The importance of the family and learning at home

From blog by Trevor Cairney – Professor in Education at UNSW

The Australian Federal Government funded a longitudinal research study of children from birth to eleven years of age. The project was called Growing up In Australia

The study concluded that while much of the diversity in knowledge and skills that children bring to school can be linked to social background, the differences in learning and developmental outcomes related to the family learning environment are apparent irrespective of the social and economic circumstances of the family. This shows the significance of the family learning environment on child outcomes, something that has also been established by other researchers.

Features of family learning environments that showed strong evidence of being positively associated with higher learning outcomes included the following:

- the child is read to on three or more days per week;
- there are more than 10 children’s books in the home;
- the child enjoys being read to for more than 10 minutes at a time;
- the child has access to a computer in the home;
- the child has medium to high engagement in out-of-home learning activities with family members.

What’s one of the most important things you can do to help your child to learn? And, what’s one of the best things you can do to strengthen your relationship with each of your children (or grandchildren)? Spend time with them! And as you do:

- Listen to them
- Answer their questions
- Look for teachable moments
- Point out things that you find interesting
- Share your memories, your values, and your beliefs

Where do these teaching/learning moments occur?

- While you bath your children
- While you’re walking
- While you’re eating together
- Watching TV
- Reading with them
- Throwing rocks into a creek
- Tossing a ball
- Hanging out washing
- Weeding the garden
- Doing the recycling