

Parenting for High Potential

ABCs of Being Smart ...

By Dr. Joanne Foster

A is for alphabetical—and for alliteration. It's for articles addressing appropriate action.

In this, and in upcoming issues of *Parenting for High Potential*, I'll take a creative approach as I focus on ways to encourage and support gifted-level development. One letter at a time, I'll share understandings and ideas for parents, and teachers.

This series design is actually an outgrowth of an article I wrote some time ago about roles and responsibilities for fostering giftedness and nurturing children. It was published in *PHP* in 2006, and was entitled *R We There Yet?* The answer was, and still is, “no”—and so I believe we have to work harder to find and implement strategies that will turn the tide. The time is ripe to consider with greater refinement and depth how to build programs, clarify terms, make meaningful connections, develop plans, share perspectives, and turn visions into realities.

In this first piece, I present an **A** list to help parents become more astute—including being alert to, attentive toward, approachable about, accommodating of, and adept at handling gifted-related issues. In subsequent articles I will extend the material, and offer fresh insights, moving systematically from **B** through **Z**. I invite parents and teachers to share their own concepts and views, and I'll consider how to incorporate these into the mix. I look forward to hearing what readers of *PHP* have to say, and learning from their interesting, authentic, and diverse experiences with children. I hope readers will enjoy the unique format of this series of articles, and find the content to be applicable, beneficial, comprehensive, and more. And, in the next issue, the **B** goes on... and then we'll **C**...

A is for Action and Attunement

- **Answer** – respond to children's questions about their abilities in ways appropriate to their level of understanding
- **Ask** – encourage them to ask more questions
- **Active listening** – pay attention to what children are saying – and sometimes *not* saying
- **Anticipate** – be prepared to address issues as they arise
- **Appreciate** – acknowledge and encourage children's efforts, not just their accomplishments
- **Academic Advancement** – this is not just about *schooling*—support children's interests, choices, and capabilities
- **Arrange** – be proactive; help to facilitate learning opportunities, including discussions with others who can assist in nurturing children's high-level development
- **Access** – find, read, and use up-to-date and reliable resources

- **Aspire** – help children fuel their imaginations, tackle challenges, stretch their intellects, and set goals that are high but reachable
- **Autonomy** – respect their individualism and desire for independence
- **Availability** – be there—in person, in spirit, indefinitely—as needed
- **Asynchrony** – appreciate that a child may have areas of strength and weakness, and these can develop at different rates and times
- **Affluence** – you don't have to *be* rich to *enrich*—there are lots of possibilities, with family and friends, online, within the community, and beyond
- **Adapt** – help children manage the changes that occur in their lives, including transitions to special programs, new friendships, and various situations that may arise at school or elsewhere
- **Administrative support** – parents and teachers cannot do it alone!
- **Affective** – pay attention to the whole person; social, emotional, and motivational development go hand-in-hand with cognitive development, contributing to the well-being of the child
- **Associations** – there are many organizations that parents can join or contact to garner support and learn how to foster children's high-level development (for example, National Association for Gifted Children [NAGC]; Association for Bright Children [ABC, in Canada]; Associations for Gifted and Talented Education [AGATE, state by state]; Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted [SENG]; Council for Exceptional Children [CEC])
- **Activities** – there are countless opportunities for learning—in regular classrooms; in special programs at school, or during the summer, holiday times, or on weekends; in extracurricular programs; at home; with mentors; through special interest contests and clubs; and via global and technological means
- **Advanced placement** – these cooperative endeavors between colleges and secondary schools, enable advanced students to acquire accelerated content and services, and meet college-level educational objectives during their high school years (How cool is that?)
- **Already-mastered material** – students who have mastered subject-specific knowledge should not have to sit in class and bide their time—it leads to boredom and frustration—and parents and teachers can discuss ways to ensure that children are happily engaged and productive
- **Aptitude** – encompassing both cognitive strengths (such as reasoning ability, prior knowledge), and extracognitive factors (such as motivation, interest, persistence)—aptitude is directly linked to the context in which learning occurs, including kinds of instruction, support systems, technology, resources, and connectivity with different disciplines—all of which influence success
- **Albert Einstein** – sure, he had gifted-level abilities in some domains, but he was not particularly scholarly when he was growing up—and this speaks to the fact that children's developmental trajectories, like their potential, are predictably unpredictable
- **Artistic and Athletic Abilities**— some learners are artistically or athletically inclined and may excel in such areas as drama, music, sculpture, dance, skating, gymnastics, swimming... (Abilities that have to be encouraged and supported in concert with children's academic pursuits.)
- **Authentic challenge** – tasks should be meaningful—that is, relevant, and connected to individual interests or real world problems

- **Assessment** – teachers can (and should) find out where a child is at in any one subject area, teaching and building understandings from there, and monitoring and evaluating progress along the way—a sure-fire approach to augmented learning
- **Above-level testing** – this is a good way to determine what a student already knows
- **Ability grouping** – refers to children working with others who share their capability levels; a more flexible approach is one that also encourages mixed grouping and individual pursuits
- **Accountability** – allow children to take responsibility for their actions, including homework, task completion, goal-setting, and day to day behavior
- **Anti-intellectualism** – the term implies resentment, disrespect, or suspicion of people who excel in certain areas—and there is certainly no place for these kinds of dispositions among those who recognize the value of having and using intelligence, and striving for excellence
- **Acceleration** – the goal of acceleration is to move a child ahead toward more satisfying academic involvement, and there are many approaches that can be embarked upon in an informed and thoughtful manner, including single-subject, full grade, telescoping of grades (such as three years across two), and early entrance to programs
- **Advocacy** – one of the most important “A words” in terms of making a difference for children because it is at the heart of finding ways to facilitate, nurture, and support their development
- **Attitude** – parents attitudes about giftedness and high-level development really do matter; think and act in positive, collaborative, flexible, and constructive ways

Author’s Addendum: Additional **A** list suggestions can be found on pages 280 -286 of *Being Smart about Gifted Education, 2nd Edition* (2009).

About the Author - Joanne Foster is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of the award winning book *Being Smart about Gifted Education, 2nd Edition* (2009, Great Potential Press). She is also a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist. Dr. Foster has over thirty years 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 of the University of Toronto.

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