

Parents: More Vital to Education Than We Realize?

Sometimes it seems that America is on a never-ending quest to boost achievement and make education better. One year, classroom technology is the answer to the problems. The next year, the answer is universal preschool. The year after, test abolishment is believed to be the solution. And on it goes.

But what if we've had a major answer to these educational woes under our noses the whole time, but have simply chosen to ignore it?

That question came to mind when an intriguing study came across my desk. Conducted by a team of five researchers, the study looked at the influence a parent has on a child's future academic success, particularly through home learning activities such as reading, games, and conversation in the first three years of life. The authors [report their findings](#) below:

"We found a strong correlation between the early home learning environment and language, literacy and math skills when the child was 10-11. These associations were the same for all ethnic groups.

We also measured children's language and cognitive skills on entering school at age 4. We found that the home learning environment explained children's scores on these early abilities, and thus gave children the foundational skills required to do well in school at age 10-11. Children's language and cognitive skills at preschool age accounted for 91% of the correlation between the early home learning environment and their abilities at age 10-11."

The researchers use this evidence to emphasize how important a

child's early home learning environment is to his or her future education.

But the interesting thing about this research is that children are whisked off to school at age four. According to [Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child](#), at that age, children still have between one and two years in which the language elements of the brain are developing:



Preschool education has traditionally been thought to benefit children who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Because their parents aren't exposed to as many education theories, nor do they have access to many learning tools, it is thought that the state must invest in early education so as to keep them caught up with other children in the nation.

The quest for preschool has in turn spread to children from middle- and upper-class families, spurred in part by [two-income](#) homes who find the childcare aspect of preschool attractive.

But given the above research on the value parents contribute to their child's learning in the early years, are we making a mistake by whisking young children off to formalized schooling? Would we actually see more benefits and [fewer detriments](#) to children of all backgrounds if, instead of investing in universal preschool, we encouraged more parents to stay at home with their children for a few more years, and then trained parents how to boost their child's academic skills and cognitive development?

[Image Credit: [Mr. Stephen Baack \(IMCOM\)](#)]