

# ABCs of Being Smart . . .

## F Is for Fit and Flexibility

By Dr. Joanne Foster



How can parents and teachers foster individual abilities and facilitate foundational supports so children will flourish? There is no fast or flawless formula. However, readers can use these F words to flesh out, fill in, fine-tune, or formulate a particular framework of factors they might want to think about in relation to supporting and encouraging children's gifted or high-level abilities.

The focus of this feature is *fit* (between a student and learning opportunities) and *flexibility* (on the part of all those involved in nurturing a child's development).

### F is for Fit

- **Fortitude**—spunk, an adventuresome attitude, and the drive to forge ahead are the fuel that sparks the fire of high-level ability.
- **Future**—it's unknown, like potential.
- **Friendships**—relationship-building is not always easy, and children may need guidance when learning to navigate the social landscapes of classrooms, playgrounds, and activity groups in search of one or more friends with whom to share time, ideas, interests, activities, and fun.
- **Formal identification**—a child's learning needs are better determined by multiple measures, including ongoing assessment that is individually responsive, integrated into instruction, and subject-specific. Standardized tests can be useful for providing additional information and objective confirmation of teacher judgment and other assessment data.
- **Flow**—a state of being wherein one is totally immersed in an engaging task (like a perfect fit between person and project) such that realities like time, fatigue, or daily distractions seem to fade away and a sense of satisfaction prevails.

- **Foresight**—taking a thoughtful, discretionary approach will likely lead to sensible decisions about educational choices or program options.
- **Fairness**—gifted learners don't need or want more work; they need and want relevant and appropriately challenging activities. Encourage children to become involved in planning their learning experiences and in setting reasonable goals for which they can then be held accountable.
- **Feedback**—timely, appropriate, and honest feed-back stimulates further inquiry and motivates children to progress to the next level in their learning.
- **Fast-tracking**—this term implies moving ahead at a pace that is quicker and presumably better suited to high-ability learners, which may take different forms such as advanced programming, acceleration, or more sophisticated curriculum content.
- **Findings**—research continues to enlighten us to how children learn and what parents and teachers can do to support learning. Let's focus!
- **Followers**—there are two types of people: those who lead and those who follow. Be a leader or follow someone or something meaningful and good.

## F is also for Flexibility

- **Forces of nature**—there are many things we cannot control in life. We have to learn to accept what's feasible, fix what's flawed, and live flexibly— and teach children to do likewise.
- **Failure**—fizzle, flunk, fiasco, flop, faults, fumbles, folly—any of which can frustrate—or lead to growth and further learning. It's important to recognize that learning is about making mistakes. Whoever said success was foolproof?
- **Family dynamics and values**—a supportive family is formative, advising, enriching, encouraging, and caring.
- **Funding**—educational systems require funding to function; however you can find many exciting learning options that don't cost a fortune.
- **Fixed mindset**—the inflexible and unfortunate belief that giftedness is fixed or innate (no, it's not) and that it cannot be furthered with learning provisions and effort (yes, it can).
- **Feats**—accomplishments come in different formats, fabrications, and fashions; achievements don't have to be flashy or foremost to be first-rate.
- **Feelings**—they frequently fluctuate, and parents have to stay attuned to the various factors and influences that affect children's emotional functioning.
- **Fun**—learning can be fun, challenging, and inspiring. In fact, fun is just the beginning.
- **Fast workers**—not all high-ability learners fly through tasks. A fastidious approach (slow, steady, thoughtful, and purposeful) can be better than flurrying.

- **Fact and fiction**—understandings of giftedness run the gamut between what's true and what's false; what's fine and what's feared; what's real and what's presumed. It's important to be accurately and well-informed about gifted-related issues.
- **Fuss**—don't fret about children's giftedness; just embrace it, have faith in children's abilities, and let it be fulfilling!
- **Fate**—chance, luck, fortune, destiny, and unfathomable unknowns accompany hard work and favorable opportunities and that can lead to future success and well-being.

### **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 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 visit her website at [www.beyondintelligence.net](http://www.beyondintelligence.net)