

# PASSION-LED LEARNING

In our last conversations, we explored how language shapes our inner world... how relationships shape our experience...and how learning emerges in the space between us. And today, we move into something that sits at the heart of it all...Passion.

Or perhaps more simply... curiosity. Because when a learner is lit from within... something shifts. Learning no longer needs to be pushed. It begins to pull. There is a natural drive within every human to explore, to question, to understand. You can see it in young children. The constant “why?” The fascination with the smallest details. The desire to touch, build, experiment, and discover.

This isn't something we need to create. It's already there. And yet... somewhere along the way, for many learners, that spark begins to fade. Not because they've lost their ability... But because the conditions around them have changed. Much of our current system is built on external motivation. Rewards. Grades. Comparison. “Do this... and you'll get that.”

But research shows that when we rely too heavily on external rewards, something important begins to diminish. **A theory known as Self-Determination Theory** explains that humans are most motivated when three core needs are met:

Autonomy — the sense that we have choice  
Competence — the feeling that we are growing and capable  
Connection — the experience of being seen and supported

When these are present... motivation becomes natural. When they are absent... learning can begin to feel forced. There is also something happening in the brain. When we engage in something we are genuinely interested in, the brain releases dopamine. This enhances focus. It strengthens memory. It increases persistence. In simple terms...The brain remembers what it cares about.

Think about something you've learned effortlessly in your own life. A skill. A hobby. A passion.

You likely didn't need to be told to practise. You were drawn to it. You returned to it. You improved... not through pressure, but through interest. We see this reflected in stories as well. Harry Potter captures this beautifully.

The excitement of discovering new abilities.  
The curiosity that drives exploration.  
The desire to understand something meaningful.

Learning, in that world, isn't simply delivered. It's experienced. And while it may be a story... it reflects something very real within us.

So what happens when we begin to shift our approach? Instead of asking: “What should this child learn?”

We ask: “What is this child curious about?” Instead of controlling the path... We begin to follow the spark.

This doesn't mean there is no structure. It means the structure serves the learner... not the other way around. It means we guide, we support, we offer tools... But we don't extinguish the flame in the process.

Because when curiosity is present... Effort feels different. Time feels different. Learning feels alive. Perhaps the question we might begin to ask ourselves is this: Are we trying to motivate learning... Or are we creating the conditions where motivation naturally exists?

## **STORY “*The Project That Wasn't Assigned*”**

A young boy sat at the back of the classroom, often distracted. His work was unfinished. His attention wandered. He was described as unmotivated.

One day, during a free period, he began sketching. Quietly at first. Then with increasing focus. It was detailed. Complex. Intentional. The teacher noticed. Instead of redirecting him back to the worksheet... she paused.  
“Tell me about what you're drawing,” she said.

His eyes lit up. He spoke about design, structure, ideas. Over the following weeks, that simple moment grew into something more. He began researching. Measuring. Building. Maths appeared through scale and proportion. Literacy through notes and explanations. Problem-solving through trial and error. The same learner... In the same classroom... But now, fully engaged. Not because he was told to learn... But because he had something he wanted to bring to life.

## **LISTENER INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Curiosity Mapping**

Ask a child (or yourself):

- What are you most interested in right now?
- What do you enjoy learning about?

Write it down. Follow the threads.

### **2. The “Follow the Spark” Experiment (1 week)**

- Notice moments of natural interest
- Allow extra time there
- Observe changes in engagement

### 3. Reframe the Question

Instead of: “Finish this task” Try: “What part of this interests you most?”

### 4. Passion Project

Invite:

- build something
- research something
- create something

Let learning emerge through the process.

### 5. Reflection Prompt

- When do you feel most alive while learning?
- What environments support that?

## PASSION PROJECT EXAMPLES

*Sparking imagination across different types of learners*

#### 1. THE HANDS-ON BUILDER

**Project:** *Design and Build a Chicken Coop or Outdoor Structure*

**What it could look like:**

A learner becomes interested in building—perhaps through helping in the yard or watching someone construct something.

They decide to design and build a small structure:

- chicken coop
- cubby house
- garden bed
- simple shed

**Learning that naturally emerges:**

- **Maths:** measurement, angles, budgeting
- **Science:** materials, weather resistance
- **Problem-solving:** trial and error
- **Responsibility:** caring for animals or maintaining the structure

**Key insight:** “This isn’t separate subjects... this is integrated, living learning.”

## 2. THE ARTIST

**Project:** *Create a Nature-Inspired Art Collection or Exhibition*

**What it could look like:** A learner loves drawing, painting, or creating.

They begin collecting inspiration from nature: leaves, textures, colours, light  
They create:

- a series of artworks
- a visual journal
- even a small exhibition at home or community space

**Learning that emerges:**

- **Observation skills**
- **Creative expression**
- **Art techniques**
- **Confidence through sharing work**

**Extension:**

- Write descriptions of each piece
- Explore artists and styles
- Sell or gift artwork

## 3. THE WRITER

**Project:** *Write a Story, Blog, or Mini Book*

**What it could look like:**

A learner enjoys storytelling, journaling, or imagination. They choose to:

- write a short story
- create a children's book
- start a blog or podcast
- document real-life experiences

**Learning that emerges:**

- **Literacy skills** (naturally, not forced)
- **Structure and sequencing**
- **Vocabulary expansion**
- **Self-expression and voice**

**Extension:**

- Illustrate the story
- Share with younger children
- Turn it into a printed book

## 4. THE CARETAKER / CHANGE-MAKER

**Project:** *Improving Lives of People or Animals*

**What it could look like:**

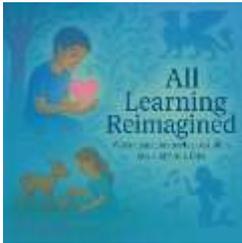
A learner feels deeply about helping others. They might:

- volunteer at an animal shelter
- create care packs for community members
- design a fundraiser
- start a small initiative (e.g. food garden, donation drive)

**Learning that emerges:**

- **Empathy and relational awareness**
- **Planning and organisation**
- **Communication skills**
- **Real-world problem solving**

**Key insight:** “This is where learning meets purpose.”



To listen to an interesting podcast on Passion led learning go to <https://bbsradio/alllearningreimagined>.

Recorded on to the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2026. See below for ideas to promote passion led learning in any educational settings. Enjoy!