

By George! Curiosity is Really Necessary

Why do children love that little monkey still? Because, the creator of the beloved Curious George, has always let that little monkey follow his curiosity. No matter where it might lead him, no matter what funny, outlandish or awful situations might occur, children have wanted to accompany George to find out, “what will happen if...”

Apparently, we all have much in common with George. Susan Engel, PhD, a developmental psychologist, and author of the best-selling book, *The Hungry Mind*, believes that curiosity is essential when it comes to children learning. Her evening, April 27th, Glenbard Parent Series presentation, held at Glenbard East High School, provided parents and educators with data-based evidence that while children come into the world with an intrinsic, natural curiosity, once they enter school, their curiosity steadily diminishes. Why?

Engel explains, that starting in infancy, as Jerome Kagan, a noted early childhood developmental psychologist observed, “Children use their curiosity because they have a need to resolve uncertainty or to explain the unexplainable.”

“Infants follow patterns and absorb familiar routines. If something doesn’t fit into their known pattern, infants have a ‘novelty detector’ and try to figure out why the anomaly exists.”

Citing the 1984 data of researchers, Tizzard & Hughes, Engel says that when children are two to three years old, they ask, on average, between 27 to 100 questions per hour. By the time they are old enough to be in a classroom situation, their questions drop to an average of just 4 per hour.

According to Engel, “Curiosity is the single most important tool to get students to want to learn something. Curiosity helps students to: 1) learn information quicker; 2) retain information longer; and 3) learn information at a deeper level.”

Sadly, students’ curiosity diminishes the longer they are in school. Engel explains that teachers don’t foster curiosity in students because they are fearful of getting off track with planned classroom activities and won’t be able to cover the course material required.

Finally, Engel believes that the greatest influences on a child’s curiosity, at any age, are the following:

- 1) Role-models - parents and teachers need to express curiosity regularly.
- 2) Encouragement - parents and teachers need to encourage children; and
- 3) Security - parents and teachers need to create an environment where a child will feel secure enough to express curiosity, even if it requires risk-taking or results in failure.

So maybe when it comes to your student’s academic environment, it’s okay to “monkey around.”

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