

# Children State Their Educational Philosophy

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ELSIE W. ADAMS

Over a period of time the teachers and principals in the Denver elementary schools have worked, as faculties and in committees, to formulate a philosophy for the elementary school. In many cases parents have been brought into the picture. One principal of three elementary schools felt that the children, who would ultimately reap the reward of a working philosophy, should express their ideas as to what makes a good school—what might make it better. Elsie W. Adams, supervising teacher in the Department of Instruction, Denver, tells of the way children were encouraged to formulate their "philosophy," and shows us how these five- to twelve-year-olds unerringly recognize the goals which some of us, as teachers, have perceived only dimly.

I would tell teachers to explain things well.

They should let you do things for yourself.

There should be an art period every day.

There should be interesting things to play and work with.

These are statements from five- to twelve-year-olds which reflect what children expect from their schools. They came from children in three schools as a result of efforts to determine children's "philosophy of education."

## We Went to the Children

In our efforts to discover the "philosophy" of children in relation to their attitudes toward school, the methods used were simple and direct. So that there would be no feeling of striving to say those things which the teacher might expect of them, classroom teachers were not present during discussions with chil-

dren. An atmosphere of freedom and confidence was built up with each group as it was explained that in planning better schools we, of course, want to have the ideas of the children since they are the ones for whom the schools are planned. The questions asked were direct and short: "What makes this a good school?" "How would you plan a good school for girls and boys?" and, in some instances, "What do you expect the school to do for you?"

In two schools children in each room discussed the questions. At the third a longer discussion period was spent with committees—one committee composed of three representatives from each of the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade rooms; and the other committee of representatives from the first, second, and third grades. In talking to the upper grade committee, "Why?" was the question asked as children suggested that factors such as discipline, cooperative parents, and a nice-looking building were necessary for a good school. Certainly this procedure seemed effective as chil-

dren, in explaining their points of view, revealed attitudes based upon genuine thought and judgment.

### **They Know What They Want**

In informal talks with children every effort was made to show no evidence of approval, disapproval, or surprise when the answers bubbled out. Suggestions were recorded exactly as given. Many children in each room would repeat in their own words ideas and suggestions already given, but unless there was some difference in meaning or intent, only the original statement is quoted. Surprisingly few replies, it seemed, were colored by traditional home attitudes in relation to skills in spelling, arithmetic, and reading. Children speak in broad terms. They reveal that school is a way of living for them. They want it to be a place where they do more than "learn." They plead in their own words for "education for the whole child."

These contributions of the children are significant insofar as certain very definite attitudes and desires are revealed through them. When children from first grade to sixth express over and over again the same ideas, surely those ideas should be considered in planning and evaluating the kind of education we are giving to these children. The basic needs and desires which they reveal should point the way in formulating a philosophy of education for the elementary school.

A working philosophy must always be judged in terms of the way it meets the needs of those concerned. Many of their needs are not discerned by children. These must be considered by those who are planning their educa-

tion. Too often, however, valid needs and desires which children *do* express are overlooked.

### **This They Told Us**

The following psychological needs are clearly shown through the simple, often naive statements, quoted verbatim, which are made over and over again by children:

*Need for understanding, affection, self-respect.* The teachers should be nice. They should not be cross when they don't have to be. I would tell teachers to explain things well. They shouldn't get cross when you don't understand. They should let you do things for yourself. They should give you responsibility. The teacher should be interested in every child.

*Need for security.* A school should have rules to help children. The teacher should make the children mind. The teacher should really teach you. I'd make the children be good. The Safety Patrol and Color Guard help us. You develop responsibility when you have a job to do for your school. The way the children act makes a good school.

*Need for recognition of physical growth and development.* I'd have a bigger playground with more swings and slides. There should be a gymnasium. There should be more play periods. I'd let children use the gym after school. Play in the gym rests children after they have been working hard.

*Desire for varied types of activity for the whole child.* There should be an auditorium where we could give

plays. I'd have more picture shows. I'd take the children on excursions. There should be an art period every day. Our teacher lets us have free work periods and she talks and jokes with us. I'm glad we have music and sing together. We have social studies and get to make nice things.

*Need for satisfaction in the desire for learning.* I'd have lots of books for the children to read. The teachers should bring things to show the children. I would have clay and art things and a work bench. I would have a school library. There should be pictures for the children to look at. There should be good things to play with and to work with. I would plan interesting work for the children to do.

*Need for participation in the group.* The children cooperate. We try to make friends with new children. The boys and girls are nice. School should help us to be good sports. The teacher and the children should have meetings to talk things over. We have fun together. Children should learn to work and play together.

*Desire for proficiency in meeting situations demanding academic learning.* You feel better when you know you have done your work well. I think the school should teach me the things I need to get a good job. I like the way the school teaches us to handle the problems we need to know about when we get older. Hard work makes you learn more and know things. The children should read a lot of books, and write, and do work. We have arithmetic and I like it.

*Desire for order and beauty in surroundings.* The building should be neat and clean. The children should help to keep it nice. The teachers should put decorations up in the rooms. There should be grass and trees and flowers growing around the school. The children should make pictures to decorate the room.

#### **Their Requests Can Be Filled**

This "philosophy" of the children comes close to the best in modern educational philosophy. The ideas are there. School should be "a place for doing"—for "learning what we live." The children have given their suggestions. Many of them can be put into practice tomorrow morning in classrooms.

Teachers can try to be *nice* teachers: to like and understand each individual child; to explain things carefully; to be patient when the explanation fails to go over; to take time out now and then for a talk and a little joke; to be both reasonable and consistent in the demands made upon children. Teachers can vary the day's program and work definitely to make it more interesting. They can plan the unusual experience which will highlight regular routine—such little things mean so much to children. The schoolroom can be made a happy place with pictures and growing things; and the children can help to keep it orderly and attractive. They are eager for a share in this responsibility. They are eager, also, to learn, to respond, to grow.

This, then, is the challenge underlying the philosophy so simply stated by the children. It is a philosophy which can be put to work.

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