unconscious motivation. The labels conventional and progressive cannot be applied to this school.

Based on this philosophy, the school has three definite purposes. To develop the personality, able to use knowledge constructively, secure enough to maintain balance in the face of conflicting emotions and unresolved problems, a personality secure, ready to contribute to society. This requires effective psychological and social adjustment. This is an area of mutual responsibility between home and school. To provide for gifted children instruction which develops knowledge and skills on the intellectual and artistic levels which gifted children are able to attain. This requires much emphasis on academic teaching and study skills. It calls for a combination of learning of facts with learning how to think critically and creatively and to arrive at one's own conclusions. This matter goes beyond both learning by doing and rote learning."

This is the beginning of the statement...

(19:07) Now, maybe I should make first a few more general statements to lead us into the discussion. It seems to me very important, I feel very strongly about it, that

our youngsters, particularly if we should have later on a high school, are getting a preparation that prepares them for a life in 1980 and in the year 2000. What kind of preparation can we give for that? I don't mean that only in terms of learning and knowledge, but also in terms of attitudes. What kind of personality should that be? What would this personality have to face? Well, it seems to us that what will be most needed for such a person, who is now 12 or 17, is adaptation to various needs. Adaptation to new findings and to incorporate them in their lives, and adaptation to change. Now, our school has to operate in such a way that it can itself adapt to needs just as we want the children to be adaptive to needs. We have done that already. Our first step was education of the gifted. We saw that this sector of child education was neglected; it needed to be given attention. That we had to fight (*unclear*) of intelligence, that (*unclear name*) of the U of Chicago stated that half of the gifted children failed to realize their potential. We said, this is something that needs attention, the country needs it, and this is what we should do.

Well, I don't need to state again the need for gifted education. But it seems to me important to try to find out first what is the affinity of the gifted and then set up a curriculum. We don't do it that way. We have a curriculum and we find out that, say, the 7-year-old child can already do what the 8-year-old is supposed to do, or the 9-year-old. We still are in a phase of gifted child education in which we essentially move down subject matter that is usually taught later. We have to ask ourselves if that is really what we want. If we move subject matter down, do we really give them a different or new preparation for the future life? Or is it the same thing we did before, only at a different age? Maybe we should examine first, what is a child of 130 IQ capable of doing, and then plan accordingly. We select methods of teaching the gifted before investigating whether high-intelligence children have other ways of learning.

We touch on that. We teach the children that they should learn to get at the facts or the truth by the process of elimination, deduction, reasoning, rather than learning

things by memory. We do that. But the basic approach of finding out what can and what should a child of high intelligence learn and what methods should be used that may be different from other children, we have not investigated yet, and have not adapted yet. We should be able to adapt our school's program to new findings, and by that we mean proper research. The research that Irving Siegel of Merrill Palmer School is doing in cognitive functioning might bring up results that we will have to consider. We should be open-minded to these outcomes and results and adapt ourselves.

There is a professor and a group from Germany coming with a highly interesting question: are the highly gifted more likely to be ambidextrous? This is important because if it should turn out to be that people of average intelligence use only the right hand and left lobe and neglect somehow the other side of the brain, but if they would use both of them, they would increase their intelligence. If the results are such that they have validity, we might have to do something about that, train them to use both hands.

(27:00) We have already also since the beginning of the Gifted Child Program, when we thought mainly in terms of intelligence, we have already changed our minds on that, and found that the concept of intelligence is too limited to identify gifted children, that creativity, critical thinking, and other higher mental processes are involved, we begin to know more about that. Maybe we will have someday soon a CQ, a creativity quotient. I get almost every day a letter asking how our CQ that I mentioned in *Time* magazine is coming along. A person from an advertising agency said they would like to employ a new advertising man and want to know how to assess his creativity. I have to disappoint them and tell them there is no such thing, I only said it is something we ought to have.

And we are aware that various kinds of dynamics cause human achievement, and most of all unconscious mental processes.

(28:47) As I have said previously, maybe the most important thing we have to do with our youngsters is make them ready to adapt themselves to change. And although we have always had change in history, have always had to deal with that, what is new is the rate of change, the rapid, turbulent change.

I would like to illustrate what is really meant by this rapid change. (George *begins to read from a book.*) *“Within a mere seven and a half decades, we have experienced not only two catastrophic world wars but a complete change in the balance of power, and the apparent re-orientation of those powers into two dominating, competing ideological systems; the liberation of untold millions of people, some of them we are told from hardly more than late Stone Age cultures.”* You know about certain tribes in Africa that are still close to the cannibal stage. This is really quite some ways from these times.

“And the emergence of scores of new nations which make a map even 10 years old virtually as obsolete as a map of the Middle Ages. Only fifteen years ago the (unclear), man’s achievements in technology and science, both pure and applied, staggers the imagination. Automobiles, movies, teletypes, wireless, radio, television, radar, sonar, diesel engines, tank, submarines, airplanes: any one of these would seem enough to change a civilization. Jet propulsion, plastics, assembly line manufacturing, automation, soil conservation and increased productivity, food processing, x-rays, radiology, insulin, sulfa drugs, penicillin, antibiotics, immunizations, the synthesizing of chlorophyll, the splitting of the atom, our new concept of matter and energy and the universe itself. All of that in a very short time, most of it in the last six years. Nor should we leave out of the picture, the increase of some 20-odd years of life expectancy.” I remember when I went to school, at the age of 15 or 16, life expectancy was still in the 30s, and now it has come to (unclear). Perhaps the life expectancy will be doubling, perhaps tripling, the

world's population, which according to many scientists constitutes the world's greatest problem.

"In the past fifteen years alone, we have thrust into both the Atomic and the Space Age. It may well be that this phenomenon of ever-accelerating change is the most important single fact of life today. In the face of it, man becomes perplexed. His knowledge proliferates and splinters. Instead of the philosopher, we get the scientist. Instead of the humanist, the specialist. Instead of the artist, the technician."

(33:30) I don't quite agree with that. I think we will always have the artist, the humanist and the philosopher, in particular the philosopher. I think since Sputnik and maybe a little bit before, since the Second World War, this country and possibly the whole Western world has concerned itself much more with what is really democracy, what does it represent, how can it be related to everyday events. If you see the statements by the education commission of, I think, the NEA, and the Manpower Commission, and the Rockefeller report, these are beautiful statements on democracy and how it relates to today and to the future. I think that hasn't been done for a long time, that we get suddenly an accumulation, an outburst, of basic statement on democracy and freedom and what it means. And what is that? That is philosophy. I think instead of just having technicians and specialists, we have people who are working very hard on basic concepts of what democracy means.

"Gentlemen, it would seem that as man has come to know more facts about himself and the universe in which he lives, he finds greater difficulties in coming to terms with that, in arriving at fundamental understanding and making wise decisions. Traditional values – religious, ethical, mythological – no longer sustain him." This I think is also very true. It appears to me that in this conflict between the ideals of Communism and Western freedom, the church plays a rather small role. Few people are really gripped by the fact that it is also a struggle between atheists

and believers. This has somehow stayed in the background. It has not sustained the struggle. What sustains the struggle is the concept of freedom versus the collective, but it is not carried out universally on a religious basis, which always surprises me. I would have always thought the Western world would arise and say, "We fight here an atheistic world," that this is the main driving force. But I don't see it. I don't see it in the literature, I don't see it in the newspapers. The argument is carried out on a different level.

Well, maybe this brief recitation gives an idea what change really means, and what we face, what we are exposed to. This is out of the Horace Mann School in New York, where somebody made a statement at the end of the book to point out what change means.

(37:27) "Adaptation cannot be left to the next generation. As Margaret Mead says, adults must not once, but continuously, take in, adjust to, use, make innovation in a steady stream of discovery in new conditions." And we see that also already spreading all over the nation, and that is the system of adult courses. This is something rather new. That it is now customary for lawyers, doctors, engineers to take refresher courses. This certainly is what must be done in these times. What we learned in college 12-15 years ago is largely obsolete. We have to continuously keep ourselves up to date by learning things all the time, being informed about new discoveries, new conditions.

(38:58) We have a curriculum that is different – that we – that students study anthropology and history of populations. I predict that history as a list of dates will be obsolete. History as a history of power relationships – the factors that determine civilization do not start and stop with a war. In Social Studies, we include Oriental history, not only history but literature – very important in a world that gets so much smaller.

(41:45) Just a taste of what we are heading for, what we need to do. I have said very little about what our philosophy covers, it's so much more than this. Look to the future. Have every moment in our teaching life and our minds that we have to educate our children for the future, not for the past. And as much as traditions have value, and I have a sentimental attachment to traditions, we must never forget that the wish to feel secure in traditions underlies a sense of anxiety, because anything new we meet with an anxious (*George pronounced it "anx-i-e-tous"*) feeling. We must part with what is familiar, what is known, what we have tested and tried out. This is always difficult, immensely difficult – which is why we love tradition – and yet we must have the courage to tackle the unfamiliar, the untried, especially the new and be daring about innovation. Only then will we meet the future problems. And to go back to the avant-garde, I would like very much to invite the entire faculty to this play. (*Note: presumably the Edward Albee play referred to earlier.*) I will get tickets for everyone. At the Wayne Theatre in March. Meet afterwards – plenty of controversy – it will lead into new thoughts. (*Note: Edward Albee's one-act play "The American Dream" debuted in 1960. From Ben Brantley's review in The New York Times: "It features Mommy, the raw product of a very angry young man, who sees in her pretty much everything that's wrong about the US he grew up in...It wears the influence of European Absurdism, and especially the work of Ionesco, like a badge of honor."*)

(45:10) Max Bondy, in *The New Concept of Education* (*Note: this is a book by Max Bondy published in 1922 that is available only in German. The title in German is Das neue Weltbild in der Weziehung*) described a type of personality which was ideal (he only talks about boys; girls were somehow in the background) and the boys were to be fair-headed, tall, intelligent, but also somewhat naïve – their motivation was not intellectual calculation but a genuine intuition. And he surrounded himself with these people even in his school, which was a wonderful school with many different types of people. He himself in his group – every teacher had a group for which he was responsible – in his group, he selected only the tall

and fair-headed ones (*laughs*) and didn't like the others. Eh, and I think we have departed from this concept and have accepted and know that human beings are all different kinds of people. I was so happy when yesterday in Human Relations (*Note: this was the class George taught to all grades that involved discussions of ethical dilemmas*), Rita – a 7th grader – was talking about a 2nd grader..... (*George goes into a lengthy description in which one child was concerned about the well-being of another child, which pleased George*).