Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment of the Gifted

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist

Post-Conference ‘Bijzonder Begaafd’

www.talentstimuleren.nl

Nieuwegein, The Netherlands
September 29, 2016

Gifted Development Center
8120 Sheridan Boulevard, Suite C-111
Westminster, Colorado 80003 USA
www.gifteddevelopment.com
303-837-8378
The Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment*

Expert examiners use qualitative as well as quantitative information in creating a cohesive picture of a child. Their judgments are informed by observing the child’s behaviors before and during the assessment. Children who say “approximately” or “precisely” demonstrate advanced language development, regardless of their actual scores. The IQ scores of parents or siblings, early achievement of developmental milestones, profound curiosity, deep moral concern, remarkable associations or generalizations, perfectionism, advanced vocabulary, keen attention to detail, unusual empathy, vivid imagination, superb memory, early reading or fascination with LEGOs, school achievement, reading interests, and parental anecdotes of unusually precocious reasoning are all taken seriously in determining the abilities of a child. A seasoned tester of the gifted uses this information to create a composite picture of the level of the child’s abilities. IQ test results, then, are nested into this schema to add further information. “Those qualities that we have learned to recognize as gifted—or highly or profoundly gifted—become recognizable. Likewise, the developmental history of a child is vital information in judging apparent or potential ability levels” (Gilman, 2008, p. 59).

One type of evaluation, developed by Dr. Annemarie Roeper, relies completely on observations such as these. With her husband, George, Annemarie founded The Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, one of the first schools for the gifted; it has been in operation for 75 years. The Annemarie Roeper (AMR) Method of Qualitative Assessment is used as an alternative to, or in conjunction with, traditional testing and offers a unique approach to evaluation for giftedness.

The human psyche is one of enormous complexity, not fully measurable by standardized psychometric examinations. The only instrument complex enough to understand a human being is another human being. AMR Method practitioners use themselves as the instrument through which to understand the child or adult. AMR Method of Qualitative Assessment offers a broader perspective to the assessment process, revealing the inner world of the individual. (Roeper, 2012)

Psychometric assessments have repeatedly demonstrated the efficacy of this method of estimating levels of intelligence in gifted children. AMR Qualitative Assessment is used independently by some private schools for the gifted as their method of selecting students. The evaluator experiences the child in an unstructured observation that resembles play therapy. He or she enters the child’s world with no preconceived notions. “An essential element of AMR Method of Qualitative Assessment is to provide an open and totally non-judgmental atmosphere in which the child has freedom of expression” (Roeper, 2012). The children frequently talk openly about their interests and experiences, their hopes, their disappointments, and their problems. In addition to talking with them, the evaluator plays games with them that
require strategies or problem-solving abilities, and allows them to express themselves with building materials, art, or story telling.

Qualitative Assessment is an excellent alternative for children who do not perform well on IQ tests or for whom the test ceilings are too low. In addition to yielding information about the child’s level of cognitive functioning, Qualitative Assessment offers a glimpse at the inner world of the child, his or her emotional functioning, and may reveal issues related to the home, the school, peers or self-concept. Videotapes of Annemarie Roeper’s qualitative method have been created with the assistance of a grant from the Malone Family Foundation. They are available from The Roeper Institute (2012). Anne Beneventi, who worked with Dr. Roeper for nearly 20 years, has become the current Director of the AMR Method of Qualitative Assessment (QA).

Below is an article Anne Beneventi wrote about Annemarie’s QA method for the Gifted Development Center Newsletter, shortly after she was appointed Annemarie’s successor. For more information, please see the upcoming Roeper Review (October, 2016), which is dedicated to the work of George and Annemarie Roeper, in honor of the 75th anniversary of The Roeper School in the United States.

References


Qualitative Assessment with Annemarie Roeper

The Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment*  
Anne Beneventi

Annemarie Roeper developed her method of assessment to reflect the qualitative or emotional difference she observed in gifted children. For 5 decades, she and her husband, George, directed The Roeper School, one of the first schools in the United States for the gifted. I met Annemarie in 1986 when I was hired to teach in a program for gifted families called Curious Kids Bunch. I found the depth of Annemarie's educational philosophy compelling and shared her reverence for children. Curious Kids Bunch launched my apprenticeship and friendship with Annemarie Roeper.

Gifted children feel different from their chronological peers because they are different. When gifted children are out of sync, especially in school, parents and professionals may conclude there is something wrong because the child is not fitting in. By conforming to standard expectations, children often sacrifice their authentic sense of Self and emotional well-being. An awareness of these differences in the context of giftedness offers a positive interpretation of behavior. The goal of QA is to recognize and reflect the inherent value and uniqueness of the individual and encourage a positive esteem and interaction with the world.

The Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment (QA) focuses on intensities and sensitivities, which underlie an individual's cognitive drive. QA does not separate the cognitive from emotional development of the individual but rather endeavors to understand the emotional need behind commonly agreed upon characteristics of giftedness. For instance, if a child has a strong interest in dinosaurs, extensive knowledge is evidence of advanced cognitive ability. Driving
the motivation to learn is the individual’s need for depth and complexity. Gifted children may be inspired to learn about dinosaurs to better understand the origin of the world in which they find themselves. To recognize a strong interest in dinosaurs as an emotional need expressed cognitively offers a more complex understanding of children, which includes their inner experience.

Following are principles of The Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment (QA):

1. Giftedness is an internal experience, the essence of the individual, not determined by performance, achievement or talent. It's who they are, not what they do with their advanced ability. Giftedness is innate and continues throughout the life of the individual.

2. In Qualitative Assessment, the child is the priority, and conclusions or recommendations by the practitioner must not be skewed by outside interests.

3. Parents are seen as experts and are relied upon to contribute knowledge of their child.

4. It is necessary for the QA Practitioner to pull back her own agenda, allowing the child’s to emerge.

5. Intellect and emotion cannot be separated. Gifted children have asynchronous development and are recognized as whole.

QA guides parents by providing a portrait of the whole child and supports respectful understanding of the individual, positive parenting and appropriate educational planning.

Anne Beneventi has a lifelong passion for working with gifted children. Anne began working with Dr. Annemarie Roeper 25 years ago, and has been appointed the new director of the Annemarie Roeper Method of Qualitative Assessment (QA). She served as Admissions Director of Helios School for Gifted Children in Palo Alto (now in Sunnyvale) since its inception and Head of School for one year. She has been a professional associate of the Gifted Development Center in the Bay Area for the last seven years, conducting Needs Assessments, scheduling clients, and offering her expertise in post-test conferences. She has a private practice, evaluating children for giftedness using QA and consulting with families and schools to provide appropriate educational and emotional support for gifted children.

GDC Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment (QQA)

In 2014, Gifted Development Center, in conjunction with our affiliates in California, began offering a combination of Qualitative Assessment and Quantitative Assessment: the most comprehensive way of understanding a gifted child. This state-of-the-art combination of assessment methods allows children to demonstrate their abilities in both the structured environment of standardized testing and in the familiarity of their home, where they are free to express themselves in any way they wish.

The special training and personalities of the Qualitative Assessment (QA) practitioners invite the children to be completely comfortable in sharing who they really are. Instead of an evaluation, QA feels like an opportunity to engage with an interested new friend in their own home. Our QA practitioners, Anne Beneventi and Linda Leviton, are able to discover a great deal about the children in one hour, as well as recognize signs of giftedness. A uniquely child-centered approach, QA is invaluable for understanding the more elusive qualities of a child (e.g., creative, emotional, spiritual, ethical) that correlate with high IQ. It can supply vital information that may not be revealed in standardized testing, creating a fuller picture—especially for those who may not test well.

Although some private gifted schools use QA for admission, public schools and most selective private schools require the kind of documentation provided by quantitative assessments. Our new service, Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment (QQA), provides the ideal combination of different approaches for understanding a gifted child in depth.

QQA has some additional features. We also assess the child’s learning style. The visual-spatial learner (VSL) construct originated at the Gifted Development Center and we are the central source of information about how to teach and parent VSLs. We also are the leaders in research on overexcitabilities. We created the Overexcitability Inventory for Parents (OIP). The latest 28-item version measures all five overexcitabilities—psychomotor, sensual, imaginative, intellectual and emotional. Emotional overexcitability now divides into two factors: emotional sensitivity and empathy. Now we are able to assess empathy in children.

In our signature two-hour post-test conference, parents meet with three different specialists: an expert on Qualitative Assessment, an expert on quantitative methods, and Linda Silverman, Ph.D., Director of the Gifted Development Center, all addressing different facets of a child’s development. Collectively, this team co-creates with the parents an Optimal Development Plan to promote the child’s emotional growth and educational career.

At this time, QQA is only offered in California.
Components of Comprehensive Assessment

Psychological testing comes in a variety of forms. Neuropsychologists offer extensive batteries of tests that measure various kinds of neurological functioning. This type of testing is needed to assess executive functioning, AD/HD, nonverbal learning disorder, memory weaknesses, mood disorders, brain trauma, seizures, lesions, and other neurological impairments. School psychologists may conduct behavioral observations or functional assessments in the classroom. Psychological assessments in the school are useful for children experiencing difficulties with performance or behavior.

Some examiners offer IQ testing to determine if a child qualifies for a gifted school or special program. Comprehensive assessment of giftedness goes beyond testing for school selection. A comprehensive evaluation gathers more information, provides test interpretation and recommendations, and involves an extensive report. The purpose of the assessment is to understand the child better, determine strengths and weaknesses, document disabilities, suggest resources, and guide the parents in supporting the child’s optimal development. The method used by the Gifted Development Center has been refined over 37 years with a team of seasoned examiners, and has served more than 6,300 families from all over the world. It may be instructive as a model for other practitioners or agencies.

Most of the referrals to the Gifted Development Center are from other parents. We also receive referrals from teachers, physicians, website listings, and schools for the gifted. Several have found the Center through Internet searches. And some have attended presentations or read publications by staff members.

Reasons for Seeking Assessment

A study of 60 cases uncovered 33 different reasons for seeking assessment:

1. To better understand their child and learn more about giftedness
2. To document the child’s abilities for the purpose of advocacy
3. To confirm gifted traits observed by teachers, parents, doctors and others
4. For admission to a school or special program for the gifted
5. For assistance in finding an appropriate match for the child's abilities
6. To determine the appropriate grade placement and gain support for acceleration
7. To understand the child’s strengths and weaknesses
8. To discover the degree of the child’s giftedness
9. To learn about resources for the gifted
10. To learn how to parent more effectively
11. To reverse the pattern of a child “dumbing down” in school
12. To locate support networks for the child and the parents
13. To deal with school refusal, school phobia, or psychosomatic illnesses
14. To help the child maximize potential and get the most out of life
15. To help the child become more well-rounded
16. To deal with the emotional ramifications of giftedness
17. For advice on dealing with the child’s intensities
18. To understand the child’s learning style (e.g., visual-spatial learner)
19. To determine if the child has hidden learning issues
20. For diagnosis of twice exceptionality
21. To reverse or prevent underachievement
22. To understand the causes of recent changes in the child’s behavior and performance
23. Because of a family history of dyslexia or other learning disabilities
24. Because of a family history of giftedness (e.g., a gifted sibling)
25. To teach the child self-advocacy
26. To help the child develop better self-understanding
27. For Section 504 accommodations or an Individual Education Plan
28. For accommodations on College Board examinations
29. To understand the child’s motivation
30. To learn about different educational strategies
31. For information about homeschooling
32. To re-test the child on a test with a higher ceiling
33. To re-test after the child has received interventions (Silverman, 2013)

**Gifted Development Center Instruments**

Parents who contact the Center are sent a set of instruments to complete, and then an Initial Consultation is scheduled with a senior staff member before testing is scheduled. Comprehensive assessment of the child actually begins with an analysis of these tools and any records of prior assessments. They help provide a detailed picture of the child’s functioning in many areas. The forms include:

- Characteristics of Giftedness Scale
- Developmental Questionnaire
- Introversion/Extraversion Continuum
- Overexcitability Inventory for Parents
- Behavioral Checklist
- Short Sensory Profile
- Home Language Survey (for bilingual children)

The 8-page Developmental Questionnaire requests predominantly narrative information regarding reasons for assessment, early indications of advanced abilities, developmental milestones, handedness, activity level, imaginary companions, birth history, allergies, sleep patterns, medications, glasses, sensitivities, history of ear infections, illnesses, injuries, fevers, abilities, interests, previous testing, favorite books, school performance, recent changes in school performance, favorite and least favorite school subjects, motivation, extra-curricular activities, special needs at school, social interactions, friendships, leadership, relationships with siblings, relationships with parents, relationships with teachers, personal characteristics, traumatic events, anxieties, phobias, counseling history, learning style of parents, familial history of giftedness, family history of depression or suicide, family history of learning or attentional difficulties, parental occupation, parental interests, parental
education and description of child (personality, development of friendships, etc.). Review of the Developmental Questionnaire provides an in-depth view of the child.

**Post-test Conference**

The post-test conference is usually scheduled for a two-hour block of time the day after the testing. The examiner and a senior staff member work as a team to create as clear a picture of the child’s needs as possible and to create a list of recommendations that will be useful for the child throughout his or her school career. The examiner describes the child’s performance on all of the assessments and reviews the information obtained in the instruments completed by the parents. The senior staff member writes recommendations and suggests referral sources. Test interpretation is informed by the developmental information provided by the parents and the observations of the tester. For example, a child who spoke later than siblings, had more than 9 ear infections that began at 4 months of age, mishears parents frequently, asks for many repetitions during the evaluation, and has lower than anticipated scores on Comprehension and Digit Span, may need further evaluation from an audiologist.

The post-test conference is also a counseling session with the parents to answer all of their questions, especially, “Where do we go from here?” Many topics are covered, including advice on parenting, schools for the gifted, homeschooling collectives, listserves to connect with other families, scholarship opportunities, ways to further develop particular talents, enrichment opportunities, and information about available resources. A few books might be recommended. The parents leave with an evaluation summary (which is a shortened first draft of the report), containing all test results and recommendations. In addition, they receive copious articles to read about every aspect of their child that was revealed during the assessment (e.g., auditory, visual or sensory processing; AD/HD; parent advocacy; the highly gifted; parenting; birth order; social relations; introversion; perfectionism; advocacy; visual-spatial learning style; gifted girls; early childhood development; etc.).

**Comprehensive Report**

The report serves as a blueprint for assisting the child now and in the future. Designing the report is the most challenging part of the assessment process. The examiner needs to synthesize an enormous amount of information. The report usually is composed of the following sections: reason for referral, background information, previous test results (if applicable), measures administered, an interpretive discussion of each test given to the child and each instrument completed by the parents, test behavior, strengths and weaknesses, learning style, summary and recommendations. Examiners emphasize the child’s giftedness and suggest ways of developing the child’s gifts further, before discussing means of accommodating and ameliorating weaknesses. Reports tend to be between 10 and 15 pages. Some complicated cases with considerable previous testing can be over 20 pages. It usually takes approximately one hour per page to write a cogent report. All reports are submitted for review and proofreading before being sent to the parents—a process that takes about 6 to 8 weeks.
Are IQ Tests Appropriate for Identifying the Gifted?

Yes, I believe they are. But test scores are not sufficient. They need to be interpreted by people who really understand giftedness—who use qualitative information in conjunction with test scores.

With gifted children, there are many nuances in both testing and test interpretation. False positives are very unlikely. Scores in the gifted range do not occur “unexpectedly,” as one cannot fake abstract reasoning. However, false negatives are abundant. Many more children are gifted than test in the gifted range. Underestimation of gifted children’s abilities, unfortunately, is much more common than accurate appraisal. The common phrase in test reports, “This is a valid estimate of the child’s abilities,” needs to be reconsidered when assessing the gifted. How can one be certain? Underestimation of gifted children’s abilities, unfortunately, is much more common than accurate appraisal.

When the examiner knows enough about giftedness to recognize the pitfalls that may cause underestimates, he or she confirms test results with other data. If, for example, a child’s Broad Reading score is 160, but the IQ score is 125, the IQ score must be an underestimate. It is impossible for a child to achieve beyond his or her capabilities. (This is why the term “overachiever” is an oxymoron.) The highest indicator of a child’s abilities at any age should be seen as the best estimate of the child’s giftedness. When other measures fall short of this indicator, the evaluator needs to explore carefully to determine possible causes of the underestimate. Qualitative data are essential to forming a complete clinical picture of the child.

Annemarie Roeper is gone, but her work needs to be carried on. She was the champion of children and the champion of intuition. When it is my time, will there be others who have the strength of conviction to bring their intuitive judgment to the table in interpreting a child’s abilities? Or will the numbers be left on their own to tell the story? It’s because we thought numbers could speak for themselves that people stopped trusting them. With no mediators, eventually the numbers will be discarded, and these precious minds will become even more invisible. Obviously, the numbers tell only a small part of the story, but they do convince the pragmatic, empirical and scientific communities of the existence of a child with special needs. A child who is measurably different.

Accurate diagnosis of the degree of a child’s developmental advancement is worth the investment of time, money and extensive training. Diagnosis should be based upon clinical judgment, rather than psychometric data. IQ scores are never an end in themselves; they are simply tools to be used wisely in the hands of professionals who understand giftedness.