



## ABCs of Being Smart . . . E is for Education

*By Dr. Joanne Foster*

Every installment of ABCs of Being Smart is like an entryway. I hope to energize readers and expose them to current information, organized efficiently. I invite everyone to (1) *engage* enthusiastically with the material (considering how it might be useful to them, and whether I might have missed anything essential); (2) *entertain* their own thoughts about each of the points I emphasize; (3) *elaborate* upon the ideas; and thereby (4) *enhance* their understandings about high-level development.

There are many **E** words that relate meaningfully to giftedness at home, school, and beyond. In this, the fifth column in an alphabetical series, I expand upon some explicit examples — with an emphasis on the essence of giftedness, and on external and experiential elements.

### The Essence of Exceptionality

- **Explanation**—giftedness is exceptional ability in one or more areas, such that a learner requires educational adaptations.
- **Exceeding**—gifted learners are those whose capabilities in some subjects markedly surpass those of their age or grade peers.
- **Emotional intelligence**—children’s understanding of feelings enables them to be open-minded, empathic, and respectful of others.
- **Excellence**—with a bar set high, children are inspired to strive for excellence.
- **Ease**—gifted learners do not necessarily find things easy; they often work very hard to reach extended levels of understanding (which maybe higher than that of their peers but nevertheless require effort).

- **Eminence**—few gifted or highly talented children ever achieve a high degree of eminence; moreover, there are too many unknowns to be able to predict which children will become successful adults in a given domain, let alone who might achieve national, international, or public prominence.
- **Exploration**—learning is a multi-tiered investigative process, fueled by inspiration, anchored by determination, and enhanced by discovery—from infancy onward.
- **Expertise**—the term “expert” is typically reserved for adults, and applies to those who have attained extremely strong capabilities or have mastered certain skills (based on acquired know-how and practice).
- **Ethics**—examples of extracognitive factors that are integral to advanced development, academic and otherwise, include doing the right thing, having integrity, and showing responsibility.
- **Experiences**—they influence how we choose to use—or not use—our various inner and cultivated strengths.



## External and Experiential Elements

- **Encouragement**—children benefit when they are given that extra boost, even in its simplest form such as a word, a nod, a smile, a thumbs-up, or a pat on the back.
- **Engagement**—not all advanced learners are productive or motivated to achieve; parents and teachers can motivate children and sustain their engagement in tasks by ensuring that learning is relevant, interesting, and appropriately challenging, and by offering support along the way.
- **Effort**—never underestimate the importance of persistence and hard work, and never underestimate the value of reinforcing children’s effort.
- **Extracurricular activities**—children make the most of exciting and individually targeted learning opportunities beyond those that might be available at school.
- **Exercise**—it is not enough to stimulate children’s minds; physical activity is important for optimal health and general well-being.
- **Enrichment**—encourage children to explore and take advantage of the many programs expressly set up within schools and communities for the purpose of providing high-level and

extended learning options in different areas of interest.

- **Environment**—a learning environment can be any place where a person can discover something new; the most conducive setting (or classroom) is one that is safe, enabling, comfortable, and challenging (in a good way).
- **Expectations**—think “Goldilocks”: not too high, not too low, but just right.
- **Economic disadvantage**—there are many school-based, community-oriented, government-funded, and philanthropic-generated programs that endeavor to give *all* children the chance to succeed, even when economic realities are harsh.
- **Elitism**—some people think that special education for gifted learners is a perk and that tailored academic opportunities smack of elitism, but would these same charges hold true at the other end of the learning spectrum? Each child is entitled to an education commensurate with his or her abilities.
- **Evaluation**—teachers can choose from a broad array of fair and efficient evaluation processes, including established methods, creative approaches, co-created and preset rubrics, and countless other options.
- **Early learning**—play, in particular, is a fundamental way for children to learn, socialize, try things out, develop skill sets, and share.
- **Eligibility**—many if not most school districts have policies that determine which students can or cannot participate in gifted programs (by virtue of attaining a certain cut-off score on an IQ test or excelling at designated criteria), although (happily) there is momentum toward more inclusive practices that are flexibly responsive to a broader population of learners and their individual strengths, enabling a larger cadre of children to participate in gifted programming options.
- **End**—no way! There are 21 letters to go! (Please feel free to encapsulate, e-mail me, and extend ideas!)

### **Author’s Note**

**Joanne Foster, EdD** is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education* (2009, Great Potential Press), and *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* (in press, House of Anansi). 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 topics at conferences and learning venues all across North America. She teaches educational psychology and 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) or you can visit her website at [www.beyondintelligence.net](http://www.beyondintelligence.net)