

# CURIOUS AND ENGAGED ... exploring three characteristics of real and effective learning

## - ENGAGEMENT -

Engagement is all about being genuinely curious and actively exploring whatever has caught their interest.

### Through the conventional/school lens ...

- ✓ curiosity is squelched early: toddlers are told “no” over 400 times a day
- ✓ teachers are tasked with channeling what curiosity is left down the curriculum path
- ✓ fixed time-line for “learning” doesn’t allow teachers to follow their students’ curiosity and questions beyond the curriculum

### Through the unschooling lens ...

- ✓ curiosity drives learning
- ✓ their enthusiasm to explore is encouraged, at all ages
- ✓ because their time is their own, their questions roam as far and as wide as their inquisitiveness takes them
- ✓ all communication and learning styles are embraced
- ✓ experience the “joy of complete engagement” in the flow of their activities

## - MOTIVATION -

Motivation is the inspiration to keep trying, even in the face of challenges, to accomplish whatever they set out to do.

### Through the conventional/school lens ...

- ✓ focus is on external motivation
- ✓ sense of accomplishment derived from good grades, judged and awarded by the teacher (external value)
- ✓ drive for grades subverts their interest in learning and mastering a topic
- ✓ “Why do I need to know this?”: learning is disconnected from life, making it harder to piece together, and to *want* to

### Through the unschooling lens ...

- ✓ focus is on internal motivation
- ✓ sense of accomplishment derived from what they can achieve with their new knowledge/skill (internal value)
- ✓ driven by their wish to reach their own personal goals → there’s a real purpose for learning, to push through challenges
- ✓ don’t internalize the message “learning is hard”; the challenge is in getting to the goal

## - THINKING -

Thinking is the analysis and creativity that sparks learning connections, in turn bringing deeper understanding.

### Through the conventional/school lens ...

- ✓ steeped in memorization of facts and procedures; even thinking/opinion expected to align with the teachers’
- ✓ memorization skills have come to represent understanding and learning
- ✓ majority of time spent with same-age peers means that learning relationship and social skills is limited

### Through the unschooling lens ...

- ✓ about analyzing facts and situations and letting creativity loose to see things in new ways
- ✓ about noticing hidden gems of opportunity, brainstorming options, making choices, and seeing how they play out
- ✓ there is no “ahead” or “behind” when the perspective is lifelong learning
- ✓ friends with a range of ages: nurture younger kids/mentored by older kids

***When these three characteristics are at play,  
learning thrives.***

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Free to Learn & Free to Live books  
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