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Retrieved on July 23, 2009 from Bella Online, The Voice of Women

<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art62578.asp>

### ***Being Smart About Gifted Education***

“Being Smart About Gifted Education – A Guidebook for Educators and Parents” is an updated version of the 2004 book, “Being Smart About Gifted Children”. The authors, Dona Matthews and Joanne Foster, have rewritten the book to include the most recent research on brain development, recent trends in the education system, and new ways of focusing efforts to meet the needs of gifted learners.

In the preface, the authors state, “There is no single formula for living or working with gifted learners. People who want to support gifted-level development for the children in their lives – that is, to provide them with the best possible guidance, challenges, encouragement, and education- must begin by reflecting upon individual differences, including emotional, social, academic, and developmental. The message is that gifted students should be recognized as having individual strengths and weaknesses, and that parents and educators should address needs in each subject as they arise.

This is a generously sized book, with over 400 pages of well presented information. Despite the book's title and frequent references to giftedness, the authors appear to dislike the word “gifted” due to the implication that it is divisive. Those who work in gifted education will be familiar with how “loaded” the term has become, with some people claiming that “every child is gifted” while others cry out against gifted education as elitist. The solution, they say, is to focus on needs for accommodation on a subject by subject basis. The result of such a program would be to have every child learning at an optimal level and pace, which is referred to here as the ZPD or “zone of proximal development”. Every students learns best when their work is neither too hard, nor too easy. In an ideal world, we wouldn't need labels of any sort, because every person would be allowed appropriate work in school and throughout life. I'm not convinced that we are ready to make that leap, but it's nice to think about.

I'll review the contents of several important chapters here. Chapter one is all about perspectives on giftedness and paradigm shifts. Chapter four delves into assessments and tests. Chapter five covers the aforementioned movement away from labeling, while still meeting the needs of highly able learners. The “mystery vs. mastery” view of giftedness is quite fascinating. Chapter seven highlights alternative educational options, such as homeschooling, bibliotherapy, whole grade acceleration, second language immersion, and more. In chapter 12, we learn about teacher development and administrative support.

This is a thoughtful and instructive handbook which will be quite useful to teachers and administrators, as well as parents of gifted children.