

# Reflections from Annemarie Roeper

## A Personal Statement of Philosophy of George and Annemarie Roeper

*Annemarie Roeper*

The *Roeper Review* was founded in October, 1978, by George, myself, and Ruthan Brodsky as a professional journal in order to create an opportunity for an exchange of ideas about gifted education. We saw it as an additional task in our commitment to young people and their growth. It has served this purpose well and has become a player in the world of ideas in gifted child education without representing a specific point of view. As the years went by, the concepts and theories about gifted child education grew and changed. In fact, there developed a number of different approaches which often seemed in opposition to each other. Because of our commitment to remain open to all points view, it seems to me that our own philosophy—George's and my vision of the gifted child—has not been clearly demonstrated to the readers of *Roeper Review*. Since this journal bears our name and my husband is no longer here to articulate, I feel a need for readers to be aware of the Roeper philosophy. I want to take this opportunity to clarify our position and explain how it relates to others in the field.

Our basic life's work was the founding, developing and directing of the Roeper City and Country School, based on a very distinct philosophy of self-actualization and universal interdependence. We were concerned with the growth of the individual as well as his/her responsible membership in the world community. We saw the Self and its complex inner structure as the focal point of the process of education, for it is the motivational center of all growth. The theories of psychoanalysis, as they relate to the unconscious, served often as a basis for our understanding of the growth of a child and his or her approach to learning. When Roeper School became a school for the gifted, we saw our greatest challenge as understanding the psychological growth and development of the gifted child. We sought to learn how the psychological development of the gifted differed from the average child, and the impact the gifted make on the world community. Our emphasis was on the complex inner conscious and unconscious development of the gifted child. Not much was known about the gifted psyche. It was an exciting new field for observation, investigation and research. However, few individuals in this country have chosen to study the psychology of giftedness. Some of those include Jim Delisle, in *Gifted Children Speak Out*, the Dabrowski movement spearheaded by Michael Piechowski and Linda Silverman, and, recently, the Columbus Group efforts. (See Martha Morelock's article in this issue.)

Many experts in the gifted child movement have gone in a different direction, defining the gifted child in relation to cognitive development or talent development. Educators and experts in gifted education today see the gifted child in terms of what they do or are able to do and not who they are—not how their emotions differ from those of other children. They do not look at what motivates the child; they do not look at their Souls. In fact this word seems taboo in gifted child education. I believe and observe daily in my work that the gifted child has a complex Self that is driven by his or her inner agenda. It is my

belief that the gifted child is emotionally different from others.

The Self of the gifted child is structured differently. Their depth of awareness is different. The center of their inner life is different. Their view of the world is more complex in a fundamental way. That is why one cannot say the child is "partially gifted" in certain areas only and not in others. There is a gifted personality structure, and the more highly gifted a child is, the more this difference becomes apparent, and the more often the Self comes into conflict with the expectations of the surroundings. This difference is then seen as a defect in the child rather than in his or her relationship with an outside world that does not understand.

It is my belief that in the majority of cases, the problems we see are created by the interaction of the environment with the child. The educational community frequently thinks about strategies for making the child adjust to our expectations rather than understanding, supporting and developing the child's enormously rich inner life. Education tries to reach its goals by creating strategies of approach rather than by building channels of relationship. The inner agenda, the Soul or the Self, are intangibles which are not as amenable to research as they are to observation and empathy.

In recent years, a dichotomy has developed within the gifted movement, in which talent development seems to be on one side and the growth and development of the psyche on the other. In the article, "The Nature of Giftedness and Talent: Imposing Order on Chaos," which appears in this issue, Martha Morelock describes several of the different theoretical strands in gifted education. Specifically, she contrasts the gifted achiever strand (which is represented by many experts in the gifted child movement — one of its best known exponents is Howard Gardner with his concept of multiple intelligences) with the gifted child strand represented among others by the Columbus Group Movement and myself, as expressed in my book *Education for Life* and by a number of other people.

In her article, Martha Morelock describes how the talent development approach and the gifted child-centered approach are not mutually exclusive. I totally agree and would like to go further than that by saying that they cannot be separated. By having done so, we have diminished our understanding of the gifted children and our ability to help them grow. It is important to acknowledge the existence of the psyche of the gifted as well as the existence of multiple intelligences or abilities. There is no question that children differ widely in their talents and abilities, and that they have differing ways in which those abilities grow and develop. The manner in which they develop, however, is the function of the Self. The motivation to develop the talent originates in the Self. Talented children are often driven by their inner agendas. They have a deep need to make sense of the world, to understand it and master it and make an impact on it. This may well grow out of their innate abilities—the talents they have, but the motivation to develop the talents comes from the inner need of the Self to express itself. In other words, self-actualization, talent development, and creativity are all intertwined. Creativity originates with the Self and its

expression is a *necessity for the Self*. Without the opportunity for creative expression, the Self suffers and cannot grow. It needs creative outlets for survival.

I believe that all growth and learning is filtered through the complex Self of the gifted. This complexity needs to be highlighted, understood and nourished. The child's first unconscious goal is the survival of this Self. Only if children feel that their environment supports this growth will they trust us and not build defenses against us. This needed trust coming from the self of the gifted child depends upon our recognition and support of his or her talent, of his or her specific cognitive abilities, of whatever it is that drives a particular child to learn and to grow.

Included in the inner agenda of gifted children is the enormous need to develop themselves, to master the world. This is an emotional need, not a cognitive one. Gifted children's emotions require cognitive and talent development. If we do not provide these opportunities, we will not help their psyches survive. The gifted child who sits in the classroom and must do repetitive skill work all day dies on the vine, so to say. Creating the appropriate environment for growth is part of the needed nourishment. The child needs it for his or her growth.

Different gifted children have different kinds of talent, but beyond this talent there is the psyche, which also differs, of course, with each child. By separating these two approaches, the talent strand and the Self strand, we are, in our educational endeavors, unintentionally injuring the psyche of the gifted child. By not recognizing the inner need for the development of creativity and cognitive growth, or by not recognizing the energy of the inner agenda of the gifted child, we will not support the urgent needs of the psyche of the gifted.

It is my opinion that creativity is a need of the Self and not an obligation to society. The gifted individual—not society—owns his or her creativity. Much more needs to be said about the structure of the gifted Self. At this point we must ask, what is giftedness and what is creativity? It can take infinite forms. It may express itself in the conventional manner, visible and recognizable to all. We then call it giftedness and talent. It may exist in the private chambers of the Self, or it may appear to the sensitive, empathic observer in the facial expression, the light in the eyes, or the real moments of the meeting of two minds. It may be the golden moment of rapport between the teacher and the student. It may be a way of thinking and feeling, or a luminous ability of empathy. It may be the sensitivity which goes beyond the powers of most people and is the basis of telepathy and other such abilities. It may be the power of the healing hand, the loving touch, and much more beyond our ability to comprehend or define. On this level, the line between giftedness and creativity disappears because it becomes indefinable. All we know is that we are often surprised by its existence. (A more detailed description of these concepts will be described in a special issue of the *Roeper Review* and in my forthcoming book, *The "I" of the Beholder*.)

I do see a dichotomy in a different area—not between the talent development and the gifted child concept, but between two models of education: the self-actualization model and the success model, which also means whether the emphasis is on learning or teaching. Education of the gifted child can only be successful if we include both the gifted Self strand and the talented education strand in our educational structure. However, it is at this point that we need to clarify our philosophy of education. We need to look at whether we educate for success, or educate for the self-actualization of the individual child. Do we want the child to achieve and succeed according to our homogenized standards or do we educate for Self-growth and the success within it?

If the self-actualization model is based on mastery and the

talent development model is based on achievement, then there is a dichotomy in approach. One emphasizes growth and learning as a goal, the other achievement and teaching. These lead to differences in three areas; first, the existence and role of the psyche; second, the goal of education; and third, the method of education.

It is my opinion that the trend in education, followed by the trend in psychology, has been toward education for success. This is the philosophy that has led us to the separation between talent development and Self-growth. The success model emphasizes achievement and is not concerned with the Self. The Self-actualization model begins with the needs of the Self. Yet this choice does not really exist. The psyche has energy of its own, driven by its need for survival. If we separate the needs of the psyche from the goal of achievement, a deadly battle will ensue because they are often incompatible. This often leads to the impairment of the Self as well as to lack of success.

The philosophy developed by George and myself as the basis for education at Roeper School is grounded in the concept of self-actualization and interdependence. In other words, the goal is to create an educational environment which allows the psyche to grow, and, at the same time, builds the necessary bridges to the expectations of the world. Indeed, the Self cannot grow in isolation.

The structures of the psyche of each gifted person have many characteristics in common. In our approach to education at the Roeper School, we tried to include all aspects. We emphasized the psychology of giftedness by creating the school as a community, focusing on relationships among students and between teachers and students, and trying to understand the psychological make-up of each individual child in the school. We also developed a careful process to allow talents and abilities to grow. We created a flexible, non-graded program, allowing each child to learn at his or her own pace and yet have a group identity. We also created a system of working with specialists, giving children opportunities to spend more time on their special interests and abilities with experts in the areas of art, music, drama, dance, mathematics, computers, etc. Our goal was self-actualization first, and, at the same time, building a bridge from the Self to the outside world, for the Self must find a place in the world. The spotlight, however, was on the Self.

Philosophically, this dichotomy goes beyond gifted education, and even education in general. It is reflected in how humanity conducts its affairs in all areas such as politics and the penal system. For example, society clearly emphasizes punishment over rehabilitation. It is interested in changing the person's behavior rather than recognizing the needs of the Self which have produced the behavior in the first place. It is my opinion that all human action is determined by basic physical and emotional needs, and if these needs are thwarted, anger and anti-social behavior results. By being concerned primarily with children's success and achievement rather than the growth of the Self, education attains similar results. If we hope to live in a less violent society, we must learn to understand and respect the needs of the individual as well as the needs of society and integrate all these needs.

My purpose is to clarify where George and I stood and where I stand today in terms of the debate that goes on in gifted education. If there could be common agreement on the concept of the existence of the psyche as well as the existence of differing talents and intelligences, and the understanding of their interconnectivity, one could build a whole new line of research that yet needs to be done to understand the psyche of the gifted person.

Editor's note: For an elaboration of these ideas see *AnneMarie Roeper: Selected Writings and Speeches* and *Education for Life: The Modern Learning Community*.