

# ABC's of Being Smart

By Dr. Joanne Foster

**D**etermining what giftedness is all about means focusing on many aspects of the individual. In this column, the fourth in an alphabetical series, I start with specifics about giftedness (details), and then move on to some ways of thinking (dispositions).

## D is for Development

### Here are some details:

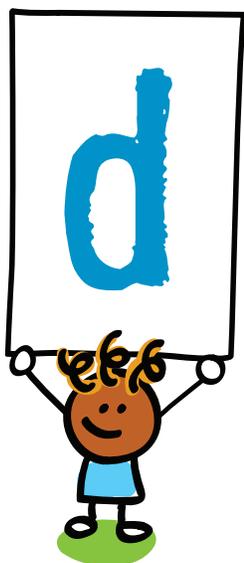
- **Developmental differences**—No two people are alike or have the exact same experiences across the life span; giftedness is about diversity and individual differences in how we develop.
- **Dynamic**—Growth is fluid, a person's capabilities change over time based on influences, supports, effort, and a host of other factors.
- **Domains**—This refers to the contexts in which we live and learn, as well as subject-specific areas of strength and weakness.
- **Diagnostic**—Teachers can be diagnosticians; they can find out individual students' current educational (and other) needs, and then plan learning and programs accordingly.
- **Differentiation**—Differentiated programs are teaching practices that take into account a flexible range of options and focus on the individual student.
- **Difficulties**—Gifted learners may struggle with some tasks—maybe math, spelling, organization, or sports; not everything is a slam dunk (offer assistance as needed).
- **Drawing/Drama/Dance**—Some children have gifted-level abilities in art, theatrical performance, or other areas not fully addressed at school; a parent has to be proactive and seek ways to enable them to develop and showcase their talents.
- **Desk**—Every student needs a place to think and work effectively (a nook in the attic or under the stairs is not ideal, but it's better than no nook at all!).
- **Documentation**—It's a good idea to keep a record of your child's accomplishments (both in and out of school), along with examples of the kinds of

supports that help your child flourish in different settings.

- **Delicate matters**—Sometimes children ask elusive or tricky questions about giftedness, ones that are poignant or that cause adults to stop and think harder than they might otherwise (e.g., Will I always be gifted? Why don't I feel smart? Is Grandma gifted? Are you? How do I know if I'm gifted?).
- **Discussion**—Talk about these questions, answering them honestly, while keeping in mind the child's age and level of understanding.
- **Disabilities**—A child's ability may not be realized if a disability prevents him from expressing his talents or affects his achievement; a comprehensive evaluation can be useful in determining if a child has dual exceptionalities, learning issues, or vulnerabilities—and what kinds of accommodations to try.
- **Determination**—Tenacity, resilience, and staying power can facilitate learning, and help to make us stronger and wiser. Who can you think of who has true grit?
- **Demands**—Sometimes teachers give gifted learners too much work, piling on the demands, rather than providing more suitable (and reasonable) learning opportunities; students may have to speak up (respectfully, of course, and preferably with a practical plan in mind).

### Here are some dispositions (directed toward taking action):

- **Desire**—It's not enough to be bright enough to learn, it's important to *want* to learn.





- **Deliberation**—Thinking, planning, monitoring, and reflecting on outcomes—all of these are important to personal growth and achievement.
- **Dreams**—There's more to life than facts and figures. Where would we—or poets, or scientists, or athletes, or *anyone*—be without hopes and dreams?
- **Dispel misconceptions**—There are lots of myths and mistaken beliefs connected with giftedness. We have to strengthen understandings of what giftedness is and is not.
- **Direction**—All children need guidance and help to stay on course, and to navigate the daily do's and don'ts.
- **Decision-making**—Choosing the most suitable school, program, or the right learning options (for and with a child) takes time, information, thought, a collaborative approach, and diligence.
- **Dweck**—If you haven't already done so, check out Carol Dweck's research on the value of having a *growth mindset* and on the importance of encouraging effort.
- **Doldrums**—When children are not challenged sufficiently, they can become bored or despondent (the doldrums is a dull, drab, desolate place where nothing ever changes and nothing ever happens); when learning drags due to dreariness or despair, perk things up by discovering creative alternatives and rousing and stimulating choices.
- **Doubts**—Even the smartest people can experience misgivings about their abilities; parents and teachers can counter these thoughts and feelings by offering encouragement and positive reinforcement.
- **Dumbo**—A different kind of elephant, who was able to fly by flapping his ears. Now that's a gift!

(Triumph is often a matter of perspective).

- **Demonstrate**—Parents and teachers can model the kinds of dispositions and actions that will serve children well in different situations, including troubling times and when things go awry.
- **Destiny**—No one is born smart. We create our own destinies and become who we are based on how we assemble the many pieces of life's puzzles over time.
- **Dare**—Why not?
- **Delight**—Share the happiness and pride you feel *about* your children *with* your children, and help create new and joyous adventures every day. ☺

### Author's Note

**Joanne Foster, Ed.D.**, is coauthor (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education* (2009, Great Potential Press), now in its second edition. She also is a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She has written extensively about high-level development and has presented on a wide range of gifted-related topics at conferences and learning venues all across North America. She teaches educational psychology as well as gifted education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at [joanne.foster@utoronto.ca](mailto:joanne.foster@utoronto.ca).

\*Readers are invited to send Dr. Foster word bites for possible use in future columns. It's E-Z!