

Hawaii HIPPY Programs Findings from the 2006-07 AmeriCorps Evaluation

Researchers at the University of South Florida conducted a multi-site evaluation for the third year of the HIPPY AmeriCorps Initiative to document the influence of the HIPPY program on the development of children's receptive vocabulary skills or other reading readiness skills and first-year HIPPY parents' perceptions of gains in their involvement in different types of home and community literacy activities. A second interest was in measuring first-year HIPPY parent gains in knowledge of early childhood development, teaching skills, quality of parent-child relationship, and participation in positive parenting practices. Outcomes for parents completing their second year in the HIPPY program were also examined including their perceptions of gains in self-confidence, the quality of the home literacy environment, use of HIPPY teaching skills with other children in the home, and the social support they received from other HIPPY parents.

Children's Receptive Vocabulary Development

Seventy-five children from two Hawaii programs were administered the Get Ready to Read! developmental screening instrument during Fall 2006 and 64 of the 75 children were administered the Get Ready to Read! again in Spring 2007. Change over time is reported for the 64 children who completed the Get Ready to Read! during Fall 2006 and also in Spring 2007. The 64 children had completed, on average, the sixth week of the HIPPY 4 curriculum at the time of the first administration and on average 23 weeks in the HIPPY program at the time of the second administration. As shown in Table 1 below, none of the children scored in the "Very weak skills" category in Fall 2006. In fact, 63% of the children were assessed as having "Very strong skills" in Fall 2006, and this percentage increased to 86% in Spring, 2007. According to the developers of the Get Ready to Read!, the average mean correct score is 9 with a standard deviation of 4. Generally, scores of 16 and above indicate that a child is ready to begin learning to read and has "a solid grasp of critical pretest reading skills" (Whitehurst, 2001, Executive Summary, p. 2).

Table 1. Scores for the Get Ready to Read! Screening Instrument for Fall 2006 (N=75) and Spring 2007 (N=64)

	Fall 2006 (N=75)	Spring 2007 (N=64)
	Number (Percent)	Number (Percent)
0 – 6 Very Weak Skills	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
6 - 9 Weak Skills	1 (6.7)	0 (0.0)
9 – 12 Average Skills	5 (6.7)	2 (3.1)
12 – 16 Strong Skills	22 (29.3)	7 (10.9)
16 – 20 Very Strong Skills	47 (62.7)	55 (85.9)

Improvement in children's reading-related skills were also examined by comparing the change in score categories from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007. As shown in Table 2 below, 28% of the children improved their skill level from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007. Only two children scored in a higher skill category in Fall 2006 than in Spring 2007. However, even though there was a decrease in the score category from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007 for two of the children, their raw

scores placed them in the “Average” or “Strong” score category at the second administration of the instrument.

Table 2. Change in Score Categories for the Get Ready to Read! Screening Instrument from Fall 2006 to Spring 2007 (N=64)

Change in Score Categories from Fall 2004 to Spring 2006	Number (Percent)
Weak to Average	1 (1.6)
Average to Strong	1 (1.6)
Average to Very Strong	6 (9.4)
Strong to Strong	4 (6.3)
From Strong to Very Strong	10 (15.6)
Very Strong to Very Strong	40 (62.5)
Very Strong to Strong	1 (1.6)
Strong to Average	1 (1.6)

Overall, these results suggest that these children have developed, or are developing, strong print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness skills as assessed by the Get Ready to Read! screening tool.

HIPPY Parental Involvement in Their Children’s Learning for First-Year Parents

A retrospective parent survey was administered to 29 first-year HIPPY parents who were being served by a HIPPY AmeriCorps home visitor. All of the first-year parents completing the survey were enrolled Honolulu HIPPY program and completed the English version of the survey.

A paired means sample t-test was used to examine the change in first-year parents’ involvement in home literacy and community educational activities. The findings show that first-year HIPPY parents reported significant improvement in their level of involvement with their children in home literacy and community educational activities after completing an average of 25 weeks of the HIPPY program. An item analysis showed that the largest percentage of reported gain by parents was on those items that described the activities that were part of the weekly activity packets they complete with their child. These activities include spending more time reading with their preschool children, having conversations around the shared picture book reading experience and teaching their child the alphabet and letter sound associations and numbers.

A paired means sample t-test was also used to examine the change in parents’ perception of their early childhood knowledge, HIPPY teaching skills, the quality of their parent-child interactions and participating in supportive parenting behaviors. The result from the compared means t-test was significant across all of the 12 items measuring these activities and behaviors for parents completing the English version of the survey. An item analysis revealed that the largest number of parents reported gain on items measuring their ability to identify the specific skills their child is learning and developing a regular routine of working with their child on the HIPPY activities.

Additional Benefits of HIPPY: Findings from Retrospective Survey II for Continuing HIPPY Parents

A retrospective parent survey was administered to 32 second-year HIPPY parents who were being served by a HIPPY AmeriCorps home visitor. Thirty parents were enrolled in the Honolulu HIPPY program and two parents participated in the Kailua-Kona HIPPY program. All of the parents completed the English version of the survey.

A paired means sample t-test was used to examine the change in second-year HIPPY parents' involvement in home literacy and community educational activities. The result of the t-test across all of the items measuring participation in home literacy and community educational activities was significant for parents completing the English version. Though the gain reported by parents across all of the eight items was found to be statistically significant, it should be noted that the size of the gain reported by parents was a modest one. It may be that second-year HIPPY parents have already established routines of working with their child and continue their same high levels of involvement during the second-year in the HIPPY program.

A paired means sample t-test was also used to examine the change in second-year HIPPY parents' changes in their self-confidence, the quality of their home literacy environment, their use of HIPPY teaching skills with other children in the home, and the social support they received from other HIPPY parents. The result of the t-test across all of the 20 items was significant for parents completing the English version of the survey. An item analysis revealed that the largest number of parents reported change on items measuring their enjoyment of doing educational activities with their child.

Discussion

As was true in the first and second year evaluation findings, Hawaiian HIPPY children have developed, or are developing, strong print knowledge, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness skills as assessed by the Get Ready to Read! Participating in the HIPPY program also produces benefits for parents. Overall, these findings suggest that most HIPPY parents are actively participating with their child in the HIPPY program. It is clear that parents participating in the HIPPY program feel the program has been influential in many aspects of their lives including how they interact with their child, what activities they participate in with their child, how they feel about their ability to advocate on behalf of their child, and their ability to engage and establish relationships with other parents of preschool children.

Study Limitations

Certain limitations must be taken into consideration when interpreting the significance of the findings for parental involvement in home literacy and community educational activities. When responding to a retrospective pretest questionnaire, respondents may feel a need to justify the effort they have invested in the HIPPY program and thus underrate their pretest and over-rate their posttest response. Similarly,

social desirability may also play a role in how parents respond to retrospective pretest measures. However, in the case of this study, many HIPPY parents have expressed to both the coordinators and home visitors how much personal benefit they have derived from their participation in HIPPY, so it may be less likely that they felt the need to do so on the questionnaire.

The limitations on the retrospective pretest-posttest methodology do not undermine the strength of the differences demonstrated by the statistical analyses. One advantage of the retrospective method is that it offers participants the opportunity to respond with a more accurate understanding of the constructs being measured. The retrospective method also allows respondents to assess their personal growth by giving them a frame of reference.