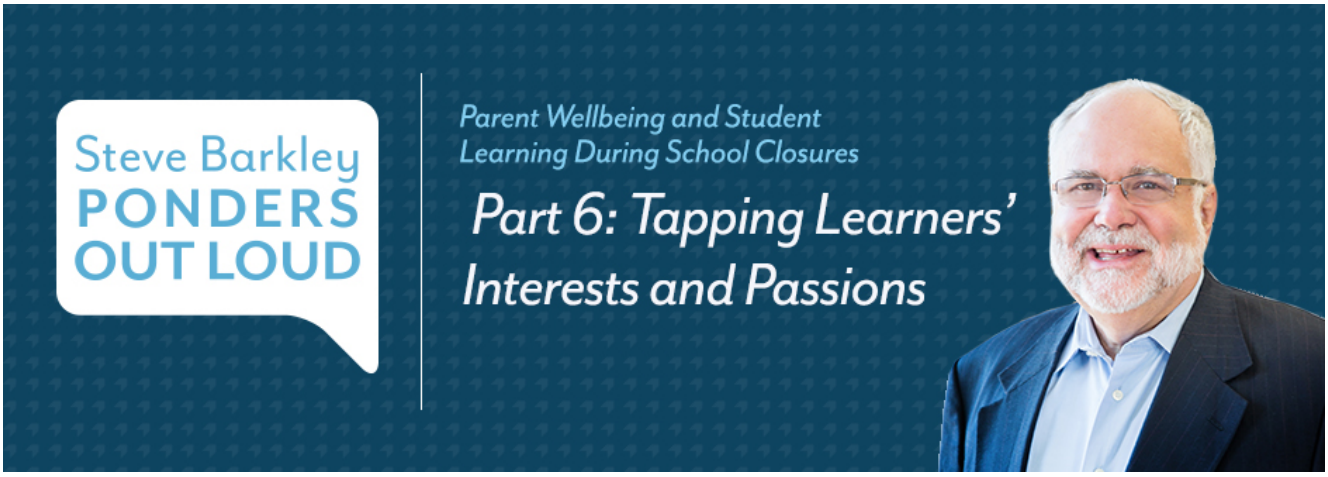
Podcast for Parents: Tapping Learners' Interests and Passions (Part 6)



What can parents do with this gift of time that they now have to spend with their children? Explore the best ways to tap into your learners' interests and passions while supporting their creativity.

Subscribe to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast on iTunes or visit BarkleyPD.com to find new episodes.

Parent Well-Being and Student Learning During School Closures
In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on education, I've started a new podcast grouping called Parent Well-Being and Student Learning During School Closures. The hope is that these podcasts can be forwarded on to parents by teachers, schools, and districts to help support them and in their new role with their children during this time. Feel free to send me your questions or suggestions that I can share with others. You can contact me at sbarkley@PLS3rdLearning.com. Thank you for listening.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT
Announcer: 00:02 We are all facing the unique challenges of

working and learning from home. The near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools or NESA is holding it's next networked learning series featuring Steve Barkley. "Personalized Coaching With Steve Barkley" will address the unique challenges and opportunities instructional coaches, administrators, teacher leaders, and mentors are presented with during this time. Take your skills to the next level with this online, facilitated, personally coached, six week program with Steve Barkley. Learn more at barkleypd.com.

Steve [Intro]: 00:43 Hello and welcome to the Parent Wellbeing and Student Learning During School Closures Edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. With the extended closing of schools, we as parents have entered into a new territory regarding what we have known as "school learning." With this and future podcasts, I'll look to share my experiences as a teacher, educator, parent, grandparent, and continuous learner.

Steve: 01:16 Tapping learners' interests and passion. This podcast topic was triggered by a note that I received from a colleague and a mom, so I asked her if she would join me at the beginning of the podcast to introduce it. So, Jen Jordan, welcome to the podcast.

Jen: 01:33 Thank you Steve. Thank you for having me.

Steve: 01:36 Jen, you raised a question that really caught my attention. You asked, "what can we do with this gift of time?" And I just love that thought of a gift of time. What were you pondering when you sent that off to me?

Jen: 01:51 Well starting with, I have two daughters. Lola is 13 years old and she's in 8th grade and Emma is 10 years old and she is in 4th grade. And I started receiving a lot of work from the teachers and I thought this is great, we have a lot of have to do's right now. But, what I really wanted my kids to do during this time is to kind of take a step back and

appreciate this gift of time that we have. And a lot of times we're running from school, to activity, to activity that you know, sometimes it's hard to even sit down and have dinner as a family. So now, being that we're been all together every single day,

Steve: 02:32 [laughter]

Jen: 02:32 I really want my kids to enjoy this time. So I try to tell them, this is a gift to work on things that you might not have the time
to do in "normal life," but more scheduled.

Steve: 02:47 You mentioned, you mentioned in your note that you were introducing creative time, I think you were calling it. Tell us about that.

Jen: 02:57 Yeah. So, I said, today going to have mandatory creative hour and I was met with groans and grumbles.

Steve: 03:05 [laughter]

Jen: 03:05 And "what are you going to make us do?" And I said, just follow me here. So I said, today, from three to four, you're going to have – you're going to work on something that you want to work on. Not that the teachers want you to work on it, that I want you to work on, no chores. So pick something that interests you and that you want to do. And they kind of hummed and hawed for a little while. And Emma said, well, can I use my iPad? And I said, well, what are you going to do? And she said, there's these drawing tutorials that I've been wanting to try. And I said, perfect. I said, let's get some pencils and some paper together and some crayons and here we go. And she was immersed in this drawing, teaching tutorial that she had found on YouTube and she became really excited about it and she produced some really great things that she was really proud of and sent pictures to our family and posted it on her Instagram. So, that was something that she kind of dove into. And before, you know, time went by and it was over

an hour that she was doing it.

Steve: 04:10 Yeah. They call that flow. F. L O. W. – so that task took your daughter in the flow. And that's when a time kind of flies by and that's the neat thing that you caused to happen there. Go ahead with the other example.

Jen: 04:26 Yeah. So my other example of creative time – my daughter Lola is 13 and my husband's actually a physician in Buffalo, New York. And right now, across the country, you know, there's a shortage of protective gear and whether or not the protective gear is actually protecting them or not, there's a shortage of it. And we just feel better if Dad had a mask on. And so we've had a sewing machine sitting in our basement and she decided she was gonna make Daddy a mask and the nurses that he works with. And she went downstairs, pulled up a YouTube video, learn how to thread a bobbin, learned – basically taught herself how to use this sewing machine in a matter of a couple of hours, came upstairs with several masks that were pretty darn good.

Jen : 05:17 And it was just one of those moments where I said that's something that she wanted to work on, that's something that she was passionate about. She wanted to do something for somebody that she loved and right now it's really hard because we can't, you know, be in contact with a lot of people. And she wound up feeling very proud of herself and I was really proud of her and maybe she'll make me some pillow covers and curtains next, who knows. But, she found something that she has passion for and she loves to do. It passed a lot of time during the time where we have extra time. So I just thought this was probably one of my best ideas as a Mom, was creative time. And even though I had a little bit of frustrated children in the beginning,

Steve: 05:54 [laughter]

Jen: 05:54 they definitely embraced it and are learning to

love that time to themselves.

Steve: 06:00 Well Jen, you gave a perfect example of what schools have been implementing over the past few years called genius hour. So in the rest of this podcast, I'm going to spell out for parents a little bit of understanding about genius hour. We'll change the term to genius time and we'll give some examples of how they could get started. So thanks so much for triggering my thinking and for sharing your ideas. Appreciate it.

Jen: 06:32 Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it too.

Steve: 06:36 Genius hour had its roots in what was known as 20% time. I found this short history. The 3M company started the process back in the fifties with their 15% project. The results of that project were post-its and masking tape. Google is credited for making the 20% project what it's known as today. Google asked their employees to spend 20% of their time working on a pet project, a project that didn't necessarily fit into a person's job description. As a result of 20% time, we have G-mail, AdSense, Google News, and Google Teacher Academy. Using 20% time in the workplace allows for innovative ideas and projects to flourish and or to fail without the bureaucracy of committees and budgets. Catch that statement, flourish and or fail. You see, it sounds like the right time without the concerns of a grade or a project due date, a passion or interest that a student has could be explored in depth.

Steve: 07:59 As children, we all tend to be curious and intensely observant. As parents, you've all had the opportunity to have your child see or hear something that we wish they hadn't because they lock in on it. Too many of us tend to shut down that natural curiosity that's driven by our observation and questions. We begin to look for, too quickly, solutions and at school, correct answers. The term that's been

used as teachers have applied 20% time in classrooms has been labeled as genius hour. Sometimes it's an hour a week and sometimes it's an hour a day. The goal is to give students a chunk of time that they can invest in learning, problem solving, producing, something that is totally driven by the student's interest. As I share with you how educators have been looking at genius hour, let's change the term to genius time and you begin to think about the adjustments you might make from these ideas to work with your learners.

Steve: 09:18 Consider the length of time that you might want to establish adjusting it to your child's age and independent learning perseverance. What pieces of genius time would you look for the student to tackle on their own and where might you as a parent work with him or her and maybe where does their project turn into an entire family learning activity? Here's a few guiding thoughts to have as you begin to work with your child in genius time. One, is there a driving question? What is it that the student would like to learn or learn to do? Two, the genius time should require research. For older students, that can mean online YouTube, Twitter searching. What questions might they post online? Do we know people who have the knowledge that the student needs that they might interview over Skype? Are there family members or friends that we could tap as a resource for students gaining the knowledge that they require?

Steve: 10:40 Many people now have extra time and would be available and probably anxious to connect with your learners on such a task. Remember that for younger students, research can mean trial and error, such as what happens if I make the clay wet? What happens if I make it wetter? How's it different if I work with dry clay? And the third item to consider is can the results be shared? Going public with my discovery, with my learning, with my production, always carries a an extra bonus, an extra motivation. So how could the results be shared? Might I post it? Who can I tell? Can I share it with my teacher?

Might my teacher decide to have me share it with my class? Can I take a picture and post it to share? Here are some genius time questions or projects that might trigger you or your learner's thinking.

Steve: 11:50 How do things work? Is there something that I could take apart and try to put back together again to find out? Years ago I worked with a teacher who kept a bicycle in back of his room and across the time frame of the whole year, two students first were given the task of taking the bicycle apart into all of its pieces and then two other students put it back together and then it passed on to two who took it apart and put it back together. He had that genius time activity going across the whole year. How far back can we trace our family history? Could you write a biography of your grandfather or grandmother? Is there a piece of clothing that you'd like to refashion or would you like to design a fashion for a piece of clothing? What can I train my pet to do? How intelligent is my pet rabbit?

Steve: 12:51 How does his or her intelligence compare to a dog or a cat? With a budget from my parents, what family vacation might I plan for this summer? With a daily schedule and everything in the budget spelled out. Lots of research to do there. Some high schools have a dedicated time for students to do learning through interest. Students explore their strengths, weaknesses, goals and career interests. Those reflections lead to questions explored through research, finding and working with mentors, setting goals and developing plans. How might you and your middle school or high school student, use this gift of time to possibly unlock an ongoing future impact? If you Google genius hour, you'll find many posts by teachers and education writers with examples and guidelines that you can modify for use with your learner at home. Let me close with some reasons to explore genius time.

Steve: 14:12 First, it can be fun. Hard work can be fun when it's driven by my passion. Genius time will likely be

different from what many of the assignments are that your learner is receiving from school. We learn most by doing versus hearing. Especially when it’s something we want to learn. Learning how to learn is one of the most critical life skills for students to develop today. And here’s a side benefit. As your learner engages in learning, you may find that it creates some independent learning and or working time for you. Here’s a place you might start. On YouTube, checkout Caine’s Arcade, that’s C. A. I. N. E., Caine’s arcade on YouTube. You might want to watch it with your learner. It’s about a young boy who taps in to his passion and creativity and learning. Thanks for listening.

Steve [Outro]: 15:28 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean and please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.