

BabySmart #1: Ms. Ellen Sanford, Developing Early Literacy Skills and Reading Recovery

File Date: 11/2/2019

Broadcast Date: 11/2/2019

10.3 MB / 11:32

Ms. Ellen Sanford was the guest expert. When interviewed, she was the Teacher Leader of Reading Recovery for Oconee County. She still teaches reading recovery and early literacy classes as a Clemson University adjunct professor. Ms. Sanford is also a BabyRead Advisory Board member.

City Talk host Mr. Riley Johnson introduced the three guests and commented once again that the BabyRead interviews on WSNW, the Lake, get more compliments than almost any other *City Talk* segment. Ms. von Hippel provided the “standard” BabyRead program introduction and then introduced Ms. Ellen Sanford, the first BabySmart guest.

Reading Recovery Defined. Ms. Sanford explained the Reading Recovery program is a one-on-one intervention for Oconee County’s 1st graders that are slightly behind. This is about 20% of the county’s first graders. **She stressed it is a short-term effort** that introduces communication, concepts about numbers, letters, colors, and shapes; it builds memory and vocabulary skills. She stressed that many of the reading recovery 1st graders have never been read to as infants or toddlers and may never have even held a book, so they are intimidated by them.

What’s the Best Way to Read to Babies? Cuddling is very important. It provides a safe comfortable connection to you. **Be expressive.** Infants love it when you vary the tone of your voice (higher or lower pitch) and when you use different voices. Don’t worry about following the text directly; at this stage it is about hearing your voice [and stimulating the language center in the brain]. **Don’t worry about repetition** – it’s actually beneficial. **Be descriptive.** Mention colors, shapes, things on the page. Periodically ask questions. It is the bonding experience and the sound of the voice that is important and not what you are saying.

What About the Books? Ms. Von Hippel said BabyRead uses the best books for different ages, but you can read anything. You are bonding and building pathways in the baby’s brain.

Ms. Sanford confirmed more brain development occurs between 1 and 18 months than between 18 months and 18 years. **Ms. Von Hippel added that even if you haven’t been reading to your child in the early years and your child is 3 years-old, just start reading and they will be ahead of the game in school.**

Will Reading Make Them Smarter? It boosts vocabulary and develops future reading skills needed four years later when the child enters kindergarten. Research indicates the quantity and quality of reading are good predictors of future early reading skills. In essence, it does make them smarter, but **what’s really important is that it prepares them for the most important phase of their little lives, 1st grade.** Frequently, **problem children [without developmental problems] are children that have a problem with reading.** Ms. von Hippel reiterated the words “prepared through the pre-literacy efforts”. Ms. Sanford agreed that the schools don’t have the resources to deal with the problem; that’s why Oconee County can only address the bottom 20 percent even though they would like to do more.

It Starts with Parents/Caregivers. Ms. Sanford said parents want their children to be successful but don’t realize that 50 percent of their future success is set by the age of 4. **The ability of their child to learn really rests with the parent/[caregiver]. Other differences attributed to early reading are greater vocabulary, love of books, increased attention spans, and contribution to hearing, seeing, and**

feeling development. English is a difficult language. They learn how to look at books and how books work. They learn *directionality* – letters and words go left to right. That they have sentences, and the word or words on the page are related to the picture. They learn page turning.

Not a Good Reader? Not a Problem! Ms. von Hippel and Ms. Sanford agreed that if you aren't comfortable reading, you don't even have to read the text to be effective. Describe the colors, shapes, and what's on the page. Examples were provided. **In addition to making them comfortable with books, they are learning to love books.** They are learning how books work (directionality). They learn how to pay attention. **As they are read to longer, it increases their attention span.**

Ms. von Hippel relayed BabyRead contact information. Ms. Sanford concluded by mentioning the Clemson University website on reading recovery (www.readingrecovery.clemson.edu).