

Developing the joy of literacy in First Nations children: SFU's Chief Dan George Centre aims to facilitate native content and perspectives in education:[Final Edition]

Dorothy Woodend. The Vancouver Sun. Vancouver, B.C.: Oct 3, 2002. pg. A.19

Abstract (Article Summary)

In 1972, when Simon Fraser University gave Chief Dan George an honorary degree, he was one of the first native Canadians to receive a university degree. Thirty years later, and 21 years after his death, the passions of his life -- peace, tolerance and education -- have come full circle with the creation of the Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education at SFU's Harbour Centre. Founded on the principles of improving relationships with First Nations people through advanced education, the centre will offer programs designed to develop First Nations content and perspectives in education. The centre is also facilitating HIPPY Aboriginal -- an initiative dedicated to fostering learning among toddlers and preschoolers in B.C.'s native communities.

Linden Pinay, director of the Chief Dan George Centre, agrees. "We saw HIPPY as an ideal program to help aboriginal communities in turning the tide of poverty and education. Over 75 per cent of our children won't finish school and there are very few resources in terms of aboriginal programs. HIPPY is unique because it helps the people who need it the most and recognizes parents as the first and most important teachers. Its philosophy also recognizes the need for native control of native education and honours the principle of self- government."

Full Text (723 words)

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Raise a Reader

In 1972, when Simon Fraser University gave Chief Dan George an honorary degree, he was one of the first native Canadians to receive a university degree. Thirty years later, and 21 years after his death, the passions of his life -- peace, tolerance and education -- have come full circle with the creation of the Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education at SFU's Harbour Centre. Founded on the principles of improving relationships with First Nations people through advanced education, the centre will offer programs designed to develop First Nations content and perspectives in education. The centre is also facilitating HIPPY Aboriginal -- an initiative dedicated to fostering learning among toddlers and preschoolers in B.C.'s native communities.

HIPPY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters) was founded in Israel in the 1960s, and operates in seven countries, including many communities across Canada. The psychological, social and academic benefits of the program are scoring off the charts: HIPPY children tend to do better on standard IQ tests used to predict school achievement, and are more confident and enthusiastic about learning.

Using educational material aimed at developing three-to-five year olds' cognitive and coordination skills, trained HIPPY home visitors coach parents to be their child's first teachers. The two-to-three year educational program relies on community leaders and home-based learning to help socially disadvantaged parents prepare their children for kindergarten.

Leonard George, former chief of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation (also known as the Burrard Indian band), and the son of Chief Dan George, along with his niece Chief Leah George, first female chief of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation, sit on the board of directors.

Like his father, Leonard George came from a primarily oral tradition. "I'm a storyteller," he says. He sharpened his skills as an orator telling stories to his children and grandchildren, but he recognizes the importance of honing other forms of literacy in his community. He became involved with HIPPY through Simon Fraser and immediately knew it was well-suited to First Nations people.

"Programs like HIPPY are important because they work in the opposite way from other formal education programs," says George. With many native communities still coping with the legacy of residential schools, George believes one of the best ways to combat the stigma associated with traditional education is to start early, teaching kids the joy that comes from learning. "We've always associated education with fear, with physical and emotional abuse; HIPPY works with our old culture," he says. "We believe that children begin learning in the womb and that the spirit of learning doesn't end until you die."

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One of the first HIPPY Aboriginal pilot sites to be implemented is in Surrey, home to the fastest growing urban native population in Canada. Although HIPPY programs usually run October to May, "We anticipate it will be up and running before January of this year," says Pinay. "Currently there are five or six pilot sites in B.C. this year and we plan on adding five to 10 sites every year."

The timing of HIPPY is prescient.

In Adrienne Clarkson's recent Throne Speech, the Liberal government promised to increase access to early childhood education, in particular for aboriginal families, on reserves and in urban areas.

"It's the right time in history, the government has really refocused their agenda on early childhood development and programs like HIPPY, or Raise-a-Reader plant the seeds in

young children," says George. "Developing literacy is equipping them with a voice to create their own success."

[Illustration]

Photo: Glenn Baglo, Vancouver Sun / As a promoter of the HIPPY literacy program, Leonard George knows the value of reading to children and practises what he preaches, here reading to (clockwise from bottom left) Gordon George, Lisa George, Samantha Seymour, Owen Thomas, Delphine Guss and Tristan Thomas (on his lap). ;

HIPPY helping children most in need: At a time when there is a dearth of funds and lack of standards, such programs offer hope to parents.:[Final Edition]

Paula Brook. The Vancouver Sun. Vancouver, B.C.: Sep 29, 2000. pg. B.3

Abstract (Article Summary)

Started 30 years ago by an educational researcher in Israel, HIPPY has grown into an international organization with standardized teaching methodology and materials. A coordinator oversees a team of minimally paid home visitors (themselves HIPPY parents) who provide hands-on weekly supervision to 10 or 12 families in their community. Parents teach the daily lessons in 15-minute sessions, using home- activity packets focusing on problem solving, discrimination and language skills.

[Debbie Bell] agreed to do some more homework -- this time in Jerusalem, where she joined a HIPPY seminar led by founder Avima Lombard at the National Council of Jewish Women's Research Institute for Innovation in Education at the Hebrew University. Lombard took the group to visit a Palestinian HIPPY project. "These women were dealing with the same issues as the women we're working with in Canada, and the women we're working with in Northern Mexico -- income issues, gender issues," observed Bell. "I was still conflicted about how this would work -- it was so different from the models I've seen. I said to Avima: `But I do community development,' and she said, `You need a context to do community development in. HIPPY provides you with a context.' "

With fund-raising help from the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Bell and the East Van women launched their own four-year HIPPY pilot project a year ago. The first 40 children graduated from the junior level last spring. Most of them now gearing up to continue with HIPPY at home while attending kindergarten in the public system. Thirty more four-year-olds have been recruited for the junior level.

Full Text (1243 words)

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Bad news on the child-care front this week, with the release of the largest-ever study of day care in Canada. The lack of national standards and dearth of funds means underpaid staff are giving half- baked care to those relatively few Canadian children whose parents can afford licensed spaces. Don't even ask about the vast majority of infants and toddlers in unlicensed care.

There's a lot of hand wringing going on among early childhood educators, a lot of nail biting by working parents, and more heat than usual in the debate over how governments should respond to evidence of an entire generation losing its "zero-to-three" edge. Even if the feds could find the required \$6 billion-plus to make good on their stalled promise of a universal child-care program, it is unlikely they'd risk the ballot-box fallout from social conservatives who would rather spend the billions on tax

breaks that would allow middle-income Canadians to stay home and raise their kids "properly."

This is becoming such a big, messy debate, it is refreshing to stumble upon a small piece of unqualified good news about early childhood intervention. I have such a story for you this week -- about a local program, initiated by parents, that was tailored to their needs and, after its first year of operation, is doing a remarkable job of meeting them.

It's called the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), and it targets those who are least served by the government's so-called Children's Agenda: the children of poverty, of broken homes and uprooted cultures who start school severely disadvantaged and finish poorly, if at all.

In Vancouver, HIPPY operates out of Britannia Community Centre, where it serves 60 families representing 24 different countries of origin. Although child development is the goal, parents (primarily mothers) are equal beneficiaries of a program premised on an affirmation that they are the primary educators of their children, and that home socialization sets a pattern for life.

This week, I joined a group of HIPPY parents for tea around a big table in a small classroom in the basement of Britannia secondary school. This is where they hold their biweekly group meetings -- a melting pot of cultures and a hotpot of emotions as the moms, most of them otherwise isolated by language, culture and social insecurities, share stories of daily progress and discovery with their children.

"I never realized how much my children are capable of learning," says Wazi Dlamini-Kapenda, HIPPY project coordinator and mother of two. "Even my two-year-old daughter, who would sit with her brother and me when we were working, would be paying close attention and asking so many questions -- I was amazed how much she could process in her mind. I've heard this from a lot of parents who have more than one child at home. They have to make extra copies of the work sheets so all their children can do them."

"The group meetings are very moving," says HIPPY program director Debbie Bell, of Simon Fraser University's department of continuing studies. "The parents consistently tell us how much closer they feel to their child, how they've learned to play with their child, how it's given them confidence in their own abilities as a teacher."

Bell, who has worked for years in local and international community development, was not a quick convert to HIPPY. She was suspicious of its highly structured, top-down delivery of service to families -- a model that runs counter to the prevailing politics of "culturally based" programming.

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Parents teach the daily lessons in 15-minute sessions, using home- activity packets focusing on problem solving, discrimination and language skills.

Bell discovered the program in San Diego, while on a research trip with a group of East Vancouver women representing non- governmental multicultural organizations. They observed a variety of community development initiatives in poverty-stricken Hispanic neighbourhoods. The San Diego HIPPY project left Bell and her academic colleagues unmoved, but lit a fire under the East Van women. The group was torn by debate, culminating in an epiphanic moment for Bell:

"Some of you came on this trip with egos, and the rest of us came with needs," charged one of the women, as Bell recalls. "Our needs are our children -- doing the best for them in our new country. They are continually marginalized in the school system, we don't know what they know, we don't know how to advocate for them, we don't know how the system works and we think this program would make a difference."

Bell agreed to do some more homework -- this time in Jerusalem, where she joined a HIPPY seminar led by founder Avima Lombard at the National Council of Jewish Women's Research Institute for Innovation in Education at the Hebrew University. Lombard took the group to visit a Palestinian HIPPY project. "These women were dealing with the same issues as the women we're working with in Canada, and the women we're working with in Northern Mexico -- income issues, gender issues," observed Bell. "I was still conflicted about how this would work -- it was so different from the models I've seen. I said to Avima: 'But I do community development,' and she said, 'You need a context to do community development in. HIPPY provides you with a context.' "

Bell bought in. "We like to think we're doing this work for the community, but we don't always bother to ask them what they want, or really listen to them when they tell us. Almost universally, what immigrant groups want is for their kids to integrate and do well in the new culture."

With fund-raising help from the National Council of Jewish Women of Canada, Bell and the East Van women launched their own four-year HIPPY pilot project a year ago. The first 40 children graduated from the junior level last spring. Most of them now gearing up to continue with HIPPY at home while attending kindergarten in the public system. Thirty more four-year-olds have been recruited for the junior level.

The program, which costs parents nothing, is funded by Health Canada and a number of private foundations. The cost to them -- about \$4,000 a year per child -- is a small fraction of the cost of remedial help for children who might otherwise fall through the cracks. Collateral benefits include the socializing of parents, and the professional training of home visitors, many of whom were previously on social assistance. Bell, who hopes to introduce a college-level credit for home visitors who complete two years with HIPPY, expects to see many of these hard-working women move on to careers in child care and education.

Dr. Avima Lombard visits Vancouver Oct. 5 for a free public lecture, "Success Begins at Home," at the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue, starting at 7 p.m. To book seats: 257-5133. For more information on HIPPY: 718-5817.

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[Illustration]

Photo: Steve Bosch/Vancouver Sun / GOOD NEWS: The Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters is meeting with plenty of success in East Vancouver. Program participants (from left) are Maria Sanchez-twa with daughter Diana, Terry Guss, and Aprelle Houle with children Serena and Johnathan. c ;