



Keeping the Educational Fires Burning

by Clare Adrian Day

It's the long-awaited last day of school. The clock ticks toward the end of the school day. The final bells ring and a surge of anxious students blast open school doors across the nation. Many are content to meander into aimless days of blissful, mental inertia. At the doors to the school buildings are locked, do kids have to close their minds to education or can a flickering flame of enthusiasm for learning stay lit through the summer months?

Most kids would prefer to keep the relationship between school and summer at a minimum. But just as a fire stays lit with rekindling, air and added fuel if necessary, the mind can be stimulated through the summer months with rekindling prompts from parents, the gentle breeze of suggestion and the fuel of planned activities. All this can be done without being attached to the idea of learning at all but rather, with a sense of adventure.

Prompts

• Inquiry into Daydreams

Young minds wander without much prompting (especially when given a task.) Where they wander might provide a clue into learning adventures for the summer months. The busy schedule of the school year doesn't allow interests to blossom much further than "Never, Never Land." So if you have the opportunity to venture near with "what are you thinking?" you could get a glimpse at a budding hobby, a potential invention or eventual career. Even if it's something seemingly impossible to achieve, an idea can be expanded with a trip to the library or an experiment. And whether access to the Internet is available at home, community center or library, the wealth of information available at your child's and your fingertips won't ever let that fire burn out.

My son's invariable answer to my inquiries into his thoughts was for a long

time anything to do with spies. Even I found researching spy equipment fascinating. Night vision isn't just for hunting, and some of those James Bond gizmos are for real. With a tenured interim of cars as his mental fixation, the spy technology interest has blossomed into a micro technology-engineering career.

• Suspended questions

When you are asked a question, rather than giving the answer if you know it, throw the ball back in your child's court. How do you think suspension bridges are built? What do you think we should do next? Following your child's lead, you may encounter a road you hadn't thought would be of interest. One summer I had taken my daughter and a group of friends to the library. We stopped for lunch, but somehow the group chose to go and eat a picnic lunch in a nearby cemetery. That lunch launched a lively discussion about the origin of such burial places, what

gravestones were made of and the origin of some of the names on the stones.

• Memories of favorite times in school.

You or your child will most likely recall some topic studied during the nine months of the school year. Even if the favorite time was recess, it's expandable. If foursquare was the favorite game during recess, what would be needed to play foursquare in the driveway? Estimating then measuring the amount of space needed, purchasing or substituting a particular ball, considering the number of players, and teaching the game to you (even if you already know how) all incorporate math, problem-solving and communication skills, as well as the eye-hand coordination benefits of the game itself.

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