

The importance of preventing learning loss during summer and other away-from-instruction periods: a summary of the research

Extensive research has been conducted showing that significant learning loss takes place during summer breaks and other away-from-school time periods. In research conducted by Cooper et al.¹, the analysis showed that summer learning loss equaled at least one month of instruction. Especially vulnerable are mathematical computation skills and skills related to reading and writing, such as spelling skills.

In addition, children who speak a language at home other than English experience a setback in their English language skills without practice during school breaks.¹

In order to prevent and slow this learning loss, students must have access to grade appropriate activities and practice materials during their away-from-school time. *Kids Learn* was designed to bridge the away-from-school gap in instruction with activities that are based on standards of learning, as well as best practices in education and learning.

Kids Learn includes student-directed activities in mathematics, reading, and writing. The average learning loss in mathematical computation skills over the summer months is approximately 2.6 months of grade level equivalency.² Approximately 30% of the practice pages in *Kids Learn* provide basic mathematical skills review and computational practice. The remainder of the pages review reading and writing skills.

In addition to the general learning loss experienced during the summer, studies show that this loss contributes to the achievement gap in reading performance, especially between lower and higher income children.³ *Kids Learn* addresses this phenomenon by including both reading and writing activities. For example, students may be asked to read a passage or a book and write a directed/constructed response to it or they may be required to follow written directions in order to complete an activity. The reading selections are written at the reading level for the grade the students recently completed, maintaining their reading skills at an appropriate grade level.

The importance of the connection between reading and writing and how this connection improves both skill sets has been supported through research by Whyte (1985).⁴ *Kids Learn* offers many opportunities to make that all-important reading-writing connection. For example, each ten-page section includes an activity that requires the student to read a book and write about it.

And finally, studies show that students are most susceptible to losing facts and procedural skills during instructional breaks.⁵ That is why *Kids Learn* places a strong focus on

practicing and reinforcing basic skills such as phonics, punctuation, parts of speech, seeing patterns in number sequences, and knowing the value of coins and bills.

A synthesis and analysis of studies of learning suggests that there are nine factors that influence learning. The top two factors are:

1. Amount of time students engage in learning
2. Quality of the instructional experience including method and content.⁶

Kids Learn addresses both of those factors by extending the learning beyond the traditional school year, and by providing research- and standards-based activities that practice both basic skills, as well as higher level skills needed for success in school and beyond.

For additional research on the topic of summer learning loss, TCM recommends the influential article, *The Learning Season: Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement*, written by Beth M. Miller, Ph.D. and commissioned by the Nellie Mae Foundation. This report is a synthesis of the latest research and data on how opportunities and experiences children have outside of school result in gaps in achievement-test scores. The author asserts “In fact, summer programs have the potential to close the test-score gaps in a way that thus far has alluded us” (pg. 3). To illustrate this potential, the author takes a look at why summer makes a difference for middle-class and lower-income families through the learning. Using data gathered from different types of summer programs implemented around the country, the author analyzes the efficacy of these programs and who participates in them. To conclude, the author makes policy recommendations, so all students have equal access to high-quality summer experiences. Through this report, the Nellie Mae Foundation hopes to spark public dialogue, policy changes, and on-going research about summer learning. This article can be accessed at <http://www.nmefdn.org/Research/>. Click on the link titled “New Nellie Mae Education Foundation Research Reveals that Summer Learning is more important than previously believed.”

References

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