

How many summer memories do we share? Maybe you were as lucky as I was.

- I walked to my hometown library at least once a week, and one year the sidewalks on the way there were covered with 13-year cicadas, which were hatching out just as school was over for the year. A science lesson by itself.
- My dad took me to see a famous art exhibit, Monet's Years at Giverny, which opened in the summer of 1978 at the St. Louis Art Museum. It made an impression!
- A bat landed on my mom's sweatshirt while we were hiking in the Rockies. The expression on both the bat's and my mom's faces are also still vivid imprints. It was my one chance to see a bat up close.
- My family visited Mexico. In particular, I remember walking the Great Ball Court at Chichen-Itza and learning about Mayan and Toltec cultures.
- While camping in Vermont, I found a rock to add to my collection with a cool spiral on one face. Later that summer, my dad and I polished it smooth on a machine in his lab so I could clearly see its features.

Although your summer memories are different from mine, I suspect that most of you had many rich experiences, both working and playing in the summers. I treasured the months of summer and never would have traded them for more classroom instruction. Even then, I was conscious that most of my classmates did not go to the library weekly, did not hike in the Rockies or camp in Vermont, did not go to the zoo or the art museum, did not visit a lab where scientists did their work, and never, ever dreamed of leaving the country for a vacation.

I was very lucky. Without being conscious of it, I was learning all year long. Because I enjoyed reading a lot, hiking in the mountains, visiting art museums, and going to concerts, my learning was simply embedded in play. Because I helped choose my own activities in the summer with the help of well-educated, engaged parents, I was in the driver seat of my learning. These summer activities stood in stark contrast to the rest of the year to my young mind—aptly called “schoolwork”—which somebody else put in front of me and which required sit-down, pencil-and-paper effort on my part.

But before I read the articles in this issue, I did not know just how lucky I was. If on average students lose a month of learning in summer, and some lose as much as two, over the course of a school career, the unluckiest have spent nearly a quarter of their time in school retreading old ground fall after fall. What would it be worth to those children—and to all of us—if they could get that time back to learn new things, and in new and engaging ways? What coalition of partners can we bring together to enrich the summers of every student? A committed effort now, in the dead of winter, can ensure that summer learning is rooted in planning and forethought and no longer about luck.

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