

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE SUMMARY

The HIPPY early intervention program: It's impact on school readiness and parent involvement

Amber L. Brown

University of Texas, Arlington

Ursula Johnson

University of Texas, Health Science Center at Houston

HIPPY is a 3-year, home-based, early education intervention program that aims to help parents with limited formal education prepare their 3-, 4- and 5-year-old children for school. This article begins with a brief overview of the HIPPY program and then presents the results of a study of the effects of the HIPPY early intervention program on the parental involvement and school readiness of the children at multiple HIPPY sites in Texas. According to the results of paired-samples t-tests, HIPPY parents significantly increased their in-home literacy activities, contact with school personnel, and other school involvement activities. Kindergarten teachers reported that in comparison to parents of other students in their class, 91% of HIPPY parents were equally or more involved in their children's education. Kindergarten teachers also reported that in the area of classroom adaptability, 88.7% of HIPPY students were rated as "ready for school." In the area of classroom behavior, 90.8% of HIPPY students were rated as "average" or "above average." Overall, the results of this study suggest that the HIPPY program intervention can increase readiness skills and build a strong base for future parent involvement in their child's school experience.

Keywords: School readiness; parent involvement; early intervention programs; HIPPY

Increasingly the American public has begun to recognize the importance of the first few years in the life of a child for promoting healthy physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Yet due to disparities in their life experiences, many young children face deficiencies in the years leading up to school entry in terms of emotional support, intellectual stimulation, or access to resources which can impede their ability to enter school ready to learn. These deficiencies are predictive of subsequent academic performance (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). While there are many types of intervention programs for at-risk children, those designed to improve children's school adjustment and to prevent later academic problems are most effective when they occur at school entry or during the preschool years (Hanson et al., 2006). Strategies that emphasize parent-child interactions can promote children's readiness to start

school. One delivery method for early intervention programs is through home visits. Home visiting programs during the preschool years are generally based on the premise that parents are the first teachers of their children. Home visiting programs also aim to improve a family's access to resources, meet basic needs, and strengthen family wellbeing. By working intensively with families, these programs can help to prepare children for successful engagement with the school environment. The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program, better known as HIPPY, is one such early intervention program.

WHAT IS HIPPY?

HIPPY is a free, three-year, home-based early intervention program for three-, four-, and five-year-old students from poor and immigrant families (HIPPYUSA, n.d.). The fundamental philosophy of HIPPY is to “empower parents as primary educators of their children in the home and foster parent involvement in school and community life to maximize the chances of successful early school experiences” (HIPPYUSA, n.d.). HIPPY utilizes home visits to train parents to promote their children's whole development at home. The primary goals of the HIPPY curriculum are to prepare children from low-income families to be developmentally, and especially cognitively, ready for and successful in school. The program accomplishes these goals by empowering parents to facilitate their children's learning by becoming their first and best teacher to facilitate their children's learning.

The HIPPY program consists of 30 weekly lessons that integrates explicit instructional lessons designed to enhance students' language development, problem-solving skills, and sensory and perceptual discrimination. Paraprofessionals from similar communities as the families they serve deliver the HIPPY program in weekly home visits. These visits are used to teach parents, through role-playing, how to engage their students in the curriculum learning activities (HIPPYUSA, n.d.). HIPPY also provides books, activity packets, and all necessary materials (e.g., pencils, markers, note papers, scissors, glues, etc.) as part of the program curriculum.

In addition to serving as an early education program, HIPPY incorporates features of family support programs. HIPPY parents meet on a monthly basis to discuss various issues (e.g., parenting, local resources, etc). HIPPY is based on an ecological approach that recognizes students' development as powerfully influenced by the families, communities, and societies in which they live (Westheimer, 2003). HIPPY focuses on creating greater continuity between home and school by enhancing students' home learning environments.

HIPPY programs provide support for families in a way that is designed to recognize and respect family needs and values, another common feature of family support programs. HIPPY, like many other family support programs, respects the cultural diversity of the families it serves (Baker et al., 1999). The most unique characteristic of HIPPY compared to other parent support models is its highly structured model, which supports parents with curriculum including a set of lesson plans designed to enhance students' whole development. The major emphasis of HIPPY curriculum is on students' cognitive skills (Westheimer, 2003). The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of HIPPY on the parent involvement and school readiness of children.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH METHODS

A sample of 2,146 families new to the HIPPY program participated in the study from 2005 – 2008 to examine parent involvement change pre- and post-intervention. Mothers completed the *Parent Involvement Interview (PII)* with their home visitor before Week 2 of the 30 week intervention and again after Week 28 of the HIPPY program. The 14-item, 4-point Likert interview examined parents' home literacy involvement with their children and school involvement with staff, teachers and school activities.

A sample of 619 kindergarten teachers completed the *Kindergarten Teacher Survey (KTS)* in the spring of 2006, 2007, and 2008 for children who participated in HIPPY when they were 3 and/or 4 years of age. Most of the HIPPY kindergartners' home language was Spanish (89.4%) and were Latino (87.6%; 7.1% were African American; 4.9% were Asian; and .04% were White). The kindergarten teachers observed HIPPY children's behavior throughout the school year and completed the KTS in regards to the child's classroom adaptability, verbal classroom behavior, and frequency of child's parent school involvement. The teacher was instructed to compare the child's (and parent involvement) behavior to other non-HIPPY children in the classroom. The school outcome data was calculated as percentages and compared to previously established benchmarks. The benchmarks were developed to determine how many of the questions in the classroom behavior and classroom adaptability sections of the KTS needed to be rated as average or above average by kindergarten teachers for the students to be considered "ready for school".

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of HIPPY on the parent involvement and school readiness of children. The following questions guided this study: 1) Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their engagement in home-literacy activities with their preschool children?, 2) Did HIPPY parents of 3- or 4-year olds increase their interactions with school staff?, 3) Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their school involvement?, 4) In comparison to other non-HIPPY parents, how involved are HIPPY parents of kindergartners in the education of their children?, and 5) Do HIPPY children enter kindergarten "ready for school"?

Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their engagement in home-literacy activities with their preschool children?

During HIPPY parents' first year of participation, 63.3% of HIPPY parents increased the amount of time they spent engaging their child in home literacy activities. The most striking finding was the increase from "weekly" to "daily" time spent in some type of home literacy activity. HIPPY parents significantly increased the amount of time they participated in home literacy activities, such as reading books, telling stories, and singing songs, from the beginning of the program to the end of the program during their first year of participation.

Did HIPPY parents of 3- or 4-year olds increase their interactions with school staff?

During HIPPY parents' first year of participation, 60.4% of HIPPY parents increased the frequency of interactions with school staff members. On average, HIPPY parents increased their involvement with their children's school in face-to-face, phone conversation or conference meetings about one-half of a standard deviation from the beginning of the HIPPY program to the end.

Did HIPPY parents of 3- and 4-year olds increase their school involvement?

HIPPY parents with children attending school statistically significantly increased their school involvement from pre- to post-intervention. The first year HIPPY parents reported attending more school meetings and volunteering in the classroom at a higher rate than they did at the beginning of the HIPPY program.

In comparison to other non-HIPPY parents, how involved are HIPPY parents of kindergarteners in the education of their children?

Kindergarten teachers were asked to rate whether the parents of HIPPY children were less, equally, or more involved in their children's education compared to other parents in the teacher's class. These HIPPY children were approximately 5 years of age, and had participated in HIPPY for two to three years. Kindergarten teachers reported that 97.1% of HIPPY parents participated in some type of involvement in their child's education on at least a monthly basis. In addition, Kindergarten teachers reported that 91% of HIPPY parents were equally or more involved in their children's education, which means that of 619 HIPPY parents that were included in the study, 563 of them were as involved (or more) than parents of other students in their class. The teacher reports supports first-year parents self-report of increased school involvement.

Do HIPPY children enter kindergarten "ready for school"?

To determine the school readiness of HIPPY kindergartners, teachers completed the *KTS*, which was analyzed using benchmarking procedures. In classroom adaptability, 88.7% of HIPPY students were rated as "ready for school," evidenced by a score of "average" or "above average" in at least three out of five questions. Classroom adaptability references children's ability to listen, and be attentive and engaged with their peers and the teacher. In classroom verbal behavior, 90.8% of HIPPY students were rated as "average" or "above average" on a minimum of five of eight questions, meaning that they were "ready for school." Classroom verbal behavior signified children's expressive and receptive language skills with their peers and the teacher. Overall, there were 84.2% of HIPPY kindergartners that were deemed school ready in both domains by their teachers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Early intervention programs, such as HIPPIY, provide service to populations that are at-risk for school failure. HIPPIY, a home based early childhood education program for parents of three, four and five year old children, provides education for parents, many of whom have limited formal education and are low-income, to become their child's first teacher. By empowering parents to interact and engage their children for a minimum of 15 minutes per day and to advocate for their children in the school context, positive child outcomes emerge. Preschool teachers and administrators can build on this finding by supporting parents in helping their children at home. Provide parents with specific activities to try at home with their children, and if necessary, provide examples of how to complete the activity with the child. One of the strengths of the HIPPIY program is the use of role-play, which helps parents become comfortable in their role as teacher as well as parent. While it may not be practical to role play with parents, it may be possible to demonstrate how to complete activities and to provide clear instructions with examples on how to complete home assignments.

The current study suggests that the HIPPIY program can increase school readiness skills and build a strong base for future parent involvement in their child's school experience. Specifically, participation in the HIPPIY program resulted in significantly higher parent involvement activities as well as notable rates of school readiness. This may suggest that the parental involvement curriculum in HIPPIY programs helps typically at-risk students to overcome the barriers they face when ecological factors are in place. Based on these findings regarding the benefits of HIPPIY participation on the school readiness of young children and the increased parent involvement of their families, several lessons emerge for implications for early educators. Preschool teachers and administrators can encourage parents' participation in the school and class by respecting parents' culture, values, and beliefs. Examples of this include encouraging parents to share their insights into their children, respecting their expertise as their child's first teacher, and collaborating with parents, not lecturing to parents.

While parental school involvement is positively related to school achievement (Henderson & Map, 2002), minority parents and parents that have limited English proficiency are less likely to be involved in their child's schooling (Hyslop, 2000; Nistler and Maiers, 1999). Due to parent's lack of school involvement, they may not have a chance to build positive relationships with teachers that may prove beneficial to their child's learning and development, nor do parents learn how to better support the school's intentions in the home. HIPPIY may increase parents' attendance in school events and volunteering at the school by helping parents become familiar with the school environment and school personnel through monthly meetings that feature school-related staff. Through the HIPPIY program, parents are empowered to take the lead in helping their children learn. Early educators can replicate HIPPIY's approach by hosting school and class events/activities that bring together families and school staff in non-threatening ways (e.g., hands-on workshops) by offering events/activities in parents' first language, providing child care, communicating in a variety of methods (e.g., verbal, email, note home, etc.), and being flexible with scheduling.

In summary, the HIPPIY program is designed to increase at-risk children's school readiness and continued success in school, and the current study's findings of increased parental school and home involvement and the rate of children who entered school "ready to learn" reflects parents' confidence in advocating for their children's success in and out of the home.

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