

THE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF
ROBERT FROST

by

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REPORT

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As a poet, Robert Frost is highly acclaimed by the American people. Yet, they should also praise this man for his innovative contributions as an educator. Though writing poetry was his first love and true vocation, out of the necessity to make a living he took up teaching. Early in his dual careers, he found no conflict between writing poetry and instructing. Indeed, while on the staff of Pinkerton Academy, Frost felt writing and teaching complimented each other. Frost's success in teaching gave him a confidence he had not yet received in writing.¹

From the time he had begun to gain confidence through his teaching at Pinkerton, he had been writing more and more poetry. To his surprise, he found that the harder he worked the greater the stimulus to his writing.²

By 1916, as a renowned poet, Frost had a more contradictory view of attempts at combining the professions.

I'm a good teacher, but it doesn't allow me time to write. I must either teach or write. I can't do both together. But I have to live. . . .³

¹Lawrance Thompson, Robert Frost: The Early Years 1894-1915 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 366.

²Ibid., p. 355.

³Lawrance Thompson, Robert Frost: The Years of Triumph 1915-1938 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 67.

Few critics would conclude that Frost's poetry suffered because of his efforts in the classroom, but seldom do they credit him with being one of the revolutionaries in education. Yet in the several teaching positions he held, he always demonstrated a creative technique which was a change from the stilted practices of that time. Because of this free-thinking instructor, and others like him, classrooms today are more relaxed, natural, and are moving into openness.

Frost was frequently at odds with the educational system of his time. In the poem, "What Fifty Said," he described the rigid education he received:

When I was young my teachers were old.
I gave up fire for form till I was cold.
I suffered like a metal being cast.
I went to school to age to learn the past.

In this "form" there was no room for individual ideas of development, just regimentation and conformity. The American classroom has become more informal now, although schools are still bound by schedules, lesson plans, and busy work. Frost is still an inspiration with his criticism on these matters when he said:

Too much of the system is taken up with busy work, work prescribed because so many hours must be filled according to schedule and not because either teacher or student is having fun in the work.⁴

He realized that a stiff environment was not conducive to any creative emotions on the student's part. A student might not

⁴Mildred R. Lawson, "'No False Curves': Robert Frost on Education," School and Society, LXXII (Sept. 16, 1950), p. 177.