

Is There a Scientist in the Crib?

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Why is it important to encourage a child's curiosity?

"Because nothing is more fundamental to solid educational development than pure, uncontaminated curiosity."

Dr. Burton White says, "We have never come across a healthy 8 month old who is not incredibly curious. We have never known an 8 month old who, once she learned to crawl, needed to be encouraged to explore a home. *Bear in mind that a very strong exploratory drive is of central importance to humans. Nothing is more fundamental to solid educational development than pure, uncontaminated curiosity.*"

White thinks the curiosity has been there but now that the 8-month-old baby can get around it can really be expressed. That baby has been looking at things and wanting to get to them - and now she can. She, in fact, becomes *dedicated* to physical exploration as soon as she can move her body through space. "Situations that most adults would find uninteresting often fascinate a baby. Don't be surprised if you find a baby swinging a kitchen cabinet door back and forth several dozen times a day for several consecutive days. Or if she is intrigued by a small piece of dirt he has picked up from the floor. Or if she is fascinated by a cellophane wrapper from a package.

This baby wants to see everything, touch everything, and bring everything to his mouth. She'll pretty much explore any area she's allowed access to. She'll explore anything that is sort of small for its novelty and then for what it will do. She not only wants to find out what they are like - she wants to know what she can do with them and what the consequences of her actions will be. You flip that switch and the light comes on. You press that button hard enough and the door bell rings. You throw that toys at your mothers face and she yells at you - that kind of thing. And if the results were interesting, this kid wants to do it again and again." (White)

And the deal is curiosity mixed together with quickly developing motor skills, makes for an eight-month-old who is as ready for exploration as any scientist on their way to Antarctica! "The year or so that follows features active exploration of simple cause-and-effect mechanisms, of the movement patterns of objects, and of the textures, shapes and forms. This is an incredibly rich time during which the child is acquiring the foundations of higher mental abilities. Surely as far as education is concerned, few things are more central than the sensorimotor exploration upon which higher levels of intelligence are built. It is perhaps worth pointing out that the bulk of these acquisition that underlie later thinking ability come about through thousands of simple explorations of small objects and without the benefit of any special input by other people. (White)

How do you encourage that curiosity in babies, in toddlers, in preschoolers?

- First, you have to realize the importance of curiosity. Recognize it as a vital piece of his education. Curiosity is an internal motivator. The thirst for knowledge comes from inside the child and you are simply providing opportunities for it to expand.
- Make certain that the child has maximum access to as much of your space as possible.
- Try to make that space as interesting as you can. Give those babies play areas under windows. And you want really good toys and things to play with. Remember simple things like boxes and a plethora of balls!
- Give the children in your class time and opportunity to explore things. If a child is intent in her play, I so encourage you to respect her play and not interrupt it unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Get the child outdoors as much as you can. Babies out under quilts. Stroller rides where babies see flowers and touch leaves and feel the wind. Time for watching clouds and stomping in puddles for older children.
- Help parents see their child's curiosity as an intrinsic motivation to learn rather than just a reason to make a mess of everything.
- Use cute sticky notes and a spiral and note the curiosity you see. Use this to tell the parents about.
- Don't insist that a child must attend to something-- like flash cards. Try instead to build upon her natural enthusiasm for learning by responding as warmly and as supportively as you can when she gets excited about something. Sometimes it's as simple as making a positive comment. It is not terribly important that you come up with a brilliant observation: the major requirement is that you support and broaden her curiosity.
- When you see an older child get interested in something -ducks, construction vehicles, animals, trucks, scooping and pouring, building - build on it. Go watch the ducks at Herman Park, point out the trucks as you drive down the roads, sit a watch the vehicles at a construction sight, buy a couple of bags of bank sand and play in the sand - or save your coffee cans so you can build tall towers. Extend the interests with books and stories. *Implicitly, such behavior on your part makes it clear to the child that to be curious, to be learning, to be exploring, is something that you strongly approve of.*

What you approve of means a great deal to your child, especially at this particular phase of her life.

What inhibits curiosity?

1. Too many "no's." Too many things in the environment that they cannot touch, mouth, throw. . .
2. Too much caution.
3. The wrong clothes! Clothes so cute that you worry the child will get the clothes dirty rather than experiment with messy stuff. I suggest you ask each parent for one outfit to keep at school. Maybe something they didn't like or something they picked up at Blue Bird Circle - that you can put that child into when there is good, messy play around. It is critical to help parents see that clothes can really inhibit a child's opportunity to explore and learn.

Balls! Balls! Balls!

You invest in balls.

- Beach balls, both small and large
- playground balls
- ball-pit balls, at least 100
- tennis balls,
- whiffle balls, large medium and those little orange practice golf balls
- bean bags
- Ping-pong balls for the older kids. And small footballs.
- There are even great balls for babies with lots of different textures.
- You want all kinds of random balls. I stay on the look-out for good balls. I love the ones that stick on windows!

And then you find great things to add for all kind of possibilities of ball play. In fact, you're working toward a room full of possibilities.

- It can be outdoors or indoors, but you might want to limit the play to ball play.
- This is great for foul weather play in the gym, but parts of it can be done in a classroom, parts outside as well.

Five areas of ball possibilities are set up - but expect more possibilities than you think.

1. "hoops" -- a basket, a wastebasket, a laundry basket on a chair, a child's basketball goal and tape or spots delineated from which to shoot.
2. An incline -- a slide, a ramp of boards, a soffet ramp,
3. Tubes - open or closed tubes to be used however. Or a large cardboard wrapping paper tube tied to a stairwell handrail so that it is positioned at and 45° angle and has a small basket of balls near the upper end.
4. A table with balls and straws and paddles
5. Hula hoops

You are going to take the children into the ball area and say, "**We brought a million balls for ya'll to play with today. What can we think of to do?** Carson, what can you think of to do? Margaret, what would you like to do with these balls?"

Watch for their reactions. See if they vary their actions, or vary their balls, or work to control a ball. **Teach by asking questions *not* giving directions.**

What will happen if. . . ?

Can you. . . ?

How did you. . . ?

Can you do that again?

I wonder why. . .