

The Vancouver HIPPY Project:
Preliminary Evaluation Findings from a Multicultural Program

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The research reported herein was supported by a grant from.

The story of the Vancouver HIPPY Project began in 1998 when a group of women accompanied Debbie Bell (now acting Director of HIPPY Canada) on a trip to San Diego and Tijuana as part of a Canadian International Development Association (CIDA) funded project called Common Journeys. The women were largely minority, low income, grassroots community activists whose purpose for the trip, in part, was to observe programs for low-income women and children in the communities they visited. Among the programs they saw was HIPPY, and it was this program that stood out to the women as being something they needed and wanted in their own communities.

Upon arrival back in Vancouver, Debbie, in her capacity as Director of Community Education Programs at Simon Fraser University (SFU), began to receive calls on an almost daily basis from the women she had traveled with, asking for her assistance in bringing HIPPY to Vancouver. If not for the interest and tenacity of these women, who saw HIPPY as an avenue for improving the lives of their children, the Vancouver project would not have occurred. Coincidentally, at the same time, the Vancouver chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) was exploring the possibility of launching HIPPY in Vancouver as part of their mandate to alleviate child poverty. Independently, both NCJW and SFU contacted HIPPY founder, Avima Lombrad, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Through this contact, NCJW learned of the interest in HIPPY at SFU. A partnership was struck in October 1998, focused on making HIPPY a reality in Vancouver. A community partner was found in Britannia Community Services Centre, a unique multi-service complex located in a low-income multicultural area of the city. Britannia was ideally located and serviced for HIPPY and became the home of the Vancouver project.

The Vancouver HIPPY Program was launched in November 1999 as the first implementation of HIPPY in Canada. It is located and serves families in an area of the city known as Grandview-Woodland, which is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Canada. This neighborhood, which is culturally and ethnically diverse, has the highest rate of families headed by a single parent in the city and the second highest percentage of children (aged 0 to 12) in single parent families on social assistance (close to 20%).

Early in 2000, a coordinator and six paraprofessional home visitors representing five different cultural communities that live in the Grandview-Woodland area were hired as HIPPY staff. These women were known through their involvement in their own cultural communities, which included First Nations, African, Latin American, Vietnamese, and Near Eastern and Eastern European groups. Within weeks of being hired, the coordinator and home visitors had recruited families from 26 different nations (including 6 First Nations) to participate in the program. Participants were recruited through a variety of means including handing out flyers, knocking on doors, and word of mouth.

Home visits started in the second week of February and continued until mid-July. In this time the home visitors covered 23 of the 30-week Age 4 program. The families that stayed with the program completed, on average, 17 weeks. The research presented in this chapter is based on 14 children whose families returned to HIPPY, completed the Age 5 program and continued to live and/or send their children to school in the Grandview-Woodland neighborhood. Several returning children either did not complete the program or attended schools outside the neighborhood due to a family move or desire to send their children to a non-secular school and were not included in the study.

Design

This evaluation research included three groups of children. The HIPPY group included children who had completed 2 years of HIPPY and one year of kindergarten. The Preschool group included children individually matched to the HIPPY children on teacher, sex, ethnicity, and family sociodemographic factors. Children in this group did not participate in HIPPY but all had attended a centre based preschool program. The third group included children who were also individually matched to the HIPPY and Preschool children on teacher, sex, ethnicity, and family sociodemographic factors but who had neither HIPPY nor preschool experience. Every effort was made to find in each classroom the two best matches (preschool and no ECE program) for each HIPPY child. We relied heavily on teachers for assistance in this regard, particularly as concerned family sociodemographic characteristics. Because of the constraint of selecting comparison children from the same kindergarten class as each HIPPY student, it was not possible to meet all the criteria in all cases.

Data were collected at the end of the school year. Although the original research design also included an assessment of each child at the outset of kindergarten, we were unable to conduct this first assessment due to job action on the part of the British Columbia Teacher's Federation at that time. Consequently, we do not have kindergarten entry data.

Participants

Within the HIPPY group there were 14 children (6 boys) whose mean age was 71 months (range = 64-77 months) at the time of assessment. The group was multi-ethnic including Chinese, Vietnamese, European, African, and Latin American children.

The Preschool group included 13 children (5 boys) with a mean age of 71 months (range = 66-77 months). The No ECE Program group contained 14 children (6 boys) who had a mean age of 70 months (range = 64-75 months) at the time of assessment.

Procedure

Ethics approval was applied for and granted by both the Simon Fraser University ethics board and the Vancouver School Board. Introductory letters were then sent out to the principal of each school (n=10) in which HIPPY children were enrolled. This introductory letter explained the HIPPY program as well as the proposed evaluation research.

School principals were then contacted by phone and a request was made for a meeting between themselves, the kindergarten teacher of the child participating in HIPPY, and the researchers. Further information regarding the HIPPY program and the evaluation study were provided at that meeting and feedback from principals and teachers regarding the proposed study was encouraged.

Teachers, with the assistance of a research assistant, chose the best comparison children for the HIPPY student in their classrooms. Consent forms were then sent home with every participating child. Translation of the consent form into the parent's first language was arranged whenever necessary.

Research assistants contacted the participating teachers 1 to 2 weeks after they had sent home the consent forms. When all consent forms had been signed by the parents and returned to the school, an assessment date and time was arranged at the teachers' convenience.

Graduate student research assistants who worked individually with each child for approximately 2 hours conducted the child assessments at the school. Teachers completed measures on all participating children in their classrooms. These measures were either given to the teacher at the initial meeting or mailed to them shortly afterwards. The completed teacher measures were given to the researchers at the time of the child assessments. If the measures had not been completed at this time, teachers were provided with a self addressed stamped envelope to mail the questionnaires to the researchers at the University.

Measures

Child measures: The Bracken Basic Concept Scale (Bracken, 1984) was used to evaluate knowledge of concepts that most children acquire during the preschool and early elementary years. Many of the concepts assessed by this measure are explicitly taught in the HIPPEY program. The test has 11 subtests, the first five of which (colors, letters, numbers, comparisons, and shapes) are combined to form a School Readiness score. The remaining six subtests include Direction/Position, Quantity, Size, Social/Emotional, Text, and Time/Sequence. Administration time for this measure was about 15 minutes.

The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, 4th edition (SB4; Thorndike, Hagen, & Sattler, 1986) was used to assess the overall cognitive development of the children. The SB4 yields an overall Intelligence Quotient (IQ) score as well as subtest scores for Bead Memory, Quantitative Reasoning, Verbal Reasoning, and Visual. Administration time for the SB4 was approximately 40-45 minutes.

The School Liking Interview (Le Mare, 1999) assesses children's comfort with going to and being in school. It is a 15 item interview that asks children to respond on a

3-point scale (always, sometimes, never) to questions such as *Do you feel happy at school? Do you feel sad in the morning because you have to go to school?; and Do you feel scared of any kids at school?.* Each item is followed up with probes asking children to further explain or elaborate on their responses, for example, *Tell me why you feel sad about going to school?*

Teacher measures: Positive school adjustment was assessed with the Preschool Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ; Jewsuwan et al., 1993) which yields scores for Prosocial Behavior, Positive Affect Within the School Setting, Peer Competence, Ego Strength, and Adjustment to School Routines.

Play was assessed with two teacher report instruments – the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS; Fantuzo, et al., 1995) and the Preschool Play Behavior Scale (PPBS; Coplan & Rubin, 1998). The PIPPS assesses three types of play – disruptive, disconnected, and interactive. The PPBS assesses five somewhat different forms of play – reticent, solitary active, solitary passive, rough, and social. Internal consistency for all scales on both measures is above .80.

Teachers also completed a number of items asking about their perceptions of the parents' attitudes toward their child's schooling, parents' involvement in their child's education, and rates of absenteeism.

Results and Discussion

One-way analyses of variance were computed for all measures, comparing the mean scores of the HIPPY group with those of the Preschool and No ECE Program groups. Given the small sample sizes in this study, and hence the reduced statistical

power, non-significant differences were found among the three groups on all measures. Despite the lack of statistically significant findings, it is, nevertheless, very important to note the pattern of results. On nearly every measure taken, HIPPY children performed or were rated the most favorably of all groups. Mean scores on each measure for each group are presented in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, the HIPPY children, as a group performed better on cognitive measures than either of the other two groups. On the Bracken Basic Concepts scales HIPPY children either outperformed or equaled the performance of the Preschool and No ECE Program children. This measure taps some of the skills that are directly taught in the HIPPY program so this finding was an encouraging indicator that the children were learning the content of the curriculum. Differences among groups on this measure were particularly apparent on the Size and Social/emotional subscales.

Overall cognitive development, as indexed by performance on the Stanford Binet, was also highest in the HIPPY group. One of the most valuable uses of IQ scores is as a predictor of later school performance. In this sense, the mean IQ score of the HIPPY group, which is nearly half a standard deviation higher than that of the Preschool and NO ECE Program groups, indicates an advantage for future school success.

It is noteworthy that differences between the groups in cognitive development were apparent at the end of the school year. This was after all children had spent a year in the same public school program, which may have been expected to even out any differences that existed at the start of kindergarten. Indeed, when teachers were asked to think back to the start of the year, they did report that HIPPY children were better prepared for kindergarten, both academically and socially, than children in the other

groups. These differences among groups remained for the duration of the school year, despite participation in identical kindergarten programs.

That the HIPPY children were seen by teachers to be better socially prepared for kindergarten than other children, particularly than those who had centre based preschool experience is very interesting. This may not have been expected given the cognitive emphasis of the HIPPY curriculum and the fact that peer interaction is not a component of HIPPY as it is in centre based programs. Moreover, like their academic advantage, the social advantage of the HIPPY children remained over the duration of kindergarten. This was evidenced in their higher scores on the Positive Adjustment Questionnaire scales, their higher scores on Interactive Play, and their lower scores on Disruptive and Rough Play.

Although we have no data directly addressing why the HIPPY children showed more positive social development than children in the other groups, anecdotal comments from parents suggest that HIPPY had a powerful and positive impact on the quality of parent-child relationships. In group meetings, when parents had the opportunity to talk about the impact of HIPPY on their families, they invariably spoke of how since being in HIPPY they had developed a new understanding of their child as a person and learned new and positive ways of interacting with their child (see Le Mare, this volume). We can speculate that such changes in parent-child interactions had a positive impact on the children's social development through a variety of mechanisms. These could include children modeling prosocial behavior learned in the context of positive interactions with parents, enhanced feelings of self-worth in children as they experienced positive attention

from their parents and, possibly, greater feelings of security and accompanying changes in children's internal working models of the social world.

The positive views that the HIPPY children held of their social worlds were seen in their responses to the School Liking Interview. The HIPPY children were less likely to endorse negative statements about school (e.g., being bored, picked on, sad, or lonely at school) than children in the other groups.

Limitations and Conclusions

The findings reported here are very encouraging for a couple of reasons. First, they support the usefulness of the measures selected for evaluating the impact of HIPPY on young children, and in particular, a multicultural group of young children. Second, the results suggest that participation in HIPPY positively supports the development of “at risk” children, both cognitively and socially, and that HIPPY is as or more beneficial than centre based preschool for this population. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that none of our findings are statistically significant. A sounder evaluation of the program would include larger samples with sufficient power to determine the reliability of the differences between groups seen here. Ideally, future evaluation efforts will also include assessments of children prior to entering the public school system and will continue to follow the children through their school years. The evaluation reported here focused only on the impact of HIPPY on children. The HIPPY program theoretically has the potential to affect many aspects of the social ecology of the child (see Le Mare, this volume). Future evaluations should address all those aspects, including the impact of HIPPY on caregivers, families, schools, and communities.

References

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Table 1. Mean scores on all variables for the HIPPY, Preschool, and No ECE Program groups.

MEASURE	HIPPY (n=14)	Preschool (n=13)	No ECE (n=14)
Bracken Basic Concepts Total Score	87	86	81
Bracken - Direction/position	7	7	7
Bracken - Quantitative	8	7.5	6.6
Bracken - Size	9	6.6	7.7
Bracken - Social/emotional	9.5	7.7	7
Bracken - School readiness	8	7.5	7
Bracken - Text	9	8	8.9
Bracken - Time	8	8.3	6.5
Academic prep. for kindergarten (teacher)	3.2	2.8	2.7
Social prep. for kindergarten (teacher)	3.5	2.9	2.7
Overall adjustment to kindergarten (teacher)	3.8	3.5	3.4
Days absent	3.1	3.4	3.9
Stanford Binet (SB4) IQ total	102	95	96
SB4 visual IQ	105	100	102
SB4 memory	102	96	94
SB4 quantitative IQ	105	96	98
SB4 verbal IQ	94	92	91
Parent involvement (teacher report)	1.9	1.4	1.7
Disruptive play (PIPPS)	23	26	27
Rough play (PPBS)	3.5	4.3	4.7
Interactive play (PIPPS)	27	26	24
Positive Adjustment Questionnaire (PAQ)			
PAQ - Positive affect	17	16	15
PAQ - Positive adjustment	31	29	29
PAQ - Ego strength	24	23	19
PAQ - Peer competence	23	23	21
PAQ - Pro-social behavior	21	19	19
Child Interview – 1=“always” 3=“never”			
Child Interview - Bored at school	2.8	2.3	2.7
Child Interview – Don’t want to go to school	2.8	2.4	2.6
Child Interview – Picked on at school	2.3	1.7	2
Child Interview – Sad at school	2.7	2.3	2.5
Child Interview – Kids are mean to me	2.4	1.9	2.2
Child Interview – Sad in the morning	2.7	2.2	2.9
Child Interview – Lonely at school	2.7	2.3	2.9

