



Implementing a Curiosity Oriented Approach

By Richard Hill

FEATURE

Curiosity is something that has excited me my whole life. I am sure a lot of people share my fascination and enthusiasm for curiosity, but what does it really mean to be *curious*? It's surprising how many fascinating and wonderful things in life are taken for granted without being clearly understood. Recently I have been asking people what they think curiosity is. The most frequent answer is "I am curious about things that I don't know" or "I'm curious about things I want to know more about". These answers, however, aren't saying much about what curiosity *is*, just what people are curious *about*. When I ask, "So, what do you mean by being *curious about what you don't know*?" the most frequent answer is, "Well... you know... curious...".

I find there are other words that people use without a clear understanding of what they mean. Words like *love*, *happy*, and *hope* are used to express the most meaningful needs, wants and desires of life. Some people might well have a strong personal definition, but not one that we all share and potentially one that creates argument. People have been desperately seeking happiness, often without any real idea of what it is they are looking for. Clearly, many people think that curiosity is *all* about being interested in information unknown, but it is so much more than that. That is just one aspect of one facet. I suggest that there is so much more.

I was a speaker at the World Congress of Psychotherapy in some years ago. Over early morning coffee a colleague asked what I was

working on. I briefly described my thoughts on curiosity and she blithely dismissed it with, "Oh, I think everyone knows about curiosity. I am always curious about my clients." Not very encouraging. We soon moved in for the first keynote lecture and a fascinating professor began by declaring that one of the most important things in therapy is curiosity and the trouble is, no-one really knows what it means and how to use it properly. My mind went a little giddy and then I did a quick search around the audience for my colleague, but I was unable to have the satisfaction of an "I told you so" look. I'm glad for that because, as I now know, that sort of attitude is one of the things that turns curiosity off.

The speech was quite wonderful, but I realized that it didn't touch on half the things that I was thinking. This inspired me to continue researching and to develop more depth and clarity.

State of Brain * State of Body *

State of Mind * State of Being

When a client enters the room, they are in a "state" (Klein, 2015). The concept of a state has a wide scope of research and discussion. We might initially recognize it as a depressed state or perhaps an anxious state or a traumatized state or other types or combinations of states. This "state" permeates their system on a number of levels: in their body – captured at a cellular level, in visceral conditions, in movement and action capacities; in the brain – determining the way in which energy and information flows through the neural and related tissue; and as a mindset – that emergent quality of

their biology that becomes the process that regulates the ongoing flow of energy and information throughout the body and especially the brain, which, collectively, is experienced as their overall state of being. This orients how they function, how they feel, how they think, what they believe, what they are able to want and the limitations and constraints of what is possible for them to be at this time.

What clients want from therapy is some form of beneficial change. The Catch-22 of therapy is that it is very difficult to create beneficial change from within a negative state. You can't *make* a depressed person cheer up or *make* an anxious person calm down or *tell* a traumatized person not to worry about it. Before you can even start it is vital to create a safe environment and develop a trusting relationship. That is part of the process we call "rapport". This, however, only creates a starting point that needs to be patiently achieved in concert with the client. It is the foundation of what all therapists do and how all therapy begins (Leach, 2005).

To move toward beneficial change the client needs to be able to explore with some expectation that the future will be ok. They need to be less afraid and less likely to be frightened and suffer further trauma. They need to feel a sense of growth and a pleasing feeling when they make that growth, or take a positive step or discover a hidden truth or make an inspired breakthrough. Most therapeutic practices that I know endeavour to bring the client through these processes into healing and wellbeing. A *Curiosity Oriented Approach* is not a therapy in itself, it is a state of being that shifts the mind, alters the flow of energy and information in

the brain, and changes the biology all the way down to gene expression and protein synthesis to produce the biochemical milieu that creates the best conditions for therapeutic progress toward beneficial change.

I suggest that curiosity is the most effective state of mind to enable the client to make a change and reframe negative states. As an example, I received a distressed phone call from a grieving client who had recently lost her husband. She was only in her mid-forties and the death was sudden and tragic. She was inconsolable, tearful, exhausted and desperate. There was nothing that could be said to make the grief less or brighten the starkness of her life. All the things she found unbearable were largely true. She needed to shift her state, but how was this possible in the context of not being able to shift her reality? Neither sympathy nor even empathy had or could have given her any solace. Instead, I utilized a curiosity oriented approach.

I reminded her of something I had said in a recent session, “Your husband hasn’t gone. He’s just changed the way he stays”. I asked her to look around the room and see the places where he used to linger, his favorite chair, the books he liked to read, where she could imagine him staying. She began telling me about the various parts of the room where she could feel his presence. I then asked her if she could think of other parts of the house where she could feel him “stay”. She paused and mentioned a few. Then I suggested that when we finished the call, she could explore the house and find all those places, those things, and those memories as best she could. We were quiet for a little while, maybe 20 or 30 seconds and she discovered she had stopped crying. She also discov-

ered that she did not feel so desolate. Suddenly she said, “Richard, what did you just do? What did you do to me? I am still sad, but I seem ok now. What did you do?” I told her that I had changed the way her brain was flowing and the way her heart was beating and the way she was breathing and, most importantly, what she believed was possible. I saw her again several days later and she told me that she continued to feel ok, to manage. She was ever so grateful.

This is just one example of the sudden change of “experiential state” that happens when curiosity is ignited. There is a deeper neuroscience which is described in a previous issue (March, 2018), but, for now, let us look at what curiosity is and how it makes it possible to create beneficial change in a grieving woman over the phone on a Wednesday afternoon.

THE THREE FACETS OF CURIOSITY

The following is a new conceptual framework to understand and utilize curiosity in therapeutic practice and daily life.

Litman and Jimerson (2004; 2005) examined two aspects of curiosity, both which serve to motivate exploration. They described it as a Curiosity for Deficit – those things that are not known driven by feelings of uncertainty; and Curiosity for Interest – a pleasurable attraction to novelty regardless of whether any information is acquired. This provided a platform on which to build a conclusion that there are three distinct, but indivisible facets of curiosity that I describe as the *3 Facets of Curiosity*.

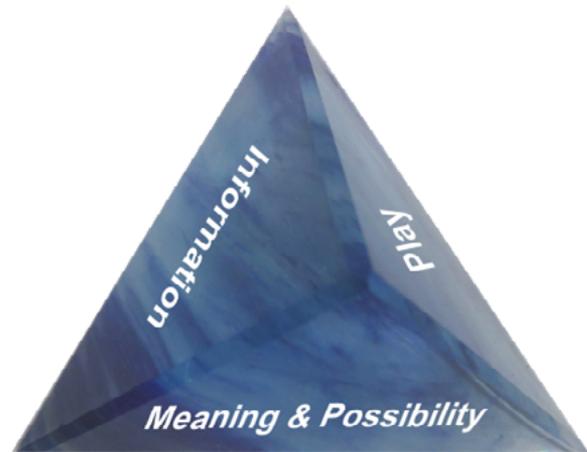
Although these facets can be differentiated for description and discussion, just like the fac-

ets of a gemstone, optimal curiosity is a balanced expression of all three. Disproportionate focus on one or other of the facets can produce an imbalanced view that is not a true representation of the gem.

I can appreciate why Littman and Jimerson felt that curiosity is motivated by deficit, but that feels like such negative language. I rename this facet – *Curiosity for Information*. Their second category is named as interest, but I suggest it is much more than just interest. This facet is more about exploring in an unregulated manner, allowing and even seeking out what is novel, unexpected and serendipitous. This facet is more reasonably named – *Curiosity for Play*. The final facet, which was not considered by Littman and Jimerson and when discussed in the literature is rarely related to curiosity, is, in my view, the most important and the most relevant for therapeutic practice and for personal development. This facet elevates curiosity beyond just acquiring an answer or playful pleasure by both extending the exploration into the future where something is not just discovered, but created, and turns the curiosity inward to delve into meaning, purpose and value. I first named this *Curiosity for Meaning*, but it is something more. It explores beyond the specific, as in *Curiosity for Information*, or the momentary and serendipitous, as in *Curiosity for Play*, and into the realm of possibility. This facet is best names – *Curiosity for Meaning and Possibility*.

When all three facets of curiosity are expressed, then all the healing, growth and change benefits that a *Curious State of Being* is made possible. The effects are felt in all areas of life ranging from our affect and behaviors to our neuro-biochemical milieu and the activity

of our genes. These natural self-organising and self-healing capacities are no longer in the distance, but at our fingertips.



Let us unpack the three facets a little more:

- Curiosity for Information (CFI) is the application of curiosity to something specific. This is curiosity for what is not known, to fill a lack of knowledge, of understanding, of experience or of perception. Curiosity can be stimulated from the bottom-up i.e. in response to sensory information from the body, and can be generated in response to top-down thinking i.e. from afferent cortical activity. Determining what to be curious “about” can begin as a cognitive, rational process. It can also be triggered by ideas that come across the “social synapse” (Cozolino, 2006, p. 447) from other brains and minds. Each facet of curiosity is time sensitive. CFI is expressed within a timeframe of need, exploration and discovery. It begins when there is a realization that something is not known and it continues (assuming

the exploration isn't abandoned) until the answer is found. The energetic drive and motivation from CFI wanes once the information deficit is resolved. The interesting thing is that there is often a pleasurable reward when the answer is found in the form of a puff of endomorphin or endocephalin (Tseng, et al., 2013). This explains, in part, the almost addictive nature of inquiry and investigation which can be seen in the popularity of quiz shows and trivia competitions and also the loss of motivation in therapy, learning and business when goals are reached

- Curiosity for Play (CFP) is a wonder, an interest, or a fascination in whatever is happening now. It is in the timeframe of the immediate. This is the pleasurable and playful curiosity that is often seen in children, but also in adults when the weight of responsibility for past or future is lost in the pleasure of playful exploration. CFPL is the type of curiosity we see in children as they engage with the world in a moment by moment way – “What’s that... what’s that... what’s that... why... how... where?” These are the 1000 questions that are partly motivated by CFI, but also by CFPL as the curious child moves on almost immediately from an answer to the next thing. CFPL is an engagement in unregulated playful activity which we know is so important in developing both social awareness and boundaries as well as social bonds. People have wondered why,

when they play a sport, they don't always have a pleasurable experience. This is very important, because an organized sport is not curious play. Curious play is where there are no rules, overt regulation, or organization. Interestingly, rules and organization often emerge as the play experience progresses. That is the information and learning that comes from play, although the pleasure of play may be all that is required to satisfy the participants. Because play is in the immediate, CFPL wanes as soon as play stops or is stopped. Play is an incredibly important and useful tool in therapy to shift people out of negative states into more receptive, engaged and integrated states.

- Curiosity For Meaning & Possibility (CFMP) is a wonder, an interest, and a fascination about what *else* is possible *because* of whatever is happening now. CFP is about the future because when something is created it does exist in the present. To create is to move into the future. That which is to be created exists only in the future. It is manifest in a future moment. Possibility is always present as a concept – like many doorways – but the act of moving forward into what that possibility might produce requires you to step out of “now” and out of the “held past”. One of the difficulties of depression is the loss of connection with the future. Anxiety is, on the other hand, a fear of moving into the future for what might already be there. CFMP

is about enabling and allowing for connecting and engaging with the future as a positive place where new things are, at the very least, possible. CFMP utilises our natural creative capacities and encourages us to explore metaphor and representation; to look for meaning and self-reference; to positively anticipate what else might be; and to be an agent in what might be created. Possibility, surprisingly, is not broadly desired or encouraged in a number of social environments. Certainly, people are initially interested to explore their possibilities, but when you begin to delve deeper into the process, barriers often rise. Safety is seen by many as a predictable future and a dependable present. Demands made by society on time and flexibility leave many people feeling that imagination, creativity and possibility are things they cannot afford until they have secured the needs they believe will make them safe in the world. This can be anything from external social demands for money or success, to internal beliefs that you are not good enough or worthy. Many have developed a *winner/loser world* mindset that is created by the expectations and demands of the world (Hill, 2006). These external standards are taken by many as measures of their value and worth and where winning or losing defines you. I believe that is an “elephant in the room” that creates personal limitations and restricts exploration. Possibility thinking does have individual limitations created by insecure attachment issues, early life trauma

and congenital disabilities, but the negative effects of peer pressure, bullying, and overwhelming social trigger unmanageable inflammatory processes that affect the immune system, unmanageable stress many of those things that effectively put a lid on our access to the expansive possibilities of our lives. It is precisely because of all these restrictions and constraints to CFMP that it is so important and may be why it has not been considered a facet of curiosity, and something much darker and philosophical. But, CFMP is the most rewarding and beneficial facet of curiosity, despite the restriction and resistance it faces. It is the facet that can be present at all times, even when the other facets are not active. In personal development and therapeutic processes, it is from CFMP that the transformational processes of change, realization, and healing finally emerge.

CFMP, however, is something that has been practiced by teachers and therapists alike for generations. There are examples of stimulating learning by utilising curiosity as an *initial condition* (McQuillan, 2008). During my academic study I researched transformational teaching practices using the rich resource of data from film, video recordings, documentaries, docu-dramas and dramas about difficult educational experiences. Turning students on to the curious wonder and possibilities of learning, not just learning the facts to pass exams, can be very difficult. It is very difficult in therapy to encourage a client to be curious about what

is troubling them. How can we be curious about depression and anxiety, especially when those affective states are suppressors of curiosity? Being able to turn on curiosity is obviously very important. We need to both acknowledge the troubling state that brings the client to therapy and also move them to a new state in which they have some opportunity to find resolution or, at least, beneficial change.

In the dramatic film production, *The Freedom Writers* (DeVito, 2007), we experience a situation that is concerned with both learning and therapy. The film begins in the childhood years of one of the students witnessing a drive-by shooting. Her voiceover tells us, "... and I saw the war for the first time." The story follows the experiences of teacher, Erin Gruwell, in her struggles to teach at a school which brought in (bussed in) minority students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In a memorable scene, Gruwell draws a line on the floor and asks students who know someone who has been killed to step over the line. Every student steps across (except one Caucasian boy). As Gruwell increases the number of people who have been killed, many students remain across the line. Their pain and discomfort and their total lack of curiosity is obvious. Their lives are about survival, not adventure or exploration. Gruwell tries to reach out to the students and is finally successful when she takes them to the Jewish Holocaust Museum. For the first time the student's minds were opened to possibilities they had never contemplated. Gruwell took them to visit Holocaust survivors. Their curiosity about these people who had suffered beyond their own suffering created the transformational change. Gruwell asked them to write their stories, which they gradually did. The stories

were eventually published as a book – *The Freedom Writers Diary* (1999). Their stories not only described the facts of their lives, but also their dreams and wishes. The stories became more than just the tragedy of their lives, but about their possibilities. This is an excellent example of narrative therapy.

Gruwell shifted their mental state from one of systemic distress – chronic sympathetic nervous system activation – to a state of wonder and interest in something outside of themselves, something that gave their lives some meaning and especially some perspective. This opened them up to previously unknown possibilities. They began to grow as people and also grow as students. They began to learn. Without knowing exactly what she was doing, Erin Gruwell intuitively achieved what we all need to be able to learn and heal and grow – a sense of self and the meaning of our experience, which creates intention and purpose. That is why we want our clients to get into a state of positive expectation, of wanting something, of having some positive sense that something is coming. This is really important. We don't want people just benignly doing what we ask them to do, we want them to have a feeling of, "Oh, this is going to be worth it. This is getting me somewhere. This is what I need to find my better self". We want them to feel safe to move "towards" and we want them energized, aroused and attentive. We want them to be enthusiastic, with some degree of drive or push and we want them to be attuned and engaged with us throughout the process. These are the conditions that are achievable when engaging in therapy from a curiosity oriented approach.

THE CONSTRUCTS OF THE THREE FACETS OF CURIOSITY

Without wanting to restrict things to a linear construct, the following “de-constructions” seek to explore the elements in greater detail, while always allowing for the dynamic nature of the overall process. In *interpersonal neurobiology* terms, this process is described as *differentiation – linkage – integration* (Siegel, 2001) where the elements are differentiated in order to create some clarity and distinction for the purpose of exploring them more deeply so that they can be reintegrate into the dynamic whole again.

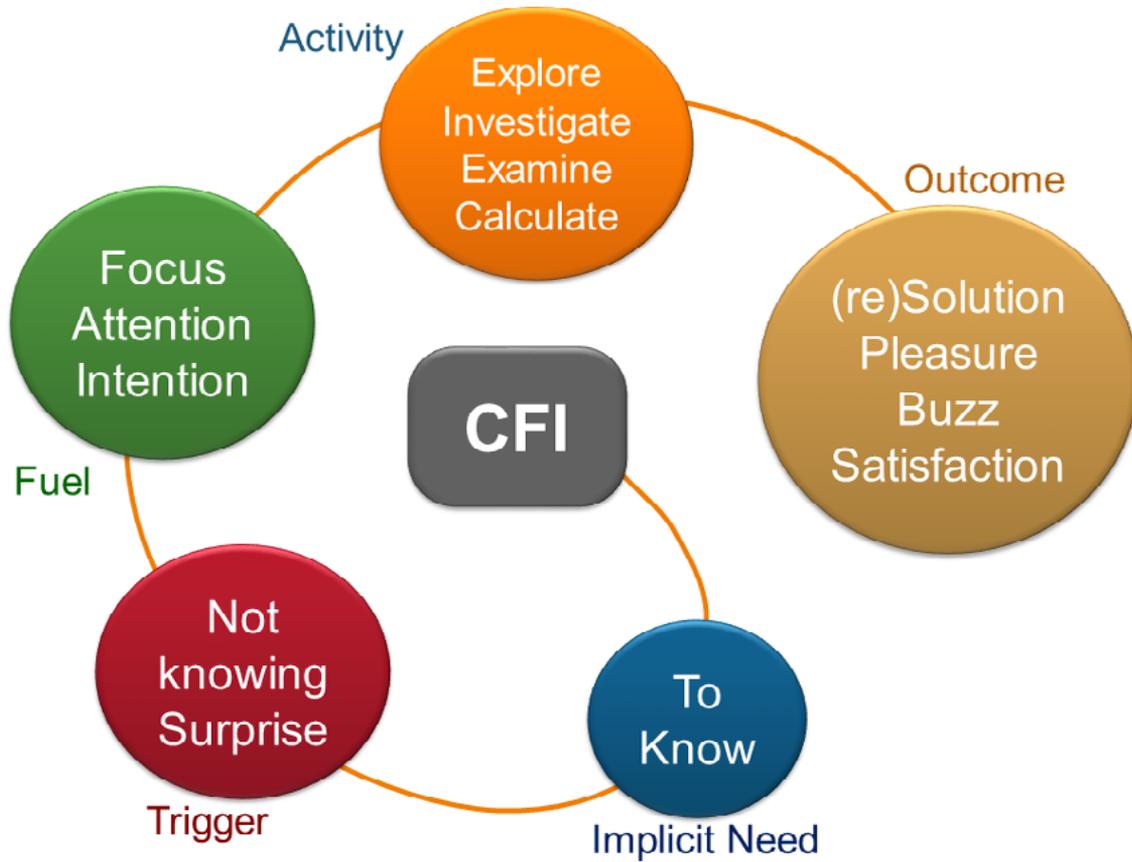
To this end, I have differentiated the process into: Implicit Need; Trigger; Fuel; Activity; and Outcome. You will see that the diagram is drawn in a spiral rather than a straight line because the spiral reflects how any of these elements can stimulate any of the other elements in a dynamic interplay. When you are attuned to and observing your client, you may notice the presence of any one of the elements I describe, from any one of the steps. A curiosity oriented approach utilizes that observed awareness to promote and engage in curiosity. For example, I have had clients who are exhibiting the fuel required and it was just a matter of directing that fuel to the best curiosity facet for that moment. It is these flickers of potential within the client, or flickers that we create from our attuned, embodied presence, that become the sparks of utilization and a positive shift in therapy.

I find that when I am working with a client, suddenly a word or an action or an emotion seems to stand out and feels like a doorway to

something more. As an example, a regular client was recalling the previous week and, among so many things, he mentioned that when he looked at photo of a social event he “looked like a child in an adult’s body”. It is always hard to reflect on what makes a word or action stand out in therapy. It was something to do with the change in voice tone and a shift in sitting position and facial muscles tone that grabbed my attention, and, with the client’s agreement, we made that thought the focal point for the session. So much emerged from that one comment. Interestingly, at the end of the session he confessed that he actually planned not mention the photo. His implicit voice certainly knew what was important! The message here, is that his comment was more from the middle of the curiosity process, probably the Fuel or Activity, and the therapeutic process expanded out, eventually engaging the entire spiral to arrive at a satisfying outcome before the session finished. That is the *Curiosity Oriented Approach* in action.

1. Curiosity for Information:

CFI is founded in our implicit need to know, to expand ourselves in response to demands. When we are confronted with something new or novel or a change in the environment, both inner and outer, there is an innate drive to find out what that is about. This is the *seeking* drive that Jaak Panksepp (1998) describes in his seminal book. This drive does not necessarily take us down a positive or pleasing path. Not knowing can carry with it unpleasant feelings of uncertainty and vulnerability. We can seek out things that are very bad for us. Panksepp uses the example of seeking drugs or hedonis-



tic pursuits. Seeking can open doors to negative resources and potentially trigger affective disorders like depression and anxiety. Seeking is a drive that is useful during curiosity, but it is not all that curiosity is. Curiosity must have all three facets engaged to be beneficial, otherwise imbalances occur that can be problematic and even cause damage. CFPL and CFP can balance the process of CFI by shifting the mind away from fears of failure or verifying negative and limiting personal and/or social beliefs. The activity in CFI is exploration, investigation, and examination, but it can also involve calculation, too. Trying to work out how things come together, what are the parts, and how that might create a greater whole. The outcome of CFI is

really terrific – we get an answer. This may come as a solution, but can also be experienced as a resolution where the new information or discovery is a final piece of the puzzle or triggers the insight that we couldn't see before. Solutions and resolutions then trigger a buzz of satisfaction and pleasure. A simple children's television program gave me a great example of this buzz in action.

The program was called "The Curiosity Show". Two lovely "scientific guys", Rob Morrison and Dr Deane Hutton, would investigate all kinds of things to do with weird and wonderful science. In one episode they wanted to see how to get a (shelled) hard-boiled egg into a bottle. After a few moments for the audience

to try and work it out, they showed that if you ignite a small taper and put it in the bottle, then put the egg on top of the bottle, the lighted paper will go out and then suddenly the egg is pulled down into the bottle. As you may already know, the taper heats up the air in the bottle and so the air expands, but when the egg is placed on the rim the taper goes out, the air cools and that creates a suction because the air pressure is now greater on the outside of the bottle. Like magic, the egg is pulled into the bottle. Amazing, but the story doesn't end there.

In preparation for a recent presentation on the *Curiosity Oriented Approach*, I searched the internet for video of this experiment. I didn't have to search long before I found it, but after the egg went in the bottle one of the scientists said, "That's all well and good, but do you know how to get the egg out of the bottle?" This is a great example of CFI only being active while there is a question on the table. Suddenly, the surprise of this new question triggered another round of CFI. I imagined they would tell us later on the show, so I scanned through the rest of the thirty minute video to find the answer. I couldn't believe it. They didn't tell us. They didn't show it. My CFI went into overdrive. I just had to know. I wanted to complete the story.

I spent all day searching the internet for video of the solution. This is an excellent example of the power of the seeking drive, but by maintaining a curiosity oriented approach the search did not give rise to negative emotions like frustration or the negativity of winner/loser thinking (see Chapter 6). I continued with the attitude that it was possible to find something and so I maintained a playful ap-

proach. After "mucking about" for most of the day, interspersed with work activities, I finally found a 40th anniversary story on a recording of a morning television show. The scientists were there, probably in their 80s, and my curiosity was resolved: "Put the bottle to your mouth and let the egg roll into the neck of the bottle. Now blow into the bottle and when you pull your mouth away... out comes the egg." It follows the same principle of air pressure, but this time, by blowing air into the bottle, you're increasing the air pressure in the bottle compared to the outside of the bottle, and *voila*, out comes the egg. Everybody on the TV show, including me, shouted with pleasure as the egg fell to the floor.

That is one of the fascinating things about CFI: when you discover the answer, there is a puff of the endomorphine from the Nucleus Accumbens and the Periaqueductal Gray (Carter, 2019). You are rewarded for discovering and learning by maintaining a curiosity oriented approach. The same reward is not received if you become frustrated or angry, which simply turn curiosity off. It makes sense that a species that survives because of adaptability and social engagement that we are primed to learn because we can anticipate a reward when we learn. When there is no pleasure in learning or discovering the new and novel, then that is a strong indicator that the person is not in a curious state. Negative or ambivalent response to finding the answer is a clear indication that curiosity is no longer the motivation. This, however, is very interesting to the curious therapist because it provides an insight into the inner feelings and motivations of a client. So, even when the client's curiosity is disabled that is a message that a curious therapist can notice.

2. Curiosity for Play

CFP is slightly different. Play is for fun and pleasure. Jaak Panksepp has described play as a fundamental emotional drive (1998). It is natural to want to have a good time. There are many benefits during play: you enjoy yourself; let go of responsibilities; and shift focus away from needing to know, toward simple pleasurable engagement. The trigger can be as simple as boredom, but it can also be a release from work and social pressures. It can just be an opportunity - a ball rolls into the group of people. "Just because" is as good a reason to play as any other. CFP is still about not knowing, but it is investigating what you don't know without any pressure to actually find out anything. Surprise is a trigger, as it is for all three facets,

because surprise is usually novel and interesting or unexpected.

The fuel is imagination, creativity and responsiveness. Play exists in the moment. Play is most beneficial when the participants let go of demand and expectation to allow information to emerge from the experience. Rules and regulations might emerge, but they are not predetermined. The activity of play is an unregulated, unsupervised, self-organizing activity. The outcome is enjoyment, social interaction and discovery.

A delightful examples can be seen in a video clip from a playful experiment at the railway station in Odenplan, Stockholm (Youtube, 2012). People can exit or enter the station by an escalator or a set of stairs that are side-



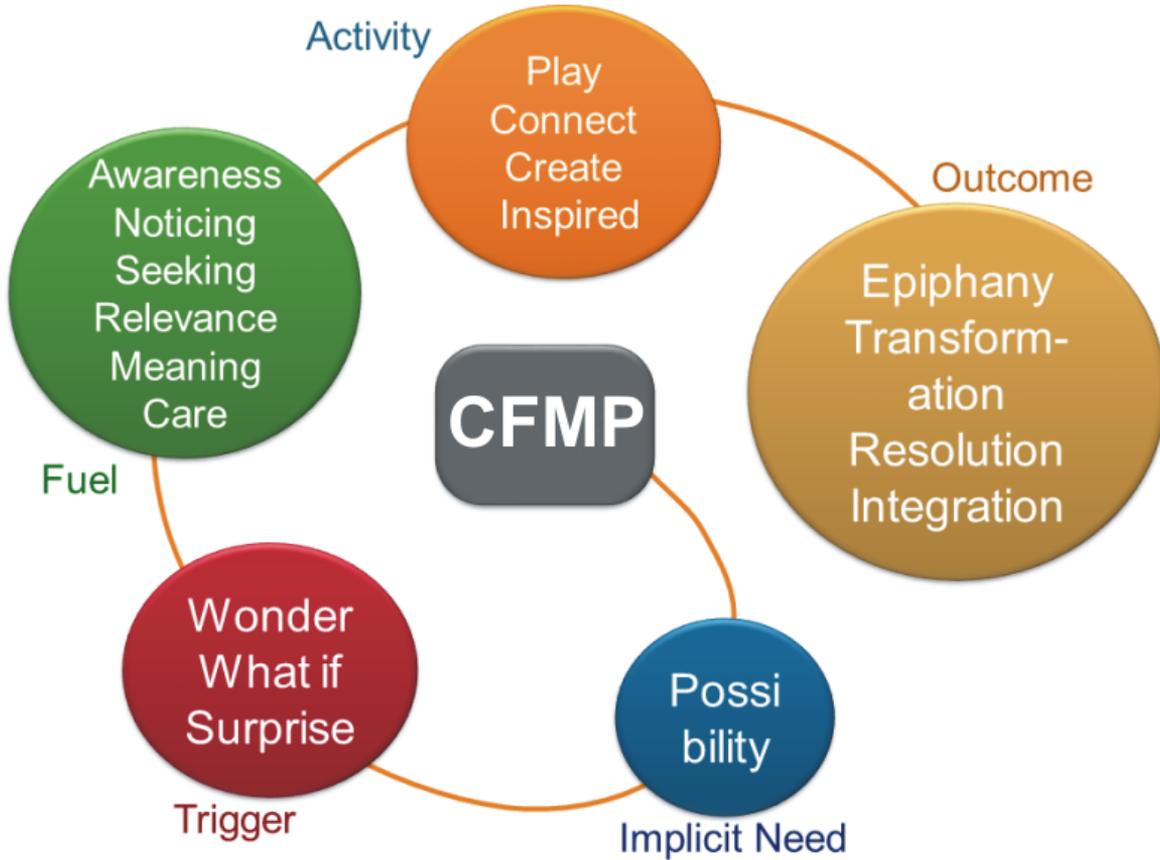
by-side. A hidden camera was set up which showed that, even though it was only one flight of stairs, most people took the escalator. Overnight the experimenters added a covering to the stairs that looked like a piano where the keys actually played the musical notes when stepped on. The next day people came along and were quite surprised to find their stairway is now a working piano. This would at first, have stimulated their CFI – “what is this all about?” – but then, when they trod on the first step, their CFI was resolved – “ah, this is like a piano” – but their CFP was sparked – “I wonder what I can do with this?”. People had such fun climbing the stairs, making music, jumping with friends, even playing “Chopsticks”. Everyone played differently according to their own needs. Some played in a group, some made spontaneous groups who played together until they reached the top of the stairs. It was in the moment, it was fun and created social engagement. It may even have created new possibilities for some. I wonder how many heard music the next time they walked up some stairs or chose to take the stairs rather than the escalator? Eventually 66% more people than normal chose the stairs rather than the escalator. Taking the stairs became interesting, no longer a chore even though it is exactly the same physical action. CFP made the difference and this is precisely what happens in therapy when CFP is added to a traditional technique: things that may have been a chore to resist can become almost enjoyable. The *Curiosity Oriented Approach* invites the therapist and the client to be playful whenever possible, but not in a trivializing way and never when it is counterproductive. It can be wonderful to introduce some humor into therapy, especially when the problems are dark

and difficult. Turning on curiosity first helps to shift the mindset toward a more receptive and responsive state.

3. Curiosity for Meaning & Possibility

Curiosity for Meaning & Possibility opens the doorways beyond those that just satisfy a particular need, as in CFI, or a surprise opportunity, as in CFP. CFMP delves into what the *literal* messages and information might *represent* as metaphor or association; it looks for additional and alternative directions and perspectives; CFMP explores the deeper worlds of meaning, purpose, value, truth; and opens the mind for things not yet imagined, unlikely and even improbable – but possible. CFI explores specifically for what needs to be known. CFP explores for pleasure, without a need for anything to be discovered, just allowing whatever emerges. CFMP explores for insight and inspiration to enable transformational change. CFMP is the open-eyed wonder and fascination about what might be, and what could be, if... CFMP seeks to discover something new and surprising. It is looking for connections that have been invisible and to integrate seemingly disparate elements into a cohesive whole. These might be things in the outer world, but also in the inner world or connections and integrations between worlds. CFMP seeks to make sense of confusion and find purpose and meaning in life. To do this, CFMP is fuelled by a heightened state of awareness and attention that shifts the brain, and the whole being, into an open, engaging and engaged state that facilitates the creativity that produces transformative change.

Although that may sound grandiose, CFMP can be subtle and simple. There was a man in



Sydney, Don Ritchie, who was known as the “Angel of the Gap” (Kwek, 2012). He lived near-by The Gap which had become a location for suicide. He saved many lives with a very simple strategy. He would ask them to talk about it, to share their story over a cup of tea. It seems too simple, but this question opened a possibility in the mind of the person standing on the edge. The difficulty of suicide is that all sense of possibility, other than to suicide, has been lost. The surprise of the question was enough to shift the mindset of many to include something of the future and the possibility of their continued presence – at least for the timeframe of a cup of tea. There is a literal meaning to the cup of tea and the telling of their story, but it is the other meanings, metaphors and associations that

can open doorways of possibility. These would vary with each person, but you can imagine that the cup of tea could represent a gift, or perhaps something that their mother or aunty would do, or something warm and comforting. The opportunity to talk, to tell their story, also meant that someone cared, that they mattered to someone. All these things were possibilities that had been disconnected and pushed away. The simple and gentle question reintroduced the possibility of living.

Information and play can bring a lot to the therapeutic space, but I suggest that CFMP is the field where therapy produces change and transformation. We want our client to turn on their curiosity and especially the CFMP, but let’s not forget the other very important fac-

tor in the client's journey – you, the therapist. It is equally important, and beneficial, for the therapist to be curious, too. That open, productive, engaged state of brain, mind and body created in the state of curiosity is a wonderful place for the therapist to create a relationship, to safely explore with the client, and to enable the self-care that every therapist needs to avoid vicarious trauma and emotional burn-out. Curiosity can be contagious, just as we experience with laughter. It can be transferred across the “social synapse” via Mirror Neurons (Iacoboni, 2009). A curiosity oriented approach urges the therapist and client to be a part of the dynamic experience of curiosity. Beginning in a state of curiosity will enhance your attunement with the client and heighten your observation and professional attention. Milton Erickson, and my personal mentor Ernest Rossi, persistently teach therapists to, “Notice everything. What is their tone of voice? What are their facial expressions? What are their moods? What are their shifts?” We also see this teaching from somatic therapy practitioners like Peter Levine and Pat Ogden who teach how to look for what moved, what shifted, what part of the body is related to what's going on in the mind. Because everything is connected, it is possible for every part of a person's being to communicate with us. Everything and anything can help us get to the healing, growth and transformational change that both client and therapist wish for.

The outcome of CFMP is usually a major change or shift – epiphany, transformation, resolution and integration- where people re-integrate into a whole, healed or healing person. I don't mean this to sound too magical, although it can feel like it sometimes, but

it brings people into a place where creating a liveable life becomes possible. We are now beginning to understand how these therapeutic developments can alter structures in the brain and even in our DNA in a mind-to-brain-to-body exchange.

I am always looking for examples of curiosity and especially if there is also inspiration and possibility. An example of curiosity and all three facets in action is found in an extraordinary TED talk given by Professor Clifford Stoll in Monterey in 2006. To describe him as eccentric might be an understatement, but this wonderful, wide-eyed, unkempt grey-hair-standing-on-end as he pranced erratically about the stage led us through a number of fascinating, surprising and curiosity igniting topics in his presentation. The highlight for me was the story of when he was at University of Buffalo back in 1971. There was an anti-Vietnam War protest turned riot on campus, to which he largely oblivious. Stoll was just walking through the campus wondering what was going on when a policeman started to chase him. He says, “I ran into the clock tower in Hayes Hall and I saw the pendulum swinging and thought to myself, “Wow, the square root of its length is proportional to its period.”” This is a brain in play, even though in some stress because there is a policeman chasing him with a club. He is still fascinated and playful about science.

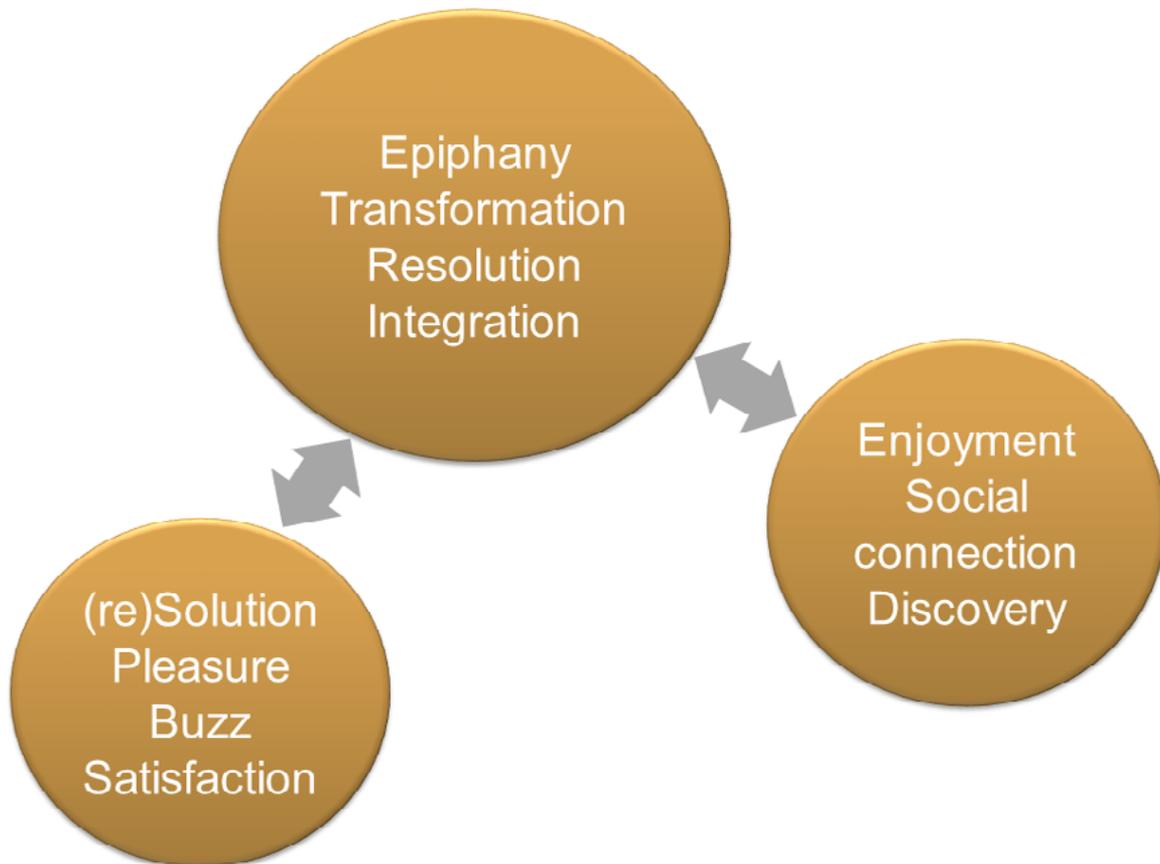
He escapes the policeman by running up the stairs to the top of the belltower where he could see students below throwing bricks, being hit by police and tear-gas and he wondered, “What am I doing here?” This is, in some part, straightforward CFI, but this question opens the door for the bigger question about what he

is doing in his life to find himself here. I could see the door for CFMP opening. What might I discover in this belltower? Where is the meaning? Suddenly he remembers that a tutor once told him that bells often have an inscription, so he goes over to the bell, wipes off the pigeon droppings and he finds a beautiful message that contain these words (slightly paraphrased) – “It is the voice of life that calls us to come and learn.” Wow! For all his eccentricity, Professor Stoll, asks us to look beyond the literal experience of learning and see that the real purpose and meaning of learning is to respond to “the voice of life”. That message was clear to Erin Gruwell and, eventually, to her young students. In any educational setting there is a fundamental need for CFMP. Otherwise, what is that in-

formation for? I say the same for any therapeutic setting and also in day-to-day living.

The Combined Outcome of all 3 Facets

Am I suggesting that the voice of life is curiosity? I humbly suggest that it is, although I would say that it is not the only voice. I would also suggest that not all voices are pleasant or even desirable, but curiosity is a voice that seems to have the capacity to render so many of the negative and destructive voices silent or, at least, subdued. It is very hard to be angry while being curious. It is almost impossible to be curious and afraid. It is contradicting to be curious and depressed and curiosity can tame anxiety so that the future is no longer a



frightening place. Of all the voices of life, curiosity provides a healthy, productive foundation. When the outcomes of the three facets of curiosity are shown together, reintegrated as a dynamic system, it seems clear to me that a life lived through a curiosity oriented approach is the sort of life I wish to live and the sort of life I wish my clients to embrace in order to recover, heal and thrive. Surely, that is possible?

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