

Process in Transition

*I have an empty hollowness
within my inner self
that no amount of food can fill*

*An airspace
vaporous, soft, substanceless
a container with no filling
no core
no inner framework*

*A body without a skeleton
airfilled coreless
full of space full of nothing
 waiting
 waiting
 waiting quietly exhausted
emptied but not vacant*

*Strange place, this
Strange sensation
Strange in its unfamiliarity,
its newness filled with
unsubstance*

*I am filled with an un-substance
My mind is quiet
I breathe through my slightly
opened mouth, throat tense,
jaws slack, my tongue
resting in the back of my mouth
between top and bottom molars.*

Carolyn Read

Gifted Adults:

Their Characteristics and Emotions

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ABSTRACT: *Giftedness can be both a positive and a negative force in an individual's life, but the positive aspects are rarely described. In this article, the unique characteristics and emotions of the gifted are discussed, along with their positive and negative consequences. The characteristics of gifted adults often appear in childhood and shape their life experiences. While the environment has an important impact on the development of gifted individuals, these individuals also have a powerful impact on the environment.*

*Because I had found it hard to attend
To anything less interesting than my
Thoughts, I was difficult to teach.*

— Yeats—

Giftedness is a state of being—a process that makes an impact wherever it occurs. What would this world be like without our gifted adults? We cannot, of course, imagine it. Yet, the gifted are not well understood, and, at times, are not recognized or highly regarded.

The gifted have their own sense of purpose from which they derive great satisfaction whenever they have the opportunity to concentrate on it. I have spent much of my life in the company of gifted adults and their children. I've experienced and shared their emotions, actions and reactions, and have observed how they are received by others. I have seen many of the same characteristics in gifted adults that are found in gifted children. Adult

giftedness, however, has not been studied to the same extent, and, therefore, the gifted adult is more likely than the child to be alone in understanding his or her giftedness and in coping with the negative and positive consequences of it. This article is based on my life's work with the gifted, rather than on empirical research. I hope it will shed some light on the phenomenon of adult giftedness and that it will enhance self-understanding in gifted adults.

Before the gifted child movement gained momentum, the gifted were perceived as the most advantaged people, those who needed no help because life contained no problems for them. It has become clear through the study of gifted children that giftedness creates a complex vision of life that brings with it a variety of reactions—both painful and joyful. There has been a tendency, partially as a reaction to the original perceptions, to look mostly at the negative aspects of giftedness. In this article, I will attempt to show not only the difficulties but also the inner exhilaration and the joy of discovery which giftedness brings. Giftedness in itself is neither a positive nor a negative factor in a person's life. It is merely a different perspective, a different way of looking at life, which can lead to the extremes of joy as well as pain.

The Impact of the Gifted on the Environment

Gifted adults are found everywhere in the world. They come from all races, ethnic backgrounds and religions, as well as different social classes and economic circumstances. They are the inventors, the creators, the scientists. They study the past, the present and the future. They probe the universe and the depths of the ocean. They are attracted to everything micro and macro. They give us art and music, literature, dance, and drama. They give us change, variety and progress. They help us interpret ourselves and the world.

The greatest impact is actually made by the vast majority of the gifted whose light does not shine on the universe, but, instead, penetrates our daily lives. These are the gifted teachers, the gifted parents, the gifted cooks, the gifted drivers of buses and writers of letters. They are the quietly gifted—the privately gifted. Most often they're not aware of their giftedness. But the same characteristics are found in the privately gifted as in those whose contributions are more well known.

The far reaching impact of the gifted can be either life-enhancing or life-threatening. The heart implant and the atom bomb are the result of the work of gifted people. The expansion of life and the possibility of mass destruction both require advanced knowledge and can be credited to gifted scientists. Where would we be today without Darwin or Freud or Beethoven or Shakespeare or Eleanor Roosevelt? Where also would we be if there had not been Hitler, for he, too, was a gifted person who had the capacity to create enormous evil. The gifted give us the best and the worst in our lives.

The Impact of the Environment on the Gifted

What is the impact of being gifted on the individuals themselves? Does being gifted add an additional burden or does it help lift the burden of life? It does both to the extreme.

Giftedness is a burden when it has no channel for expression and it is not understood. For example, a woman I know who is mathematically and creatively gifted grew up in one of the Moslem countries where women lead very restricted lives. She felt keenly those restrictions, not only as most women would, but as unbearable pain. Not only was the human being imprisoned, but also her giftedness. Her creativity needed an outlet, her mind needed to work, her understanding needed to expand. She felt choked. In her father's eyes, she did not exist. Even though she was his eldest child, he always called her younger brother his "oldest." When she came to America, she felt that for her the doors of a prison had been opened. She gained recognition for her abilities, and understanding and support for her desire to grow and learn. All of a sudden her undefined discomfort changed into delight and a sense of adventure.

Not all experiences of gifted adults are so extreme, but many see their own situations as similarly restrictive. There are gifted children whose parents do not understand them; there are students who attend schools which have developed a structure which feels like stricture to them. Adults whose employment situations allow for no opportunity for personal expression experience the same restrictions. In all these situations, the person's giftedness becomes a burden to them. This is also true in cases where people do not understand their own giftedness and misinterpret their own pressure to create and express themselves. They view their discomfort as a failing on their part. They often feel like outsiders on this earth.

Another source of constriction for the gifted arises when there is a communication gap between them and others. Many gifted individuals have no opportunity to affect the life and history of the world because circumstances in their lives close the channels of communication. A communication gap can lead to withering of the development of the gifted person. One of the best examples of this is the story of the Elephant Man who had an illness that made him look disgusting to other people. He was mistreated and exhibited as a freak until someone found out that he was a most gifted, highly educated and creative person. Even then, housed in a distorted body, his extraordinary abilities could not fulfill their promise.

Unsupportive environments can lead to depression, to the suppression of one's abilities, even to feelings of desperation that could become self-destructive. I also believe that when the flow of individual expression is not restricted, but well received and supported, gifted adults are capable of enormous enjoyment and happiness because of their special sensitivity, depth, achievement, and discoveries.

Characteristics of the Gifted

Some time ago I wrote an article in which I listed characteristics of young gifted children (Roeper, 1988). In looking at this article I find, not surprisingly, great correlations between the personality traits of gifted children and adults. I believe the same characteristics exist throughout life, changing somewhat as the person matures. The qualities and experiences described below are fairly typical of gifted adults:

- *Gifted adults differ intellectually from others.* They are more sophisticated, more global thinkers. In addition, they have the capacity to generalize. They see the complex relationships—the patterns—in the world surrounding them. They can grasp difficult concepts and phenomena. Their imagination and creativity are often incomprehensible to the average person.

- *Gifted adults retain childlike emotions.* Throughout their lives, the gifted are often so successful in the pursuit of their goals that they may have managed to skip some of the earlier developmental phases in which young children are confronted with the limitations reality places on them. For example, the average toddler may tumble down the stairs a few times before he learns to manage them. The gifted one will not attempt them until she has figured out how to keep from falling. Therefore, at times the gifted maintain a certain feeling of omnipotence because this feeling has not been challenged as much by limiting experiences in their early development.

A few gifted adults retain a type of childlike behavior that interferes with their relations with others. I have known several brilliant, innovative people who created new directions and ideas for the institutions in which they worked. But their self-centeredness and infantile approach made it very difficult for others to work with them. Mozart is one of the best examples of the combination of genius and "childlikeness."

The ability to retain a childlike delight in discoveries and in life in general, however, can be a source of energy. Many gifted people possess the capacity to bring their giftedness to bear on their particular life circumstances to make a basic difference. At the same time, they make their situations more bearable by their ability for childlike pleasure. My uncle, Dr. Curt Bondy, a noted psychologist and prison reformer in pre-Nazi Germany, illustrates this point. He had a wonderful childlike sense of humor. He loved his car as a child loves a toy. He kept a diary in the name of the car, writing in such terms as, "Today I feel well fed, I drank 30 gallons of gasoline, but I didn't like driving in circles on the ice of the pond." Circling the pond was one of my uncle's favorite fun exercises. His enjoyment of his car was delightful to watch.

My uncle introduced "prisons without walls" in Germany in the early 30's when this was unheard of in the rest of the world. After Hitler came to

power, he founded a school for adolescent Jews to learn agriculture in order to prepare them for a new life and emigration. He recognized that the greatest need for these youth was the acquisition of practical skills which they could use abroad. Many of these young people later emigrated to America and Israel and became successful farmers. As far as I know, this was the only attempt to instruct and prepare young German Jews in a field that facilitated emigration in practical and caring terms.

Along with some of his adolescent students, my uncle was taken to a concentration camp, from which they were released after a few months. Unlike most others, they all survived in good emotional and physical condition. He told me later that he consciously maintained an attitude which would not allow him or his students to see themselves as victims. He had great leadership qualities and was beloved by all these young people as well as by his students in America and Germany.

Curt Bondy was a man who made a difference to many, many people. He could think of alternatives such as teaching these young German Jews to become farmers rather than despair when confronted with terrible odds. His giftedness and creative thinking abilities made his own life and the lives of these young people—as well as the lives of the prisoners he was dealing with earlier—more acceptable. It also, I'm sure, gave him a certain sense of power at a time when most German Jews felt powerless. Giftedness, in this case, became his most valuable possession which not even the Nazis could take away from him.

- *Gifted adults often feel fundamentally different about themselves than others feel about them.* Their potential may not be recognized by others; they may be judged only in terms of their behavior; they may be elevated in people's eyes to a point where they're not allowed to be human; they may be disparaged out of envy; or their intensity may be misunderstood as irrational. Gifted people have normal feelings of anxiety, inadequacies and personal needs. If, however, they are in leadership positions, they often are not forgiven for their human frailties. For example, in my position as co-founder of Roeper City and Country School, I frequently felt that it made others feel insecure if I showed insecurities, weaknesses or hurt feelings. My experiences were confirmed over and over again in discussions with others in leadership positions. Gifted leaders often suffer from being endowed by people in their surroundings with more power and ability than they really possess. This may lead to great disappointment. People want their leaders to be well and strong. That means they may never be sick or weak. When a leader shows human weaknesses, people get as anxious as children do when their parents are ill. This discrepancy between the expected behavior of the leader and their actual humanness is difficult—for the person as well as for the community.

There is also a tendency to search for problem behavior in gifted leaders. It is as though people were trying to say, "They are no better than I

am, after all." I have often marvelled at how much effort is put into disclosing Sigmund Freud's negative qualities, as though finding these would in some way discredit his great achievements.

There are also gifted individuals who have no idea how they are perceived by others. One man in an organization had many new and forward-looking ideas but could not communicate them effectively to others and, therefore, appeared opinionated. Some people became afraid to offer their own opinions in his presence. He had not learned to empathize with others, because he lived in his own world of ideas. He did not really see himself as superior to others, but appeared as though he did. When it was pointed out to him that others felt put down by him, he said with astonishment, "I felt they just didn't respect me at all."

- *Gifted adults are often driven by their giftedness.* Gifted individuals do not know what creates the drive, the energy, the absolute necessity to act. They may have no choice but to explore, compose, write, paint, develop theories, educate children, conduct research, or whatever else it is that has become uppermost in their minds. They need to know; they need to learn; they must climb the mountain because it is there. This "driven-ness," this one-track-mindedness, may keep them from sleeping or eating, from engaging in sex or any other normal behavior, for the duration of their specific involvement. I knew an artist who routinely worked day and night until his project was completed, living on black coffee, forgetting about his family around him. Everything else in his life was excluded from his consciousness during this working period. This "driven-ness," of course, may also lead to personal disaster, as was the case with Vincent Van Gogh and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Creative individuals may go through cycles of ups and downs that are often difficult for others to understand and cope with. Occasionally, they may be forgiven by their associates for their thoughtless behavior during periods of creative stress when they have interfered with the life and work of others. For example, a drama teacher I heard of had enormous difficulties respecting the school's structure, work places and schedule right before a performance. This often created anger and resentment in those teachers whose work and schedules had been disrupted. However, this resentment usually dissolved into admiration when they saw the results of his work with the children.

Gifted people are not as often driven to become rich, famous, or powerful. They are more likely motivated to follow their inner agenda. I've heard people say jokingly, "If you're so smart, why aren't you rich?" The answer is, "It is because I'm so smart that I'm not rich, for that is not the goal."

Where does this drive in the gifted originate? It is in part a psychological need. It grows from the need to make sense of the world, to understand the world, to create one's own world. It is a need for mastery—intellectually,

creatively, physically. It probably originates from the same source that motivates people to ski down a steep hill and experience the feeling of exhilaration. It may be confrontation with and victory over death. In the last analysis, however, creative giftedness is a mystery, just as life itself. The gift and the need to express it are both part of the person and, yet, separate, just as the unborn child is in the mother but a separate entity. There have been times when this force enables the sick and handicapped to carry out seemingly impossible tasks. Maybe it is because they dream the impossible dream.

- *Gifted adults may be overwhelmed by the pressure of their own creativity.*

The gifted derive enormous satisfaction from the creative process. Much has been written about this process: how it works, the pressure of the inner agenda, the different phases it involves, the excitement and anxiety that comes with it, and the role played by the unconscious. One aspect, however, is not often mentioned. I believe the whole process is accompanied by a feeling of aliveness, of power, of capability, of enormous relief and of transcendence of the limits of our own body and soul. The "unique self" flows into the world outside. It is like giving birth. Creative expression derives directly from the unique Self of the creator, and its activation brings inherent feelings of happiness and aliveness, even though they may be accompanied by less positive emotions, such as sadness, fear and pain. Underneath all is the enormous joy of discovery and personal expression. The creative experience is not unique to the gifted, but I believe that for them there are more opportunities for creativity, and that the experience is more alive and powerful.

Just as the creative process creates a feeling of happiness, the greatest unhappiness can occur if it is interfered with or not allowed to happen. In that case the inner pressure cannot be released. This occurs when the facilitating tools are not available, when the environment is too hostile, or when the outer or inner circumstances simply do not allow it.

- *Gifted adults often have strong feelings encompassing many areas of life.*

They can see the foolishness of many actions in public and personal life. They see the unfairnesses. They see the dangers. Gifted people are more concerned with the future, and the ultimate future is death, its inevitability, its finalness, and its mystery. Awareness of death exists in the young gifted child and never leaves the adult. This makes them more angry and more afraid. But gifted adults also have a heightened capacity to appreciate the beauty and the wonderment in our universe. They see the beauty of human relations, of nature, of literature. They deeply experience the richness of the world around them: hearing beautiful music, seeing a lovely landscape, watching a child grow, observing life, feeling empathy with others. I saw a young artist burst into tears at the sight of a beautiful gothic cathedral. Many gifted people never lose their sense of wonderment. Because there is greater awareness, many things are felt

more deeply. The ability to experience deeply is present in gifted children as well as in gifted adults (Piechowski, 1991).

- *Gifted adults are not necessarily popular.* They relate best to others who share their interests. They often have a small circle of friends, and sometimes only one friend, but their relationships are deep and meaningful. There also are those gifted adults whose special abilities include leadership qualities, and who are an inspiration to groups and even nations.

- *Many gifted adults have amazing verbal ability—they love to engage in intense intellectual discussions.* They crave the interchange of ideas with other gifted adults. They need a common basis of understanding for discussion. However, they also may enjoy their own inner dialogue, looking at the pros and cons by themselves. There are many who feel they are their own best company.

- *Many gifted adults need solitude and time for contemplation and daydreaming.* Daydreaming for adults is as important as it is for children. It takes quiet time to clarify one's thoughts and feelings. Many exciting projects and ideas important to humanity had their beginnings in daydreams. However, no time for reflection is built into our modern hectic way of life. It does not often allow for such pursuits. Both gifted children and adults need to allow time for inner life experiences, to understand themselves, to let their inner unique Self exist freely so it will not be overshadowed by stress and demands from the outside world.

Our neighbor, A. J. Levin, who was a most gifted thinker, inventor and writer, could actually only spend a limited amount of time in the presence of others. While he found it stimulating to be with interesting company, he was most motivated by his own ideas and needed to get back to them quickly.

- *Gifted adults search for meaning in both the inner and outer world.* The need for meaning and the joy of discovering extends to discovering one's own Self as well as the world around one. Many gifted people who have achieved a great deal in the world still can never overcome a feeling of dissatisfaction, a feeling of a need unfulfilled, until they truly experience their own unique Self. Often this is a matter of removing layers of accumulated attempts to live up to outside expectations which are foreign to their inner reality. Only through careful and honest exploration, alone or with a friend or through counseling, can this inner tension be resolved. Often, too, creativity is not free to express itself until this work has been done.

A young teacher I knew serves as an example. She was often at odds with parents and other teachers. In the classroom, however, where she had a great deal of freedom to develop her own program, her results were spectacular. She inspired the children to do the most beautiful art work. She developed exciting science and social studies projects. The children felt drawn to her warm acceptance of them. She could create her own world in

the classroom, but she could not really connect with the world of adults. Although she tried hard to adjust, she didn't succeed. She felt inferior in the outside world. Through therapy she discovered the unconscious reasons for her feelings and learned that she had a right to be herself and to expect respect and understanding. She had found herself. This made it possible for her to see others as they really were. Her changed attitude created change in the response of those around her.

- *Gifted adults often develop their own method of learning and of grasping concepts.* This may lead to conflict with others who don't understand the route used by the gifted person to solve a problem. Just as children surprise their math teachers because they reach the correct conclusion by a process unknown to the teacher and often unknown to themselves, some adults use approaches puzzling to others. Despite this lack of understanding, there are occasions when a more complicated or more sophisticated route leads to better results than the usual method.

For example, at Roeper City and Country School, we had a fleet of buses that picked up the children. The routes had to be carefully worked out each year. Some of the drivers realized that a longer route might actually be quicker since there would be less traffic. Others could not think along such lines. The fact that unusual thinking is often not comprehended may keep the more sophisticated and more reasonable action from happening.

There are also ways of dealing with daily problems which could be described as the "educated guess" or as something that arises from the unconscious. I believe that many experiences add up to certain insights in a gifted person's mind even without their being aware of the logical sequence. Their accumulated knowledge leads to their actions, but they may not be able to trace the origins of their decisions. My husband and I have experienced this many times in our understanding of children. We have incorporated into our unconscious our long experience of living with gifted children. It has often astonished other people that we may see a child for a few minutes and discover a characteristic just from this brief observation—from the child's behavior or expression or language—without being able to tell what led to the discovery and without using testing devices.

Many gifted teachers and parents have the capacity of empathy. They know in an instant what upsets a particular child, what words she needs to hear and how she thinks and learns. Others miscommunicate because they do not have these unconscious "clues." Through this type of empathic knowing, Helen Keller's teacher was able to find the clue to reaching her. This unconscious reaction, however, requires the inner freedom to believe in one's intuition rather than in conventional wisdom.

Not all gifted persons allow themselves to listen to their inner voice. Those who have the freedom and the capacity to follow their own drummer experience a feeling of power and inner achievement. It is difficult for them to understand that others do not see their logic. Less gifted people are more

apt to see the logic of the moment rather than the complex impact of their actions or the eventual implications for the future. For example, struggling organizations may decide to cut their mailing lists in order to save money while a gifted person might want to consider the fact that this limits their exposure and inevitably leads to further decline.

- *Gifted adults have a special problem awareness.* This means they have the ability to predict consequences, see relationships, and foresee problems which are likely to occur. This ability leads to greater anxiety and concerns but also may lead to the prevention of foreseeable problems, through finding innovative solutions. In running the school, I often kept a problem from developing because I saw conditions which would make it a likely possibility. However, I would get no recognition for doing this because no one else knew that its potential existed. I would, for instance, suggest that a certain child not be placed in a group with a certain teacher because I knew that there would be a personality clash. Or, to put it positively, I would know that a certain child would thrive with a particular teacher. On occasions when I was overruled by others, my inner predictions would often come true.

- *Gifted adults are able to see the pattern of development and growth, and therefore will recognize a trend.* This allows them to predict and, by certain actions, to influence the trend. My husband, George, developed a fairly accurate method of predicting enrollment at our school for a given year. He analyzed the enrollment trends of previous years and developed a formula from them. Some of the people who entered the data did not understand the underlying concept: namely, if there are a certain number of applications in January, one can predict a certain definable increase in the Spring, which becomes smaller in the Summer. The sum of these factors predicts the approximate number of students that will be enrolled in a particular school year. Early in the year, therefore, one can more or less "guess" what the enrollment will be and base budget decisions on this estimate—unless, of course, something unforeseen happens, such as an economic downturn. As far as we know, after we retired from the school, this formula was not used again, making it less possible to develop realistic predictions upon which to formulate the budget. Unfortunately, the gifted are able to predict trends, but are not likely trendsetters, because it is difficult to convince others of their way of thinking.

- *Gifted adults often react angrily to being subjected to public relations methods of image making.* Just as gifted children notice and react when teachers pretend to know more than they actually do, gifted adults react with anger when they are exposed to any kind of propaganda or slanted reporting, whether it is in politics or in daily life. It offends their sense of justice. For inherent in giftedness, I truly believe, is a demanding search for truth. There are,

of course, those gifted adults who are themselves the type who manipulate the truth. In that case, unfortunately, they might be very successful.

- *Gifted adults are perfectionists.* This leads to basic differences in their behavior and reactions. They are perfectionists in terms of their own standards and expectations, not necessarily in terms of the expectations of the outside world. There is an inner urge to fulfill their own expectations even if no one else sees the need to do so. They feel very guilty if they cannot carry out what they expect from themselves. Many cannot stand injustice and feel compelled to stand up for their beliefs, whatever they are. If they embrace a moral behavior they probably will not deviate from it. This trait may lead to the appearance of rigidity.

I must use myself as an example here because I think it shows this tendency very well and was, in fact, a puzzle to me until I understood its origin. Our school was very successful in the early years when our approach was a more traditional one. It was geared to the expectations of society and expected children to perform in the traditional mold. All this took place within a humanistic framework. We tried to help individual children make a good adjustment to expectations by giving them personal support and empathy. Child psychology and knowledge of unconscious motivation were always part of our educational process. However, the goal at that time was for the child's adjustment to outside expectations rather than the development of a framework which would include the child's own inner agenda and resources.

Even though things went well, I felt that we were not fulfilling our promise to children, and it created a growing sense of guilt in me. I began to look for an alternate structure to facilitate children's development of the unique Self and at the same time build a bridge toward society's expectations. Many gifted adults cannot find that "connection," that bridge. My only motivation was the feeling that the education we provided was not perfect—not giving children what they truly needed.

When I finally discovered the open classroom and all of its possibilities, I felt a great sense of satisfaction and release. Introducing the open classroom was not easy at first. It resulted in some unhappy teachers and some student withdrawals. From that point of view, the innovation was not a positive one. From my point of view, it was necessary to open a new door for the growth of the children. Our innovative approach to education, which seemed to make children feel safe and challenged, later became the specific attraction of the school. My motivation did not come from the outside and was not based on approval by others and society, but solely on the desire to create an approach which would allow children to become the persons they really were. Once the change had been made it became obvious to teachers and parents that it was a positive one (Roeper, 1990).

- *Gifted adults are often confronted with the problem of having too many abilities in too many areas in which they would like to work, discover and*

excel. For example, university students often move from one field of study to another because they are attracted to both. They may at times end up not doing well in either. However, other gifted students have a great capacity for learning and may be able to study several areas side by side and acquire several doctorates in fields far removed from each other. Some gifted students have the amazing capacity to do several things at the same time, such as watch TV, play chess, and study, and do them all well.

- *Gifted adults often have feelings of being misunderstood, of being an outsider, of being unable to communicate.* This may be the most difficult problem confronting the gifted. They may accept traditional expectations as their own standards and then feel inferior because their inner drives lead somewhere else. Einstein wrote in a letter to his sister that he was depressed because he felt he failed his parents' expectations (Dukas & Hoffmann, 1979). On the other hand, as he grew older he became one of those who create their own forum, their own framework into which others will fit. Such people are able to make their dream penetrate the reality of their environment, whether it is by directing an orchestra, developing a laboratory, founding a school, or nurturing the growth of a business. This involves much responsibility and many problems; it may lead to failure or success, but it provides a continuing basis for personal expression with fewer restraints. It is true that there are always pressures from the outside that intrude on freedom. These pressures are, of course, necessary realities. However, if the gifted person has a strong self-image, intrusion from the outside will actually be stimulating. Other gifted adults create in isolation, such as artists, writers, and scientists. Isolation, although it may entail problems, permits free development toward one's own goals and brings with it the unhindered enjoyment of one's own creativity.

- *Gifted adults have great difficulties in understanding the seemingly inconsistent and short-sighted behavior of others.* They may feel helpless to deal with such behavior. Any kind of confrontation creates problems with many gifted people because few issues are clear cut and they can usually see both sides rather than absolute good or bad, right or wrong. They are aware that everything is relative, depending on one's perspective. And yet, *they often come to believe in a basic universal morality which is based on a reverence for life and beauty.*

- *Gifted adults see a difference between justice and equality.* That may mean that at times they will make decisions that seem unfair to others. They understand consistency in a different manner. This view grows out of a long range deeper vision of the complexities while others may base their decisions on a narrow sense of fairness. It is an injustice, for example, to provide equal educational experiences for all children regardless of their abilities. Six year olds who are capable of reading on what is considered third grade level

should have access to suitable literature, and those who cannot read need careful instruction on a different level.

- *Risk taking for a gifted person may be more difficult than for others because they know more what is at stake.* This applies to physical daring as well as the risk taking of disagreeing with the majority on issues of justice. At the same time, they may understand the need for risk taking more deeply and end up involved in the more dangerous action, possibly with greater anxiety and only after more careful investigation. As a rule, it will take the gifted longer to decide to dive into the pool, but they will be less likely to hit their heads on the bottom.

- *One of the most outstanding features of gifted adults is their sense of humor.* It takes complex thinking to see the funny side of life. The sense of humor of the gifted differs from others. It consists often of subtle jokes, intricate teasing or puns. Gifted people often find that their jokes are received with silence because they are not understood.

- *Gifted adults can develop emotional problems related to their abilities, but they also have greater resources for dealing with their problems.* The gifted commonly experience inner conflicts that differ in nature and degree from those of others (Piechowski, 1991). The conflicts are often connected with feelings of guilt for not having lived up to their own expectations, with feelings of disappointment, panic, complete lack of power, and using their creativity to conjure up the worst scenario. These feelings may grow out of an inability to truly make sense of their own life. However, the gifted also have a greater capacity to listen to themselves and work through their problems, as well as find ways of healing themselves.

- *The gifted often have difficulties with authority figures.* They are independent thinkers and do not automatically accept the decisions of their supervisors. Their reactions may be based on perceptions of the fallibility of decisions or may relate to moral questions. Gifted employees are often driven to take action against situations they don't approve of, and, therefore, become threatening to people in authority over them. Gifted people function well in a participatory community or with supervisors who are also gifted and can accept their attitudes and innovations. One comment I heard often from our teachers was that they liked working with us at our school because their creativity was respected and their job was not threatened even if they disagreed with us.

If their natural tendency to question authority is dealt with too harshly in childhood, some gifted individuals become permanently alienated from society and resort to criminal behavior. Gifted individuals who are not living in an environment that allows for their unusual need for self-growth and creative expression may resort to antisocial behavior in their search for an outlet for their inner creative pressures. When the gifted become misdirected, they are more

dangerous to society, because they are more capable of deception. For this reason I believe that gifted education needs to stress moral development of children.

• *Many gifted people have strong moral convictions and try to use their specific talents, insights and knowledge for the betterment of the world.*

These are the people who, for example, use their gifts in the service of the planet. It is the gifted who are global thinkers, who have an understanding of the complexities, the patterns and the interrelatedness of global affairs. It is the gifted who have the capacity to replace the world's shortsighted, short-term reactions with careful, overall solutions. A combination of a deep commitment to our planet and the ability to cope with it is our only hope for survival. Eleanor Roosevelt's work with the United Nations exemplifies the impact that a gifted individual can have on the world. Unfortunately, the world's lack of understanding of the gifted prevents more of them from fully developing their potential to help society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, giftedness is an ongoing process and not a product. The process leads in a direction which differs from the direction of the majority, but also can integrate with it and bring about change. It can lead to the greatest wretchedness and the highest ecstasy. The gifted person has the capacity to penetrate the complexities of the landscape of life and understand the supreme interconnectedness. Experiencing one's own giftedness—one's creative abilities—is one of the most exciting aspects of the gifted person's life.

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Dialogue

The purpose of the Dialogue section is to provide readers with an opportunity to respond in depth to ideas presented in this or other issues. Dialogue allows Advanced Development to be interactive with readers, as well as providing continuity from issue to issue. In this issue, we are proud to present a recent tribute to Annemarie and George Roeper, highlighting the inspiration that they have given to the field of gifted education. We offer it as a complement to the essay on giftedness by Annemarie Roeper in the previous section.

Remembering the Roepers

James Delisle

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It is difficult to fully appreciate the significance of life's coincidences until they are seen from a distance, over time. Such was the case in my own life and career as they relate to my introduction to the Roepers, their school, their work, and the journal that bears their name.

It was 1978. I was just beginning my graduate study of gifted child education, having spent the previous few years teaching in a program for children with learning and behavior problems. During my teaching career, there was one young boy, Matt, who used to toss his desk regularly—but I had been trained to handle such outbursts. What I was perplexed by, though, was how to handle Matt's intellect; for every day, Matt would complete, flawlessly, several papers and projects that he found interesting, and shoot the other papers back to my desk in the shape of paper planes—Matt's form of personal air mail. Usually in red crayon, Matt would have written the word "irrelevant" on top of the page. Generally, he was right—they were.

So, for me, it was time to learn more about children like Matt. Thus, I began my doctoral program at the University of Connecticut. While there, I ran across a journal—*The Roeper Review*—that had begun publication within months of the start of my Ph.D. program—coincidence. For me, always enamored by the beauty of words, it was love at first sight. For as I read about the journal's mission, and its humble beginnings as a parent newspaper for a school of which I had never heard—Roeper City and Country School—I began to see Matt's image reflected in the pages. Connecting intellect with emotion, and placing the goal of "caring to learn" on an equal basis with "learning to care," the articles and editorials taught me much about this field of study which was eventually to become my career.

"Imagine," I wondered, "what a wonderful place that school must be. Perhaps some day I'll visit it." The very next year, coincidence again, my