

The Importance of the Home Learning Environment to Educational Success

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The quality of the home learning environment (HLE) plays a critical role in the academic achievement of young children. (7, 10) Not only is an enriched HLE a strong predictor of academic success, but the benefits are long-lasting and positively impact a child's future income levels and social relationships. (1, 2, 4) And the good news is, these benefits transcend the income, race, and education level of the parents. (6, 8) In other words, as long as a child is engaged in quality experiences at home, learning outcomes improve regardless of a family's socioeconomic status.

That said, because children from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be at greater risk of under-achievement, it's important for schools to help these families establish an environment at home that supports academic achievement. And since research shows that early math skills are the best predictor of a child's success in school and beyond, including a variety of math related activities is a good place to start. (3)

Central to a quality HLE are:

- the availability of learning materials such as books, math games, and puzzles (5)
- the quality and frequency of parent*/child interactions (9)

Learning Materials

Because setting the foundation for academic success begins early, the sooner families have access to quality learning materials, the better the outcomes. Once sent home, however, it's important for families to engage with the materials. One way to help with this is by sending home games. Everyone likes to play games; they're inherently motivating and fun so it's an easy "sell". And from an educational perspective, they can be a powerful learning tool. Games can:

- reinforce skills learned in the classroom
- develop mental math skills
- encourage strategic thinking
- foster mathematical communication
- build confidence

Providing families with quality games, therefore, is an easy - and fun - way for parents to help support their child's academic achievement.

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Parent/Child Interactions

In addition to increased academic achievement, engaging families through math games has other benefits, as well. Playing games together encourages positive parent/child interactions which helps foster a child's self-esteem. And parents who are actively involved in their child's education are more likely to have children that attend school regularly, show fewer behavior problems and have positive social skills. ⁽⁴⁾

Clearly, the research shows that a HLE where parents are actively engaged in their child's education has far-reaching benefits. Not only do these children do better in school, they do better in life overall. When schools help families create enriched environments, everybody wins.

*This article defines a parent as any adult involved in the education of a child such as a grandparent, foster parent, aunt, etc.

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