

ABCs of Being Smart ... N Is for Nurturing

By Dr. Joanne Foster

In this installment of *ABCs of Being Smart*, I navigate words beginning with the letter N, with a nod to all those who nobly nurture children's high-level development—in accordance with their numerous needs. In a nutshell, here are **necessities** and **nuances** to think about now.



Necessities (the nitty-gritty)

- **Networks**—friends, families, and colleagues—we depend upon one another, locally and globally, for ideas, recommendations, updates, findings, and strategies. NAGC is one noteworthy organization. Its members embrace and further the mandate to help kids reach the highest levels possible.
- **Neighbors**—another integral part of that network. Our communities are strongholds for children's optimal development. “It takes a village to raise a child.” *
- **Netscapes**—new technological advances alter the status quo, and will continue to affect the way we acquire information, communicate, and learn. Help children attain technological know-how, and teach them to use it wisely.
- **Nascent**—each child has promise—talents and abilities that will emerge with maturity, and with the right kinds of learning opportunities and nurturing.
- **Naïve**—don't be. As long as there've been kids, there've been parents looking out for them. Observe, listen, model, guide, motivate, and be available (nearby) when needed. If you think your job is done, then think again.
- **Notice**—keep your eyes open for the little things as well as the big ones. Sometimes small matters end up becoming challenging issues that might've been nipped in the bud.
- **Narrow**—kids who narrowly miss a designated “cut-off” for inclusion in a gifted program likely have advanced learning needs that should be addressed. Differentiated programming would be beneficial. In fact, it would be beneficial for *all* children.
- **Neural Plasticity**—the brain continually changes in its structure and functional pathways, sculpted by experiences across the lifespan. Intensive brain-building occurs during the early years, and it influences and shapes children's development. Necessities for optimal brain health include opportunities for playful exploration, conversation, and exposure to many kinds of cognitive and sensory stimulation.
- **Never**—never stop advocating for gifted/high-ability learners. If you don't, who will?
- **Nucleus**—offer safety, learning experiences, direction, and reassurance, ideally within the nucleus of a loving family.



Nuances (nevertheless, don't neglect...)

- **News-worthy Versus Nonsense**—be astute when it comes to determining what child-rearing information merits your close attention, and what should be taken lightly. (In other words, use your noggin.)
- **Negotiation**—it's somewhat of an art. When engaged with kids, be sensible. However, don't be too quick to say **no**.
- **Normal**—what's normal? What's not? Every child is different. Some have strengths with numeracy, or numbers; some are naughty, or nerdy, or neat, or noisy, or nonstop questioners. Others are still finding their personal nexus or niche.
- **Nagging**—kids often need reminders; however, don't needle or nitpick.
- **Nap**—rest is important. A balance of stimulation and downtime is good over the long-term.
- **Notions**—children have all kinds of curious, novel, and even outlandish ideas. Why be a naysayer? The future depends on creative juices!
- **Nerve**—the word brings to mind the synonyms courage, boldness, spunk, and bravado. No matter how you define it, a child's spirit of adventure shouldn't be nixed.

Endnote

* Popular African proverb, adapted more recently by Hillary Clinton for her book *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (1996)

Author's Note

Joanne Foster, EdD, is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award-winning book *Being Smart About Gifted Education, 2nd Ed.* (2009, Great Potential Press), and *Beyond Intelligence* (2014, House of Anansi Press). As a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist, Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience in the field of gifted education. She teaches at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and writes and presents extensively on high-level development and on a wide range of topics at conferences and learning venues across North America. Her book *Not Now, Maybe Later: Helping Children Overcome Procrastination* is forthcoming (Great Potential Press). You can visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net or contact her at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca

