

BabySmart 22-2 with Janet Figueroa (September 2022)

Janet Figueroa was the guest for BabySmart #10. BabyRead's Janice Garcia interviewed her in September 2022. A recently retired teacher with 37 years of teaching experience; Ms. Figueroa spent the last seven years as the Literacy Coach at James M. Brown Elementary School in Walhalla, SC.

Ms. Figueroa began by stating reading from birth is one of the best things parents can do for their child's future, noting research shows birth to 3 years-old is a huge window of opportunity for learning. Research also shows reading early provides a real academic advantage to children as they grow.

Janice Garcia asked if there is an age to stop reading to the children. **Ms. Figueroa recommended reading from birth to school age and beyond.** She recommended beginning reading books for emerging readers (kindergarten and 1st graders) because they have a lot of repetition, pictures and reading clues. She noted reading back and forth (parent-child-parent) is how literacy and reading develop. Reading story books to older children helps expand vocabulary.

Ms. Figueroa discussed several ways to enhance the reading experience and add value. Even if the parents are only reading are really doing an excellent service for the child. **Enhancements include elaboration, asking questions, singing, and playing.**

She used the example of describing the brown fur on the cover of "Brown Bear" before even opening the book and asking about the color brown. Asking about feelings is another aspect of elaboration. She used the example of asking the child how he/she thinks Mary feels when reading "Mary Had a Little Lamb."

Janet Garcia commented that BabyRead recommends parents/caregivers ask questions and "narrate your life" – describing everyday events such as changing a diaper, shopping and cooking. **Ms. Figueroa noted that our voices change inflection when we ask questions and babies do respond** by looking away from the book and looking at the reader, wrinkling their brow, or other actions. The change stimulates the brain and neural development. **Tactile books with different textures and images behind flaps stimulate other senses such as touch.**

Singing is another means of garnering the child's attention – songs and nursery rhymes add repetition and vocabulary. Nursery rhymes are especially important because repetition makes learning easy and helps develop language skills and reinforces language patterns. **Ms. Figueroa also recommends adding sound effects, when appropriate, to maintain interest and stimulate the brain.** **Puppet books are very popular – they are one of the frequent free books handed out by BabyRead.** Ms. Figueroa noted these were very good and some of the books come with the tie-in character toys which allows for play and reenactment. **Some rhymes like "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "I'm a Little Teacup" encourage hand gestures or body movements that are good too because the child experiences multiple elements such as movement, hearing, speaking and play.** Janet Garcia reiterated BabyRead readers recite nursery rhymes, do finger plays and

sing as part of the in-person routine. A former reader, Janice remarked that she had to Google some of the nursery rhymes because she'd forgotten them and there were even YouTube videos to assist.

Ms. Figueroa also discussed parents' complaints about reading the same books again and again. **She said she had experienced that with own children and didn't see the value initially but after learning more about literacy she saw the benefits.** She suggests bringing in new books while keeping the old ones nearby. **For emerging readers (4- and 5-year-olds) she suggests tracking the words with your finger.** The child begins to realize that each word is a separate entity. It also contributes to understanding how words go together and syntax while providing that brain stimulation. **You can also start asking the emerging reader about specific words to see if they can recognize the word by sight.**

Ms. Figueroa also described "echo" reading and "choral" reading techniques. In echo reading, the parent reads books they want their child to remember. Books with lots of repetition and picture clues are good for this. The parent reads the whole book first to gain understanding. The parent then reads a page and asks the child to read the page back to them, then they go onto the next page. In choral reading, the parent reads the book several times, then asks the child if he/she would like to read the book together with the parent.

Ms. Figueroa closed by stating reading books with your child is a wonderful experience for the child and for the parent.