Setting Up your School Room

By Nicole Kanyilmaz

School of the Air children learn in all different environments to suit each family. Some families have a classroom, some work from their dining table and some may even be travelling and therefore have very limited space and resources. I have a child in Year 6 and twins in Year 1 and we originally started with the dining table and very limited space. We’ve now progressed to a designated classroom (tiny I might add but it works for us). But I have always included the learning areas I’ve listed below (even if they had to be packed up at the end of the day).

So how can you best utilise the space you have to work with and turn it into a practical and manageable learning environment for your child? Once you have established where your child will be learning it’s time to set up your school room. Here are some ideas that have worked well for my children in their school room and they are super easy and don’t need expensive equipment!

- Desks, dining table or fold up camping table – The children need to have a quiet area to write and complete their formal school work. #Tip – always have lead and coloured pencils sharpened and plenty of rubbers in containers ready for use. You may also need to allow some room for a computer. Kids don’t need a huge space to write but it should be clean and organised and clear of any clutter. #Tip – small whiteboards for kids are fantastic and can also be used for teaching if you don’t have the space.

- Quiet book area – you don’t need a huge area for this, you could use a couch, a small mat with a couple of cushions, a camping chair, a picnic blanket, a basket with assorted books, finger puppets or even a CD player and headphones so the child can listen and follow along to a story. Story CD’s are great for those travelling families on the road!

- Mat Area – I think this area is a really important area and is a focal point of our day. Our mat area is very small but it’s big enough for my 2 boys to use together. We start every day on the mat. We use it for reading stories, maths revision such as Today’s date, days of the week, we also use it for sight words, soundwaves revision, learning, games, puzzles, music, it also doubles as an art mat (covered with an old plastic table cloth). I also have a small trolley set up on the end of my mat that includes a variety of lego, wooden blocks, animals, magnifying glasses, flash cards, finger puppets, scissors, glue, textas etc. If my boys finish their school work early or they need a short break they can choose something from this trolley, even if it’s only for 10 minutes. This could easily be achieved while travelling as well by using a picnic rug, a couple of activities and the outdoors.

- Interest table – again, you don’t need a big area for this and kids love it!! You could use a small coffee table, side table or even a crate turned upside down and covered with a cloth. Our interest table is themed to reflect either something they are learning in Maths, English or Science and I fill it with books and whatever resources I can find laying around the house (with a little imagination you’d be amazed what treasures you can find that don’t cost a cent). Eg. Maths – buttons or pebble stones for counting, scales, dice, play money, number cards etc. I usually have the table against a wall and utilise the wall for learning posters relating to the theme as well.

- Storage – obviously this depends on how much room you have. It’s so much easier when things are stored away neatly whether it be in a large cupboard, small cupboard or a small storage container. I find the takeaway containers you can buy at woolworths are great for storing all the little things too and super cheap!
Obviously your learning areas will reflect the ages you have in your school room. Because I have mixed aged levels, I also needed to consider my older child in Year 6. She has her own designated corner that she decorates with learning posters and artwork, she has her own desk with school laptop and is positioned so she can work independently without the added distractions. Not everyone has the space for a separate corner but again you don’t need much room. Originally when we had to use the dining table, we gave her a fold out camping table with her laptop in a corner of the room, and she was more than happy with this. The older ones like to have their own space, regardless of where it is or what it’s made of.

Decorate your walls or the space you have with sight words, bright learning posters, kids artwork and make it your own!