

**First Encounter Between the Inner and Outer Worlds:
A Child is Born; A Self is Born
Delivered by Annemarie Roeper at The Roeper School
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Annemarie Roeper: Well, first I should say that I have been at Roeper School now for ten days, and I can't tell you how delighted I am with being here. It's not just a visit; I've met with a number of children, with teachers, with parents, and seen what goes on all on all over the school.

I left the school fifteen years ago. I've been here when the identity of the school was not as clear as it is now. Now what I find so exciting is that there is a basic trust relationship, which is a lot of what I am going to be talking about today. Whatever problems there are, one deals with them objectively rather than having to think in terms of manipulation or things like that. Of course, this (manipulation) may happen because we are all people. I've seen so many schools, but I have not seen a school just like Roeper. It is exciting for me to see that I still have something to say and that I can make an impact. I hope we can all learn from each other because, basically, I don't believe there are such things as teachers in the broadest sense. We are all learners. We continue to learn with our children.

I see these four sessions as a continuum. The first one was to give a sense of the framework of the philosophy and the history of the school. Today I'm going to talk about "The First Encounter: A Child is Born: A Self is Born" which is about the meaning of encountering the world for the gifted child. The next one will be "Encountering the Larger World," like going to school and encountering teachers. And then the last will be "Learning about Community." One grows out of the other.

Some things I will be reading to you so I am sure that I am using the words that are appropriate and that I feel.

At this session, I want to spotlight the psyche of the human being: what it is and how it develops. This is about gifted people, but the psyche also sets the framework of human beings in general. We need to look at the structure of the psyche, its development, and most important of all, its place as the center of the pursuit of education – in general, but for gifted children specifically. I'm saying this because in recent years the psyche has lost this position. Whenever we think about education, we

don't hear about the Self, the total person. It is not seen anymore as the deciding factor in our understanding of children.

The role of child psychology has gone through many stages over the years. There are many reasons for it. I think that the new and exciting discoveries about DNA and brain research have opened new and different doors to our understanding of how children grow, and it has moved the emphasis from the psyche to the brain. That's one reason for the change.

Another is that the focus of education has moved more and more from being child-centered, which it was 50 years ago when I first came to America. The emphasis then was on, "Who is this child?" Now it is curriculum-centered. We are seeing the child mostly as the recipient of the delivery system of the curriculum, which only relates to the individual as it relates to the subject matter offered. We don't ask, "Where is the child coming from? What is the perspective of the child at the moment he is confronted with a certain expectation?"

And thirdly, we rely on so-called objective measurements for understanding children, such as tests. Intuition and the art of observation have become somewhat suspect. It is really not believed, even by those who are capable of observing very well, to be a means of understanding, of relating, and identification. As long as we are trying to be so objective and rely on tests, we do not try to see who the child *is*, but only what she or he can *do*, be it academically, physically or even socially. We start with expectations and then relate them back to the child. We confront the child with a variety of expectations and observe how he or she reacts to each and then draw conclusions about the person. This leads to partitioning of the individual: the math part, the reading part, the organizing part, the social part, but never the whole. I really feel we are not putting Humpty Dumpty together again. Instead we are dividing him up. In California this is what I see, and the reports I get about children are cut up into pieces. What I read does not tell me who the child is, and no one seems to make that attempt.

I believe that because of these developments, we have lost a whole field of understanding human beings; we have lost something we used to take for granted in the past. There is, however, a vast body of literature relating to the psyche, the Self, consisting of theories of developmental phases, the impact of relationships, for instance, between teachers and children, or among siblings, or between parents and children. In fact we have forgotten, I think, a whole vocabulary when it comes to the psychology of children, a vocabulary that to me is so taken for granted. We need to

resurrect this and integrate this into the new findings. We don't need to give up the new approach, but in the last ten years it is like the whole world of psychology and education has changed.

We must ask: "Who is the child? What is their unique Self?" Whenever you watch human beings, you are confronted by the mystery and variety. Each human being is inhabited by his or her own unique Self, his or her own unique agenda. My husband loved to watch children play. There are never two who are just alike. There are never two who look the same, or act the same, or seem to be reacting the same. If you truly concentrate, there is much excitement in that. I feel the same way. That is one reason why I am so happy seeing children (as a consultant) because the variety is unbelievable.

The Self and the inner agenda consists at any moment of a combination of all the things that go on in us. The DNA, the inherited qualities, all accumulated and digested experiences, the dreams, the fantasies, the expectations, the conscious, the unconscious, the feelings of love, the feelings of hate, and the mystery, they're all there in this Self. We don't think of this person as this complex human being. The Self and inner agenda become the eye of the beholder, and it is this eye, this perspective, that reacts to our expectations.

A gifted 7-year-old once said to me, "Why do I have to always answer the questions of the teachers? There are so many things I want to know. I want to understand the world. Why can't I ask the questions and send the teacher out to find the answers?" I thought that was perfect.

Only if we can feel or identify with the Self of the beholder, can we understand why we bring forth a certain reaction in a person. We must not only look at the expectations but also at the vision of the person we are expecting this reaction from. In fact, each of you will react differently to what I am saying in thoughts and actions because you are all bringing something different to this situation. The same is true of the child. She or he will receive what comes her way against a background of her inner agenda at the moment, which consists of the unique Self and all the factors that go into that. The person is simply not just a "tabula rasa," an empty page to be inscribed. Nothing is ever received emotionally and understood intellectually the way it is offered. If we don't realize this, it leads to many misunderstandings and misjudgments. And that I think is one of the most important things. We make so many judgments, and we base

our judgments not on who the person is, but how the person reacts to what we expect from them.

But people look at things differently. I would like to show you what happens. I used to show children different pictures when I was at Roeper and ask them to interpret them. First of all, they interpret in their own way, differently from each other, but also children interpret them differently from adults. Take, for example, this print by Kathe Kollwitz.



The reactions I used to get from children were very different. You see that the mother is standing up and she puts something to the child's mouth and the picture is very serious. The reactions I got from children about this were really unbelievable. A lot of it was negative. The children were interpreting that the mother is forcing the child to eat, that the child is trying to get away and the mother is holding on to her, that the mother was angry. Children's interpretation was so different. I have seen this so often, that children have a different reaction from adults. Some had a whole other story, said that she had found this child crying in the streets and was adopting the child. For the children, they were surrounded with all sorts of feelings, some of them threatening.

Those are the things we don't know when we confront children with our ideas. How do these misunderstandings come about?

In order to understand this, we need to look at the structure of the psyche, what it is and how it develops. At this point I would like to tell you my vision of the human Self. I believe it is basically a mystery. We don't know any more about how it functions than we understand life and death. I am attracted to a spiritual approach, but for an intellectual understanding, Sigmund Freud's theories have always served as a basis of my understanding of children. In my opinion, his discoveries, the way he looks at the psyche, are more important for education, for understanding children, than for therapy. Understanding the normal structure and development of the psyche gives us a better handle for understanding our children. It avoids some of the misunderstandings. In my opinion, since we have moved away from that kind of structure, we misunderstand children more now than we used to. This structure allows us to create the appropriate listening environment at different developmental stages. It allows us to understand all the stages of development. I know all the objections to Freud, and I'm not going to go into them, but I believe he has given us a usable basis for understanding the Self. The more I get into this, it could be a whole-year course. One can't go into all the details, but there is a certain focus I would like to get.

Freud interprets, and most of you probably know this, that the human psyche is consisting of three parts: the id, the ego and the superego. The id is the drive for wish and need fulfillment, the instinct, the sexual drive. Much comes from DNA. The superego is roughly equivalent to the conscience – the learned taboos and the things we have learned not to do, the internalized rules and regulations from the outside world.

The ego is in between the id and superego. It is the link between the inner and the outer world. It balances demands from the id, the superego and the outside reality into a workable way of coping with life. That is the role of the ego. In order to do so, it develops a number of reactions such as repression – feelings we have learned we are not supposed to feel. Substitution of behavior, which is called sublimation – substitution of behavior which is undesired by society with a more desirable one while still fulfilling the drive. For example, it is pretty well known that many people who become smokers were thumb-suckers when they were younger. Replacing hitting with swearing is one that children often do. Sublimation is giving up the original impulse and replacing it with one more acceptable. Water play for little children replaces the fact that they used to be wetting. In fact, children who are never allowed to play with water have a more difficult time becoming toilet-trained.

One of the biggest tasks of the ego is controlling impulse and aggression and postponing gratification because reality demands it. It develops – and this is all Freud -- when the pleasure principle meets with the reality principle. An example, for instance: the child's ball falls down the stairs. He learns to control his eagerness to get it because he has fallen down the stairs before. He postpones his gratification. This is, for instance, where a gifted child begins to develop different kinds of reactions from the child who is not gifted. Maybe the gifted child never fell down the stairs because he learned how to handle it, so he doesn't have to give up certain gratification that the other children have to give up, because they learn from the reality experience that they've had. I could tell you much more about this. The whole psychological development differs for the gifted for these kinds of reasons.

The unconscious plays an enormous part in this. This is another thing we forget when we work with children. We can't explain all their reactions because some come from a place that we don't understand, from an unconscious reaction. The id is mostly unconscious. The greater part of the ego is conscious because that's the part that regulates. The superego is often unconscious as well. We may feel guilty about something but without knowing what caused this guilt. It originates from an earlier time when we have incorporated something but forgotten where the guilt comes from. For instance, Catholics weren't allowed to eat meat on Friday. Many people have told me how guilty they feel eating meat on Friday. Even though it is no longer part of the requirement, they still feel guilty because it was so much a part of their upbringing not to do that.

At birth these areas don't exist, these different parts of the psyche. As the child grows, these areas develop in different proportions to each other in reaction to the inner push of wanting to learn that comes from the child and the outer experiences. It is at this point the gifted react very differently from other children. They, for instance, will develop guilt feelings much earlier because they understand what's behind it and yet their impulses may be different. Again, I can't go into detail. There is a whole variety of reactions that are different for the gifted. There is not a definition of gifted and there is less of a definition of the psychology of it. With all the work that has been done, there is still no agreed-upon definition of gifted.

I'd like to go into what happens when the child is born. I believe that even at that time the gifted child brings along certain facilities that make him or her more aware, even if only vaguely. From the very beginning, gifted children develop differently

psychologically from other children. The birth process in itself is an enormous experience. They open their eyes to the new world and the child now has the task to learn all about it and also to learn to include all of it in her emotions. She must begin the journey of developing trust. His or her needs will be fulfilled, needs which are enormously strong within the context of the total dependency of the newborn child. The prototype of all the encounters with the outer world begins at the moment of birth, when the child is the most powerless and dependent, confronted with the total unknown. You have to try to imagine what that's like. Let's keep this image of this confrontation in mind because it stays with us all through our life: the insignificant self with its complex agenda, which grows all the time, confronting the complex world with all the contradictions of danger as well of support. We all become part of the world and yet we are in some ways forever separate.

The task of the Self is a daily one and differs for each individual, changing as time goes on. For if we look at ourselves honestly, we continue to see ourselves as a tiny powerless Self, confronting the fearful and sometimes dangerous outside world. And how do we manage this awesome task--this confrontation, which is an enormous thing?

This is the point I am about to make. The tiny child cannot do this alone. Neither can any of us. The child, as do adults, needs help, and help is available in the form of the parent or parent substitute who re-establishes some of the safety and comfort of the womb by giving physical nourishment and care and cuddly love and comfort. Soon the child begins to have their first emotions and they begin to reciprocate this love with enormous passion. The way a baby loves a mother or parent – I don't know if we ever feel that much passion again. The whole universe exists in this motherly hug. All our lives we long for this net of safety. The relationship to the parent or caregiver is the prototype of all relationships. It is truly the lifeline for the child. It is an invisible replacement for the umbilical chord. Our future relationships are modeled after this primary one.

Relationships are the basis for all emotional, intellectual, and even physical growth. This is the part I really want to bring to you because this is the part we don't talk about any more. The basis for all growth and learning exists in relationships.

There were a lot of studies done on children in orphanages. They died because they weren't given this kind of love. The condition of this relationship is of crucial importance. It carries the burden of continuous daily interactions. Every day there are opportunities to hurt this relationship, to make it one that doesn't bring with it the total

safety the child needs. It depends on the mother's or father's inner agenda and on the developing inner agenda of the child. This unit, the first community, becomes the prototype for future communities and it becomes a part of that inner safety net. All of this becomes the basis for the next step – for teachers and school. The relationship between the student and teacher is the basis for the child's learning. And not only the content of the teaching; the relationship itself has to be considered. Especially if there are any problems, we need to look at that (relationship).

But before we talk about that I would like to talk about the care and maintenance of the original relationship – the basic lifeline – and the impact it has on the child's Self and inner agenda and, in fact, the relationship to oneself because we learn to love ourselves because of the original bond to the parents and the love we received from the parents.

The child's unconscious hope is unconditional acceptance and love from the all-powerful parents and therefore the world. Realistically, this is impossible for the parent who has other connections that go beyond the child. The parents' own and unconscious needs may make an impact on this vital bond and may disturb it some way. Factors beyond our control limit our power, but, on a continuum, the more uncluttered with other factors the relationship remains between parent and child, the freer the child will be to blossom. That is the bottom line. The maintenance of this relationship has priority over all other expectations and parental obligations, such as introducing the child to learning and the world.

How do we maintain this relationship? We do this by consciously looking at our own motivation for expectations for our child and trying to maintain empathy for and awareness of the child's soul to any extent possible. Now, probably you think this all is taken for granted. In my work, when I see a child and I tell the parent the child is gifted, the parent asks, "What do I do now? How will I fulfill this enormous responsibility? How many museums should I take my children to? How much educational material should I buy?" It (their first reaction) is not the understanding that the gifted child, almost more than other children, truly needs the support of parents more than anything else. All the rest is fine, it's important, but it needs to be inside that lifeline, not outside. It's very important that the child doesn't develop a feeling of wondering whether he or she is going to be supported by the family if he doesn't live up to these expectations. We must take care that the knowledge that the child is gifted does not turn into an expectation. Many children have told me they wished they hadn't been identified because it puts a burden on them.

The relationship is the basis for the child's trust and growth. I think that's the important point. They will grow better intellectually when they have this relationship. With this framework the inner agenda grows and develops as she learns to differentiate and recognize her own environment. The child learns some inner control without panicking. The truth of these children is that they are driven to conquer this world, to want to understand it. They put pressure on themselves when they can't immediately learn. One of the things that gifted children have trouble understanding is that there is such a thing as trial-and-error learning – that before they do something they have to make mistakes. They need to feel that the parents are there to support them, to help them, to explain it. It's a kind of inner control. Learning about the world gives you a sense of power and allows you to become a part of the world.

There are so many times the child is confronted by a task that is too big. They need to learn how to do this, gain this inner control, this knowledge, without panicking. When this relationship is flawed, or if the outside demands are too great, then panic sets in. We've all seen children in this panic. They feel the lifeline is not there to support them. The stronger that lifeline is, the more they are capable of developing the way they are driven to do it. When the relationship is flawed, the child internalizes this panic, which makes it more difficult to develop the inner structure of control and mastery that the child is looking for.

Here is a story. Two children were taken to the hospital for appendectomies. One child had a very positive relationship with her parent, who stayed with her. The child was worried and afraid even though she was told the truth. She overcame it without too much trouble, mostly because she was interested in the procedure, why it was happening, and what was going to happen. The other child was left alone in the hospital. She felt abandoned. Most of all, she felt she was being punished and that it was her fault. It took her a long time to get over this, to live with the pain, with the discomfort. There was nothing there to give her the necessary support. There are many other reasons why the support of the parent is of such great importance.

Within the trust situation, postponement is learned. The child realizes that postponement means "soon," not "never." The child who isn't trusting feels maybe that the mother may never come back. The child accepts the adult's power as support for him. At this point the ego begins to regulate the needs of the id and the outside world. The intellect and the ability to differentiate increases, and as the child grows, she acquires more and more satisfaction. They more and more master the world and

delight in learning because they are doing the learning for themselves. Mastery is a deep need for these children. It brings with it not only skill but also brings with it some trial and error and failure, and they can only deal with it if they have support.

The Soul grows along with the body. It develops power and control but also adaptation and submission. Indeed they can do this when they have developed trust – this lifeline relationship. The goal of the child is to find his or her niche in the world. The environment makes certain demands, which the ego regulates. They learn how to share space and time and attention. The child learns how to regulate this without damage to the Soul if a trust relationship is established.

One of the important byproducts of the modern approach – the modern approach that leans towards nature rather than nurture – is that there is more of the feeling that the child is born with whoever he is, even if there are things still to be identified, such as learning difficulties. There is the feeling that the child has had it (the Self) since birth and that it's not anything which grows out of the relationship. I have observed a reduction of parent guilt feelings, which used to be so very prevalent, because we are putting it all on nature and DNA and inheritance. I don't really want to bring the guilt back – I have never thought that if there were difficulties between parent and child that it was somebody's fault, and it's wonderful that there is less of it – but I do want parents to look again at the fact that the relationship is the most important thing. The parents need to think about that part as much – or more – as, what is he learning, how is he learning, will he get into Harvard, and all these other things, rather than looking at our obligation. Is it our obligation to make sure he has all the skills to live in this world, or to give him the basic security so he can face this world? Of course the child, the gifted child particularly, wants to learn. They want to understand this world, and they want the parent to help them learn. It is also part of this lifeline that we help them interpret their own feelings, help them receive the kind of support and help they need. I think the important thing though is that we are giving the support that *they* want, that *they* need and not think so much about what we think the world wants.

Today, one of the high school students in the class I am teaching about the psychology of the gifted said, "What you need to know if you are a gifted person is that there are always two goals. One is *your* goal, what you need to fulfill yourself, and the other is the goal of the outside world." How to bring those two goals together is really the task of both the parents and the educator and the child. I really believe there is always this confrontation: What drives this child? And what drives the gifted child is really worth listening to. That's the other thing, very often we think they have to learn

what we expect them to, but what goes on in this child may often be much more important, more insightful than this particular skill we feel we have to concentrate on.

There's another reason why the gifted need parental support even more than others. They need their parents to be their advocate, that's one of the main things the parent needs to be. They often are seen as different by other children, by other adults. They have often a different language, a way of learning. They are not skill learners, they are concept learners, and that's something we will talk more about next week. I think it is difficult to grow up, anyway, but for the gifted, it is even more difficult. Even though they have some other skills, and also have more excitement because learning is so very meaningful to them, but all of that needs to be inside the lifeline.

That is easily said but not so easily done. Children think very often that they disappoint their parents. I remember reading a book of letters by Einstein where he told his sister that he had disappointed his parents because he felt he had not done as well in school as they had wanted. Of course, you know, he overcame it. (General laughter.)

They are driven by their creativity, which may conflict with the outside expectations and demands. Often gifted children are loners. They see themselves as different. What I find with many of them is that they are aware of whatever the difficulties with their relationship with other people, and when they feel that their parents are their friends, they can manage it.

So often, of course, we don't know how to interpret a child's behavior. A child draws on the wallpaper. Is he doing it because he is so filled with creativity that he needs to express himself? Is he doing it to spite his parents? Is he doing it because he doesn't know any better? I'm not saying that we should let a child do that, but we need to seek to understand *why* the child does it. I have seen children who need to understand water pressure and put their hands under a water faucet to make a fine mist, and of course they make an enormous mess, but it's the need to experiment and find out. I'm not saying we need to let them do it, but we need to understand and react to them in a way that isn't too punitive.

I wanted to just give you an example for how gifted children are confronted with their own differences and need the help of their parents, and sometimes the parents are on the other side. I am thinking of one child who is a daydreamer. He would sit in the classroom and look out the window. He would see a bird. First he would look at the

bird and wonder how it could fly. Then his mind would wander and he would begin to think about how in the future there will be less and less birds because we are polluting the environment and so forth. The teacher would be angry because he wasn't paying attention. He was so upset about this, because his parents were upset, that he moved his desk so that he was facing a blank wall so he wouldn't daydream. But it didn't work. He had all sorts of thoughts that neither his teacher nor his parents were interested in hearing. He felt so alone. The only other person he could talk to was an 8-year-old girl friend. But then who heard of an 8-year-old boy having a girl friend? So he felt totally without support. His father was upset because he thought he should have a boy friend and not a girl friend. His sister was always cleaning his room up because it was a mess. He felt like no one was supporting him, and if anyone needs support, it is that type of child.

This is the main point, and I'm belaboring it a little bit, but I feel like I am fighting a battle to re-establish this point of view. It has a great many implications for what goes on at school and the role that parents play at school. For instance, where parents take over homework. It is a very complex situation which is difficult for parents and for children because the parents feel like they need to carry out the demands of the school and yet the child feels lonely with the big task in front of them when they don't feel that anyone supports them.

This is a poem, or something, that I wrote many years ago – it doesn't even have a date on it. It was probably about 15 years ago, when the process of changing the attitude toward children began.

The Dilemma of the Modern Family

As we are watching, the process and the goals of education are changing beyond recognition.

We stand bewildered between the familiarity of our past with its well-known failures and glories and the hopes, fears, and utter unknown of our children's futures.

What used to be a narrow, well-defined path, well-traveled path to be followed by the child, guided by parents and teachers, has become an immense landscape to be explored by the child limited only by his or her desire and ability to learn and grow. What then will happen to our child? Will he be safe? Where is the place of parents in this scheme of things?

Parents, your place now has become more important than ever before. You are in the middle of this wide landscape.

It is you who creates the atmosphere – the coziness or coldness, and the color and the shape in tones and overtones of your child’s world.

It is you who helps him feel capable of mastering the unknown, or to let him feel overwhelmed by the vastness of it all.

It is you whose love is in the background of every step he takes.

It is you who are his model by virtue of what you are and what you feel for him.

School is but a part of their landscape – a part that builds a new foundation and expands it to nurture his ever-widening circle of perception.

Any questions?

Q: Annemarie, you spoke earlier about children writing on the wallpaper and the need to understand why they do it. Our five-year-old child does this, and the problem we have is getting him to open up and tell us what he’s really feeling. He seems to want to tell us what he thinks we want to hear. Is there any way to help us encourage him to open up?

AMR: Of course, this is already rooted in your relationship and I don’t know what that is. Chances are, he doesn’t know himself, and you may just need to try to interpret. I think what is important is that he doesn’t feel that he is a bad boy. He needs to know he has your acceptance, and then you explain why he can’t do this, or you give him a big sheet of paper, or whatever.

It happens so easily that this lifeline is not there. For example, one of the things that is very typical for gifted children is that they are not daring, they have to be very careful because they know the dangers, and it comes to a point where all the neighborhood children are riding a bike and he isn’t, or they are all swimming and he isn’t. And he disappoints you because you really are ambitious for him to do it. That’s the situation when we have to think about our own feelings. Are we identified with him to such an extent that he has to fulfill our needs, that we want to tell our neighbors what a good swimmer he is? Or, on the other side, does he really want to do the thing and is afraid to do it and needs us to push him? The important question is whether we are making demands to fulfill his real needs, or is he fulfilling our needs? Even that at times we need to do (fulfill our own needs), but we have to be clear. The child needs to realize, that in the end, he needs to do what we are trying to help him achieve because it is in the direction he wants to go.

These children are more sensitive than other children. It is difficult to raise a gifted child. As they get older it becomes more difficult because that's when everything becomes more important and the discrepancy between the inner agenda and the outer expectations might be greater. These children are very unique and they might have their own goal, which might not be one that will make them famous or rich or anything like that. And yet we have to find ways to understand them and decide whether it is to their advantage to insist on their doing it our way.

I remember a child who went to school here. These children often have many gifts. This child was a very talented musician, but he was very bright in everything else. He always wanted to be a musician but he became a lawyer. He felt obligated to do this, it wasn't even that his family was pushing him, but because that was the way the world was. And he became more and more unhappy. Emotionally, he was not happy. So at 35 he gave up being a lawyer and became a musician, which is what he wanted to be. In that case, maybe he had to go through this. That's where we need to have the sensitivity for them. Of course I have simplified this because there are other factors – financial, siblings, etc. – but it is important the child realizes that his own way is worth trying to develop, that we are trying to allow the child to blossom the way they are. As they get older it becomes more difficult. In fact, parents change as they get older. It is easier to be accepting of whatever a little child does, but as they get older, the impact from all directions comes into play.

Q: What do you do with a child who gets all As without doing any work? I go to the teachers – this is not at this school – and they say, why are you complaining when he's getting all As? But in the meantime, he is lazy. How do you bring his gifts out?

AMR: Well, the question is, the big question, is why have we decided that he has to learn what we are teaching him? Why is that curriculum, which someone has invented, what any child should learn? But most of all, what this particular child wants to learn? Maybe he wants to go in a very different direction. He gets all As, because he is very bright. He is probably not very interested. He is fulfilling his duty, but I think there is probably something that he would really like that has not been found.

Something else that we will talk about more, gifted children need to be with other children who are gifted, who can stimulate each other. And, really, a school should have a great variety of opportunities for the child to plug in and grow. Choices. There should be many, many other ways that will allow us to let him grow.

The other thing about gifted children... As adults, because we've all lived in this world for quite a while, there really aren't that many other directions we think we can go. We try to do the best, we're competitive, we want to win, and to win you need to do the same thing other people are doing, otherwise you can't win because there is no one doing the same thing. These gifted children may want to go in a direction that no one has ever gone before, especially the highly gifted ones. Einstein didn't do that well in school, but he was going in a direction no one was going, so there was no way to judge him, or even to help him go there. So I think what we need to do is open the door and see where they want to go. This is difficult to do, I realize.

Q: I have a question about sibling rivalry. I have a 5-and-a-half-year-old and a 2-and-a-half-year-old. The 5-year-old is quiet and introverted, and the 2-year-old is outgoing, aggressive. They are completely the opposite. She is always overwhelming him and complains that he is sad all the time.

AMR: I don't think I can give you an answer without knowing more of the specifics, but if the children are perfectionists, or emotional perfectionists, they have certain fears. They think they're not supposed to have these feelings, and they don't really know how to handle the more aggressive sibling. Try to find ways to settle it, to support them in this situation. The one thing about gifted children, it's always amazing to me how much they know. If you just open the door, make it clear that you are a person who is not going to make a judgment, that you are just excited to hear what they have to say, they will tell you. They will tell you their feelings about their siblings, and they will discuss it.

Q: You touched upon the child who goes into their fantasies. How do you help the child balance their inner agenda and development of their fantasy world with learning certain skills that will help them to be able to express their ideas and function in the world? The teacher looks at them and says they aren't focusing, they aren't part of the class, maybe labels them or suggests medication to help them focus.

AMR: I think that's the very basic question, and the thing we need to understand, about gifted children, and the decision we have to make about what do they have to learn, what do they want to learn? They really don't want to learn skills, because they are global thinkers. They want to understand the world; they want to learn concepts. Most schools concentrate on teaching skills, but I think we need to surround them with opportunities to learn about the world. I remember when I was working with young children, we would discuss the question of what's alive. They got so excited because

that is what they wanted to understand. Or what is real. Anything that has to do with increasing their understanding is as important as any skill. They are really not skill learners and they are often late (to learn). There are children who are self-taught readers, but often children, if they are not self-taught, are very late to read because they aren't interested. They aren't very good at math computation; they are very good at math concepts. They aren't good spellers; their handwriting is not necessarily good. It's not generally so, but that is often the case.

I think it's that we have so many expectations that at certain ages they have to do certain things, and they don't live up to that and we are disappointed in them. We need to change our expectations when it comes to the gifted. And also we have to look at the child first and then what we expect. We have to give up some of that anxiety and turn it into trust. There is no rule that they have to do certain things by certain ages.

It also has much to do with their motivation, and the motivation comes when they understand a reason for it. There are children who don't learn to read because reading is, well, it is why often gifted children do not draw very well because their hand coordination does not keep up with what they know and it is the same with reading. What they are able to read is very boring to them, because what they want to know is the big thing. There are many gifted children who read late, and we don't need to be anxious. We need to trust them. I remember one child in the school, and I think she had the highest IQ in the school at the time, I think it was 175. She was the child who told me she wanted to live on the moon. And I asked her why, and she said it was because she was a dancer. I still didn't know why she wanted to live on the moon. She said, "You know, I am a little chubby and on the moon the gravity is much less. So it would be much easier to be a dancer on the moon." She was 4 years old. She did something gifted children are able to do. She was able to transfer one concept from one situation to the next, a very complex process. But she would not learn to read. Reading was just not what she wanted to do. Her parents were very understanding about it; she went to Roeper and we weren't pushing it. Then she got to be 8 years old, and in Stage III. At that point all the girls were reading "Black Beauty" and she couldn't read it. She all of a sudden realized how important it was to be able to read because she couldn't talk about the book with the other girls. So she learned to read in two weeks.

But what we really need to do is have a broader approach. If you were going to look at our children first – I think that is the question you were asking about skills – that's something we will bring to them from the outside because we think they are important, that the world thinks they are important. And it is something we are

imposing on them. Unless we have the sensitivity to allow this to grow and to happen, then we are disturbing the lifeline, as I have been calling it. Those are exactly the things we need to be more aware of than we have been.

Q: What do you do when there are time constraints around the creativity? For example, there is a bedtime that is the ultimate goal, and everything is done and this is the time for a shower and all of a sudden this wonderment comes out and you're thinking, "I'm going to lose my mind but I don't want to stifle it, but on the other hand I have to have some control, but then I have to find balance..."

AMR: You don't have to be afraid of that. What I am trying to say is that, as a parent, you don't have to give in.

Q: I understand that, but where do I draw the line?

AMR: That's up to you. You have to draw the line where you have to draw the line. What I only want to say is to be careful when you become the enemy, when the relationship becomes cluttered with other expectations. The other thing to consider is that many gifted children need little sleep, they really don't need to go to bed early. Often that is a need the adults have. (General laughter.) Maybe you could explain that, maybe let them play in their bed. But I'm not saying you should only think about your child. You have to think about your other children, about yourself, about your husband. But it's a sensitivity I'm talking about, a focus. If that relationship is there, if there is a strong bond, then it is not going to break so easily. You don't have to worry so much. You can make mistakes, you can get angry at them, you can do all sorts of things as long as that is there. It's like a wall, a cocoon within which we live together. It is when the child gets outside that that the child feels lost and panicked and so on.

Q: I'm thinking of gifted children as they get older. I'm thinking about a 19-year-old who has wonderful ideas but doesn't have the practical skills – the ability to save the money to be able to execute his ideas, or the social skills to be able to execute his ideas. Is there a way of infusing those skills?

A: Well, I don't know how much infusing you can do, especially if he is 19 years old. We have to allow children their fate. We even may have to allow them to go through a period where they're not secure, when they're not going to have enough money. The parental control is an important factor. They need parental support. They need safety. But the control can only go up to a point and then we have to trust. We think we have

done all the best we can. We have made them learn these skills. We've gotten them through school. They've gotten all A's. But something emotionally has not been fulfilled. I think it is the emotional growth that we need to be just as much aware of as anything else.

Q: I have a 4-year-old and a 2-year-old, and the 4-year-old is so impatient with the 2-year-old. He complains how she doesn't understand this or that. How do you discipline a gifted child who is so sensitive, so aware, compared to ordinary children?

AMR: I don't understand the question.

Q: How do you discipline a gifted child, set boundaries, without stifling their creativity?

AMR: There is not a recipe for this. The only thing I am talking about is your own sensitivity to the child's feelings and your ability to have empathy with that child. There are things that go on in a child's mind that are very difficult for us to identify with, like the child who has lost his favorite teddy bear and he can't go to bed or can't sleep without it. It is hard to think why that should be as important as the fact that the father has just lost his job. But it is just as important. We just need to have the sensitivity for it. Discipline is a word that is hard for me to deal with because it is not a goal in itself. I think there are some very realistic expectations that we have to have of children. Once they understand that the expectation is there because it is realistic, not just because I want it for him, they'll understand. I don't think one has to ever be afraid of being strict with a child, or being angry – as long as we maintain this lifeline. We don't need to feel ashamed of being angry as long as we've maintained this lifeline. That's really what I'm talking about.

Q: You've talked about how awareness creates fears. I have a 7-year-old, and the thing I'm dealing with right now is, at bedtime, my son says, "I'm frightened. Every time I look at the clock and the second hand moves, that's another second closer to when you'll die, to when I'll die." (Sympathetic murmurs.)

AMR: The fear of death for gifted children is one of the basic fears. That is when the lifeline idea comes back. Actually this is an experience I remember having myself. It almost ruined my childhood, having that thought, because death meant more than just dying. It meant, "What is life?"

Q: That's his next question!

AMR: Those are realistic questions. Again, we don't know the answers. It is all right to tell them we don't know the answer but give them as much support and all the love you can give him at that time, and remind them that you will get through it together. I remember my father sitting night after night by my bed because I was so afraid, and it was the same thought, that by the next morning, it would be a day closer. At that time, I didn't know I was going to live to 87 years old. (General laughter.)

Q: You talk about gifted children being so sensitive. My son is 4 and a half and he's very shy. I'll take him out to a store, and the clerk will say hello, and my son will look at the floor and not answer. And then the clerk will say, well, someone got up on the wrong side of the bed today. How can I protect my son?

AMR: You have every right to be mad at that clerk. She has no right to say such a thing.

Q: I know – it infuriates me. Finally, I'll say something like he just doesn't talk to strangers.

AMR: The way to help him is to tell him he can do whatever he wants and that you thought that what he did was fine. I remember with my children, they were all thumb-suckers, and one day when I was buying Tommy, who was four, an ice cream cone, and this person says I won't give it to you because you're sucking your thumb. (Shrug.) The main thing is for them to know you are on their side.

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