

Will your children suffer summer learning loss?

Back in the last century educational researchers established that most children's progress on standardised tests regresses by a month over the summer holidays. For Mathematics, with a two month regression, the stats are even more alarming.

Since Cooper's work, in 1996, established the one month norm, and other academics discovered that lower socio-economic classes regress more (mainly because they have less access to books) there has been less research on summer learning loss. It seems that the case is closed.

But in the 21st Century, with far fewer books available in homes, and far more digital distractions, is it not time to revisit summer learning loss?

Nowadays time-poor middle class parents, working longer hours and frequently just an e-mail away from yet more work, have less time to read to their children, less time to talk with their children than previous generations. Possibly middle-class "affluenza", symbolised by a surfeit of digital gizmos 'baby-sitting' the kids, may be impeding summer holiday learning.

Though perhaps the area screaming out for research is the learning deficit of 16 year olds. Often GCSEs are over by mid-June and PGT (Post GCSE Trauma) prevents many children from even picking up a book until September. Consequently, by the second week of their new courses, many pupils are struggling. Sixth Form academic work is intellectually a step-up, and these pupils' skills have just taken a huge step down.

If, today, you were to design the school year, starting with a blank piece of paper, you would create a very different calendar. The long summer holiday is an archaic relic of a

predominantly agricultural society when families needed their children to help get the summer harvest in. With online shopping, today's kids don't even have to visit the supermarket to pick their apples and pears. Yet the school year does not look as if it will be experiencing dramatic change anytime soon.

With schools shut and teachers holidaying, the responsibility falls on parents to avoid summer learning loss. Yet what can they do?

With end of year examinations and reports to provide the data to analyse your child's performance, this is where professional tutors can step in. I know of parents who have been planning a course of booster lessons for July and August since Easter! Long summer holidays, often 8 weeks in some private schools, provide an opportunity for pupils to work on areas of weaknesses, whilst enjoying the break from school thus returning to school both fresh and on top of their studies.

Other shrewd parents worried about the effect of the overlong hiatus between GCSE and A Levels have requested mini introductory sessions, particularly where their children have opted for "fresh start" options such as Business Studies, Economics, Philosophy and Psychology. There are some tutors who are experienced at offering short 1:1 programmes, to be delivered online, introducing background reading and key concepts to help students begin to develop the evaluative skills which are essential for Sixth Form success.

And if you are moving around to multiple international destinations over the summer period: going 'home'; visiting friends and family, then the stability of an online tutor is something which can travel with you. I know, having tutored

to and from many different locations, that no time difference is insurmountable.

Of course there is much that parents can do themselves to reduce regression too. For example you can take your children to a bookshop or library to stock-up on reading or if they prefer to read digitally help them choose some books online. In an ideal world read the same book as your child so that you can discuss plot, characters and themes as they progress through the chapters.

But, surely, the summer with its freedom should not merely be a damage limitation exercise restricting the summer learning loss of your child. Those 6 or 8 weeks are a glorious opportunity for diverse learning; a chance for your child to return to school with neurological pathways both rested and refreshed, fully prepared for a new year of learning.

So grasp what opportunities you can, and embrace new learning away from the confines of the classroom ...

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