

ABCs of Being Smart . . . G Is for Gifted!



By Dr. Joanne Foster

Giftedness can generate speculation, misconceptions, expectations, pride, innuendo, apprehension, puzzlement—and the list goes on. What does it mean to be a gifted learner?

In this installment of the series “ABCs of Being Smart,” I grapple with the term gifted, giving a glimpse into giftedness, along with some general guidelines for children’s optimal growth (whether one is formally identified as a gifted learner or not). I hope readers think about these G words, and use them as springboards to gain further understanding about gifted-related matters.

Giftedness: The Gist of the G Word

- **Giftedness**—“Giftedness is not innate or fixed. It is not an attribute that is owned exclusively by some and not by others. Rather, it is a domain- specific intelligence that changes over time, and that can be influenced by many factors.”*
- **Gifted education**—the most suitable learning opportunities are those that meet children’s individual and diverse learning needs, and provisions will vary from one student to the next on a situational and subject-by-subject basis.
- **Genius**—someone who has demonstrated exceptional achievement in an important field, such as Leonardo da Vinci, Stephen Hawking, Shakespeare, Beethoven, and Galileo.
- **Guarantees**—no one knows what the future holds so there is no sure-fire way to ascertain who is likely to succeed. (However, effort and persistence are germane.)
- **Gaps**—gifted learners can have gaps (or even gaping holes) in their knowledge or skill sets, and like others, may require assistance to grasp concepts and to get to the next level of learning.
- **Globally gifted**—few people have exceptional or gifted-level ability across all domains; savvy educators adapt instruction in order to meet an individual’s particular needs.
- **Garden**—the brain is like a garden that requires active cultivation in order to generate growth.
- **Grown-ups**—children count on grown-ups for help in getting through the ups and downs of daily life. Don’t take this responsibility for granted. Be there for them.
- **“Geek”**—there are times in a child’s life when being “cool”—or conversely, being a “nerd”—can make all of the difference between fitting in or being left out, doing well or doing poorly, feeling glad or feeling gloomy. Self-image can be fragile and complex. Children who experience periods of social or emotional vulnerability may need extra support from parents, teachers, or others in order to stay grounded.
- **Gatekeepers**—the adults in children’s lives are conduits for their learning. Don’t impede or otherwise block gateways for development; safeguard children’s comings and goings, provide direction, and keep communication channels open.

Giftedness: Guidelines for Growth

- **Genuine**—feedback and encouragement should be sincere. Make it real. Make it matter.
 - **Generosity of spirit**—the most brilliant mind is bankrupt if the moral and ethical coffers are bare. Teach children to be good people, to contribute to society, and to be gracious.
 - **Curious George**—the protagonist of a series of children’s books, Curious George is an outgoing, inquisitive little monkey (created by Hans Augusto Rey and Margret Rey) who adapts to the big city, has many exciting adventures, and learns a great deal because he is so gregarious.
- Grandparents**—they have so much love to give and so many “grand” times to share. Make the most of every generational-bridging minute.
- **Galleries**—there are many different kinds of go-to venues where children can learn more about the world and all its grandeur.
 - **Groups**—some children function well in groups; others prefer to work independently or more guardedly. Be flexible.
 - **Girls**—vastly improved gender equity policies and practices are going a long way to ensure that girls are motivated, make sound school choices, and achieve to the best of their ability. Support them in exploring their interests and capabilities early on, through adolescence, and beyond.
 - **Google**—one of many growing search engines designed to enable people to engage in research and extend their boundaries of inquiry and learning all around the globe.
 - **Games**—high-level development in all areas starts with playful exploration, proceeding through skill acquisition, and then increasing mastery. Play can motivate, stimulate thought processes, and enhance children’s social, emotional, and cognitive abilities.
 - **Guidance**—be gentle but firm; offer and provide it if and when needed.
 - **Goal-setting**—help children learn to set reasonable objectives (realistic, timely, affirming), and encourage them to strive to reach their goals.
 - **Gumption**—the courage to be yourself, the will to move ahead, and the strength of character and mind that bring about progress—all of which show grit and can gradually lead to greatness.

Author’s Note

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* Quote excerpted from *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* by Dona Matthews and Joanne Foster (in press, House of Anansi). For information and additional resources, go to <http://www.beyondintelligence.net>