

## **The Greenville News**

### **Books, reading key to kids getting good start in school**

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By Vicki M. Davis

Eleven years ago I left my employment as a development disabilities specialist with a local government agency in North Carolina. Although I was devoted to my professional career, I wanted to spend more time with my family. Subsequently I volunteered many hours at my children's schools, in their sports activities, Boy Scout troops, and church programs. For several years I maintained professional involvement by serving on the local advisory board and the state board of directors of United Cerebral Palsy, both in North Carolina and South Carolina.

But with the prospect of an "empty nest" when my youngest son, now a high school senior, goes to college, I was looking for a deeper commitment. Therefore I was excited this summer to read an article in the *Tribune Times* titled "Mental activity vital to toddlers: Lapsits needs volunteers to be reading role models for parents." I could not imagine anything better to devote myself to than babies and books. I eagerly attended the training workshop at the Community Foundation of Greater Greenville to learn about Lapsits and how to be a "waiting-room reader."

Studies show that the language skills that children learn between birth and age 3 can determine how well they will perform in school. However, the lack of an advanced vocabulary in preschool children does not usually mean that they have a cognitive deficit, but rather that they have lacked adequate language experience and instruction. A child who enters school from a home that is filled with books, whose parents are education-focused and love and value reading, has a greater vocabulary and is more school-ready than a child who does not.

I believe that every child deserves to have the opportunity to develop the tools that will ensure that he will be ready to achieve success in school. But most early childhood care and education occurs in the home, from parents and family. Many parents lack the skills for or are unaware of the importance of providing meaningful parent-child language interaction to their newborns through 3 year olds. Therefore it is important to model for these parents the literacy activities that they can do at home with their children.



Vicki Davis with her 2 yr. old grandson Xavier Davis, 2 (has a black left eye) 9/23/04

#### **More details**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** A native of Wilmington, N.C., Vicki Davis is a developmental disabilities specialist who holds a B.A. degree in psychology from UNC-Wilmington. She lives in Simpsonville and is involved as a volunteer with Mobile Meals/Greer Community Ministries, Christ Church Episcopal School, Boy Scouts and Ebenezer United Methodist Church.

In a collaborative project with Success By 6, Lapsits places volunteers in the waiting rooms of public health clinics where parents bring their children for immunization shots and well-baby check-ups. The volunteers invite the children to come sit with them while they read books, sing songs, recite nursery rhymes, or do finger plays. While the volunteers are modeling for parents the importance of language interaction with their young children, they are also demonstrating how much fun such activities are. A parent need not be literate to "read" children's books, sing, recite, or do other play activities. What is important is the interaction. This interaction can lead to improved attachment between the parent and child, which can foster a more secure, socially-emotionally competent child.

This may enable the child to build other relationships with other adults as well, particularly teachers. The more time a parent spends talking with a child the more rapidly the child's vocabulary grows. Vocabulary and reading development are important to the development of the self-concept and to feelings of competence, which in turn contribute to social-emotional and academic development. And to think that all this is potentially possible just from sitting in a waiting room and inviting children to come read and play!

If this is not enough fun, six other volunteers and I assisted with a Book Party for 30 newborns to 2s at the Fountain Inn library. At the party, the children received free books, both new and "gently used." Their parents learned about child, language and literacy development, and the importance of their role in guiding that development. With guidance and support, the parents not only understand why literacy interaction time is important, but how to incorporate it into their everyday lives. It is a simple, fun recipe for the chance of a compelling long-term benefit.