

## Ten mostly offbeat ways teens can learn something this summer

By Valerie Strauss, Updated: June 25, 2013

Here's a list of things teenagers can do to really forget school and do some learning, courtesy of cognitive scientist [Roger Schank](#), an artificial intelligence theorist and education reformer who is the John Evans Professor Emeritus of Computer Science, Psychology, and Education at Northwestern University. He has taught at Stanford and Yale universities and is the former head of the Institute for the Learning Sciences. He is also the author of "Teaching Minds: How Cognitive Science Can Save Our Schools." This appeared on [his blog, Education Outrage](#).

### By Roger Schank

Every day, high school students get to my blog, [Education Outrage](#), by typing "high school is useless" or something similar. I worry about those kids, but I also worry about the kids who think high school is very important, who study all the time, and who obsess about getting into a "good college."

The good news is that it is summertime. Now you can forget about school and actually learn something. The teacher is you. (Your teacher will really always be you. If others in your life can help, great, but it will still be you in the end.)

So what should you do this summer? Here are 10 suggestions:

#### 1. Start a business.

This is, of course, easier said than done. That having been said, my 5-year-old grandson, Max, ran a lemonade stand the other day, made some money and was very excited about it. Think about how people make money where you live. Think about what services are lacking where you live. Think about what people need that you could provide. Maybe your business could be on the web and sell to people like you. What would you buy from someone like you? They don't teach how to start a business in high school. They should but they don't.

#### 2. Learn a real skill.

What constitutes a real skill? Computer programming is a real skill. Glass blowing is a real skill. Carpentry is a real skill. Playing music is a real skill. Building something is a real skill. Pick something that sounds appealing and find out how to learn to do it. Then practice a lot.

#### 3. Play sports.

Why is this important? Because sports teaches you a few very important things that school misses. One is how to lose. Another is humility. No matter what sport you pick there will

always be someone better than you at it. Sports teaches you to try harder. Sports teaches you how your body works and how to make it work better. All stuff school ignores that is very important.

#### **4. Invent something.**

What is missing in the world we live in? Think about it. The world is constantly changing. Who will be helping make the changes of the future? Why not you? See what is wrong out there and try to fix it. Ask what you wish you had and figure out how to invent it.

#### **5. Hang out with young children.**

Why does this matter? Because probably you are going to be a parent some day. Schools don't teach parenting skills. (I have no idea why not. Why do they think parenting isn't worth teaching?) Volunteer to help take care of kids in some way. You will learn a lot about them and about yourself.

#### **6. Do some real science.**

Is there something you are curious about? Now is the time. Science isn't about memorizing facts they teach in school. Science is about investigation and discovery. Science is about finding evidence and causes. Do some real science. Investigate something. Think about the health of your parents. The habits of your dog, the growth of trees, water, airplanes, cars. It doesn't matter what. Find out how they work. Figure out what might make them work better. This is real science.

#### **7. Read.**

Yes. Read. Sounds like something your teacher would tell you. In this case they would be right. If the only thing you read all day is texts and web sites, you are not reading. Read something complicated. Read about something that requires logical arguments, gets your mind spinning, forces you to provide counter arguments, and makes you want to discuss it with people who know more than you do. It doesn't matter what you read about. It does matter that you think about something new in a careful reasoned way. And it also matters that you talk about what you have read.

#### **8. Learn a language.**

Learning a new language can teach you a great deal about how your mind works and how your culture works. The only real way to learn one is to go somewhere where they speak that language and speak only that language for a while. When you are young it is easy to learn a language. Spend the summer learning a language and you will never regret it.

#### **9. Meet someone new.**

I don't mean a new person who is like all the people you already know. Find someone from a different culture, a different world, who has nothing in common with you. Find out about them. Hang out with a different group. See the world from someone else's perspective. Everything you know about the world, everything you are most sure of, will be shaken up if you do this. This is a good thing.

#### **10. Be bored.**

Sit quietly. Turn off all electronics. See what happens to your mind. Let it go while you are doing nothing — absolutely nothing — for an hour. You will be amazed at what happens

when you shut it all down and let your mind wander. You will find out what you really think about things.

Try this stuff. It will put school in proper perspective for you.

© The Washington Post Company