Cultivating Curiosity in the Early Years classroom
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“Kids are born curious about the world. What adults primarily do in the presence of kids is unwittingly thwart the curiosity of children.”
Neil Degrasse Tyson

Stay curious as you learn today...

• What are you noticing about yourself as a learner?
• What connections are you making to your practice?
• How is your thinking being challenged?

“It’s always ‘Sit,’ ‘Stay,’ ‘Heel’ — never ‘Think,’ ‘Innovate,’ ‘Be yourself.’”

Curiosity is the heart of inquiry...

• When the learner is curious - they are more likely to drive their own learning. Curiosity breeds initiative and independence. Curious learners actively seek out information/solutions - taking more control of their learning.

• “When students are curious about something, they seek an explanation. This motivates them to persevere in seeking information. They now WANT to learn, what they need to be taught” Willis 2010
Curiosity helps learning ‘stick’

Several studies have made correlation between individuals who showed curiosity in a learning situation – and long term, more accurate memory of what was learned. (Singh, 2014)

When people are curious about something – they learn more, and better. (Engel, 2013)

“Somewhere between ages 4 and 5, children are ideally suited for questioning: They have gained the language skills to ask, their brains are still in an expansive, highly-connective mode, and they’re seeing things without labels or assumptions. They’re perfect explorers.”

• Ron Berger: A more Beautiful Question

So how do we nurture curiosity in our early years classrooms?

Make it mysterious..

“Good teaching puts the content in the bright lights and illuminates it in ways that makes it accessible. Great teaching shrouds that content in mystery and meaningful challenges so compelling it becomes nearly impossible to keep learners from it.”

Drew Perkins 2019

Spontaneity – seizing a moment of wonder!

• Welcome unexpected moments of wonder and build inquiry journeys around these.

Curate for curiosity

• Curate for curiosity. Consider the aesthetic of the learning space. Think carefully about the use and placement of furniture, objects and images in learning spaces. Value beauty in environment indoors and out.

• Design experiences to activate the senses and inspire learners to wonder and explore.
What concepts do these materials help the child explore?

Curiosity is contagious so share your own wonderings out loud.

Model what it means to marvel at the world around you and to question what you see and hear. Show excitement about what you don’t know but want to understand.

“Back mapping” to the curriculum

- They identify and describe the changes to objects, materials, resources, living things and things in their local environment.
- Students pose and respond to questions about familiar objects and events and predict outcomes of investigations. They use their senses to explore the world around them and record informal measurements to make and compare observations. They record, sort and represent their observations and communicate their ideas to others. (Science, F-2)

Celebrate curiosity – value it and make it visible.

• Document, display and use children’s questions

Mind your language

• How do you respond to children’s questions?
• What do we ‘notice and name’ as children are engaged in learning experiences
• What do children think we value?
  • getting it right vs exploring possibilities
  • Getting it done vs the doing
  • product vs process
What does that make you wonder?
What makes you say that?
So how is your/our thinking changing?
Now THAT’s got me thinking in a new way...

Language as a ‘lubricant’ for powerful learning

“I wonder…” represents a class of linguistic lubricants. It marks the offering of a possible hypothesis, or a tentative idea with an invitation, (but not an insistence) to pick it up and improve it or take it further. For group discussions to take place such lubricants are necessary. Other examples include “maybe”, “seems like”, “perhaps” or “I think”...this kind of “exploratory talk” brings multiple minds together to work on the same problem in powerful ways.

Peter Johnson

Invite learners to share their own ‘working theories’ about the way the world works. Be curious about their ideas and about how the theories are evolving

Give them something to be curious about!

• Worthwhile contexts for inquiring
• Opportunities to connect with their own interests

Relinquish control...learn to be at home in uncertainty

Curiosity thrives best in an “environment where the rigid adherence to a plan is not a necessity”

Eisner, E. 2002: 7

Slow down!!!

• “All year I worked with my students to loosen them and wake them up...to get them agile and responsive and able to move laterally in their learning...On a daily basis I fought my instincts to plan and control and cause, and their instincts to be “finished,” listless, and compliant....”

- Heick, T. “Want to become a better teacher? Slow down” 2014
Teaching as an act of Inquiry

Remain passionately curious about your students...

• Ask: what are they revealing to us?
• Where to next?
• How are they thinking about this?

What lies beneath?

• How do I view the child as learner?
• How do I view myself as teacher?
• How do I view the curriculum?
• How do I view learning?