

Opinion

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ICAN helps to combat Summer Learning Loss here



By **SHELBY 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 VSU/W come to ICAN and work directly with youth on reading and literacy skills throughout the summer intersession.

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 weekly

STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts 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.
- Technology! 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:
- parenting.com/blogs/mom-congress/melissa-taylor/best-learning-apps-kids-summer-learning
- schoolnews.com/2018/06/15/9-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 popularity of adult dramatic reenactments of the Civil War moments and the antebellum South.

I can half understand this tradition only within the historical context of romanticizing the "good old days on the plantation" — the Disney 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 befuddlement 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, some-

where across the United States.

Unfortunately, the listings that follow are not exhaustive, but underscore far too many local and national instances of educator insensitivity or ignorance.

While an incident of cultural insensitivity here and there might get a pass from me as a teacher and scholar of American race relations, the frequency and gravity of these incidents is overwhelming and profoundly disturbing.

These headlines alone speak volumes about this pressing issue: "Teacher Suspended for Racist Comments about Obama" (2008), "Kentucky Teacher Calls Student the N-word" (2011), "White Teacher Sues to Use the N-word" (2012).

Disturbingly, racial unawareness by mostly white educators goes beyond instances of racial slurs and the N-word.

Classroom reenactments of slavery, American slavery simulation games, minstrel masks worn during an assembly, a play with high school students wearing KKK costumes and walking through a theater audience and reenactments of the Civil Rights Movement reveal one of several things about our students'

teachers: blatant cultural incompetence, absence of critical thinking, lack of empathy, ignorance of American history or discomfort with talking openly and honestly about American race relations — past and present.

Teaching sensitive moments in our American history is to be applauded as long as lessons are age-appropriate for the students.

Given the prevalence of these poor teacher choices, I can only imagine the negative impact on students and their parents directly and indirectly: "Phoenix ASU Prep School Students Dress as Ku Klux Klan for High School Play" (2018), "Class Lesson on Civil Rights Flies Off the Rails as White Students Take the Opportunity to Spew the N-word: They Took It for a Joke" (2019), "Phoenix Mom Outraged Over History Lesson" (2019) and "Parents Lash Out after Video Shows Fifth-graders Singing and Picking Cotton on Field Trip" (2019).

From these many instances at schools, I am left baffled by who is approving these lessons and how these particular teaching strategies amount to classroom "best

practices."

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 educators — and likely others — are not adequately trained to teach competently about America's 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 "missteps" 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 "missteps" are not the actions or poor judgement of all teachers and are not necessarily malicious.

See **LESTER** on page 43

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