



Curiosity: The Force Within a Hungry Mind

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What makes children *want* to learn? According to research, it's the joy of exploration -- a hidden force that drives learning, critical thinking, and reasoning. We call this ability **curiosity**, and we recognize it in children when we see them exploring their environment, devouring books and information, asking questions, investigating concepts, manipulating data, searching for meaning, connecting with people and nature, and seeking new learning experiences.

The Heart of Lifelong Learning

Most teachers understand that curiosity supercharges learning. But they also know that many students can achieve high grades *without* being curious -- by understanding the system of test-taking and dutifully doing their homework. Curious children often spend a great deal of time reading and acquiring knowledge because they sense a gap between what they know and what they want to know -- not because they are motivated by grades. In fact, when kids are in curiosity's grip, they often forget the immediate goals at hand because they are preoccupied with learning.

If you suspect that curious kids fare better in careers and life, you're right, and for a variety of reasons. Research suggests that intellectual curiosity has as big of an effect on performance as hard work (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/10/111027150211.htm>). When put together, curiosity and hard work account for success just as much as intelligence. Another study found that people who were curious about a topic retained what they learned for longer periods of time ([http://www.cell.com/neuron/abstract/S0896-6273\(14\)00804-6?cc=y](http://www.cell.com/neuron/abstract/S0896-6273(14)00804-6?cc=y)). And even more impressive, research has linked curiosity to a wide range of important adaptive behaviors

(<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2012.00796.x/abstract>), including tolerance of anxiety and uncertainty, positive emotions, humor, playfulness, out-of-box thinking, and a noncritical attitude -- all attributes associated with healthy social outcomes.

Curiosity is part of *The Compass Advantage*[™] (a model created for engaging families, schools, and communities in the principles of positive youth development) because it is at the heart of lifelong learning. Curiosity not only gives children an advantage in school, but today's business leaders agree that it is also at the heart of thriving organizations.

Psychologists view curiosity as a life force, vital to happiness, intellectual growth, and well being. It is interconnected with each of the other abilities on the Compass -- sociability, resilience, self-awareness, integrity, resourcefulness, creativity, and empathy. Like most human abilities, curiosity also has a dark side. After all, it did kill the cat! And without proper nurturing by teachers and parents, unregulated curiosity can lead students down rabbit holes that waste time, obstruct goals, or damage health.

The greatest advantage of curiosity lies in its power to motivate learning in areas of life and work that are meaningful to the learner. It points students toward the knowledge, skills, relationships, and experiences that they need to live full and productive lives. Curiosity is one of the 8 Pathways to Every Student's Success (<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-pathways-every-students-success-marilyn-price-mitchell>) .

10 Ways to Stimulate a Student's Curiosity

1. *Value and reward curiosity.*

Often, the temptation is to reward students when their curiosity leads to a desired outcome or good grade. But it's more important to notice and reinforce curiosity when you see it in action. When you praise students by describing how their questions, explorations, and investigations are contributing to their own or classroom learning, you let them know that they are valued for their motivation, regardless of the grade they achieve.

2. *Teach students how to ask quality questions.*

Quality questions are a vital medium for curiosity. Google is great at finding answers but doesn't stimulate the formation of questions. Good questions contain "why," "what if," and "how." An excellent book for understanding the art of questioning is *A More Beautiful Question*

(http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00GC53AG8/ref=as_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B00GC53AG8&linkCode=as2&tag=rooofact02-20&linkId=P5JAUQZCDZFUIYEI%2522%253e%253c/a%253e%253cim%20src=%2522http://ir-na.amazon-adsystem.com/e/ir?t=rooofact02-20&l=as2&o=1&a=B00GC53AG8) by Warren Berger.

3. *Notice when kids feel puzzled or confused.*

Is there a "teachable moment" that will spark a desire to search for answers? How can you invite students to see problems as mysteries waiting to be solved?

4. *Encourage students to tinker.*

Tinkering might be constructive play with feelings, concepts, ideas, and materials. How can students create a new widget, essay, blog article, poem, science experiment, service, or product from their explorations? Tinkering with materials, thoughts, and emotions stimulates curiosity and leads to

innovative outcomes.

5. Spread the curiosity around.

Create opportunities for more-curious and less-curious students to work together in project-based learning (<http://www.edutopia.org/project-based-learning>) . Curiosity is contagious in groups working toward a real-world common goal, helping to cross-pollinate questions and new ideas.

6. Use current events.

News reports can lead students to ask purposeful questions that help unearth what's beneath the surface of societal problems. According to research, asking "why" is the critical ingredient in unraveling these difficult conflicts. This often gets to the fundamental reason for why people disagree about solutions.

7. Teach students to be skeptics.

The term **skeptic** is derived from the Greek *skeptikos*, meaning "to inquire" or "to look around." A skeptic requires additional evidence before accepting someone's claims as true. He or she is willing to challenge the status quo with open-minded, deep questioning. Galileo was a skeptic. So was Steve Jobs.

8. Explore a variety of cultures and societies.

How is one culture or society uniquely different from another one? Encourage students to investigate their genetic or emotional links to other cultures. Why do they relate to certain beliefs or values that other societies hold?

9. Model curiosity.

You can do this in your respectful relationships with students by exploring their interests, expanding upon their ideas, and engaging them in meaningful dialogue about what matters most.

10. Encourage curiosity at home.

Help parents understand the importance of curiosity in their child's development and suggest ways that they can foster it at home. Supportive caregivers can have a tremendous impact on developing curiosity and other essential abilities.

How do you foster curiosity in your students? Please share in the comments section below.

The Internal Compass

8 Principles of Positive Youth Development and How to Apply Them

<< PREVIOUS ([HTTP://WWW.EDUTOPIA.ORG/BLOG/8-PATHWAYS-EVERY-STUDENTS-SUCCESS-MARILYN-PRICE-MITCHELL](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-pathways-every-students-success-marilyn-price-mitchell))

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