

The Roeper School

ADVANCES IN CREATIVITY AND GIFTEDNESS

Volume 5

Advances in Creativity and Gifted Education (ADVA) is the first internationally established book series that focuses exclusively on the constructs of creativity and giftedness as pertaining to the psychology, philosophy, pedagogy and ecology of talent development across the milieus of family, school, institutions and society. ADVA strives to synthesize both domain specific and domain general efforts at developing creativity, giftedness and talent. The books in the series are international in scope and include the efforts of researchers, clinicians and practitioners across the globe.

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The Roeper School

A Model for Holistic Development of High Ability

Edited by

Don Ambrose

Rider University, Lawrenceville, New Jersey, USA

Bharath Sriraman

The University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, USA

and

Tracy L. Cross

College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, USA



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and

“The Most Exciting Meetings”: An Interview with Annemarie Roeper
and A. Harry Passow, Denita Banks-Sims

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The editors,
Don Ambrose
Bharath Sriraman
Tracy L. Cross

PART I

INTRODUCTION

DON AMBROSE

FACETS ON THE GEM

Brilliance Shining Through a Special School for the Gifted

After spending significant amounts of time observing in the Roeper school and interacting with its students and personnel one feels at a loss for words when trying to find ways to describe its essence. As a lover of metaphor, I tried to find ways to capture the spirit, philosophy, and dynamics of the school through engaging metaphors, selecting one, trying it out, and then tossing it aside to play with another, and yet another. Finally, I settled on the metaphor of a gleaming gemstone. While this metaphor also is lacking in some respects it does convey some of the most interesting attributes of the school.

We can think of the gemstone metaphor at two levels of analysis. At a macro-level it represents the school itself with individual students, faculty members, administrators, support personnel, board members, and alumni as facets on the gem. Each facet conveys and reflects brilliant light, and all of the individual luminosity taken together comprises the glowing brilliance of this unique school. In addition, the gem sits up high on its point striking a fine balance between the needs and rights of the individual and the needs and rights of groups, as well as the need for exquisite balance between long-range philosophical constancy and dynamic, context-sensitive change. A gemstone sitting up on its point normally could not maintain itself in that position, and that's the case with many other organizations that attempt to strike important balances. But the Roeper School has managed to maintain itself upright in this beautifully balanced position for decades. The strength of its philosophy and the purposeful sense of agency felt by everyone involved in the system are the reasons for that.

The gemstone metaphor also seems to work at the level of the individual. For example, each student is a highly promising rough stone with enormous potential when she or he enters the school. Over the course of time, through the guidance of the philosophy and the help of peers and educators in the school, the individual begins to purposefully trim away some of her or his rough edges, as with the cutting of a diamond. This creates potentially brilliant facets of intrinsic motivation, interpersonal acumen, higher-order thinking, ethical awareness, and talent discovery and development.

A carefully cut diamond is more valuable than one that is roughly crafted. Individuals with considerable latent ability can find themselves roughly crafted by

external forces—for example, the mania of shallow, superficial test preparation that shortsighted, dogmatic policymakers and ideological hacks impose on most students throughout the United States (see Berliner, 2012; Ravitch, 2010). But individuals within the Roeper School do their own personalized, student-centred diamond cutting within a challenging but safe environment. Consequently, they tend to end up with exquisite polish and luminescent facets that allow their full potential to shine through.

As mentioned earlier, no single metaphor is adequate when it comes to conveying the essence of this school. A metaphor tends to capture some dimensions of a complex issue or phenomenon while ignoring or obscuring other dimensions (see Ambrose, 1996, 2012; Gardner & Winner, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, 1999; Sternberg, 1990; Sternberg, Tourangeau, & Nigro, 1993). The facets-on-the-gem metaphor doesn't work very well when it comes to the emergent, organic nature of the Roeper School. The metaphor seems too rigid for that. So ultimately multiple metaphors should come into play. But there isn't space in this chapter for such explorations and we'll have to leave that for another time.

Another way to think big picture about a complex phenomenon is to look for perspectives from multiple disciplines. Interdisciplinary excursions sometimes turn up useful insights about intriguing, complex phenomena (Ambrose, 2005, 2009, 2012a; Ambrose, Cohen, & Tannenbaum, 2003; Ambrose & Cross, 2009; Gardner, 1988; Page, 2007; Sriraman, 2009; Sriraman & Dahl, 2009). Many insights from scores of academic disciplines could help us understand the school in more depth and detail. For example, neuroscience has the potential to tell us something about the cognitive processing involved in the intrapersonal self-discovery or altruism that the school promotes (see Martin & Monroe, 2009; Morishima, Schunk, Bruhin, Ruff, & Fehr, 2012; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013). Historians and sociologists can pull back the socio-contextual curtains that obscure the reasons why clever, creative leaders can so callously initiate devastating wars (see Bacevich, 2010, 2012) or encourage dogmatic favoritism of particular identity groups while promoting oppression or even genocide when it comes to outsiders (see Chirot, 2012; Chirot & McCauley, 2006). Some economists can help us perceive the refined conceptions of merit that emerge from the achievements of Roeper School students and alumni and the juxtaposition of these conceptions with distorted notions of egocentric, hyper-materialistic, ruthlessly attained or effortlessly inherited *unearned merit* that prevail in societies dominated by the dogmatism of neoclassical economic theory (see Ambrose, 2011, 2012; Sen, 2000; Stiglitz, 2010, 2012). But exploring these constructs and others would require at least another book. For now, let's consider just a few more ideas from foreign disciplines.

Scholarly discussions of indigenous leadership and decision making drawn from indigenous studies and cultural anthropology can shed some interesting light on the dynamics of collaboration, problem solving, and leadership at the school. For example, Alfred (1999) showed how indigenous leadership sharply contrasts with stereotypical leadership in the mainstream Western culture. Predominant notions

of leadership suggest that strong leaders are focused, forceful, manipulative, and egocentric. In fact, studies of psychopathy have revealed that corporate leadership is populated with a significantly higher percentage of psychopaths than the general population. Psychopaths who can dial back a few of their psychopathic traits just a little while leaving other traits running at full throttle tend to find success in organizations and societies that are based on ruthless competition (see Babiak, Neumann, & Hare, 2010; Dutton, 2012; Gao & Raine, 2010).

In stark contrast, according to Alfred (1999), effective leaders in indigenous cultures are inconspicuous, remaining behind the scenes to support other members of the group in non-manipulative ways. They develop skin “seven spans thick” to deal with criticism when they do step forward to take the blows aimed at their collaborators, as opposed to leaders from the mainstream culture who tend to step forward when it is time to claim credit for success. Indigenous leaders assume responsibility and set good examples while facilitating communication, inclusion, and decision-making consensus.

In another example of interpersonal processes from an indigenous culture, Bohm (1994) discussed the observations of an unnamed cultural anthropologist who joined a group of Native Americans during a collaborative decision-making meeting. The 30 plus members of the group sat in a circle and simply began a discussion. There was no apparent agenda for the meeting and there was no designated leader. The only hint at hierarchy came from somewhat more deference paid to the older members of the group. No minutes were kept. After a considerable time the group simply disbanded without summarizing any conclusions. Remarkably, everyone in the group left knowing what to do about the issues under discussion.

These examples of nonhierarchical leadership and unpredictable, bottom-up, emergent, collaborative decision-making look very much like what goes on in the school on a regular basis. But they don't capture everything. Somehow the school manages to blend these processes with a strong focus on individual self-discovery and self-determination. The collaborative leadership processes are helpful but they seem to be means to important ends with intrapersonal self-discovery and ethical considerations always prominent.

With the facets-of-the-gem metaphor and the potential of interdisciplinary borrowing to establish a big-picture context let us look more closely at the contents of this book. We have organized it into several sections that seem to represent some essential elements of the school. The section following this introductory chapter deals with the all-important history and philosophy of the school. Contributors shed light on the reasons for the creation of the school and the dynamics of its evolution over the course of time. They also address the Roeper philosophy in depth and detail. All of this provides a foundation for the remainder of the book. The next section includes discussions of programs and curriculum, both from the viewpoint of best practices in education as a whole and from the perspective of structures and processes within the school itself. The following section addresses the ways in which leadership emerges from the philosophy and dynamics of the school

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and provides important directional beacons for students' self-discovery and self-actualization. Finally, the concluding section provides some insights about how the school fits the unpredictable, globalized 21st-century environment. The remainder of this introductory chapter outlines the authors' contributions in each section.

The History and Philosophy of the School

In many institutions in today's world a philosophy statement seems to be not much more than an item on a to-do list. Philosophy and vision or mission statements tend to be crafted, printed, framed, and posted on office walls only to be neglected over the long term. The philosophy at the Roeper School is taken much more seriously. It is the living, breathing central core of virtually all that takes place in the system. It permeates the thoughts and actions of students, teachers, administrators, support personnel, board members and alumni. Moreover, it has provided directional guidance for the development of the school throughout the mid-late 20th century and now into the 21st. The section of this volume on the history and philosophy of the school includes contributions from the school's founders, current students, alumni, teachers and administrators, and some leading thinkers from the field of gifted education.

Michele Kane begins this section with some deep insights about the school's founding, purpose, and development. Michele has done extensive research into the social-emotional dimensions of high ability and is an expert on the Roeper philosophy. In her chapter, *Constancy and Change in Progressive Education: The Roeper philosophy of Self Actualization and Interdependence*, she illustrates the compelling power and impact of the school's belief system, especially the ways in which it leads to insightful self-discovery. More specifically, individuals and groups following the philosophy will emphasize the self as the curriculum; the dynamic integration of social, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual endeavors; and the crucial importance of developing a strong school community. Young people need a safe environment to support them in the difficult work required by multidimensional self-discovery and a vibrant, accepting school community can establish that safety. While describing the importance and interactions of all of these elements and dynamics, Michele takes us back in time through the development of the Roeper philosophy and the formational history of the school. She highlights important events, documents, and a helpful timeline of the school's development to show us how George and Annemarie wrestled with important educational ideas and plans and came to refine them. In essence, while creating and refining the school they pursued the same intrapersonally flavoured inquiry processes that they hoped all of their students would use in the development of their own life trajectories.

The voices of George and Annemarie Roeper are represented strongly in the chapter titled *The Roeper philosophy*. Marcia Ruff provided this material, which is derived from a 1981 document written by the Roepers to establish the essential belief system of the school. This is a panoramic ethical philosophy that brings together notions of individual and group responsibility, community building, the

inseparability of education and real life, and a nonhierarchical, collaborative, egalitarian ethos aimed at counteracting the competitive, dog-eat-dog flavour of the ideological and cultural systems that tend to dominate the modern world. The Roepers believed that an excessively competitive culture leads to its own destruction because we don't fully use our collaborative abilities and ethical sensibilities. The learning environment they valued enables students to gain the inner strength necessary to engage in purposeful self-development, productive collaboration, and the betterment of the world over the long-term. Their philosophy supports the creation of a productive learning environment because it is based on complex replication of the real world within the structure and dynamics of the school, which also navigates a dynamic balance between constancy and change.

Demonstrating strong consistency with the philosophy, faculty member Cathy Wilmers addresses a core activity of the school in her chapter *Growing Deep Community Roots*. She provides some keen insights about the thoughtful, bottom-up, democratic approach to community building through painstaking but enjoyable student-centred processes in the school. She uses a specific example of community building through the work of a class full of purposeful, very young students who diligently worked on community building as a long-term project and then shared the results with a large number of older students at an assembly. A standing ovation from the older students put a strong punctuation mark on this work and left an indelible impression on all involved. Going even further, the students and their teacher employed impressive higher-order thinking to articulate the meaning of all of this.

Emery Pence, alumni relations coordinator at the school, gives us an entertaining, insightful look at the innards of the Roeper philosophy in action. In his chapter, *Empowering the Gifted and Intense Child*, he introduces the analysis with portrayals of hypothetical students based on composites of students he has worked with over the years. The intensity and the ability of these students to make intellectual and affective connections help them capitalize on and contribute to the student-centred dynamics of the school. Pence illustrates ways in which learning communities, service-learning opportunities, and the problem-based, inquiry approach to learning at the school enable students to develop authentic relationships, intellectual humility, and ownership of and authentic participation in the organic, bottom-up learning processes that characterize and distinguish the school. These dynamic processes permeate the school and enrich learning while providing important life lessons. Pence shows how enabling this kind of self-development is not easy and demands much of the students and adults involved; however, it is at the core of the Roeper philosophy and is well worth the effort.

In her chapter, *"The Most Exciting Meetings": An Interview with Annemarie Roeper and A. Harry Passow*, Denita Banks-Sims, director of development and publications at the school, illustrates important evolutionary steps taken by the school with a transcript of an interview she carried out with these two luminaries in the early 1990s. In the 1950s, the Roepers had been thinking about modifying the school to align it more with the needs of gifted children. They became aware

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of Dr. Passow's work and begin to interact with him. This eventually culminated in intensive conferences and other interactions at the school where the creative idealism of these visionary thinkers came alive. Dr. Passow was a leader in gifted education at the time. His strong ethical awareness combined with practical intelligence made him an ideal resource for the transformation of the school into a school for the gifted. Through this interview, Denita enabled Annemarie and Harry to describe the dynamics of this transformation, which combined Harry's broad and deep knowledge of education for the gifted with the Roeper's willingness and ability to design a school aligned with best practices and imbued with ethical sensibility. As if that isn't enough, the interview is flavoured with humour and intrapersonal insights from both Annemarie and Harry.

David Dai is one of the most perceptive, integrative thinkers in the field of gifted education. In his chapter, *Nurturing the Gifted Child or Developing Talent? Resolving a Paradox*, David begins with overviews of some conceptual trends and issues in the field of gifted education: most notably the dynamic tension between the whole child and talent-development approaches. He discusses the particular strengths of the Roeper School when it comes to the whole-child paradigm, which includes emphases on social-emotional development and intrapersonal intelligence. He goes on to craft an argument showing how the two paradigms can be integrated to create an education that develops talent and excellence within specializations while generating strong, intrinsic motivation and self-awareness. While recognizing that the school establishes exceptional learning systems that help young people discover and develop their abilities in very effective and efficient ways he makes some recommendations for future refinement. Essentially, he shows how the school is well designed and positioned to develop both the whole child and domain-specific talents.

Consistent with the Roeper philosophy, Susannah Nichols, a freelance writer and teacher of English at the school, turned the opportunity to participate in this project into a forum for some of her students to discuss their school experiences in their own voices. Her chapter titled, *In Their Own Words: Students Reflect on the Roeper Difference*, provides student insights by employing quotations revolving around important Roeper School themes. Based on a key question, which asked students what the "Roeper difference" is, their responses coalesced around a number of ideas pertaining to empowerment. Nichols distilled the responses nicely with the following comment: "these qualities (of the school) build a place where students have the courage and confidence to advocate for themselves and the camaraderie of peers and adults who share their love for learning." The students made it clear that the school is not a hierarchical institution and does not operate as a job-training factory. Instead, it emphasizes supportive relationships blended with high expectations, responsibility, and self-advocacy leading to self-discovery.

Although scholars from outside the school and professionals working within the school give us rich insights about leadership dynamics, often through the words of students and alumni, it is helpful to gain some perspective directly from

an individual current student of the school. Fortunately, Dylan Bennett, a junior at the school at the time of this writing, gives us a current student's perspective on the dynamic experiences that take place in the Roeper environment. In the response piece titled, *How is Roeper Different*, he discusses the nuances of conflict resolution, which is a core process at the school in terms of enabling nuanced decision-making, artful collaboration, and effective self-actualization over the long-term. He discusses how nonhierarchical student-teacher relationships are key elements in the system. Interestingly, he also shows how conceptions of success in the school do not align with the extrinsic, competitive definitions of success in the larger society. Instead, students engage in interest-based quests for personal meaning, which ultimately lead to personalized definitions of success. The freedom, independence, and empowerment within the school setting enable all of this to take place.

Marcia Ruff, the school historian, provides some very interesting perspectives on the workings of the school through the voices of various alumni in her chapter, *Roeper Alumni Reflect on Lasting Lessons*. She begins the chapter with some insights from George Roeper and then provides interpretations of the meaning embedded in some direct quotes from alumni. In essence, the alumni consistently confirm that the habits of mind, values, and beliefs they gained from their experiences in the school were more important than the academic preparation although they certainly value the high-level academic work the school enabled them to do. The alumni voices she highlighted included people from very diverse backgrounds. For example, a musician and songwriter, an associate professor of mathematics education, entrepreneurs and public policy experts, business owners, artists, an engineer, a law student, and a lawyer all weighed in on what they gained from the school. An overarching theme in their comments is that the Roeper School helped all of them deal with the world in more nuanced, engaged ways than they otherwise might have expected from a different educational experience.

Putting a fine punctuation mark on this section, Tracy Cross tells a story of the long-term impact of the school on an insider/outsider in his chapter titled, *A Personal Tale of Development and Growth: The Inadvertent Influence of the Roeper School on a Scholar*. Tracy is a dynamic leader in the field of gifted education having (a) edited all of its leading academic journals, (b) provided exemplary leadership for several high-profile academic institutions, and (c) taken on the role of President of the National Association for Gifted Children. Consequently, he is well positioned to assess the attributes and impact of the school in both macro and micro ways. He does this here by describing his longstanding involvement with the school in various capacities and some ways in which purposeful, ethical individuals from the school shaped his thinking over the long term. An expert in the social-emotional dimensions of giftedness (among many other things), Tracy portrays the ways in which the school impacted his own social and emotional development as a scholar and how it inspired him to do his best work elsewhere. He makes it obvious that the influence of the school extends far beyond its geographic location in Michigan.

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Programs and Curriculum

Most educational systems around the world place programs and curriculum at the center of what they do. Of course, these dimensions of education are crucially important. Interestingly, while the Roeper philosophy recognizes the importance of programs and curriculum these tend to take a backseat to intrapersonal discovery and collaborative ethical development. At the Roeper School, programs and curricula flexibly evolve according to the needs of students and often seamlessly intertwine with the intrapersonal and ethical aspects of education. This section of the volume includes some analyses of programming and curricula that are conducive to the development of gifted and talented individuals (e.g., curriculum integration, standards and assessment, program evaluation) while also highlighting ways in which the special version of student-centred dynamics at the school make these managerial aspects of education work in support of students instead of the other way around.

Joyce VanTassel-Baska is a preeminent scholar of curriculum in the field of gifted education. In her chapter, *Differentiation in Action: The Integrated Curriculum Model*, she describes the value of curriculum integration, the theoretical and research support for this approach to curriculum development and implementation, and some ways in which it aligns with some of the best practices found at the Roeper School. The integrated curriculum model (ICM) she developed emphasizes confrontations with advanced academic content, invigorates higher-order thinking, strengthens differentiation of instruction, and promotes interdisciplinary thinking. It also encourages real world, authentic learning and collaborative processes. All of these emphases nicely align with what the Roeper School does well. For example, the school excels in collaborative learning, meaningful, real world service-learning projects, promotion of higher-order thinking around interdisciplinary themes, embracing diversity, and strengthening the ethical dimensions of education. Faculty and students employing curriculum integration seem better able to avoid locking themselves within disciplinary silos. Given the complex problems in today's globalized world, silo-breaking approaches to learning, such as those embedded in the ICM, are particularly important.

Given that Joyce VanTassel-Baska highlights the importance of curriculum integration, it is fortunate that middle school science teacher Wendy Mayer illustrates some of the highly creative, inspiring aspects of interdisciplinary work in the classroom through her chapter, *An Interdisciplinary Journey*. Reacting to Joyce's chapter on curriculum integration, Wendy tells the story about how her students were centrally involved in the creation of a large-scale, collaborative, interdisciplinary, thematic unit plan on the important topic of climate change. As with many initiatives at the school this plan evolved out of faculty team meetings and a series of subsequent student meetings. Wendy describes how expansive thinking about the theme and the various relevant subject areas combined with diligent attention to detail made this plan come together. The overall plan attended to diverse subject areas and the diverse

needs of learners while generating authentic tasks such as crafting ways that students could contribute to cutting carbon emissions. Throughout the process, students were deeply engaged with the development of the unit. This stands in contrast to the teacher-centred dynamics that occur in many other locales. Wendy concludes with some insightful reflections on the entire, invigorating process.

According to leading economists (e.g., Heckman, 2011; Madrick, 2008) national economies thrive when there are healthy investments in early childhood education. In addition, the 21st-century socioeconomic, ideological, and political environments are plagued by ethical dilemmas requiring attention to issues of social justice (see Ambrose & Sternberg, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). Early childhood expert Nancy Hertzog and her collaborators, Megan Ryan and Nick Gillon, bring these two important themes together in their chapter, *Social Justice in an Early Childhood Classroom*. The authors connect the strong emphasis on social justice, which is embedded in the Roeper School's core philosophy and the dynamics of its early childhood education, with scholarly literature on social justice education. They explore some of the contentious issues surrounding this important but often ignored dimension of education. While perusing the literature on these topics they develop and refine their own conception of early childhood social justice education, which includes emphases on inequality and power structures, and then provide details about implementation.

The school doesn't hold back in the effort to develop impressive collaborative skills and ethical sensibilities so it should not be surprising that faculty member Colleen Shelton illustrates some advanced interpersonal and instructional dynamics that take place in an early childhood classroom. Her response piece titled, *A View from the Preschool Classroom: The Child's Role in Creating a Socially Just Community*, is a reaction to the more extensive scholarly treatment of social justice in early childhood education generated by Nancy Hertzog, Megan Ryan, and Nick Gillon. Colleen's analysis provides a practical illustration of some ways in which very young children can take charge of their own ethical development. The examples she uses highlight the time-consuming messiness of the processes involved in this ethical development along with the crucial importance of those processes.

The Roeper School exists within a rather foreign educational context—one currently characterized by a flurry of activity revolving around national standards, assessment, and accountability. With its emphases on purposeful, student-centred intrinsic motivation and initiative, and its cautions about external, hierarchical, bureaucratic authority, the Roeper philosophy largely runs counter to these national trends; however, leading gifted education scholar Susan Johnsen shows how the philosophy and practice of the school aligns well with the more thoughtful sets of standards in the larger environment. In her chapter, *Standards and Balanced Assessments: Relationships to the Roeper School's Philosophy and Practices*, she shows how the school actually aligns well with the more visionary sets of standards and assessment practices in education today, especially with 21st-century skills frameworks and standards developed within the field of gifted education. Particularly interesting is an outline showing the particularities of alignment

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between the Roeper philosophy and both the Partnership for 21st-Century Skills and the NAGC Programming Standards. She goes on to describe in depth and detail a wide variety of thoughtful assessment practices that are conducive to creative and critical thinking and student-centred work. These descriptions confirm some of the strengths of the school while also giving it some options for future development of assessment work that is consistent with its philosophy.

Patrick O'Connor, past college counselor at the school, delves deeply into the college selection and admission processes students engage in during the latter phases of their time as Roeper students. In his chapter, *College Counseling and the Gifted Student*, he contrasts their thought processes and activities during this life-trajectory planning process with the superficiality of the college selection process that usually occurs in many other places. As with most other procedures in the school, college selection tends to occur in a nuanced manner with much less extrinsic motivation like that experienced by most students elsewhere. College selection for students at Roeper tends to be driven by self-reflection, which O'Connor nicely captures with the phrase, "college is a natural but exciting next step in the student's deeper understanding of self." He illustrates the results of this more nuanced brand of college selection and admission through examples of the decisions past students have made and the results they experienced. Overall, college and career planning for upper-level Roeper students mirrors the exceptional intrapersonal awareness they develop through their time at the school.

Carolyn Callahan, a prominent scholar in the field of gifted education, concludes this section on curriculum and programs by helping the school look into its future. She discusses the need for and nature of program evaluation for the school in her chapter, *Next Steps for the Roeper School: Evaluation and Research*. Program evaluation requires a detailed description of the program and collection of input from key stakeholders. Drawing from various sources, including a recent accreditation self-study, she also outlined the perceived strengths of the school and the challenges it currently faces. After that, she brings into play the set of research-based standards from the National Association for Gifted Children and discovers that these standards highlight the considerable strengths of the school while also suggesting some areas for future focus. Recommendations include more attention to academic student outcomes and clarification of important terminology pertaining to the goals of the school. She concludes with a recommendation that the school align its future program evaluation with the guidelines in this chapter in order to continue its own improvement and to establish the bases for research that would guide the field of gifted education more effectively over the long term.

Emergent, Democratic Leadership

Leadership is a very strong theme at the Roeper School. The founders, George and Annemarie Roeper, had seen and viscerally experienced the dark side of leadership in the ascendance of Nazi Germany and wanted to do all they could to turn

leadership into a more positive force in the world. Their philosophy addressed that issue by promoting the notion of bottom-up, democratic leadership as opposed to its more pernicious, authoritarian versions. The section of this volume on emergent, democratic leadership begins with a comprehensive overview of leadership theory and research and then moves into the subtle nuances and enormous strengths of Roeper-style leadership. As always, student growth and ethical awareness are at the forefront.

Dorothy Sisk's chapter, titled *Developing Leadership Capacity in Gifted Students for the Present and Future*, represents an expansive, in-depth look at leadership in general, which includes detailed presentations of findings pertaining to the leadership dimensions of high ability. Dorothy is a go-to expert in the field of gifted education on the topic of leadership so her panoramic overview of leadership covers all the bases extending from the thoughts of Greek philosophers, to theory and research about leadership in various disciplines and fields, to the extent to which leadership is included in definitions of giftedness. She also explores issues pertinent to the identification of leadership in gifted students. Sisk provides examples of practical leadership lessons drawn from a model she created. Throughout, her chapter is permeated with discussions of ways in which leadership emerges spontaneously and productively through activation of the philosophy of the Roeper School. She nicely summarizes the highly productive form of leadership at the school with the words: "relational, transformative, process-oriented, learned, and change-directed," which also characterize her refined conceptions of this important phenomenon.

An administrative leader of the school herself, Lisa Baker provides a response to Dorothy Sisk's extensive treatment of leadership and substantially grounds that work in the everyday realities of the school. In her response chapter titled, *Emerging Leaders: Believing in Children and Building Leadership Capacity Over Time*, she employs many examples drawn from the rich variety of activities in the school, and the voices of students, alumni, and teachers, to illustrate ways in which this leadership is nonhierarchical and emergent in nature, and how it is consistent with the Roeper philosophy. One of the most interesting of these consistencies is the dispersal of leadership throughout the student body to the extent possible. Instead of seeking out and developing a few promising leaders the school attempts to develop leadership talent and inclination in all students. Moreover, this development begins in the students' early years. The school does not wait until students reach adolescence for them to think about their own leadership abilities. In Baker's view, the students feel comfortable navigating between roles as leaders, followers, and collaborators depending on topic and circumstance.

In his chapter, *Leadership at the Roeper School*, Emery Pence gives us a ground-level view of some ways in which leadership emerges and evolves in the school setting. He develops an operational definition of giftedness, guided by his rich experiences as a professional leader in that school setting, to frame the discussion of leadership. Also, as with some other chapters in this volume, he provides a synopsis of the Roeper philosophy as it comes alive in the leadership dimensions of the school.

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In wise, rather Zen-like statements Emery captures the essence of this dynamic when he says, “The Philosophy is something we not only *have* but *do*.” And “our only non-negotiable is that we have to negotiate.” In this chapter, he finds ways to drive home the important point that leadership isn’t about egocentrism. Instead, it is an emergent phenomenon that works in a bottom-up fashion to provide students with rich opportunities for self-discovery and ethical collaboration. Finally, he describes some of the attributes that are necessary for a leader to be successful at the school and discusses some challenges that lie ahead when it comes to keeping the Roeper philosophy alive in a complex 21st-century environment.

In the response piece, *Leadership at The Roeper School Through the Eyes of an Insider*, alumna Alexandra Dickinson gives us another up-close view of the unobtrusive leadership style fostered by students, teachers, administrators, and board members at the school. She details a number of ways that nuanced yet energetic conversations brought about problem resolutions and new directions for individuals and groups during her time as a student. Through the use of intriguing examples such as arguments over possession of a playground fort, dealing with the Columbine tragedy, and student representation on the Board of Trustees during the selection of a new head of school, she captures the spirit and practice of leadership at the school with the term, “leadership by conversation.” She illustrates ways in which leadership emerged from multiple players in the system as opposed to lodging itself at the apex of a reified hierarchy. In her view, the success of this approach largely resides in the ability of skillful individuals and groups to listen carefully and to structure conversations artfully. Alexandra closes with some commentary about the ways in which the lessons she learned about leadership have stayed with her in the adult “real world,” much to her benefit.

Anyone who has served as the principal of a school or the superintendent of a school district knows the feeling of angst when a group of students pushes the boundaries with a well-intentioned initiative that can be viewed as controversial. David Feldman, the current Head of the Roeper School, uses one such incident to illustrate the uniqueness of the school in his response piece, *Process and Voice*. He describes how he viewed an upper-school theatre production that included highly provocative, sensitive, and mature themes. Interestingly, the students and faculty involved did not back away from the inflammatory content but instead used it to “engage the community in important conversations.” And they didn’t stop there. Having gained the attention of the audience they asked for support and involvement with the purpose of improving the lives of deprived and desperate people. In essence, they took risks to seamlessly integrate an artistic performance with purposeful service learning. Feldman discusses the way in which these high levels of student engagement and the trust and empowerment provided by the adults involved represent impressive examples of engaged learning that are rarely found elsewhere.

In his reaction piece, *Observations on Governance at The Roeper School*, former chair of the Board of Trustees Douglas Winkworth enables us to see within the Roeper School system through yet another intriguing lens. Serving as board chair for

a school can be challenging but it's even more so when that school is saturated with a distributed, democratic, emergent leadership ethos. Fortunately, Doug's intelligence and dispositions enabled him to excel in this and in other roles throughout his affiliation with the school. Not surprisingly, Doug views the role of board chair as that of supporting and preserving a flexible, nurturing environment for the important student-centred work that goes on in the system. He captures this work with the term "guardians of the philosophy." He also articulates some indispensable characteristics of the work done by the board and several ways in which the board deliberately sacrifices organizational efficiency to sustain the all-important philosophy of the school.

Looking Forward

Our final section consists of a chapter analyzing the fit of the Roeper School with the demands of the highly complex 21st-century context, and a response chapter to this piece from an alumnus. It is fitting that the book ends with a portrayal of the school as time-transcendent. Based on these analyses, the philosophy, structure, and dynamics of the school are at least as relevant in the 21st century as they were in the mid-20th century.

In the chapter, *The Roeper School in the 21st Century: Trends, Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities*, Don Ambrose engages in a wide-ranging interdisciplinary excursion to develop a panoramic portrayal of big opportunities and enormous problems in the 21st century. He uses this portrayal as a framework highlighting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for success in the 21st century and then employs the results of that analysis to analyse how the philosophy and dynamics of the Roeper School align with 21st century demands. During this process he draws insights from repeated visits to the school along with findings from the school's strategic plan and accreditation study to develop a picture of the school's attributes. His conclusions are that this school, which was conceived within the turbulence of mid-20th century disasters and ethical problems, is at least as well suited to the demands of the even more turbulent and problem fraught 21st century. Among many other connections he shows how the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals develop through their experiences in the school will help them grapple, as individuals and as collaborative citizens, with 21st-century macroproblems such as climate change and increasing socioeconomic inequality. Macroproblems are so large and complex that they cannot be solved from within a single academic discipline or within the borders of a single nation. He also shows how graduates of the school are well positioned to capitalize on unprecedented, 21st-century macro-opportunities.

In a final reaction piece, *The Roeper School from 12 Years Out: Reflections of a 2001 Graduate*, alumnus Daniel Faichney, a law student at the time of this writing, gives us an insider's response to Don Ambrose's analysis of the 21st-century context that surrounds and influences the Roeper School. Faichney selects some key themes from the 21st-century analysis (prevalence of macroproblems; emphases on

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justice, equity and altruism; emphasis on the whole child; appreciation for cognitive diversity) and uses them as lenses for interpretation of his own experiences as a student and alumnus of the school. At one point he illustrates some ways in which a group of Roeper alumni reacted to the September 11th tragedies by relying on the acute perceptivity, creative thinking skills, and ethical sensibilities they had developed while at the Roeper School. His reflections reveal a high level of nuanced judgment to which the nation's policymakers would do well to aspire.

We hope you enjoy reading this volume as much as we enjoyed pulling it together. Consistent with the Roeper philosophy, this has been a work like no other. It has been enriched by the insights of leading scholars from the field of gifted education. But the conceptual and emotional glue that holds the project together comes from the students, alumni, faculty, administrators, and board members who contributed their perceptive responses and insights. As editors for the project, we conclude that the Roeper School truly is a luminous gemstone that can shed light on gifted education and, more broadly, on the development of a more creatively intelligent, humane society.

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PART II

THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHOOL

MICHELE KANE

CONSTANCY AND CHANGE IN PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

The Roeper Philosophy of Self Actualization and Interdependence

An alternative model of education called, “Self Actualization and Interdependence” (SAI), sees education as a global, all-encompassing process of growth.

—Annemarie Roeper

The Roeper School was co-founded by Annemarie and George Roeper in 1941 soon after fleeing Nazi Germany. This immigrant pair remained at the school and developed a progressive and innovative educational framework which they refined until their retirement in the early 1980’s. Currently, as one of the pre-eminent schools for gifted education in the United States, The Roeper School remains a sanctuary for the social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual growth of gifted children.

The heart of the work that Annemarie and George Roeper developed for over forty years resulted in a concept which they deemed a *Philosophy of Self-Actualization and Interdependence (SAI)*. Together, they distilled the essence of their educational beliefs, described as “an idealistic philosophy of life based upon self-actualization, interdependence, diversity and human rights” (Roeper, A., & Roeper, G., 1981). Within this philosophical framework, the growth of the Self of the child is paramount and there is a deep recognition of the complexity of his/her inner life with all the unconscious drives and characteristics that comprise it.

The *SAI* philosophy presents parents and educators an alternative lens through which to view the education of children. With *SAI* there emerges a different purpose and goal of education. The emphasis in *SAI* is on learning from the inside out and following the inner agenda of the Self. In doing so, the Self recognizes the interdependence that is common to all humanity and the effect that each Self has on the other. Therefore, in this nontraditional model of education, the goal is to honor the Self by providing opportunities for self-actualization and interdependence.

This educational approach is humanistic and child-centered and embodies the concept of social-emotional learning. The growth of the self is the curriculum. This curriculum that emerges emphasizes all aspects of the developing Self including social, emotional, and spiritual, as well as intellectual experiences. The school community is of equal importance in this model. Accordingly, the Self in relationship to community is also a vital educational component for the evolving

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child. Educational goals become more easily accomplished within this supportive and nurturing context.

According to the Roepers (1981), the community is the context that provides the safe harbor for the child to explore his place in the world. Relationships become critical for self-development. In community, students begin to identify with each other and exchange their ideas and feelings honestly. Children are able to relate in ways that are not superficial. In such an environment of encouragement, learning does evolve from the inside out when based on the inner agenda of each child. Emotion is not divorced from intellect. The mutual respect for Self, other individuals, and the community fosters academic growth, which is a by-product of the educational process, not the main goal.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Crisp, cool air fluttered through trees that had only just begun to lose their scarlet and orange leaves. It was a typical fall day at the Birmingham, Michigan campus of the Roeper School. Yet, October 12, 2003 was not just an ordinary school day. Hundreds of people had gathered to celebrate the eighty-fifth birthday of co-founder Annemarie Roeper.

Inside the auditorium were rows of guests, tightly packed. Students scrambled to find more chairs as latecomers arrived. Five members of the Forensic Team had assembled amidst a stage set under construction. Center stage was Annemarie Roeper, the school's co-founder and co-author of the piece that the students were about to perform. This choral presentation of the Roeper philosophy, the educational philosophy of *Self-Actualization and Interdependence* that provided the framework of the Roeper School, was a gift from the students to Annemarie.

The team, under the direction of teacher Dan Jacobs, began the piece. In unison, the students began sharing core elements of the philosophy:

“Our philosophy is a way of life...”

“To develop skills of cooperation...”

“Not a hierarchy, rather interdependence”

“Equal human rights”

“Our promise to children”

Together, in pairs and individually, the group continued to thread the key points that shape the Roeper philosophy. The performance was a demonstration of the philosophy-in-action as it unfolded. Its vital spirit was reflected in both the content conveyed as well as the process itself.

Seamlessly, each student either blended in with the others or remained silent. The phrasing only served to underscore the coming together in community as well as the rights of each person to maintain individuality. Even when a student stumbled

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over lines or rushed through a phrase, it simply showcased that all is co-mingled and enfolded into the whole. These miscues served to enrich rather than diminish the piece. The teacher stood in the wings and was clearly visible, supportive, and available—but not intrusive. This performance highlighted one of the key tenets of Annemarie and George Roeper’s general mindset that “a philosophy is only as valid as its implementation” (Roeper, 1990, p. 19). This performance was a clear indication that their educational philosophy was valid in theory and in practice.

DEVELOPING AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL MODEL

Annemarie has further outlined the Roepers’ beliefs in *Educating Children for Life: The Modern Learning Community*. The book was published in 1990, after their retirement from Roeper School, and illustrates how the approach is a departure from traditional education. In the forward of the book, Annemarie states that only after retirement were she and George able to see their philosophy as one of uniqueness rather than universality. She then articulates the philosophy on behalf of the couple with the intention of moving their philosophy beyond the school walls and into the general educational community. Although George influenced the writings tremendously, it was Annemarie that translated the ideas into the written word. Many of the extant publications regarding the Roeper philosophy were compiled by Annemarie; yet, it is essential to understand that these writings typically reflect the combined ideas of the pair.

This vision of education is nestled in the arms of Max and Gertrud Bondy, Annemarie’s parents. They were both progressive educators and founded several schools in Germany. From Max, her father, she came to know the importance of community; from Gertrude, her mother and a Freudian psychoanalyst, she learned the importance of the inner world. George was student at her parents’ school and was similarly imbued with these ideas. In this milieu, the Roeper philosophy of George and Annemarie emerged.

Drawing on a strong foundation, the Ropers were able to create, change, hone, and implement this philosophy both as educators and administrators. Annemarie and George were active participants and practiced their theoretical beliefs just as they had been modeled for them. In *Educating Children for Life: The Modern Learning Community*, Annemarie begins by sharing the dilemma of modern education:

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. Education is the vehicle through which we try to keep these promises. (p. 3)

The remainder of *Educating Children for Life: The Modern Learning Community* examines what is described as the three components of education; namely, the goals and philosophy of education, the characteristics of the students and finally, from the