ICAN helps to combat Summer Learning Loss here

By Susie PEDERSEN
Guest Writer

Summer is quickly approaching, and youth are winding down their school year over the next few weeks. Here at ICAN, we are excited to welcome our youth to the center for full-day sessions, giving us more time to spend with them and offer a variety of learning and recreational options. Summer Learning Loss is a common phrase heard this time of year. Studies have shown that students can lose up to a quarter of their school-year learning over the summer. This gap is even greater for youth living in poverty. These youth have less resources to attend summer camps and less encouragement at home to continue reading and learning.

A 2007 study claimed that summer learning loss could account for up to two-thirds of the “achievement gap” between rich and poor children by the age of 14. By the end of fifth grade, low-income students are typically more than two years behind their middle-class peers. The youth who attend ICAN are very fortunate. We partner each year with the Valley of the Sun United Way on their Summer Learning Collaborative. We have a literacy coach from VSUW come to ICAN and work directly with youth on reading and literacy skills throughout the summer intercession.

ICAN is also blessed with a group of volunteers who are retired teachers with a wealth of knowledge. These dedicated volunteers work with our youth throughout the year, including the summer, to develop their literacy skills. ICAN youth will also enjoy STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) activities throughout the summer, which will keep them engaged and exploring. ICAN also has some incredible partners for field trips over the summer, including the DPR School of Construction and Chandler Schools Pizza Camp.

Summer Learning Loss can be an issue for all youth, regardless of economic background. Keeping youth engaged and learning throughout the summer can give them a big advantage going into the next school year. Here are some tips and ideas to prevent Summer Learning Loss in your home:

- Encourage your child to read 20 minutes a day during the summer months – let them read something of their choice that they will really enjoy, even magazines and comic books can be a great option.
- Puzzles, board games and card games are great ways to boost problem-solving skills. Plan a weekly family game night to keep it consistent.
- Build arts and crafts together with your child.
- Tech-savvy! Though it drives many parents crazy, technology can be a great tool to keep kids engaged over the summer. Apps like Math Champ, Opposite Ocean and Brain Quest can allow kids to be on their devices but continue to learn while they are there.

If you are looking for even more great ideas on ways to prevent summer learning loss, here are a couple of links:
- echeolawnews.com/2016/06/15/9-resources-to-prevent-summer-learning-loss. (Shelby Pedersen is CEO of ICAN: Positive Programs for Youth)

Classrooms and race: “What about the children?”

By Neal A. LESTER
Guest Writer

As an African-American born and raised in the Deep South, I do not fully understand the rationale and popularitny of adult dramatic reenactments of the Civil War moments and the anthem South. I have not read about how the “good old days on the plantation” — the Disney-like classic “Song of the South” (1946), the tune “Dixie” and myriad American minstrel shows and songs that constructed and glorified “happy slaves” as benevolently-owned human property. My belief that this has skyrocketed in recent years, months and weeks as related practices have gained a foothold in the classroom, I read about and hear from parents of color around the country who are dismayed, frustrated and angry about what their young elementary, middle or high school students are experiencing in American classrooms every day, somewhere across the United States.

Unfortunately, the listings that follow are examples of how our history is being distorted or denied. It is not uncommon for teachers to skimp on significant events, such as the Civil War, and focus instead on the Reconstruction period. This can lead to a misrepresentation of American history and can create a distorted understanding of the past.

Teaching about the history of slavery and the Civil War is an important part of helping students understand the roots of many of the issues we face today. By not teaching these topics in a comprehensive and accurate way, we risk perpetuating the same misunderstandings and stereotypes that have been around for centuries.

This is why it is crucial that educators are well-versed in American history and that they are willing to critically engage with the material. By teaching students about the complexities of history, we can help them develop a more nuanced understanding of the world around them.

I also question what critical resources these teachers are using to equip themselves for culturally responsive pedagogy. It is likely that too many of these white teachers — and likely others — are not adequately trained to teach competently about American history of race relations. Teaching the obligatory American history lessons – especially those that underscore ongoing generational trauma, comes with additional research and training on how to teach these lessons, simulations and reenactments with sensitivity and awareness. Perhaps these pedagogical "mistakes" speak to educators' own white privilege and unconscious bias.

Although I am not a public school teacher, I have a degree in secondary education and have worked extensively across the country with pre- and in-service teachers and administrators on diversity issues for over thirty years. These classroom "mistakes" are not the actions or poor judgment of all teachers and are not necessarily malicious.

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