

READY TO LEARN

HIPPY

Helping Parents to Prepare Their Children for School

by Drew Wortman

An innovative parent education program is giving new Canadians and Aboriginal families the tools they need to help their children get the best possible start in school.

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, better known as HIPPY, aims to help preschool children from families who are struggling with poverty and low levels of literacy to be better prepared for their school-based education.

The program works on the premise that parents are their children's first and best educators. Backed up by carefully-developed materials, curriculum and books, parents work 15 minutes a day to teach their three- to five-year-olds skills that will prepare them for the coming school years. Also, home visitors support the families, bringing them new materials every two weeks and role-playing with them to help them use the materials effectively with their children.

The benefits to the children involved in the HIPPY program are matched only by the benefits to the parents.

"HIPPY provides a sense of pride to parents who are taking a hand in their child's education," explains Debbie Bell, founding director and executive director of HIPPY Canada. "One mother said that by taking part in the program she

was able to be more than just a parent to her child, but also a teacher and a friend."

Further, the program's home visitors are actually parents whose own children have been involved with the program. They stay with the program for three years, which allows new parents to take on the role and provide fresh perspectives, and spreads the experience of working with HIPPY throughout the community.

"For some parents, working with HIPPY is the best job they've ever had," says Bell. "They leave with new skills and experience."

HIPPY's beginnings

Canada's involvement in the HIPPY program began six years ago when Bell, as director of community education programs at Simon Fraser University, accompanied a group of women — a mix of academics and members of a group called Common Journeys: Women Working

Together — to observe programs in San Diego and Tijuana for low-income women and children. She was deeply impressed by the HIPPY program being operated in Tijuana and could see how it could meet the needs of her own community in Vancouver.

In November 1999, through the combined efforts of Simon Fraser University, the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada (NCJW) and Britannia Community Services, HIPPY was officially launched

in Canada. Operating out of the Britannia Community Centre, it began serving families in the Grandview-Woodland area of Vancouver.

Although HIPPY is relatively new to Canada, it has been around since the late 1960s. The NCJW Institute for Innovation in Education at the Hebrew University initially developed the program in Israel, where it is known as HAETGAR.

"I was in three residential schools when I was young, so I'm afraid of schools and the government . . . I'm glad I stayed in the program for my children, so they won't be afraid of school."

— parent participant of HIPPY



Since then it has been replicated in twelve other countries. HIPPY programs around the world have contractual agreements with the Hebrew University to operate the program, and are visited and monitored by HIPPY International.

Success with Aboriginal families

In Canada, the program has been incredibly successful with Aboriginal families. HIPPY Canada expanded in November 2002 to create the Vancouver Aboriginal HIPPY Consortium, consisting of five Vancouver-area nations: Katzie, Musqueam, Sechelt, Tsawwassen and Tsleil-Waututh.

HIPPY is a culturally-neutral, community-based program. According to Bell, the program, by its nature, honours and respects Aboriginal cultures, languages and unique circumstances. It offers Aboriginal families a contemporary education in the context of traditional culture and values.

“Aboriginal HIPPY maintains the tradition of parents passing on knowledge to their children,” explains Bell.

“I was afraid when the home visitors started visiting me,” admits one parent involved in the HIPPY program. “I was in three residential schools when I was young, so I’m afraid of schools and the government . . . fear pushes people away. But the people with HIPPY made me comfortable . . . I’m glad I stayed in the program for my children, so they won’t be afraid of school.”

The future of HIPPY Canada looks bright. New programs in Victoria and Halifax were established in 2002, with more on the horizon. Its next goal is to start building links to child care centres in order to reach parents who could benefit from the program.

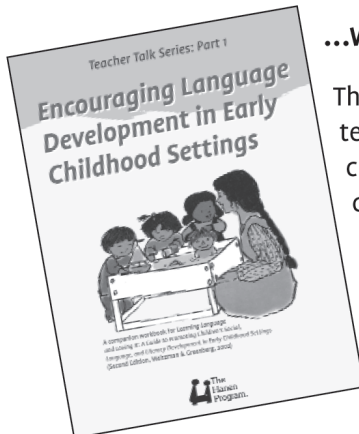
“The most important thing for HIPPY’s future is to start partnering and collaborating with child care programs,” says Bell.

For more information, refer to HIPPY Canada’s website at www.hippycanada.com.

Drew Wortman is a public relations student at Algonquin College, Ottawa, who recently completed an internship at the Canadian Child Care Federation.
© CCCF 2005

Foster the social, language and literacy development of the children in your care

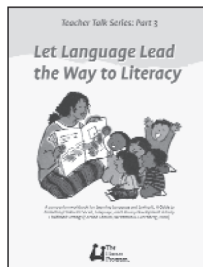
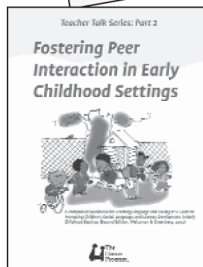
...with the new *Teacher Talk Series* from The Hanen Centre!



This set of three illustrated workbooks gives early childhood educators and preschool teachers practical strategies to help children in their classrooms interact, communicate and develop their social, language and literacy skills. Designed to help child care professionals lay the foundation for children's future academic and social success, the workbooks use the same research-based, step-by-step Hanen approach found in *Learning Language and Loving It: A Guide to Promoting Children's Social, Language and Literacy Development in Early Childhood Settings* (Second Edition, Weitzman & Greenberg, 2002).

Titles in this series:

- *Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings*
- *Fostering Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Settings*
- *Let Language Lead the Way to Literacy*



To order, visit www.hanen.org, or call 416-921-1073 ext 232.



Tel: 416-921-1073
E-mail: info@hanen.org
Web: www.hanen.org