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Holiday Learning: Empowering Parents as their Children's Teachers this Summer Holidays.

During summer holidays, while schools across Sydney diligently prepare for a new school year, families relish the time to rest and enjoy Christmas together.

School bags get "lost" under the bed; uniforms hang idle, while being outgrown, in wardrobes; and homework becomes a faded memory. Yet, this celebrated season of rest, worship and leisure need not put a stop to learning!

A mother of two recently admitted that she was at a loss about what to do with her children during the summer school holidays because she "feared she wasn't a good teacher" and they would get bored.

The problem with boredom is that it is passive. Directionless. The secret to unlocking boredom is to find ways to put children in charge of and excited about... learning.

It helps to remember that the "habit to teach in the moment" is something educators learn and refine over many years in the classroom to keep students engaged; it is not something that comes naturally to every person.

Effective teaching is rarely achieved through one-way instruction and information; but through empowering children as Collaborators in discovery, relationships, creativity, curiosity and courage – all the while inspiring and teaching creative thinking, independent solution finding, and healthy relational skills.

It is keys, like these, that can help parents who relate with this mother of two.

1. Discovery and Accumulated Learning

The unending nature of discovery makes it a wonderful mantra for holidays. "What will we discover today?"

Discovery can be inspired by:

- Family heritage – Are you descended from Vikings, Pharaohs, First Fleeters or Refugees?)
- A parent's passions – Do you love Italian cooking or baking, 3-day cricket, Renaissance Art, pottery, interior decorating, great outdoors, growing plants, etc.? Share that with your children as a family activity
- Seasonal opportunities – Is it fruit-picking season, or are there cultural or seasonal festivals, exhibitions and holiday programs offered?
- Conversations with your children – Together, learn, experience or try something new.

A wonderful way to accumulate learning is to link common themes for a more immersive experience. For example:

- You are thinking of visiting the Japanese Gardens – Do your children have a Japanese school friend to invite? Practice a few Japanese words of greeting and courtesy on the way, and plan to have Japanese food for lunch afterwards.
- You are thinking of taking a bushwalk – Focus on encouraging children to be mindful of their surrounds by asking questions about what they notice or can hear. Use photography or art materials to document plants, animals and insects to identify later from books or the Internet. Try to discover something unusual about them. For younger children, create a treasure hunt sheet with images of things they can watch for and mark up during the walk – and ask them to help prepare yummy energy-rich snacks to munch along the way!

Learning, at it's best, serves us for life and is purposeful.

2. Relationships and Connections

Children often gravitate to one another in parks and functions, providing valuable lessons in navigating social situations and new relationships. Just as important, the holiday period is perfectly suited to deepening connections with your child's local community, family and friends.

Making time to connect with friends and cousins throughout the holidays deepens friendships – both yours and theirs. Wherever you are, staying locally or off travelling, write thank you notes or letters and postcards with holiday news to relatives or friends.

Discuss local heroes; such as emergency services, the school Crossing Supervisor, or a thoughtful neighbour, and plan how to thank or acknowledge them appropriately. Bake cookies, and deliver them to an unwell or elderly friend, or new mother.

Demonstrate, practice and enjoy all the social opportunities that the freedom and the reason of holidays afford.

3. Creativity and Imagination

The essence of creativity is expression, with imagination as the vessel. The holidays are a wonderful time to consider creative projects that take children a little longer to accomplish, like creating a latch-hook pillow, a pottery sculpture or even writing a short novel.

Reading nurtures the imagination and may inspire artistic pursuit, such as illustrating a story, creating a diorama or painting a scene, or even hosting a themed afternoon tea with friends and family.

For inspiration, turn to friends, books and the Internet for fun, easy and constructive ideas; many of which are not too expensive or complicated – and to suit children of all ages.

4. Curiosity

Fueled by the hunger of curiosity, learning is inevitable.

When a friend's daughter was puzzled why a broken toy no longer worked, despite new batteries, she was handed a screwdriver and her mother partnered with her to look inside. She learnt about the circuit boards and tiny motors that once powered a little fan. Together, they found a broken connection and repaired the toy, with great accomplishment.

Likewise, curiosity is a wonderful reason to conduct some at-home science experiments to explain a range of concepts from gravity and momentum to rockets and growing seeds. Let the questions come, then be inventive and active in finding answers!

5. Courage

When we stretch beyond what we thought we were capable of, we grow courage. It is essential that, as parents, we allow our children to be brave and try new, hard things. Many parents agree, the hardest part of parenting is letting go and allowing children to take risks. Yet, courage is vital to learning.

For some children, ascending the rocket-ship climbing frame at the park requires great courage. For others, riding a horse for the first time, mastering a two-wheel bicycle, climbing to great heights (in a harness up rock-faces or trees), or diving from the 2m platform are a stretch.

By implementing the keys of discovery, relationship, creativity, curiosity and courage this holidays, I hope children and their families uncover new ways to enjoy the summer holidays, perhaps establishing some new traditions and, in the process, refining their own "habit of teaching in the moment".