Did You Know That . . . ?

Snippets of Child Development
From Jan Dollinger

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Why is it important to encourage a child's curiosity? "Because nothing is more fundamental to solid educational development that 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 that 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.

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.
- Make certain that the child has maximum access to as much of your space as possible and 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 I 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.
- 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?

- Too many "no's." Too many things in the environment that they cannot touch, mouth, throw. . .
- Too much caution.
- 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.

Jan's Favorite Bits of Wisdom When It Comes To Discipline. . .

Ya'll know this child. He might be a toddler. She might be a two. He might be even older. So what do you do with this toddlers blossoming sense of self and the quest for autonomy that goes with it. We respect it as a good, healthy part of growing up. We don't try to squash it, we try to work with it.

- I'm going to tell you what I think is the most important and easiest way to encourage great behavior in your class. GET THOSE CHILDREN OUTSIDE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. That's my biggest aha here. Beg your director for extra time outside. That's where they can run and scream and be little children. That's where they can explore. They don't care if it's cold. Put coats on them. They don't care if it's hot. Give them squirt bottles to cool themselves off with.
- Now my second thing: And this goes all the way up to your kindergarteners. Squat down. Get on their level. Look them in the eye. Make them look you in the eye. And tell them what you need for them to do. And ask them if they understand.
- My third thing. When you see inappropriate behavior – like throwing sand, the opportunity for play just ends. No more sand pile. Don't throw guilt, just end it. These kids are getting smart enough to see that everytime they throw sand, the sand gets put away.
- You want to establish reasonable limits or rules and expect them to adhere to them. As few as you can get by with. Too many is too hard for you to keep up with. Lots of praise when he adheres. We acknowledge his feelings when he doesn't, but we stay firm. Don't keep repeating your "no's". Say it once. Repeat it once and then act on it. Strive to maintain a calm, low-key, loving attitude. If they won't stop doing something move them. Don't get caught up in the struggle of the moment.
- Observe carefully. Many times you can see right before a toddler gets too frustrated or disruptive and you can intervene with help or distraction.
- Use books! When you see a child just trying to get in trouble, say, " Let's go read."
- This child often wants to be autonomous, wants to do things for himself, but just can't physically do it – which can then cause him to fall apart. Observe. Make things easy for him. Get him to a point where he can do it himself. Vygotsky. That might mean a stool up to the sink so he can wash his own hands. If he's having trouble putting on his socks, it might mean getting that sock over his heal so he can pull it up the rest of the way.
- White would tell you that the best way to meet the social needs of this child is to see that there is a balance to his principle interests. 1. That there is plenty to do, to explore to manipulate. (But not so many things that he can't choose. Still rotate.) Watch for emerging interest. 2. That there is plenty of places to run and climb and 3. That there is time with you playing., You really there, engaged, paying attention.

Principles of Teaching
Physical Knowledge Activities

- Introduce the activity in a way that maximizes a child's initiative.
  - Put out materials to which she will naturally gravitate to.
    - Jan's 50 balls
  - Present materials and ask leading questions to stimulate the child's thoughts and actions on the materials.
- Begin with parallel play
- Figure out what the child is thinking and ask a question or two in that direction
  - You can see how an object reacts. You throw a ball. It travels through space **> "What would happen if. . .?"**
  - You can work to produce a desired effect. You throw a ball and try to hit a target. **> "Can you. . .?"**
  - You can become aware of how you produced the desired effect. You throw a ball overhand and notice it comes closer to hitting the target when you pitched it underhand. **> "Can you do it again. . .?"**
  - You can work to explain causes **> "I wonder why. . .?"**
- Encourage children to interact
  - To make predictions
  - To produce desired effect
  - To become aware of how an effect is produced
  - To explain causes
- Reflect on activity afterward

Examples of PKA's

- Bowling
- Inclines
- Scooping, Pouring and Catching
- Tubes
- Blowing
- Rolling a ping-pong ball back and forth on the floor or a table with "paddles"
- Commercial toys like stomp rockets, a fishing pole or ball toys