

Review by Belle Wallace, *Gifted Education International*, volume 26, #1

Being Smart about Gifted Education: A Guidebook for Educators and Parents

Dona J Matthews and Joanne F Foster

Pub: Great Potential Press (2009) (2nd ed.)

Two distinguished educators with over 25 years experience have written this second edition for educators and parents. Their loving concern for children's healthy development runs through each page as they discuss real-life concerns in a practical way that will reach readers. The main message is refreshingly clear:

Gifted provision should 'reflect upon individual differences, including social, emotional, academic, and developmental. --- [then educators and parents will be enabled to make] the best informed decisions, and they will find new ways to enable children to experience their world fully as an engaging place in which to live, laugh and learn'. (pxviii)

Another major theme is the importance of primarily diagnosing the mismatch between a child's potential and the provision of appropriately challenging educational experiences, rather than seeking to label a child as 'gifted' or 'not gifted'. This emphasis reflects the beginning of a world shift that underlies the philosophy of creating opportunities for all children to discover and nourish their gifts – whether these are small 'g's or big 'Gs'! The concept of potential developmental 'giftedness' is inclusive and the message is clear – create exciting opportunities first and then observe and diagnose learners' needs. Another emphasis throughout the text is the importance of developing the thinking processes of learning rather than assessing the fixed pre-determined end products.

Importantly, the voices of both children and adults are evident – making the text vibrantly grounded in real-life experience.

I recommend this humane and empowering text to all educators and parents – its message is clear – put the needs and the voice of the child at the centre of educational provision rather than creating a mechanised system into which a child must squeeze! A 'one size fits all' kind of educational provision does not allow for continuing individual growth.

I quote some lines from a poem written by Joanne Foster ---
*'They tell I'm gifted --- What does this mean?
Is this something new, or have I always been?
They tell me I'm gifted --- Congratulations!
But I am uncertain about expectations.
They tell me I'm gifted --- I'm lucky, I'm blessed.
But how can they tell from one written test? (p357)*

The poem continues to express the uncertainties and personal misgivings experienced by a child labelled 'gifted'.

I think we all realise that all children have 'gifts' – but only life opportunities, personal strengths and appropriate mentorship will allow the gifts to flourish to the fullest potential. As parents and educators our role is that of support and encouragement, without pressure and inappropriate expectations.