



RED FOX
COMMUNITY SCHOOL

UNDERSTANDING THE
RED FOX COMMUNITY SCHOOL
EDUCATION

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What comprises a Red Fox Community School education?

A Red Fox Community School education supports students and their learning by focusing on developing and responding to each child holistically. Learning is an interactive process that places value on exploring, discovery, and intrinsic motivation. Children engage their imagination, creativity, and awareness of their surroundings and past experiences to help them understand concepts and practice skills. Our teachers work to build relationships, critical thinking skills in ways that support students as they navigate and shape their own learning.

What follows provides a more detailed look into our educational philosophy and the key components that make a Red Fox Community School education a lifelong gift.

Philosophy

Progressive Education at the Foundation

At the heart of who we are as Red Fox community School is progressivism. Central tenets of our pedagogy include:

- An emphasis on experiential education
- A notion that schooling serves to create a more just society
- An understanding that the way in which we learn is more important than what we learn; a strong emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking
- Curriculum that is developmentally appropriate
- An understanding that learning is primarily integrated (and we enact this through our social studies and science units)
- The belief that learning is a social act
- The recognition that children are not empty vessels to be filled but are active builders of knowledge.

A Brief History of the Roots of Progressive Education

Near the end of the 19th century, a series of reform movements known collectively as "Progressivism" gained momentum and soon made an impact on politics, culture, journalism, social services, and education in the United States. It arose in reaction to the problems created by the dramatic increase in urbanization and industrialization that characterized the second half of the 1800s.

Although Progressivism was never an organized and unified movement, it found expression through many separate societies (such as labor unions and women's suffrage groups) and many individual reformers (such as Jacob Riis, Sinclair Lewis, and Jane Addams). In the decades in which Progressivism was at its height, changes were made in the workplace; journalists took up issues such as anti-immigrant bias and urban poverty; women won the right to vote; political corruption, business monopolies, and corporate power were challenged as being antithetical to the public good, and class distinctions were seen as having no place in a true democracy.

One of the concerns of Progressivism was the quality of the life of the child. Its adherents made efforts to improve health care and nutrition, build playgrounds and recreation centers, place humane limits on the hours and conditions of child labor, make education freely available to every child, and fundamentally alter the nature of schools and schooling.

One of the strong voices in the element of Progressivism was that of John Dewey, who was influential in changing the focus of education from the school to the student. He believed that an authoritarian, formal, stultifying school environment was an inadequate preparation for life in a vibrant democracy. He understood that children were naturally playful and curious, and held that it was through these qualities that the most meaningful learning could take place. At the famous University of Chicago Laboratory School, he and others developed curricula and methodologies that focused on activities and projects, discovery, investigation, and real-world experiences. Dewey declared that education was not a preparation for life, but a part of life itself. He believed that adult guidance and control was essential to a well-run classroom but did not need to become oppressive and inflexible. Dewey also had an enormous influence on teacher training, primarily by establishing teaching methodology as a science and ensuring that it was as important as mastery of any subject area on the path to teacher certification.

Educating the Whole Child

Considering the whole child is a key component to the mission of Red Fox Community School. There are different dimensions of a child that need to be addressed in their education. These include cognitive, physical, artistic, social and emotional, and spiritual. Programs for children take into account all of these and seek to integrate them into all that is offered. Each of these dimensions are honored and consciously taught. Intelligence is a dynamic process and is multidimensional. All children have special gifts. It is the responsibility of those involved with children to nurture the whole child and facilitate the development of both the strengths and the challenges of each child.

Children are naturally curious and bring with them to the school their desire to learn and to be involved. They have a close relationship with and appreciation for nature and an innate sense of interconnectedness. It is the adult's responsibility to support these qualities.

Growth Mindset

At Red Fox Community School, we have the power and responsibility to create supportive learning environments for our students. Three elements that make the environment supportive are trust, understanding, and experience. Trust allows us to create growth-enhancing relationships with our students. With trust, we show our students that we believe in them. Understanding allows us to know our students as learners, their strengths and vulnerabilities, and enables us to help them develop their own practice of learning. With understanding, we help our students believe in themselves. Experience allows the learners to enhance their knowledge by having a chance to practice and refine it. With experience, we allow our students to believe in themselves as learners.

Every child has the capacity to learn and grow. Mistakes and misunderstandings are part of the process. Struggling with new concepts, or overcoming an inherited learning or social issue, is part of the lifelong learning process. When students accept that they may make mistakes or challenge themselves to excel in an area that is not natural to them, they learn persistence and become more creative problem-solvers. Most importantly, they learn to take responsibility for their own learning and, thus, become engaged in the process of becoming the person they want to be.

Scholarship

We live in a world with more information than is possible for one to absorb. In order to survive in this ever-expanding world of information, scholarship is important. Children learn how to question, how to see and how to evaluate. Our learning environment provides a balance of subject depth and breadth, and academic process and content to help the learner become a perceptive, critical, and eclectic thinker who looks beyond the superficial. We want children to be confident in their abilities, curious about the world, inspired by the arts, willing and able to solve problems, fluent readers, spontaneous and literate writers, sound mathematicians, and scientific thinkers who are able to apply their knowledge.

Experiential Education

A child should be actively involved in their learning. Our experience tells us that understanding and retention of knowledge are based on involvement with a subject that has meaning to the student. The more opportunity the child has to discover, manipulate, teach, and experience the subject, the more learning will occur. Therefore, the learning environment at Red Fox Community School is set up to invite a child to become involved, and it should support the child's pursuits of their interests and creativity. An important goal of Red Fox Community School is to nurture the learning process and the development of children who love to learn and who become lifelong learners.

Child Centered Education

At Red Fox Community School special care is given to having a curriculum that keeps each child engaged and motivated while learning academic concepts and skills. Teachers work to create a curriculum with the student that best meets that child's needs and pushes them to grow. Understanding the interests of the learner allows the child to truly explore her/his own special interests and supports the building of a larger self-identity. It helps the child find their way in developing personal gifts and talents that they will later contribute to society and the larger community, and which will also bring satisfaction to their life. It supports our goal to have children who love to learn, who are self-motivated, creative, and capable.

Community

At Red Fox Community School we are first and foremost a community. Wendell Berry said of community, "A community is the mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is

shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other's lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other, their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves." This is essential to us.

In order for a child to become a healthy and contributing member of society as an adult, it is important for a child to bond to the significant adults and institutions in their life. Building a strong sense of community in the school environment helps a child to bond and find a sense of belonging. The child learns to cooperate and make positive contributions within the community. They also learn to work through challenges with the support of others. From these experiences the child takes into adulthood a sense of belonging, care, and hope for the future.

Community in the school begins in the classroom. It then expands to other classrooms and children in the school. Children learn that their school is part of a larger community. Through projects they learn how to contribute to these larger communities. The sense of community gradually expands to include not only other cultures in the world but also the plants and animals that inhabit it.

Parents and teachers are an important part of the school community. It is crucial for children to see their parents involved in the classroom as well as the larger school community. Children learn to expand their sense of the school community to include families and learn from their parents to value their school experience. We ask that families consider ways that they can be directly involved in our school community.

Eco-Literacy and Interconnectedness

At the heart of who we are is a focus on giving children at least one hour every day to be immersed in the natural world. We are concerned with giving children a strong connection to nature so that they can learn to fall in love with the world. We teach children how to live outdoors through our Outdoor Living Skills (OLS) curriculum where children learn how to build fires, use a map and compass, identify wild edibles, build shelters and use basic tools. Children learn that everything is connected to everything else. They learn how to recognize open and closed systems and think about the implications of both. Children learn to understand the importance of diversity in nature and to appreciate that an ecosystem's health is dependent on the many relationships that interact in that system. When one aspect of the system is out of balance, the whole ecosystem suffers. By contrast, when all of the

intricate relationships are honored and in balance, the ecosystem thrives. Appreciating the importance and role of diversity in nature is important.

Children have educational experiences that help them to feel the wonder of the natural world and help them to connect to it. These experiences include social issues and problems, as well as environmental ones. They learn to develop a sense of hope for their future and the future of the world.

As a school, we are constantly striving to connect our students with the natural world. We start the school year with Mountain Day, which is the second Friday of the school year, when the entire school hikes one of our local mountains. Our students spend 1.5 hours a day in outdoor play. Our faculty hold classes outdoors when pertinent and weather permitting. Fridays are spent on field trips to local places which often include long stretches of time in the woods and on farms. At our school we believe support children exploring, discovering, and learning in their local environment..

Diversity

We are a community that is welcoming and inclusive to all different kinds of people. We strive to help children understand the differences in each other and to appreciate how those differences enrich our community. We recognize many aspects of diversity in the classroom: race, culture, economics, religion, learning styles, looks, skills, families, interests, and preference in books or music, to name a few. We want children to learn respect and honor for differences and to understand that the diversity in our community enriches each of us and makes our community a healthier place.

Child Development

Child development is at the forefront of what we do. Our curriculum meets children at their developmental stage so that children can meet their greatest potential as learners and feel an immense connection to their learning. Jean Piaget constructed 4 stages of child development which helps guide us in determining what is and is not developmentally appropriate. At Red Fox Community School our students are developmentally in Piaget's second and third stages of development - preoperational stage (ages 2-7 years) and the concrete operational stage (ages 7-11 years).

During the preoperational stage, children continue to develop abstract mental processes. This means they can think about things beyond the physical world. They also imagine and think symbolically, and they begin to display this ability through their language and behavior. Imaginary play, imitation, drawing pictures, and talking about the past are examples of this stage.

Piaget theorized that in the concrete operational stage children further developed and moved toward mastery with their abstract thought while also becoming less egocentric. They are able to understand that events do not always relate to them and others can have different points of view. They are able to apply logical and concrete rules to situations, but cannot not yet do the same thing for abstract concepts. Students understand that some objects can change but essentially remain the same, while others change but are not able to return to their original state. They enjoy classifying objects into groups and subgroups, important skills for understanding math and science concepts..

All the aspects of a Red Fox Community School educate work together create opportunities for self-discovery, reflection, sharing, collaboration, and fun. We strive to prepare our students to be world citizens who leave our school knowing who they are as learners, and understand that learning is a lifelong practice.