

Keeping the Educational Fires Burning

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• Kids as informer.

Plant an "I wonder what would happen if" question and see what answer lights up in your child's mind that can develop into a project of discovery. Even if they're silly, questions spark new pathways in the brain for neurons to travel. I wonder how many petals are in a sunflower? I wonder how long you can sit perfectly still? (That one might have a reverse effect on TV viewing). I wonder what would happen if we turned left at the corner? A road not taken on a routine trip to the grocery store might lead to an unexpected location that develops into a regular personal landmark visit. The likelihood of happening onto a construction site is pretty high in the summertime and can become a favorite excursion all summer long.

• Everyday routines

The day's activities have the potential to become science experiments, art projects or field trips. Did I say cleaning? Yes, it's time to get the cleansers down from the high shelves which your once-toddler could not reach. Your budding helpers are ready to read the labels and learn how to use them. But beyond cleaning as a life skill, the "I wonder why" questions borrow amidst the dirty dishes in the kitchen sink or dishwasher and the answers are as well boundless. Why does water need soap to pry grease from a plate? How do water molecules stick together so well? The topics are limited only by your particular child's developmental stage as to the complexity that can be understood.

Suggestions

• Reading

Before the summer even gets into full swing and the flickering flame burns out completely, suggest a time of day you could read together. Teachers rate reading as the number one activity of all to sustain a learning flame. And the one

mandatory quality associated with summer reading is that it be fun. Now fun will fall into different categories depending on the child. One might consider it novels while another might find fun in facts.

A reading regularity that is conveniently affixed by your public library is

ingredient is the interest of your child, not what you might think is valuable.

• Teachers' Suggestion Box

I asked a number of teachers their take on keeping the education fire burning over summer break. Their responses ranged from summer school, toys and



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the annual summer reading program. The Indianapolis Public Libraries 2003 Summer Reading Program theme is "Summer Reading—Toon Up!" The program runs from June through August and is open to any family with a library card.

Monette Harrison-Rhim, Parent Involvement Facilitator in the Indianapolis Public Schools Office of School and Community Relations, recommends the mathematically edifying series, *Math Start* by Stuart J. Murphy. In delightful stories such as "Elevator Magic" and "Spunky Monkeys On Parade," Murphy whimsically infuses story with math concepts.

• Suggestion by modeling

Kids often want to do what adults are doing. They are told what is expected of them enough. So telling them to do a fun activity in the context of a command takes the fun out of it. Instead, getting involved in an activity you know your child would like will induce interest without prodding away from the TV. A drawer full of photos to be sequenced into a binder will lure your child to your side. While you are both there, an "I wonder" question could lead to a look into daguerreotype, the first method of "fixing" pictures or to an in depth history of photography. Again the important

games at home, to parent-child time together, asking questions on outings, visiting historical sites, especially places studied in school, just keeping active, going exploring on a whim, learning about what your child wants to learn, going to art and science museums, the zoo, and finding out what your community and state has to offer for family field trips. Harrison-Rhim further informs that a potpourri of activities is available on the Web at www.ed.gov/pubs/Recipes.

I also asked teachers what one thing they would you like to have happen over the summer months that would make a difference in their classroom experiences.

Heather McCannon, science teacher in Columbia, Missouri responded, "real life experiences that could contribute to class as examples to enhance discussions." She further recommended vacations that have an educational aspect, historically or perhaps pertaining to the ecosystems of different states visited. Children can learn about behaviors and care of animals through 4H Club membership. Gardening a small plot or even in a planter rewards children with the many facets of plant growth—photosynthesis, energy transfer to develop leaves, petals and roots and perhaps how pruning affects growth.

East LA Kindergarten teacher Carmen Lopez looks ahead to her students' next year at Sheridan Elementary School. "It's surprising how much those little ones forget over the summer months." She hopes there is some fun way for them to practice letters and numbers. At the end of the year, Lopez distributes unused workbooks, leftover homework from the school year, even discontinued reading series and math books so the children have familiar academic materials at home. She recommends videos and DVDs about letters and numbers at least for some visual exposure. She adds that parents encouraging "the concept of neatness, of doing things well" would be helpful to both students and teachers when the school year resumes.

Planned activities

• The Family trip

If a family trip is an ingredient of your summer, plans, let's consider the teacher's suggestion that you direct your vehicle toward a destination studied in school. Stops at city and state capitol houses along the way would allow your child the opportunity to "teach you" some facts recently studied. And repetition being the mother of all reinforced learning, what better way to lodge what was studied in long-term memory? A useful site on the Internet for information on just about anything Indiana is <http://www.in.gov/sic/about/>.

• Tours

If you are staying close to home for the summer, there may be businesses that wouldn't mind giving a tour to see just what goes on each day, say at a printing press or newspaper. How about a stroll down memory lane at a previously attended day care?

There was a massive sculpture erected near our neighborhood park one spring. It arrested our attention every time we passed it. With a little research I discovered its creator was a local artist who welcomed visitors to his studio. I called to arrange a personal tour for my son and me. It turned out that he had built his studio to accommodate the commissioned artwork. He even had a museum of his work. The whole operation was quite impressive. You can check your local phone book, chamber of commerce or tourist bureau for ideas in your neighborhood.

By prompting young minds, suggesting and planning activities, the learning flame can burn on throughout the summer months. Your child can develop a spark under an education flame with the tinder of a questioning mind, produce a bigger flame with the kindling of research, and keep the flame burning with a continuous breath of lifelong learning, the most valuable of lessons. *