

A STATEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY^{1, 2}
Christopher Dock Mennonite High School
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We believe that God's unconditional love is a major theme of the Christian faith story.³ To manifest this love and restore a fallen creation, God became human⁴, entering the world as an infant.⁵ As an adult, Jesus rejected temporal power⁶ and chose instead a life of servant leadership.⁷ He defied social barriers and labels of discrimination by eating with outcasts⁸ and embracing sinners.⁹ He radically changed the status of children by presenting them as "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" and encouraging adults to learn from them.¹⁰ In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus demonstrated the redemptive, transforming power of love."¹¹

We believe that the Church is a voluntary alternative community of believers who have responded in repentance and faith to God's love.¹² We seek to be faithful followers of Jesus¹³ in all aspects of life.¹⁴ We are called to live together in mutual love and respect, cherishing the worth of each individual.¹⁵ Children are "safe in the care of God," to be lovingly and non-coercively nurtured and made ready by the faith community for a personal, voluntary commitment to Jesus and the Church.¹⁶ We believe that the Church has a responsibility to teach believers¹⁷ what it means to follow Jesus.

Mennonite schools have been established to fill a servant role by assisting congregations and families in this ministry.¹⁸ Effective discipleship requires strong communities of learning in which the faith is embodied and fulfilled through the ways our children and young people are educated.

Educators in Mennonite schools use life experiences and sound educational principles, old and new that is in harmony with Scriptures. These principles establish that humans are born with a need to make sense of the world and to communicate with others. All of life is a classroom; persons learn in and out of school and throughout their lives. The uniquely human abilities to acquire a language¹⁹ to pose and solve problems, to imagine and create, are God-given gifts.²⁰ Before starting school, children have already accomplished enormously complex tasks such as motor, social, and language skills.²¹ Young children's accomplishments reveal that learning is natural, social, constructive, purposeful, experimental, creative, and playful.²² All learning and human performance are, in varying degrees, physical, mental, social and spiritual. Separation of mind from heart or from body - dividing "intellectual" from "non-intellectual" - is false and misleading.²³ All talents and knowledge required for living purposefully as God's people are to be valued equally.

The classroom is a community of learners whose varied gifts and needs are best nurtured through active participation and collaboration. Each teacher and student's prior knowledge, experience, and interests become resources available to the whole group. Overemphasis on competition and comparison of persons should be avoided.²⁴ Participatory learning, peer tutoring, and cooperative group activities²⁵ provide

opportunities for students to learn from each other as well as from the teacher and to learn the value of differences. Students and teachers alike benefit from use of the storytelling and questioning methods of Jesus, the Master Teacher. In an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, learners explore problems and questions,²⁶ selecting from a wide range of resources,²⁷ learn new concepts and skills, and are permitted to take risks, to try new ideas, and to make mistakes. Students are thus prepared for life and service in an information age which requires competence in using available resources in team problem-solving and decision-making with women and men of differing backgrounds, experiences, and skills.

In our society, an emphasis on facts and reasons may lead to an arrogant view of the world as an object to be manipulated, disrespect for life, an abuse of power, and misapplication of knowledge. In Mennonite schools, faith and learning are inseparable.²⁸ In these settings, learners accumulate and use information, facts, and theories to reason, pose and explore problems. This leads to reflection on how knowledge fits God's purposes for the world, along with the need for personal transformation in order to accomplish God's purposes. The motivation to learn and the ultimate goal of education are found in Jesus who offered himself and his life to those who wished to know the Truth. Education is thus far more than just preparation for job skills that satisfy the needs of production, consumption, and technology.²⁹ When faith and learning are unified, persons are called to an ethic of care and love whereby they seek truth, find their identity in God's story of humanity, develop interest in maintaining God's creation, and grow in love of God and each other.

Educators are expected to affirm God's unconditional love which transforms the knowledge they teach, the methods they use to teach, and their relationships with the students they teach. They model discipleship, speak confidently yet humbly about their faith, and value each student's spiritual journey. Finally, they promote responsible discipleship, peacemaking, and service in a global society.

Mennonite schools are privileged to be in a supportive relationship with families, congregations, and conferences. This relationship is essential to the life of the school and will be strengthened as individuals from these various settings dialogue together in an ongoing search for a harmonious integration of faith, learning, and life.