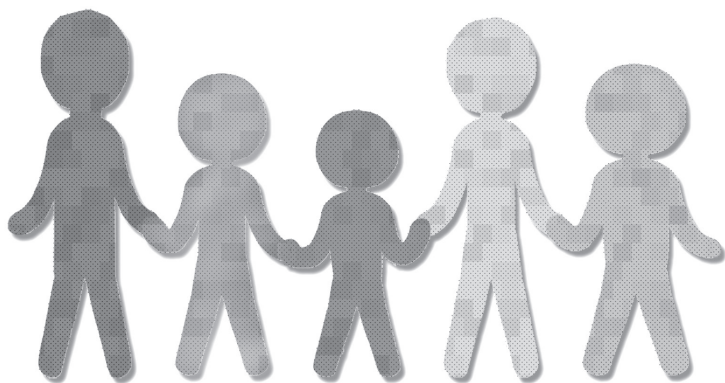


EDUCATING CHILDREN FOR LIFE

The Modern Learning Community

ANNEMARIE ROEPER



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Preface

by A. Harry Passow

It was in June of 1956 that I first met Annemarie Roeper. At the invitation of her and her husband George, I had arrived to spend a week at their City and Country School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, chairing a meeting that was to plan the conversion of the school to one for gifted children. I think there were about 10 of us, including Annemarie and George, who spent that week together in what I still recall many years later as one of the most challenging, exciting activities I have ever been involved in.

Two years earlier, I had initiated the Talented Youth Project at Teachers College, Columbia University, and my colleagues and I had already designed and started to implement research and development in the field of the gifted. And now here we were, being asked by the Roepers to design a school of our dreams! And dream we did that week as we explored every aspect of what a school for the gifted should be—from its guiding philosophy to the selection of its students, to its curriculum design and instructional strategies, to its staffing, to its overall ethos and climate.

We made our plans, fully expecting that George and Annemarie would implement them, and we were not disappointed. The City and Country School became—and still is [although now called The Roeper School]—a remarkable school with a program guided by a unique philosophy of what education should be. In retrospect, the reason that our advice to the Roepers during that week-long planning meeting in 1956 was actually heeded and acted

upon is quite simple: my colleagues and I reinvented what Annemarie and George Roeper had arrived at and believed in long before our discussions.

Annemarie has subtitled her book *The Modern Learning Community* because that is exactly what the Roepers aimed at and succeeded in creating at their school. Her purpose in writing this book is to articulate an approach to education that goes beyond the concept of education and represents a philosophy of life—a philosophy that she and George spent a lifetime living, refining, and developing. That philosophy, as she puts it simply and elegantly, “is based on both the belief of self-actualization, which respects the growth and the uniqueness of each member of the community, and the reality of mutual interdependence...only becom[ing] a reality through its implementation.” With the Roepers, that philosophy is not empty rhetoric; they have demonstrated that it “can be implemented by all who believe in it and understand it.” That’s what the Roeper City and Country School is all about.

Annemarie begins with an insightful discussion of what she calls “the dilemma of modern education” in order to provide readers with a clear understanding of where she is coming from. She then presents a philosophy of self-actualization and interdependence, which represents a philosophy of both learning and life. Readers will find her discussion of the philosophy and its implementation specific and meaningful, well-illustrated by examples taken from Annemarie’s 40-plus years of reflective experience. What she means by “Self” and by self-actualization are made clear, as is the role of the teacher in nurturing the Self, all amply illustrated with examples from the Roeper school.

The ideas are provided in the form of a model—the Self-Actualization and Interdependence Model—with a goal of educating children for life, providing them with “opportunities for total personality growth within the conceptual framework of all aspects of global interdependence” Annemarie examines the rationale, the content, the processes, and the conceptual frameworks, drawing on traditional areas to explicate how “the whole curriculum and learning environment are embedded in and surrounded by a strong, interdependent community in which children learn the basic skills and concepts of cooperation.”

Annemarie has done a remarkable job of describing the essence of the Roeper school—its life, function, climate, relationships, governance, resource use—as these contribute to implementing the Self-Actualization and Interdependence Model. While the school is known as a school for the gifted, readers will soon recognize that what Annemarie is advocating is appropriate for *all* children. The “cooperative, nonhierarchical philosophy and system of education” that is embodied in the Roeper school—the modern learning community—has meaning for *all* educators.

One can find too few examples in the literature where insightful educators have distilled their lifelong efforts to educate children and youth in a particular way toward a particular goal. Annemarie Roeper’s text is a welcome addition to this scarce genre.

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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to articulate an approach to education that differs fundamentally in philosophy and application from the conventional approach of traditional education. It is, in fact, based on a vision that goes beyond the concept of education and represents a philosophy of life. During the 40 years my husband George and I were heads of the Roeper City and Country School, we were involved in living with this philosophy and implementing it. The result is a school with a strong, unique atmosphere that is apparent to visitors and community members alike.

There have been many opportunities at which we have tried to put our concepts into words but have never succeeded completely. The reason was that even we saw our approach as only a modification of a universally accepted framework. Because these concepts had never been fully articulated, it appeared as though our personal style and personalities had created the Roeper approach. Therefore, the only way to maintain this and to ensure its continuation was to build a future on the Roeper tradition. This belief did not seem to express our vision but rather contradicted it. It was only after our retirement that we finally realized that this educational approach represents a uniquely different philosophy and therefore not a tradition tied to us as individuals.

This philosophy is based on both the belief of self-actualization, which respects the growth and the uniqueness of each member of the community, and the reality of mutual interdependence. This philosophy only becomes a reality through its implementation. It is valid if it permeates every

aspect of the educational community, without exception. It is a concept of self-actualization for all, as opposed to the concept of education for outside success, in which the primary focus is on what one can do rather than on who one is as a human being. This concept is universally applicable and can be implemented by all who believe in it and understand it.

The “success model” of traditional education has succeeded in developing people who are highly capable, but it has failed in satisfying people’s need for self-actualization and learning how to become participating members of an interdependent community. The unfulfilled need for self-actualization seeks fulfillment throughout the life of the individual, and the result to date has been the inability of human beings to manage their affairs constructively and cooperatively. Therefore, the times demand a more universal application of the self-actualization, interdependence philosophy.

This book begins with a description of the dilemma of modern education and then continues with the three parts of the model based on the self-actualization philosophy of cooperation as we tried to implement it at the Roeper City and Country School. The first part considers in more detail the philosophy and discusses the specific goals emerging from it. The second part is a discussion of the Self and its emotional and developmental phases. The third part is an in-depth explanation of our approach as one of the ways to implement the philosophy, with examples from our particular educational community. These include descriptions of the learning environment, methods and strategies of learning, approaches to subject matter, the role of the adults, the

interaction of community members, and governmental and administrative structures.

The desire for a cooperative existence and self-actualization has existed throughout the ages, but it has always been confronted with the more universally accepted concept of the hierarchy. The Roeper City and Country School has rejected that concept and instead has implemented a cooperative, nonhierarchical philosophy and system of education that enables individuals to achieve self-actualization and cooperation in the interdependent community that is our world today.

The Dilemma of Modern Education

Humanity has made two promises to its children. The first is to provide to them a world that accepts them and that affords them opportunities to live, grow, and create in safety. The other is to help them develop their whole beings to the fullest in every respect. Education is the vehicle through which we try to keep these promises.

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? 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 the child use the educational situation? Out of these first two components grows the third: the process of education. How are we going to achieve the stated goals, given the characteristics of the child to be educated?

The various ways in which educators have dealt with these components account for the development of an enormous diversity of systems that are often in contradiction with one another. It is impossible—and not part of my intent—to describe or respond to them all. I would not be able to do justice to them. For the purpose of this book, I will speak only about the predominant concept of education—the one that affects and confronts the majority of children, the one that is generally considered the norm against which all others have to measure themselves, prove themselves, and defend

themselves. I am aware that what I have written here does not apply to every educational institution.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND PHILOSOPHY

Our educational goals and procedures were established more than a hundred years ago, and they have existed in much the same manner ever since. This means that the original reasons for their existence may no longer be valid. They are taken for granted and now exist only because they have always existed. They have become a tradition continued for its own sake, and there is an unspoken taboo that says that this tradition may not be examined or changed. Thus, the components of education have been frozen in history. This, by its very nature, has resulted in a gap between the facts of today's reality and the goals and methods of education.

We are live in a world that is much more interdependent than was the case when our educational system was born. This calls for a change in our approach to education. But because education is still based on tradition, this is not happening in a fundamental way. We are not looking at the purposes of modern education. We have not thought about why we are doing what we are doing. We have not established a philosophy that relates to life today. We continue to educate for the next step, the next test, the next grade, the next school. We educate in isolated fragments, and we fail to bind the fragments together into a meaningful whole. We fail to ask the reasons for doing the steps; we are content simply to fulfill the expectations of the next step.

Not only are today's children living in a different world; they themselves have changed since traditional education

became established, and so has our understanding of child development and child psychology. This knowledge necessitates a reevaluation of whom we are educating; of our goals, methods, and procedures; of the skills, attitudes, and concepts that we want children to achieve. It is the tragedy of modern education that this reevaluation is not taking place.

There is not much emphasis on a new definition of basic goals or on the development of a philosophy for our modern educational system. Instead, there are some ideas as to the *why* of education, much of it based on our old tradition, much of it caused by a realization of the necessary changes without an in-depth look at them. Therefore, we are left with some vague concepts, hopes, and notions of education—for example: we are doing what we have always done; our parents and grandparents received the same type of education, and they have done alright; the traditional approach will make our children successful and enable them to reach the top, or to compete, or to do well economically, or to serve their country, or to become our best resources, or to understand the real world. It will equip them to be winners in such a world, to be popular, to be leaders.

There are also those who believe that education will open the doors to the enjoyment of beauty, to help others, to express our creativity, etc. But do we know that the existing method leads to those envisioned results? Do we have a realistic view of the modern world and what our children need to be and learn in order to live in it successfully and to thrive in the future?

Most educators and parents have little time to spend thinking about defining a philosophy, goals, and purposes of

education. Most of us are overwhelmed by the complexities of life. We are struggling to be in charge of our lives and are finding little time and opportunity to develop clear-cut concepts for the future of our children. Even in most books about education, the space spent on philosophy may be only one or two pages, while the rest is on how and what to teach: content and process. The importance of the philosophy in determining the outcome of education does not seem to be fully recognized.

There are those who have thought about a philosophy of life and education—thought about it thoroughly—but find it difficult to relate that philosophy to everyday living and everyday occurrences. I have heard beautiful speeches made at conventions by keynote speakers who expounded in generalities about what we ought to be striving for, and they sounded good and thoughtful, but they did not bridge the gap to reality. Often, these speeches are followed by sessions on curriculum and teaching strategies. These sessions do not reflect the philosophy expressed by the keynote speaker as an educational goal that should be integrated with our teaching. The same people who might react with great enthusiasm to the keynote speech do not or cannot see the lack of connection to other sessions or to their own approach to teaching.

Because we do not have a philosophy of life and education, education has proceeded without one. It has therefore become isolated and alienated from life. It is based on narrow, short-term goals that we somehow believe will fulfill humankind's promises. We believe that existing methods of education will magically achieve our hopes for our children to lead happy, healthy, successful lives as

they accumulate wealth and wisdom—to lead lives that will contribute to the improvement of the world.

But if our children learn all of the so-called basic skills, go obediently and successfully through the system, and enter a prestigious college, will they in fact be happy, wealthy, and wise? Or do we just assume that? Have we ever realistically examined the causes and effects of our educational processes? Have we looked at the adults whom our system has produced? Are they healthy, wealthy, and wise? Are they using their full potential? Are they equipped to deal with modern life? I have not seen many efforts made to determine this.

We raise illiterates when it comes to mastering the science or art of living. Our educational systems do not even encourage children to prepare for life in their daily acts and thoughts. The conscious and existing goal has become much more limited: we are engaged only in preparing them for college.

Education for college as the real goal creates many subgoals, each even more limited in scope. These subgoals become nothing more than education for the next step. In kindergarten, we educate for the first grade or even for a specific first-grade teacher. In elementary school, we educate for middle school; in middle school, we educate for high school; in high school, we educate for college. These are the goals that the majority of people accept uncritically as the basic philosophy of our educational institutions. Whatever is expected at each level is considered the norm, the way it is supposed to be, the step that somehow will miraculously lead our children to the promised land. But there is little

evidence that this is actually so, and no one has truly proven it to be so.

It is no wonder that along the way, many students become disillusioned, drop out of school, or drop out of society altogether. Many experience a culture shock when they enter life as adults in society or try to enter the workforce. They find that they are not prepared to cope with either. The gifted in particular, by the very nature of their characteristics and awareness, find it difficult to accept this state of affairs as a given. They are questioners, and they find that these goals are not the ones that they would like to pursue, nor do they find them to be promising in terms of happiness and the ability to cope with life.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD

An educational philosophy is the first component of a system of education. The second component is the characteristics of those to be educated. Here, too, we are basing our concepts on old realities and perceptions. These assumptions are alienated from the real personalities of the children, as well as from our knowledge of child psychology and developmental theory. We assume that all children learn in the same manner, that they are vessels to be filled; therefore, the essential ingredient for learning is the activity of teaching rather than the activity of the children of learning and growing.

We also believe that people somehow can be fractured into small pieces, that they can bring their minds to school and leave their emotions at home. Many teachers and administrators look at the emotional needs of children as a

troublesome interference with their primary task. “Schools are for academics, not for emotions,” they say. But they forget that each child is a total person who receives all experiences against the same background: the child’s Self. The child acts and reacts accordingly in all situations.

Traditional education is based on the assumption that we shape children like clay, rather than that they bring something to the situation that will affect the way in which they will receive our teaching. This assumption also grows out of the notion that all learning is cognitive and that other parts of growth—which in reality act upon and interact with any learning, such as creative expression, physical growth, and emotions—are merely frills to be added in when time is left over. They are not considered as belonging in the classroom.

Because we ignore the factors that contribute to a child’s personality, we have never actually been able to understand the motivation or the lack of motivation for academic learning. Our whole approach says to the child, “You are a passive recipient, not an active participant, in your learning process.” We do not examine whether that is truly human nature and whether that is truly the way a child grows and learns.

From this it also follows that we ignore the hidden curriculum—i.e., the lessons that children draw from teachers’ behaviors, from the structure of the institution, and from their peers and social experiences. We believe that they will learn what we teach them, as we teach it, and only that. But the largest body of learning takes place outside of the curriculum, and this type of learning has a more permanent

and integrative impact on the child than that provided by the curriculum.

The concept of children's characteristics that we use as the basis for our traditional, practical educational approach is not based on reality; it is based on limiting assumptions. We reduce the complex reality by ignoring some of the basic facts of human nature. We have separated education from psychology and therefore do not know children, even though much information is available.

Education is usually defined as the answer to the question "What do we do to and for the child?" It does not emphasize the questions "Who is the child?" "What does the child bring to this process?" and "How does the child feel about the process?" Traditional education concerns itself primarily with children's skills and abilities, with what the children can do and not who the children are.

And yet we are surprised when our children become reluctant followers, and we wonder why we find underachievers, "behavior problems," and school dropouts. Only if one of these failures occurs do we move the focus slightly from the behavior to the child and try to identify something about that specific learner. Even then we are not really looking for the person but only for a part of the person: the academic learner. We administer standardized tests, and we compare the achievements of all of the children of the nation, assuming that they all function in the same way. We consider the "failed" learner the exception. We call the child who differs "a problem."

At this point we may realize that the test results do not tell us what the problem is, why the difference exists. The

tests do not give us the complete answer to the child. Thus, we may again move our focus a little and test the child's intelligence. Again, we are asking what can the child do, not who the child is. We use a whole different set of tests, but still, we find that we do not understand certain areas of reaction in the child. Perhaps we realize that in this particular case, there are parts of the personality that are different from the intellect, and so we administer other tests—perhaps a test to evaluate the creative ability of the child.

After all of these tests, have we defined the child? No, we have not. We have taken the academic child apart, and we have tried to develop each of these parts, but we never put the child together again.

Not only do we never look at the whole child; we do not even look at all of the parts. We look at intellectual, creative, and physical abilities. We look at what the child can do, but we still have not looked at who the child is. If none of the tests helps in the education of a particular child, we say that the answer belongs in the field of psychology, not education, and that it is therefore out of our jurisdiction. We look at the field of psychology as separate from education, and we do not include the psychology of the child in the educational process. This means education does not know the child.

How can we educate without knowing who a person is? No business would develop a process without knowing what it is that they are trying to develop and the characteristics of the materials they are using. Yet this is exactly what education attempts to do. Teachers and parents, with the best of intentions, put the greatest emphasis on children's ability to perform, on what they can do, forgetting that who