

Connecting for high potential.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR
Gifted Children

• • • • • Summer 2011

NAGC receives similar questions from teachers and parents; however, rarely is there an opportunity to explore how the “other side” might be facing the issue. Interestingly, both groups benefit from the same information even though they look at it from different perspectives and have different roles to play in helping gifted children reach their potential. Our ongoing goal is for teachers and parents to develop a broader understanding of children’s potential and thus create stimulating learning environments.

Topic for this month:

“Up the Ladder and Not Down the Slide: The Summer Away from School”

A Teacher’s View

At the end of each school year, I often take a second to look at the empty seats in the classroom as students begin their summer break. While it has been a rewarding year, full of questions and incredible student work, I am troubled by the fact that many students returning from the break will require extensive review of material and skills training that I just spent the year teaching. I constantly hear from the other teachers in the building about how time is wasted on repetitive review. “It’s as if the students completely put learning on hold,” one colleague said. In truth, the point is well-taken. Learning is often put on the back burner during the summer months in favor of rest, recreation, and travel. But, there has to be some way to incorporate learning into these activities. How can I instruct my students to use the time away as an opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding and to prepare for the school year ahead?

A Parent’s View

I’ve been hearing so much lately about the “summer slide” of students losing ground over the summer. My son has always maintained a healthy attitude towards school, but lately I’ve become concerned. He just came home and expressed with overwhelming excitement that he has, “No work for the next two months!” I was surprised he had not received any summer assignments. He is heading to the middle school next year and it will be a big transition for him both academically and socially, so perhaps the teachers wanted to give him a break. Reading has always been a haven for him and he likes to go online, but we only have one weeklong trip planned to see his grandparents and the rest of the time will be spent at home. He has expressed an interest in attending camp for the first time this summer and I know of a few in the area, but I want to make sure it is engaging. My fear is that I’ll have a son who lounges around the house, plays computer and video games, and starts to lose interest in school. Are there things I can do during the summer to get him off on the right foot for the beginning of the school year?

Summer vacation has arrived! However, just as quickly as it approached, it can pass in the blink of an eye. While rest and relaxation are certainly important, there is no harm in looking a little further down the road and preparing for the coming school year. It is important to consider a child’s intellectual and emotional growth over the coming months. Support for the retention of skills and knowledge over the summer can come in a variety of forms and provide the opportunity for new understandings, as well.

The school year ahead will certainly present challenges. Summer assignments or projects are intended to prepare children for the curriculum of the new grade, not just to “keep them busy.” Practicing goal-setting as a part of the summer assignment - whether academic, social, or organizational - provides a great opportunity for students, parents, and teachers alike to learn to



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further involve themselves in the learning process with increased self-reflection and self-regulation. Summer vacation offers the prospect of engaging children, at a more relaxed pace, with a greater diversity of offerings or depth than the school year usually allows. At the same time, research has shown the importance of unstructured time for children in fostering curiosity and creativity, so a balance of scheduled and free time is important.

1. Engagement During the Summer

AT SCHOOL

- Summer assignment planning should include specific directions that will be understood by the student and parent. An ideal situation is to have a meeting with students and parents before the end of the school year to review expectations. If a meeting is not an option, setting up a “class” website with FAQ’s and supportive links is a great alternative. May’s Teacher’s Corner (<http://www.nagc.org/teacherscorner.aspx>) highlights some great summer assignments to consider.
- Offering print and web resources to parents provides another way of maintaining a presence during the time away. A simple handout given at the end of the school year may be all that a parent needs to get them started in suggesting ideas to their children. The book *The Ultimate Guide to Summer Opportunities for Teens: 200 Programs that Prepare You for College Success* <http://www.pruffrock.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=656> is highly recommended.
- Preparing students for the vacation should also include a review of what is to come. During faculty meetings, try to open up a dialogue about how to connect curriculum from year to year by introducing some future material through summer assignments.

AT HOME

- The Summer Assignment - First things first: Review it together. Create a plan with your child for gathering the necessary resources and completing the assignment in a timely manner.
- Make a list of things to do. Visiting libraries and museums, accessing websites, joining clubs, and attending demonstrations are all ways to allow your child to explore. For older students, summer affords the time for mentorships and volunteer work.
- Summer programs such as camps, academic challenges, and special schools can be great options. Visit the NAGC Website for a guide to summer programs at: <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=1103>
- Vacation often means traveling. When possible, include your child in planning the trip. She can gain a lot of real world problem solving skills. If you can’t make it away for a trip, plan for a virtual escape. With adult supervision, your child can experience the wonders of the world via Google Earth, <http://www.google.com/earth/index.html>, great works of art in major museums via Google Art Project, <http://www.googleartproject.com/>, or animals at the Smithsonian National Zoological Parks via animal web cams, <http://nationalzoo.si.edu/Animals/WebCams/default>.

2. Determining and Setting Goals

AT SCHOOL

- Reflecting on the year, the good and the bad, can provide a strong foundation for goal-setting, and in turn, help develop a student’s self-efficacy. The National Research Center on The Gifted and Talented has an outstanding webpage related to setting goals. <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/SelfEfficacy/section8.html>

In just one class period, educators can help their students understand the importance of this crucial skill.

- Journaling is a great activity for students to participate in during the summer months, not only as documentation of their experience, but for use as a reflection for goal setting during the upcoming year.
- How was the current school year? What will the next year bring? This is a time to consider where your child is and what he or she needs next to support growth and development.

AT HOME

- Social skills play an important role in successfully navigating the world around us. If your child is still developing some key ones, consider finding opportunities for guided practice including group activities, lessons, team sports, play dates, etc.
- Self-regulation is the ability to control impulsive behavior and do what is needed, even if one doesn’t want to do so. Your child might set a schedule to accomplish goals like completing chores, reading, exercising, etc. and work on sticking to them. <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/SelfRegulation/printversion.pdf>

3. Planning for the Coming School Year

- Educators and parents will find helpful information in the school calendar for the coming year. In order to maximize learning time, take note of specific programs, days off, vacations, testing, etc., and use it as a blueprint for setting your class or family schedule.
- Discuss areas of interest and talk about extra-curricular activities and clubs. Parents can see what is offered and will fit the family's schedule. Educators may want to suggest a before or after school club based upon student interest.
- Summer reading for both skill retention and growth should be a part of everyone's summer plans. Look for a mix of fiction and non-fiction that encompasses both classic and contemporary works. Support the selection of readings that are at a just-right level <http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/reading-level/> and provide appropriate opportunity for growth <http://www.scholastic.com/resources/article/choosing-books-for-your-advanced-reader>.
- Educational standards define the content and skills students should acquire in a given school year. Parents can preview the curriculum standards for the coming year online through your school, district, or state department of education website. The standards might bring to mind travel, museum outings, or reading that will introduce the next year's subjects. Also, educators and parents alike should consider reviewing the NAGC P-K-Grade 12 Gifted Education Programming Standards at <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=546> to familiarize themselves with what constitutes an exemplary gifted program.

In summer, the song sings itself.

-- William Carlos Williams

This issue of *Connecting for High Potential* was compiled by Jeff Danielian, NAGC Teacher Resource Specialist, and Susan Dulong Langley, Parent Representative to the NAGC Board of Directors.



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