

## Remarks for the evening on International Education at Ermitage

By

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Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, and many thanks for joining us for this discussion about opportunities for international education at Ermitage. My name is Chris Hunter, and I am the Head of School. It is my pleasure to open this evening with a few remarks, which I have prepared principally with the students in mind. I have chosen as my theme the quote from the Emily Dickinson poem, which we have incorporated into our Mission Statement: 'Dwell in Possibility'.

As educators, we are always wondering for which future we are preparing our students, from being young national and global citizens, to being able to find their place in a constantly changing world. I wish we had some kind of apparatus, or vision goggles, that could help us a bit: no 3-D glasses here. Just hope, courage and the audacity to believe in possibilities.

With technology snapping at our heels like a mad dog that won't let go, it seems that as soon as we have incorporated one manner of communicating, another appears and quickly tests our abilities to integrate it into our daily routines. So it is for working in the classroom and preparing our students for tomorrow. The child sitting in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade classroom will join the workforce probably in 2020. What will the world look like?

From university presidents, such as Dr. Mary Coleman, of the University of Michigan, to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, people are wondering how best to prepare students for tomorrow's challenges (*see Notes, 1 and 2*). Some answers seem to come back again and again: the importance of being able to communicate effectively, to argue intelligently and cogently, to be able to understand others in a very diverse social environment and to be creative and innovative.

The words of the great English poet, John Donne, continue to resonate today: ‘no man is an island’. We live in a world that is ever more interconnected and interdependent. To be a global citizen, one must be knowledgeable and aware, compassionate and responsible, and so able to act, both for oneself and for others. Just as our students will be acting in a global environment, this same global environment will be acting on them.

More than ever, it is essential that we dwell in possibility and discovery, that we be prepared to reach out to the world at large, to embrace differences and diversity, that we be equipped with intercultural skills and the open-mindedness that allows us to step beyond borders in a peaceful and mutually constructive way.

Young people today, along with their parents, can imagine a world of study that is much larger than that of the past. Great efforts have been made to allow students to travel from one educational system to another, to learn in very different environments, to mix with students from many different countries and intellectual backgrounds.

Young students need to be aware that they can ask these questions and look for different learning opportunities. They are the generation that must take itself in hand; the world is changing so quickly, that they are ideally suited to it. They are already accustomed to communicating in a great number of ways, of integrating different technologies into one platform, of fashioning their identity to suit their needs. From Facebook to Twitter, from the Blackberries they hold to the Notebook computers, this is their world.

Nonetheless, many of the questions asked to students in the past are asked today: what do you like to learn? What makes you excited about learning? And more than ever, young people will be asked to have a broad toolbox, that includes a variety of intellectual, social, technological, linguistic and emotional skills. Where can they get the tools that they will need?

And they will need to experience learning in a broad range of environments. Sitting passively in a classroom while the teacher presents the subject material will not be enough. They need to be challenged in diverse ways, from conducting the class themselves after thorough preparation to being comfortable and effective in group work.

Ermitage is as yet the only Round Square school in France. And since we became members in 2005, I can say that I have seen the change: students benefit from the spirit of Round Square and from the great number of opportunities that Ermitage, as a Global Member, provides (*see Note 3*).

With the introduction of the International Option of the French Baccalaureate in 2001 and then, most recently, of the Diploma Program of the International Baccalaureate in 2009, Ermitage offers its students unparalleled opportunities to learn in a bilingual environment with teachers from around the world. We are working to incorporate the IB Learner Profile into our daily classroom work. We want all of our students, no matter the curriculum, to be active and dynamic learners (*see Note 4*).

Through these programs, we believe that we can provide wonderful avenues of discovery and development that will lead students to discover their own possibilities.

And while it's a very big and daunting world out there, and I might add, often also in the classroom setting here at school, we need to help our students find the answers to their big questions: where can I imagine going to university? In which language or languages will I study? In which field will I concentrate? How will I know what I want to do?

We are proud of the offer we can give our students. At Ermitage, a student can choose to study bilingually and to prepare one of three diploma programs, the French Baccalaureate, the International Option of the French Baccalaureate or the Diploma Program of the International Baccalaureate.

As students progress from one year to the next, from the 4<sup>ème</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade through to their senior year, their priorities will clearly change. Some years will be focused on academic obligations and exams, others will give them the time to experience learning more broadly and to reflect on themselves and the world around them.

The years from the 4<sup>ème</sup> and to the 1<sup>ère</sup> are key for developing foreign languages and social skills, for taking part in exchanges and conferences, for building a strong foundation. Once students arrive in the last two years of their secondary education, the pressure builds, the

focus narrows, the deadlines begin to loom and they, along with their parents, will need to make decisions.

But these also remain wonderful years for experiencing the world at large, for testing oneself, for trying different waters in order to discover ones strengths and weaknesses, to build one's sense of the world, before entering university.

At Ermitage, we hope that we can help and encourage our students to reach out for these exciting and important opportunities, to grow in the face of the challenges and difficulties they will encounter, to make the right choices, the choices that are right for them...

And in this way, to say: "Yes, I can dwell in possibilities."

Thank you.

### Notes

1. According to Dr. Mary COLEMAN, President of the University of Michigan:

- « We believe we do our best for our students when we give them the tools to be analytical, to be able to gather information and to determine the validity of that information themselves, particularly in this world where people don't filter for you anymore.
- We want to teach our students how to make an argument, how to defend an argument, to make a choice. »\*

.\* New York Times, 2 January 2010

2. The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently polled employers to learn what it was they wanted in young graduates:

- 89 % want young people who have « the ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing »;
- 81 % want graduates who have « better critical thinking and analytical skills » and

•- 70 % are looking for people who have «the ability to innovate and to be creative. »

•\* New York Times, 2 January 2010

### 3. ROUND SQUARE, *IDEALS*:

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### 4. The International Baccalaureate with its Learner Profile

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• Knowledgeable

• Thinkers

• Communicators

• Principled

• Open-minded

• Caring

• Risk takers

• Balanced

• Reflective

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