

# The Home Instruction Programme for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY)

*Marion Stewart*

The HIPPY programme was developed in 1968 at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. An appraisal of the educational difficulties experienced by poor and immigrant communities in Israel (Palestine) plus awareness of the potential of early intervention in the life of children, their families and communities led to the development of this unique programme. Today HIPPY operates in a number of countries.

Since starting in 1988, HIPPY (South Africa), in common with many other progressive pre-primary school programmes believes that investment in education should start as early as possible. HIPPY is, however, distinct from other pre-school programmes by virtue of its home based approach.

## Holistic Child Education and Development

The HIPPY programme, therefore, works with the child in a family context. It is a holistic developmental programme founded on the belief that poverty causes a variety of losses for individuals, families, communities and society at large. It is believed that intervention at the level of the pre-school child offers a significant opportunity to move successfully out of a cycle of poverty.

HIPPY's emphasis is not only that of achieving 'school readiness'. The focus is on the capacity of the programme to rebuild the potential of families as arenas for receiving and providing health, support and fulfilment within the context of empowered and viable communities. HIPPY, not only helps in building skills in the child, but also empowers the parent who is then in a position to engage in the concerns of the community. HIPPY seeks to rebuild that which poverty and disadvantage have destroyed.

## The Child/ Parent Relationship

In intervening with parents HIPPY recognises that the child/parent relations is the nucleus of a child's life. It is often the most consistent element in the child's

experience. There is an inherent educative function in the relationship between parent and child. Parents teach their children, informally, the basic life skills they will use and build on for the rest of their lives. Most of this occurs before the child is four years old.

HIPPY is actively providing support for the legitimate role of parent as educator. This role is often undermined by the formal school system. Parents are left feeling inexperienced and irrelevant to the education of their children. Through HIPPY parents are encouraged to define a role for themselves in the education of their children throughout their schooling. Intervention with the parent enables successive children to benefit from the programme.

HIPPY is an intervention requiring parents to utilise a structured programme to stimulate and educate their 4 and 5 year old children. Parents are supported in the implementation of the programme by home visitors. Home visitors are themselves parents of children of a similar age. They are drawn from the same community. They visit families on a weekly basis.

## Home Visitors

Home visitors are key to the programme. They are drawn from the community, acting as role models for parents. The process of recruiting, training and supporting home visitors is important to creating opportunity, capacity and self reliance within communities. Parents are linked to one another through regular parent meetings facilitated by the home visitors. These enable parents to support one another, and learn more about their children's needs. The meetings offer a comprehensive range of informal adult education activities for parents who are themselves educationally disadvantaged. The meetings are forums for addressing wider community problems.

Home visitors are supported by programme co-ordinators. Co-ordinators are professional teachers and social workers, but parents and home visitors are encouraged to become co-ordinators.

In-service training, over two years, of home visitors is the responsibility of the programme co-ordinator. This year, formalised training of co-ordinators has also developed. The curriculum covers development, adult education and community work. Training is geared to providing staff with a wide range of skills with which to cope with a multitude of situations that could inhibit a child's learning. Emphasis is placed on role play, as a way of directing the transfer of learning at all levels. This serves not only to guarantee that content is absorbed, but also to impart confidence to the educators.'



*What childhood should be about. Photo: Ismail Vawda*

## Community Support

Each programme is, in addition, managed by a HIPPY community committee. The committee is made up of key figures in the community such as teachers, parents, church leaders, business people etc. The committee offers support to the co-ordinator and ensures that the programme is accountable to the community. Publicity and fund raising are also the function of the committee. Two representatives of each community committee are elected to a general forum. This meets every three months. In collaboration with the board of HIPPY (South Africa), the community committee representatives on the board formulate overall priorities and objectives for the organisation. South Africans are trying to establish a non-racial, non-sexist democracy which would end decades of apartheid. Although political settlement is important, its validity will be tested by its delivery of well-being. This will lead to inevitable, intersectoral competition over scarce resources. We plead that educare receives the highest priority and that both the state and the private sector assume responsibility for funding it.

The education of young children in isolation of their families is of limited value. The family must be encouraged to become an equal partner in the education process. If educational programmes continue to exclude parents, they disempower these parents as mediators and advocates for their children.

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