

# Curiosity

by Pete Moorhouse

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Curiosity – A strong desire to inquire and understand



Curiosity lies at the heart of children's learning – it is the spirit of enquiry.

Babies are born curious with an innate drive to discover and understand the world around them as they explore with all their senses, through touch, by putting things in their mouths, observing, responding to voices, discovering how they can impact on various objects and people, exploring their own physicality and so forth.

Throughout early childhood curiosity drives children's desire to explore, to ask questions and to play. Children learn most deeply when they are following their natural curiosity – as it places them at the centre of their learning. Initial interest and curiosity lead to inquiry, their intellectual curiosity developing the cognitive state in which they are open to exploring ideas.

Curiosity is the catalyst for motivation and engagement and it encourages the making of new connections, of noticing and wondering and the posing of new questions as children express their imaginations.

Curiosity is a fundamental innate disposition that underpins all three areas of the characteristics of effective learning. It's children's intense desire to know, their inquisitiveness, their noticing and wondering, their eagerness to understand, their thirst for knowledge which inspires exploration and play and acts as a catalyst for their intrinsic motivation and engagement. Curiosity drives the fundamental questions – What is it? What can it do? What can I do with it? leading on increased capacity for creativity: What if? How can I change it, adapt it, use it in different ways, combine it and so on as children express

their imaginations. Curiosity is the fuel that drives us to ask new questions, to make new connections, and to raise new problems to solve.

Curiosity is a way of being and of seeing the world as full of wonder and possibility and curiosity leads to the joy of discovering new things. Maintaining curiosity is crucial for life-long learning, and it's certainly integral for the capacity to be creative. Beyond early years education we see a general decline in curiosity, partly due to children having fewer opportunities to be curious as they progress through primary and secondary education. We have an education system that often requires children not to be curious, instead valuing defined curriculum content and standardisation.

Children's life experiences can also significantly affect their levels of curiosity, for example by the time children are aged three we can already see wide variety in the levels of curiosity.

Many children will experience adverse childhood experiences (ACE's) in the early childhood. This can be for a multitude of different circumstances, such as children being brought up in significant poverty, families living in temporary accommodation, significant mental health issues within the family, abuse etc. and this can embrace a wide demographic of family backgrounds. The result is that some children will experience are fewer interactions, have fewer experiences at home and this can lead to lower levels of language development and associated communication skills and lower levels of concentration and focus. These can result lower self-esteem and self-confidence. Dr Bruce Parry highlighted that levels of curiosity can also be impacted. He researched factors that a diminished children's curiosity and stated three main areas that were seen to diminish curiosity: where children were being brought up in **fear**, constantly getting **disapproval** or with **absence** of caring loving adult interaction. However, it must be stressed that as all children are unique the impact will be very different for every child.

Fear: children's world chaotic, child afraid, family distress, violence

Disapproval: Don't touch that - don't get dirty - don't shout, over-protection

Absence: lack of caring listening adult to share discovery and fun, or provide sense of safety

### **Cultivate curiosity**

The important aspect to appreciate is that not all children will be having the same starting points so it is important to do as much as we can so develop and engage children's curiosity, by building on their funds of knowledge and by providing irresistible provocations and resources to stimulate their curiosity across a broad range of experiences – essentially making learning irresistible! How we interact with children can play an important role in how we encourage a curious mindset.

### **Examples of curiosity as a starting point for investigation: Igniting the flame**

Curiosity is the starting point for exploration. Every day we observe or hear countless examples of children's curiosity with wonder-full questions and hypothesise. These are invitations - gold dust – opening up possibilities for the child and also for the adult to sensitively interact to extend and develop ideas.

### **Treasure basket:**

Amelie (1) explores the different textures of the fabric selection in the treasure basket – using all her senses. Curiosity fuelling her sustained engagement as she explores how they

feel, sound, smell, how the fabric can be used to conceal by covering other objects, how she can look through some of the fabric. Curiosity fuelling her exploration and building her understanding of the world.

#### **Bugs:**

Ana (3) and Katie (4) are curious as they discover two tiny woodlice under a log in the garden. They are fascinated watching them crawl about. Many questions arise as they wonder. Do they have mummies and daddies? I wonder what they like to eat? How fast will they grow? Where do they sleep? Do they sleep? Through co-learning and co-researching with the adult, knowledge was expanded. This developed a great sensitivity to thinking about nature and what living things need to live. Later the girls were at the drawing table drawing narratives of the lives of woodlice and then they constructed a mini-house for them in the garden.

#### **Shape:**

Amir(4) is using a USB microscope hooked up to a laptop. (A great set up for capturing curiosity!) He's curious seeing how various objects look so different enlarged. He discovers a spec of glitter is in fact a perfect hexagon. We're all fascinated with this discovery! His interest is fuelled and he becomes curious about what other shapes he can reveal – he finds triangles and diamonds in a girls ring, circles on a toy cars hubcaps. Amir then decided to cut the shapes he'd discovered and create a collage. His initial curiosity fuelling his creative expression.

#### **Research links:**

Dr Bruce Perry: Diminished curiosity. Bruce D. Perry, MD, PhD and the Child Trauma Academy. [ChildTrauma.org](http://ChildTrauma.org).

#### **Eminent thoughts on curiosity:**

Albert Einstein:

Many illustrious innovators have highlighted just how important curiosity was in their creative development of ideas. Albert Einstein famously quoted: *"I am neither clever nor especially gifted, I am only very, very curious"*. Probably a little modest too!

JL Cropley ( Author, leading thinker on creativity)

*'Curiosity is about the openness to experience'* – JL Cropley, when speaking at the world engineers conference, emphasised that this openness to experience was the most important trait for creativity.

***Curiosity - the spark of exploration***  
***Curiosity - the catalyst of engagement***  
***Curiosity - the fuel of creativity***

*Pete Moorhouse*