SUMMER learning programmes have the potential to help children and youth improve their academic and other outcomes. This is especially true for children from low-income families who might not have access to educational resources throughout the summer months and for low-achieving students who need additional time to master academic content.

The experiences, resources, and interactions provided by such summer workplaces build brains and fuel a love for learning. Yet, in too many countries, summer clubs and schools are not at the table helping to craft the policies and practices that link children and their families to early learning resources.

The Duke University has a Talent Identification Program (Duke TIP) based at Duke University, North Carolina, USA. Its purpose is to identify gifted children and help them reach their full educational potential. TIP also runs several summer and weekend residential programmes for academically gifted students, including Summer Studies, Field Studies, Academic Adventures, Scholar Weekends, and Independent learning opportunities are offered to students from across the globe.

Duke TIP programmes provide a unique learning environment designed to challenge the academically motivated student. The various aims and components of these programmes are outlined below.

Developing and Strengthening Reading: The National Reading Panel (www.nichd.nih.gov) study found that increasing the time that children spend reading is the single most powerful strategy for improving literacy skills in fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Encouraging reading during summer vacation may be a useful strategy for helping struggling readers acquire the skills needed to succeed in school and make them proficient.

Increasing Academic Vigour: TIP programmes are designed to boost analytical skills. Duke TIP Programs typically have a recreational cum analytical focus. The programmes help the young people in building social skills, self-confidence, project planning skills, and also impart the motivation to do well in school, physical skills, and in acquiring positive values, thereby increasing academic performance.

More Time: One clear advantage of summer learning is more time. Summer programmes have the potential to extend learning time in an atmosphere of excitement, fun, and support, thereby building positive attitudes toward learning year-round.

Strong Relationships: Summer programmes represent an unhurried opportunity for children and youth to develop strong relationships with adults and peers, and they can also provide a sense of having a valued place in a larger community.

Motivation and Engagement: In order to be good learners, children must want to do well. Motivation springs from many sources, including
the belief that an activity is challenging but not beyond a child’s ability, that the task will be enjoyable, if not actually fun, and that it has some real meaning. Summer programmes often build on children’s intrinsic interests, and often present an opportunity for children to develop expertise in such areas as sports and the visual and performing arts.

**Experiential Focus:** To help children adapt to diverse fields and master their subject matter, it is important to build their existing knowledge and at the same time locate new knowledge in a conceptual framework. The experiential education of Duke TIP programmes promote adventure education, project-based and community service learning, many thematic curricula, and outdoor activities which ultimately lead to outcomes such as improved self-concepts, stronger internal locus of control, stronger leadership skills, and better performance.

**Cultural Relevance:** Such camps often play an important role in building a strong racial and ethnic identity for children with lower self-confidence and vulnerable nature. Interactions over the camp help bring together youth from diverse religious, ethnic, or linguistic background playing an important role in counteracting negative stereotypes.

Research has shown that community has a very crucial role to play in supporting children’s growth and development, especially in the early learning years. Local conditions can have a major impact on whether children succeed, and challenges must be addressed within the context of the community to assure effective solutions are reached. To that end, communities across the nation are coming together to develop plans to address problems and put policy strategies into action. At the heart of these efforts is an understanding that real change will only be accomplished through broad-based, multi-sector collaboration.

Summer school and such exciting critical thinking events are well-positioned to be integral parts of coordinated efforts, but are too often untapped or disconnected resources in community efforts to support more positive outcomes for families and children.

The author was fortunate to attend one such programme and managed to talk to the Assistant Director, Field Studies, Duke TIP Program, Mary Barzee. Ms Barzee said that Duke TIP programming helps to develop the whole person and further to develop each student’s understanding of himself/herself. She said, the TIP’s programming allows students to take intellectual risks and to learn for the sake of learning without fear of failure.

In 2010, in partnership with Educational Initiatives, one of India’s largest educational assessment organizations, Duke TIP launched a talent search in India. The search uses an above-level testing model, similar to that used in the United States, and is now known as the Duke TIP ASSET Talent Search.

The Summer Studies Programs offer students the opportunity to join a community of gifted peers in a rigorous educational environment that promotes higher-level thinking through interactive, inquiry-based learning. A dynamic residential experience complements the academic program, allowing TIP students to develop their social skills. To date, almost 6,000 seventh grade students have participated in the talent search in India and more than 650 students have participated in the Summer Studies Program in India.

The message that the author carried back as an Instructional Counselor with one of the Duke TIP programmes is to encourage your child to be responsible and to work independently. Taking responsibility and working independently are important qualities for any professional stream success.

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