

The History and Philosophy of The Roeper School
Delivered by Annemarie Roeper at The Roeper School
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Chuck Webster [Head of School]: Annemarie once said that the highest purpose of education is to educate the Soul. And she has been doing that during her 50-year professional career. I can think of no better introduction than to say she is the person who helps educate the Soul.

Annemarie Roeper: Thank you very much for that introduction. Actually I didn't remember having said that, but it's really...

Chuck: It was at the Gala, and you said it to Maya Angelou.

AMR: ...but it's really what I do believe. I think it's a good way of saying it and it's also interesting that for many years this was an expression that one probably didn't quite dare to use. But I do think that it is what Roeper School is all about.

Today's lecture is really just going to be the outline, the context in which everything that we have done was done. Then the next three lectures will be relating really to the Soul and the Self and the way in which they meet the world and the way in which the world meets them. It's a subject that we really don't often talk about. Especially in recent years, we have sort of taken the child apart and actually never put it together again. We know more about pieces of the child than about the whole child, and very little about the child as he or she experiences this world.

But first I'd like to give you the context and the background of Roeper School because I think that will explain more to you why we have this point of view. And I must say that I am in recent years more and more convinced that education should be based on developing the Soul or the Self, and in fact maybe one should talk as much in terms of psychology as education, depending on how you define these different things.

I think I'd like to start out by saying how thrilling it is to be back here. Every time I come back here, it sort of impresses me that this is still the same school that we founded over 60 years ago. There are not many people who are privileged to see their work continue, to see their creation remain a living, changing, growing entity, something that doesn't basically change and yet changes all the time. Roeper is now a school of the '90s, and we started it in the '40s. It's still the same school but it belongs to the '40s as much as it does to the '90s now, and I think that it is just such a miracle to me. I can see our basic principles carried out here day by

day and I see the combination of change and permanence that we always talked about. We do need change – it is such a different world today than it was fifty years ago – and yet it is the same and the same feelings.

In fact, talking to some children today, it really sort of hit me how they are concerned about the same issues. People always think that the issues change, and the issues do change but the children don't change and they relate to them in the same way. This is just such an unusual thing to have this opportunity, to see it happening, and on top of it to be so well-received, and to be wanted here, and to be able to maybe make some contributions.

I still wish very, very much my husband could be here, and everything I say is really speaking for him. We have done this together. We have built this school together and it is just very hard for me still to see it without him. He would have loved to be here with me today.

[George A. Roeper died Aug. 24, 1992.] I see these lectures as an opportunity for mutual learning. I want to share my experiences with you, but I hope that you will let me know your thoughts and your insights and your concerns. Actually this is the way we have always related to parents. It was always a give and take. It wasn't us lecturing parents or students; it was finding out together what is the proper role. What learning really should be – and I think it is in many cases at Roeper – is sharing. We are all learners and I can learn much from you, and I hope I will.

You probably know that Roeper has a very long history because I'm already pretty old. (General laughter.) But it really predates me by quite a while. It was so long ago that one can really say it was "once upon a time." Once upon a time there was a young couple in Germany right after World War I, which was the time when I was born to my parents, Max and Gertrud Bondy. My father was an art historian and my mother was one of the earliest psychoanalysts and a doctor. My father was not only an art historian. He had a way of making art come alive. I think it was as much a sense of aesthetics as his knowledge of art. He would take us to Italy and we would travel for a month seeing pictures and buildings, and they would just have so much meaning because he knew them so well. He knew their soul, I think. But I think that's the way he also saw children. He wanted to educate people who would be in some way pure of heart and beautiful, and that was his way, that was his interest. My mother was a psychoanalyst, as I said. She knew a great deal about people. She never used psychoanalysis as a treatment or a therapy. She used it as a basis of understanding children and adults. She did something that I've never seen happen since. She had a relationship with everybody in that school. The children, if they had any kind of concerns – or even if they didn't -- would go see my mother and she became often a substitute mother for them.

Together they conceived of the idea of a different kind of education. They had a two-fold purpose and much of that has been our thinking all along. Their idea was that the purpose can't be only to educate this individual, to train him and teach him so that he will be, or she will be, ready to go to college and go through life and to just look at this individual. They always thought that there was a two-fold purpose, namely to help the individual and to understand the impact these individuals would have on the world around them and the impact the world would have on them. I was raised to think I had a task in life, which is something I don't think we necessarily teach children today, but I felt that there was something I had to do, not just for myself but for the world. One of my father's principles was that if there were only a little more love and empathy in the world, then the world would be a better place.

They founded a boarding school centered, philosophically and psychologically, around the concept of community. They saw the community as the basic essential for learning. Through community and their actions, students would learn the tools of cooperation and would also feel empowered because they always participated in decision-making. Students made decisions in all sorts of ways – this was a high school – and it was a community run by teachers and students. George was one of my parents' first students and he became a leader of the student body. I could probably fill four sessions just talking about my parents' school, but that is not really what we are here for tonight.

I think the biggest impact on all of our lives was the explosion of the Nazis. That's the way it felt to me. It changed everything. We really did have sort of an ideal situation there. I didn't know anybody in that school who didn't love it and become a pretty outstanding person. The majority of those people never turned into Nazis. But to me, it was actually the shock of my life; it totally destroyed everything. From one day to the next we had to leave the country. My all-powerful parents had to flee and had lost all their power and we weren't wanted. It was something that took a long time to overcome. It left me with sort of a continuing kind of sadness, which doesn't mean that I didn't have a happy life. It's just sort of a residue of an experience that is very difficult to describe. I have only recently learned that this feeling of continuing sadness is something that exists for many people who have gone through this experience, especially people like me who didn't go to concentration camps and never felt they had the right to even admit that they were victims of the Nazis. It has colored everything that we did later on, and I think that the philosophy of Roeper School really grew out of this. I learned so much from this. After a while, after you are over the shock, you begin to learn from it and to try to turn it into a positive experience. I think many, many things were learned from it.

One of them was that feelings are really the things that one has to deal with. Feelings can overpower reason. If you are exposed to enormous violence and to enormous hatred, which again has been nurtured in some way, reason does not overcome your feelings. That is why we have always felt that the basic educational processes must give children the types of experiences that will make them able to listen to their reason so that they won't be overcome by so much hatred that that will be the basis for their actions. But it also means that feelings are always going to be the basis of their actions, and that's something that is very important in understanding children's learning. They are going to learn if they are emotionally ready for it. They are not going to learn because we have the right delivery system. They have to have the right receiving system, and that is based on emotions. I will talk about how that happens at a later session.

My husband used to say that many Nazis were excellent readers. I think that this is true today. The world we live in today is so filled with violence and yet we know so much more than we knew seventy years ago. We know how to cure people, we know how to help people, and yet the emotions expressed are usually very primitive ones. That's why I feel that these are the things we need to learn about. I've learned so much more about the complexity of emotions. I think it doesn't help even to say all Nazis are bad or all Nazis are good. Any kind of prejudice is a primitive way of reacting. What one really needs to think about is the complexity of people's reactions and how these complex feelings arise at the very beginning of life. That is really the basis on which this school was founded.

George and I were married right after we came to America. We worked with my parents, who started a new school in New England. This was actually very interesting. Here we had American children who did not have any of the same experiences as the children in Germany. And yet my parents' philosophy, which was simply respecting and creating a community, took as much hold of these children as it did in Germany, because people have the same needs. Later on my husband and I came to Michigan and started our own school. It was a necessity for us. The only way we could live with our destroyed past was by educating children in such a manner that they would never have to act as people did in Germany. It is a real sadness for me that after we and so many other people have tried for so many years to bring some new ideas of mutual understanding and mutual respect – and of mutual responsibility, which is an important factor – that the world seems to be going in a different direction.

I think that a school like Roeper has an even greater task today to educate children, not only for their own future, but also to try and give them the inspiration to feel responsibility for others and for the environment. Psychology, this philosophy and community were always the central features of this school. This was my parents' basic concept although we have changed it

in some ways. We have not stuck to psychoanalytic theory in the same way. Our community approach was different because we are living in a different time and in a different place, but the basic idea remained the same.

The school began as a regular school. It was not for gifted children, particularly. People were at that time attracted by its philosophy and our emphasis on applying psychoanalytic theory to the process of education, which is not what one usually did. Around 1956 we became more aware that gifted children were not being well served in the public schools, or even in other private schools. We became aware that they were not being well served intellectually or emotionally. They don't fit in, and it is the emotional part that really creates the havoc. We also had the thought that it may be the gifted who will change this world.

So changing this school into a school for the gifted was probably our first innovation. Ours was one of the first schools for the gifted. We assembled a number of people who were well-known educators who had worked with the gifted. We spent a whole week here trying to develop a program for a school for gifted children. We never actually carried out that program because the idea was that one would use the first three years for nothing but skill learning and then, because gifted children could learn it so fast, you would never have to do it again. Actually the reality is that it's the skill learning – which is something that I'm going to talk about – that is difficult for gifted children. They need concept learning *before* the skills, or at least along side them. So this was never carried out, but it seemed like a great idea.

As time went on, there were a number of other innovations that we made. Roeper School was the first integrated private school in this area and the others then followed us. What was interesting was that when we started we thought we were taking a great risk, but it really didn't create a problem for us. It was an innovation that went back to our experience with the Nazis. We could not conceive of being in any way involved in segregation, in mistreating anybody or in not respecting somebody. It is this thing that I'm still the proudest of. Often I used to look around and it would look like the United Nations because we had so many children from so many different backgrounds. Today there is a new buzzword, at least in the area where I am living, and that's "diversity." It's even done quite mechanically in some schools – there are really so many different ways of diversity that you have to have just one student of each category – and yet we did this forty years ago. It was never done in a formal way. It was just part of our ideal of community.

The next step that we did was the Open Classroom, which allowed a more individualized approach to education, although there were many other reasons for it. This actually turned out to be more risky. We lost twenty students at the time because we gave up the "lock-step

system.” We gave up the grades – you know, first second, second, third grade – and we introduced the Stages in the Lower School where we mixed the ages. There were many, many reasons for that. One of them was that we thought hierarchy was a negative thing for children to grow up in, thinking that it’s better to be older and to be dominated from above. It was a school community where children of all ages were mixed, where it didn’t really matter how old you were but what you do and how you get along with others and how you manage to do the things that you are really excited about doing. This was much harder to accept and I think it is still difficult sometimes for people to see education not in a competitive way but in a cooperative way, and in a way in which you really try to fulfill the needs of the child rather than what’s imposed from the outside in order to get to Harvard or to make it in this world. The strange thing is that children who grow up with less competition and more trust will often find it easier to get into Harvard or to fulfill their own destiny.

We always connected with what went on in the outside world. During the Vietnam War we made arrangements so that conscientious objectors could teach at Roeper as an alternative service. That was something that was meaningful to us also.

As the school grew we added many new buildings. Before the Domes were built we had a symposium of educators, architects and government officials from Washington and Lansing. The educators presented the needs for a flexible building arrangement based on the educational and psychological principles that we had. Then the architects responded with different proposals. Through this cooperation the architects for the Domes were chosen. We had government support, both from Lansing and Washington, and raised the money to build these buildings from the Ford Foundation and other government agencies. But just to go through that process was interesting.

The arrangement of the school – especially the Lower School since the Upper School was a little bit more traditional – was based on our philosophy of allowing each child to grow at his or her own speed but also in the fact that this was a school for gifted children. One of the important things we introduced was that children should make choices. In Stage II they make a choice for one day, and in Stage III they have more choices and they commit themselves to this choice. In Stage IV it becomes almost like a college sign-up, where they learn how to make choices. This was not part of the curriculum anywhere else at the time. Making choices empowers the students and gives them the ability to participate in their own destiny. It also says that we believe the important thing is the learning rather than the teaching. It also makes it possible for a child with a special ability and interest, for instance a child who has a special interest in art, to go to that class every day.

People were worried that if you have a free choice, you will do what you want to do and you will not be exposed to other kinds of things. It is one of my beliefs that children do need to be exposed to many things, and then they need to be able to make choices. You have to have as rich a program as you can possibly have but the goal must not necessarily be the well-rounded child. Especially because gifted children are very often not well-rounded. They are driven to go in certain directions, and when we don't listen to that, we are not only not allowing them to express what they want to express, but we are also limiting their Souls, if you want to put it like that.

Another idea was that the children should participate in decision-making, both within the small groups and within the different Stages and the whole Lower School. The rest of the community was still running the way schools were always run, that we as the heads would make all basic decisions and the teachers could influence but didn't have really any decision-making power. There seemed to be a difference between the freedom the children had and the teachers had, so then we changed our approach to include quite a bit of participation of the staff and the parents. We weren't able to organize the parents as well as the staff simply because the parents weren't there. But there was an open way in which people participated and I think in many ways that is still happening, although maybe in a less formalized way. But it was important that adults knew how to create their own destiny and it allowed the creativity of teachers to express itself in a much better way.

The school has always had a very rich program. We have always been interested in academics. They are very important for children even as young as three and four years old, if that happens to be their interest. Arts and sports were always very present and played a very important role. We have always had very good theater and dance. Of course, we felt this is what these children really needed.

This is what we did until 1980. At that time, first my husband retired and then I did. We had been hoping that things would continue exactly the way they were, but again I think that one has to count on the emotions more than on the intellect. The school went through a period in which it somehow lost its identity a little bit. We tried so hard to prepare it so well. We had a very, very good search process that included practically every child in the school and all the parents, and yet it became a difficult time. I think it's because of what I said in the beginning – that no matter what we know, our emotions change our actions. People were sort of angry at us for getting old; I think we had become parent figures for the parents and the teachers. I remember one of the teachers saying she thought it wasn't fair, that she thought we would live forever and would run the school forever. Of course it was a joke, but I think it

had some meaning. It was just that all of a sudden, maybe in a way like what happened to us when the Nazis came, it changed.

But in recent years it's become so much the way that we had hoped it would be. It's such a place full of life, especially coming back here at this time of the year with the leaves changing. It really is an enchanted place. I don't want to put these words into your mouth if you don't feel quite that way, but it feels that way to me. It feels in a way that we may have resurrected some of what we have experienced as children and I'm hoping that your children are getting that kind of experience, but I think it's a lived kind of experience, not something that is given. It depends on everybody to be able to participate and it depends on everybody to create the kind of channels of communication in which people can express their feelings without too much hatred and avoid creating lines of differences rather than of cooperation. I see many gifted children in school in California where I live and work who are going to school in California and I see the kind of difficulties they're experiencing. A lot of it has to do with a difficulty of communication between parents and school. Fear. Everybody is afraid of each other. Fear between children and school, and sometimes between children and parents. I think what we have here is a place that has, what comes to my mind is that it is like a bowl. It's a place that can contain a whole community working out its relationships with each other.

I saw some Stage IV children today and they made me feel the way they always did when I talked to them. I have a class that is called, "What would you do if?" They can bring their problems, whatever it is that concerns them, and discuss them with the rest of the children. It worked just the way it always did and I heard all sorts of things about how some friends aren't treating them right and we figured it out together, giving each other proposals of what to do about it. It feels that this bowl is there and that you are all a part of it, and I am hoping to make a contribution to this during the four weeks that I'm going to be here.

I'd like to open this up for discussion now and, also, if anybody was interested in just talking to me, to possibly make an appointment with me. If you have something you would really like to talk about, I will be at your disposal. Thank you.

Applause.

AMR: Anybody like to say something? I hope everyone would like to say something!

Q: I was just wondering, what is your interpretation of the definition of a gifted child?

AMR: Well, of course there is no agreement on this. I think giftedness is a process, it's not something you are. It's a way of looking at life. I think that a gifted child from the very beginning sees the world in a more complex way than other children. All sorts of things come out of that. They are driven by their own agenda. That agenda has a lot to do with mastery, with wanting to understand the world, giving the world their definitions. That is why I think that skill learning – and it's something that might not be known to all people – but skill learning is not what drives the child. Most schools are almost only skill learning, especially in the early grades, when they want to learn about nature, they want to understand what goes on in the environment. Gifted children are so concerned with the environment. They want to know about science and they want to really understand the computer, they want to read and even if they aren't good readers – some of them aren't – they want to interpret the world in their own way.

Their understanding of complex situations always amazes me. It always amazes me how much they know about their parents. How much they know about their teachers and how they find out where their limitations are. But what is so amazing to me is how often they bump into a lack of understanding. It is very difficult because the world is geared toward competition, and they are not necessarily competitive. They are more interested in doing their own thing, because competition is limiting to them, because competition means you all have to do the same thing in order to do it better. But if everybody does something different, you don't compete, which doesn't mean that they aren't competitive in many ways. It's a matter of finding this balance. I think that is the big task for educators and parents, to find the balance between the expectations of the world and between what this child brings and the support this child needs.

Does that answer your question at all?

Q: Yes, thank you.

Q: That leads me to a question. I'm sure education has changed a lot since I was trained as a teacher – and I'm a former teacher now – but how do we move our educational system to train teachers to be more in the philosophy of what you are talking about so that children in the public schools are not suffering the lack of growth inside.

AMR: I wish I knew the answer to that but I don't think it's the training of the teachers, it's the system. I've always had this feeling the whole system is based on the child. I mean, on the bottom is the child and we build up a whole system of teachers and directors and superintendents and parents. This teacher has to satisfy the wishes of the superintendent, which means that the child too often has to create the teacher's success. That's what I think is

the difference between community and institution. If we had communities that really worked together, where the goal is to hear the child and not to hear the superintendent, we would have a whole different approach. People keep trying to do that. Schools try to do it. There are some private schools who try to do it and there are some public schools. You also find, and this has been my experience, that you find good teachers in the most amazing places. A lot of it has to do with the emotions, and again that is what I want to talk about more. The knowledge of the teachers and the skill are important, but the emotional relationship is important.

Q: Speaking about emotions, I don't know if you're going to talk about this later on, but what do you think are the salient emotional needs of gifted children and how do you think they can best be met, both by parents and by educators?

AMR: I think the critical emotional need is the basic old-fashioned need to be loved. It's just that it is sometimes harder for the gifted child to feel loved or even sometimes for the parent of the gifted child to love the child because all sorts of other feelings come into it. And again I want to talk more about that, the feelings of competition and also of feeling that the child has to fulfill sometimes the needs of the parents. It becomes very, very complex. But I think love is the word, and maybe more than love but love is a hard thing to define. Empathy.

I think a parent of a gifted child has to be their advocate. Gifted children are often not understood in public schools, or private schools; I don't really make that difference and my experience doesn't tell me that that is where the line is. I think that society's approach to education is passive intake: Information being given and then this empty page will be filled. Also obedience. Obedience is a difficult thing. Of course, the child needs to feel that they have to in some way listen to us because they need us. They need us for their protection. But obedience in itself as a concept can also be a rather negative thing. That is really what is mostly expected: "Don't rock the boat." Gifted children rock the boat all the time. Their sense of justice, it interferes with them a lot or they interfere. They just don't make it a smooth situation. I think probably that's something that you find at Roeper. I think it's harmonious but not smooth. Is that a good way of saying it?

(General laughter and agreement.)

AMR: It's hard but most rewarding. I saw it again when I saw these children today how enchanting they are, I mean aside from everything else. But they are a hard job for parents, and I think parents of gifted children are more tired in the evening than parents of other children. And then they don't want to go to bed.

(More general laughter.)

AMR: What did you say?

Q: I said I just thought it was old age creeping up. (Laughter.)

AMR: No, it *is* hard. We have to admit then that you can also find some gifted children who will eat you up alive with their demands and you have to draw the line somewhere. It's not only that this child needs the world, but it also needs other people who are human beings and have their own needs. It's not easy. Another reason why I think many gifted children have a hard time in a more rigid school is that they are so naïve. That is one of the things that I notice about the gifted; unless they have to be, they are not street-wise. They are not manipulative. They sort of think that the world is like they are. They want to learn all about it and they want to understand it and deviousness is very difficult for them. Many gifted children are having a terribly hard time because they really can't stand it if other children do something dishonest or tease each other. Again you will find people teasing each other here, too, none of this is totally true. But I have known quite a number of children who couldn't stand it when a child cheated or something like that. They are perfectionistic and they have an enormous sense of justice, which you would think would help them but it doesn't. The perfectionism is a whole subject in itself, of course.

Q: Will you be covering perfectionism?

AMR: Yes, I think I'll talk about that. (Laughter.) But I can say a few words about it now. I think it's really debilitating for gifted children and it's something that's difficult to handle. Because what happens very often is that it keeps them from doing what they really want to do. If they can't do it perfectly, they are not going to do it at all. It's actually a reason why some children are late in certain developments because they would rather not try. Some children have difficulties. One thing I can say about gifted children, the things that come with skills they don't do that well very often. Their handwriting is very bad, they're not great spellers – except for those who are.

(General laughter.)

AMR: Arithmetic computation, they don't want to do it, they don't want to repeat things, but in the arithmetic concepts they will be years ahead of other children. If you watch a young child trying to draw something, their small muscle ability is often not as great because they can't really reproduce this thing that they want to draw, so they give up; they don't want to do it. Children who are not that bright, they don't expect to do it that well.

Q: Obviously the parenting skills are very different for a gifted child as opposed to the non-gifted child. How do we deal with family members and the people who are around us who don't understand and totally disagree with what we need to do. How do we deal with this?

AMR: I think it's difficult, to say the least. (General laughter.) What was the first question? Is parenting so different? I think it brings with it different kinds of concerns. Basically, of course, it is not different. It's the basic relationship that is true for any child. But I think if you are the parent of a gifted child, it develops different feelings. One of them that I'm often confronted with is that people feel that it's a greater responsibility and that it is the responsibility of the parents to expose the child to more stimulation and to do things for them. I think that is the one thing that is actually not necessarily the case. These children are driven by themselves; they know what they want. I think what we might need to do is to fulfill their wishes, but not necessarily. Again, what happens is that we find that this child is outstanding in math, for example. I remember one child, all he got for Christmas was math books and math materials and those kinds of things that might make them think – that is one of the problems that I have heard from many gifted children, especially when they have a very outstanding special ability. I knew one child who went to school here who was an outstanding math student and he said he had to give it up because he had to find out who he was because everybody thought he was math. That is what he was, and that is a very important thing. The Soul needs to nourish itself in a way and not always by getting it from the outside because then you don't know who you are.

Of course, I think another thing that comes with being gifted is this enormous sensitivity, which has to do with greater awareness. I think a gifted child often really can feel a situation and they often feel when parents or when other people are not sensitive to it. One of the things that I find with many children is parents who think that maybe you should keep the terrible things in the world away from them. Well, we can't. They know all about it. I have had more children talk to me about homelessness and the atom bomb during the time when it was on people's minds. When they feel that, nobody helps them. I live in an area near Berkeley where there is a homeless person on every street corner, it's really so depressing, but what depresses the children is that people don't give them money. I had one child describe to me how people walk past this person who stretches out their hand to them or their cup and how they make a point of looking the other way. These children have tears in their eyes; they can't stand it because they are so aware of it and they also seem to have a sense of responsibility. They seem to feel they have to do something. I remember one little boy during the Gulf War who was four years old and he kept having all these ideas of how one could have done it better.

He kept thinking he was going to do something, and that he couldn't was so frustrating. Those are the things that we need to hear. We need to feel their feelings.

One thing that I think is very difficult is if we deny their feelings. Gifted children often get very frightened over all sorts of things because they take everything very seriously. If they've been told they should not eat sugar and then they do it because they love it, they not only felt that they did something very bad but also that something terrible is going to happen to them. If you have a child who is afraid at night and afraid that the burglars are going to come, or in my area there were terrible fires and earthquakes and some children are terrified of earthquakes, as am I, so I can understand it, but also there was this girl that was killed, Polly Clark, I don't if you've heard about her, very near where I live. Someone got in there and while her parents were there, took the child and kidnapped her and killed her. These children were just terrified and it doesn't help them to say it's not going to happen to you and we will leave the door open and the light is on, we have three locks on the door and an alarm, because the reasoning doesn't help. What I think one needs to say to them, "I understand it and I'm afraid too, but we will protect each other," or, I don't know, but not to deny them their feelings.

Q: Does it help to be a gifted person to teach gifted children?

AMR: I think it does. Like everything, it's complex. Sometimes you can be a very gifted person in dealing with one's own giftedness but, depending on one's gift, it might make it even harder. But I think that gifted teachers can understand the gifted better, especially when it comes to subject matter, to understand the complexity. It's very difficult when the children know more than the teacher. But on the other hand you have to accept that sometimes; I think it happens very often, too. Of course, the other thing that happens is that children know more about a subject that isn't ever being discussed, that never comes up and isn't seen as important, when they really would love to share it with others and so on.

George Vihos [former Roeper teacher]: Annemarie, it's really wonderful to see you again after so many years, and, yes, I really do wish George were sitting next to you and I could listen to what he had to say, too. I've been sitting here and listening to everything you've said about the gifted child and a question just came up about a gifted teacher. The reality is, I think, that if you've lived through a certain number of years and you have a history here at The Roeper School – and both my former spouse, Roseanne, who is here, and I have and we have two children who graduated as gifted children out of this school – I think it doesn't lie in the child anymore when you develop a gifted adult person that's living their life pretty fully. And that legacy, I think for me, and I'm sure Roseanne would say the same thing, is such a wonderful, wonderful thing. You and George are two human persons who have gone through a unique

process and have lived a life that has problems and difficult things during the day but your ideals are and were very, very high. I can't say enough, and that's one of the reasons I wanted to come tonight and say this, that this is probably the most wonderful, unique place of learning that I've ever and will ever see in my life. So I'm very proud to be here. Thank you.

AMR: Thank you, George. I think it is unique but I think there are other places. Really, it would not be good if we were the only people who had these ideas. I think in some way the cycle is beginning to change. There are more and more people who are beginning to think that the human being itself, the emotions, the relationships are important. For a long time it was not the right thing to say that you wanted to educate the whole child because it seemed sentimental. It didn't seem to be really meaningful. But now, I saw an ad the other day for a school where they said they were interested not only in academic aspects of the child but in the whole child.

One of my main things – I don't know if I should touch upon it tonight – is my concern about the labeling of gifted children. I feel that often there is a confusion about certain things that are described as learning disabilities when they are part of the characteristics for gifted children. Although again, I think more and more people are beginning to feel that we need to be very careful before we put a label on a child. Look in all directions when something doesn't go right, and see whether it may have to do with the environment, with specific relationships, with things that are not necessarily in the child or whether it is part of a certain giftedness. Gifted children and adults have an intensity about them that often interferes with other people and with other expectations and it gets labeled in some way.

Another thing is that giftedness does not stop when you grow up. I think we talk so much about gifted children when one really should talk about the gifted adult too, because I think that the same concerns that exist for the gifted child exist for the gifted adult. Many of you probably are gifted because it does run in families. But then to have both the child and the parents gifted, that is another issue. (General laughter.)

Q: This is a more specific question about letting the child who is self-directed follow his or her own pattern. I know with my child, and I assume with a lot of other gifted children, she has such a rich inner life that the rest of the world and responsibilities and homework assignments all get in the way of her living in her head, you know. She has this thing going on and she doesn't want to be interrupted. (General laughter)

AMR: I think that is the biggest problem that one has.

Q: How much do I let her do that? There has to be a balance.

AMR: You have to try and find the balance and it is very difficult. I think that it's not going to be a smooth situation. One would have to solve this in each individual case. I think that one has to look at both sides, though. I don't always find that the things adults or schools want to make them do really make sense in terms of the child. One needs to be think, is this important? Is it because I need her to do it? And then I think another whole other set of emotions comes in. Is it because the world needs her to do it? I think it's something one needs to really have conscientious thoughts about and discuss with the child.

There also comes a point when it looks like a kind of compromise to them. When they are ready to make that compromise, when they understand that, for instance, if they are really driven to be a doctor or something, if the goal is there, then they will do it. But I think that mostly you're not going to really get anywhere unless the child really wants it, and you can't make anybody want it. Mostly it's very difficult, but on the other hand there is a point when they understand this. I think what I'm usually confronted with is the question, "Is it really necessary?" When it comes to homework, I very often wonder how necessary it is. I think that the kind of homework we give here is a little bit more sophisticated, but one must be aware.

Q: You mentioned that gifted children are often more sensitive to justice in the world. Do you find often that they are more sensitive to seeing injustice around them but not mature enough to see when they are causing an injustice. (General laughter.)

AMR: I think their concept of justice has to do with their specific need and they often don't see. That's why the community is so important. They can see the interdependence, they can see how their action has an impact on somebody else. Otherwise, because they are so driven by their own needs, it's very hard for them to see that.

Q: I'm not sure this is a question or a comment, but I've been listening to the parenting skills questions, and I'm kind of dangerous because I'm trained in a lot of behavioral systems, but I'm trained in special education so I'm trained in a lot of behavioral coping systems which I've thrown all out the window when I recognized that my son, who is gifted, had them all figured out. And he tells me that his behaviors are all because he is gifted. I'm trying to make this transition to the Roeper community, which has only been for two months now, but when I'm in a social situation, shopping or something, I always have to kind of say, "but, you know, he's gifted," or I want to say, "I'm very ineffectual with him because we're always socializing." I'm looking for that link to scare up some dignity and yet everything you say makes me think I should be saying, "you are so wonderful, you are a genius of the world." But while he is going

to be a wonderful genius of the world, I still hear someone whispering, “is anybody going to say ‘no’ to him?” Is that the real push-pull of parenting a gifted child – trying to let him see that the injustice of his behavior sometimes is disturbing everybody else in the environment?

(General laughter.)

Q: I just thought I’d lay it all right out there.

AMR: I think it is a fact. Did you just say that you threw out all the behavioral kind of ...

Q: Oh, absolutely!

AMR: See, that is actually one of the things that I don’t think works with anybody but it definitely doesn’t with the gifted child, not only because they figure it out but because it comes again from the outside. It’s manipulation rather than a real acceptance of change.

Q: Okay.

Q: Someone just said to me, and I found this to be true, is to set natural and logical consequences. To me that doesn’t seem to be a real problem.

AMR: It never is, I think, unless they are too emotional and unless they are too hurt. I think one should stress that they are very logical. In fact, that is one of the reasons why many gifted children don’t do some things. They are more likely not to get into drugs. The gifted two-year-old is not as likely to run into the street. They are very careful children because they understand consequences. They’re logical and I think that the main thing one can do is talk with them, if the relationship is there and to not assume things. I think one can talk with them about almost anything. What they don’t like is if you keep things from them.

Q: I was just going to say that as a parent and a certified social worker and someone who has taught S.T.E.P. for parenting and dealt with my son, I found at very early age that logical, natural consequences were great. However, we are now getting into this, “But, Mom, it’s not fair!” I find myself going to Albert Ellis, who says to say to the child, “What are you telling yourself that is making you feel this way?” I’ll tell you it really just throws it right back on him. I have a nine-year-old, and it really makes him think.

AMR: Yes, and I think that is what we need to do as parents: to think it through very carefully.

Lori Zinser [Roeper staff]: Thank you all for coming and we will see you next week. Annemarie will be doing book signing and purchase of her two books in the small room to the right.

(Applause.)

Transcribed by Diana Elshoff and edited by Marcia Ruff, September 2009