



The Value of Board Games in Teaching your Kids about Money

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Educators agree that the days of expecting teenagers to sit and listen to long lectures, much less learn from that method, are gone. Teaching kids about good money management is a perfect example. Parents around the globe struggle with an effective way to teach their children the value of money and responsible behaviors regarding finances—lessons that will serve them through life.

The challenge is to keep the attention of a pre-teen or teenager and communicate detailed information about banking, credit and financial responsibility, without the ensuing “whatever” and eye rolls. There are many choices when it comes to financial literacy information: seminars, pamphlets, activity workbooks, videos and websites with on-line tools. Parents and teachers struggle with which form of instruction works best.

Several of the prevalent myths about learning include:

- We learn by listening to experts.
Research at Harvard and elsewhere proves that individuals filter information, hear what they want to hear, and are generally unable to apply information after simply listening.
- Experience leads to learning.
How many pennies does a person see in a lifetime? By the age of thirty, most Americans have had “experience” with about 20,000 pennies. Yet few can draw both faces of a penny accurately.
- Hands-on learning works best.
In research with Harvard and MIT graduates, all indicated they could use a bulb, wire, and battery to light the bulb. Yet none actually did. High school science students, after using a socket, battery, and wire to light a bulb, were then unable to take the battery and wire alone to light the bulb. Researchers concluded that none of these individuals had learned or understood the principles of electricity, in spite of hands-on experience.

So, if these are myths, what does work well for learning? The key is that hands-on *and* heads-on learning works best. Board games are an important tool to provide hands-on and heads-on skill and knowledge development. Not only do well-designed games create an engaging atmosphere, they also provide a non-threatening, playful, competitive environment in which to focus on content and reinforce and apply learning. Learning comes from the game elements and discussions with fellow participants about the content. Good questions allow kids to think through and apply what they have learned.

Effective games help organize information in a conceptual framework and:

- Provide an analogy or metaphor to link new information
- Verify understanding
- Make the abstract concrete
- Accommodate different learning styles.

Board games not only require critical thinking, they also help to build communication and relationship skills.

To study the effectiveness of board games designed as learning tools, testing on learning effectiveness and enjoyment was conducted with 56 students at the University of Connecticut. The game tested was regularly ranked first by the students as both the most effective and the most enjoyable way to learn. Performance on the knowledge test was significantly enhanced by playing the board game.

Teens enjoy learning when it is perceived as fun, making well-designed board games effective and valuable learning tools.

References

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