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# Current Conditions

## Your Aspiration Communication

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“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.”  
--Albert Einstein

“What’s snow?” “How come snow is white?” “Why do I have to learn about the states of matter?” “Will this be on the test?” Our students from young to old, from naïve to cynical, are curious. They want to make sense of their world. They seek out more information: touching, watching, reading, asking. Creating environments in which your students *want* to seek out more information, *want* to dig deeper into a topic, *want* to understand the relevance of what they are learning is the essence of life-long, self-directed learning. Effective teachers lead students to discover the connection between their students’ insatiable wondering and the infinitely wonder-filled world around us.



### CONDITION OF THE MONTH: CURIOSITY

Inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries.

#### 5 Strategies for Promoting Curiosity

- ✓ Instead of providing answers, ask questions: Why? What if? What next? How would you explain that to someone else?
- ✓ Organize lessons as “treasure hunts” by giving clues for how and where to find information.
- ✓ Get to know your students better by asking questions about them and what might pique their curiosity: What are their interests? What are their favorite activities?
- ✓ Read parts of *Alice in Wonderland* to your class. Talk about how Alice encounters unusual situations that she finds “curiouser and curiouser,” and how she tries to make sense of them. Ask students to share what situations have led them to seek out more information.
- ✓ Recognize students for asking thoughtful questions, not just providing expected answers.

#### 2007 My Voice© Surveys

##### **For Consideration and Conversation**

On the My Voice Survey, sixty-five percent (65%) of students agreed with the statement "I feel comfortable asking questions in class."

- ◆ How do you create a classroom environment in which all of your students feel comfortable asking questions?
- ◆ What can you do to encourage your students to use their imagination as an expression of their curiosity?

*E-mail your Curiosity stories, thoughts, or ideas to [qisa@qisa.org](mailto:qisa@qisa.org)*

# Aspirations in Action

## Curiosity

Education research mostly focuses on the cognitive rather than the motivational side of school. There are numerous studies addressing test scores, the amount of facts a child acquires, or how children use information to solve problems. Less emphasis has been placed on why or how children come to engage with information. Curiosity is one concept that addresses the motivational side.

### Curious about curiosity?

Intuitively, we know curiosity when we see it. Yet over the years, curiosity has been thought of as an appetite, like hunger or thirst; an investigatory reflex; a personality trait; and a state of relationship between a person and the environment. The current scholarly definition is that curiosity is a desire for information or a love of learning that is not stimulated by an expected external reward—a student seeks knowledge for its own sake.

### Does curiosity kill the cat?

The evaluation of curiosity has risen and fallen with the general moral tenor of a society. Although curiosity is generally considered desirable in American society and education today, past negative connotations still exist. Associations with the Greek myth of Pandora's box, "curiosity killed the cat," gossip and nosiness still give curiosity a negative halo. Leaders, parents, and educators also may be ambivalent about curiosity because it arises in some behaviors we hope to suppress in young people—such as sex, drugs, and crime. Thus, we need to be careful not only to induce and support curiosity, but also provide guidance regarding what to be curious about.

### Why do you ask?

Curiosity comes out of people's natural tendency to make sense of their world. In general, people like to be "in the know" and in control. When they aren't, they either freeze with fear, or they refuse to acknowledge the anxiety-producing situation, or they try to learn. Students become curious when they are aware of a gap in their knowledge that they would like to fill. Certain situations are more likely to give rise to curiosity. Those with novel, complex, or surprising elements that interrupt students' expectations stimulate curiosity. Students are motivated to seek more information for events they cannot explain, especially if those events are relevant to them.

Curiosity produces a strange mix of sensations and emotions in a person. Because it arises when a student becomes aware of a gap in his or her knowledge, it can produce a feeling of loss or deprivation. There is dissatisfaction with the student's current state of knowledge. This often doesn't feel good, at first, and may inhibit asking questions for fear of looking foolish in front of one's peers. But this discomfort is partly why curiosity motivates seeking behavior. People often perceive loss as more salient than gain; they will put more effort into avoiding or overcoming loss than in getting ahead. However, learning the information and filling that knowledge gap is pleasurable.

### Curiosity and the Conditions that Make a Difference®

- Curiosity relates to Belonging and Heroes because students demonstrate more curiosity and exploratory behavior when they feel secure in their attachments to important people in their lives.
- Curiosity relates to Sense of Accomplishment in that students feel more satisfied with knowledge they acquire through intrinsic interest and their own efforts.
- Curiosity relates to Fun & Excitement and a Spirit of Adventure in that it arouses feelings of anticipation, dramatic tension, and momentum toward a goal.
- Curiosity relates to Leadership & Responsibility becoming Confidence to Take Action because stepping into an unknown and uncertain environment places responsibility for learning with the student. Curiosity enables students to drive the process of discovery, secure in the knowledge that they can be successful.

*This month's Aspirations in Action was written by guest contributor Seana Moran Ed.D. Dr. Moran is the research manager of the Youth Purpose Project at the Stanford Center on Adolescence at Stanford University. The Center and QISA are partnered in the study of Purpose in young people.*