

Dr. Kurt P. Bierschock

## **Study on HIPPY in Bavaria**

During the HIPPY program circles of 2005/2006 and 2006/2007, a research team with the State Institute for Family Research at the University of Bamberg, Germany, conducted a field study at four HIPPY sites in Bavaria (i.e. Erlangen, Fürth, Munich and Nuremberg). By employing a multi-level approach with several research tools, our study involved virtually all people involved in the program on the regional level: program coordinators, home visitors, the parents of HIPPY children and, of course, the children themselves. In addition, interviews with practitioners and experts in early childhood development and education were conducted. Among the dimensions we measured, the most important ones were: socio-economic background of the parents (most of them were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants from various countries of origin, with Turkey and Russia (and other states that were part of the Soviet Union) being the most prominent among them), parents' motivation for taking part in the program, children's performance and improvement in HIPPY activities, parents' – in most cases; mothers' – willingness to act accurately in accordance with the program's requirements, especially with regard to carrying out HIPPY activities frequently, mothers' participation in HIPPY group meetings at the site location, their setting of, and their performance during home visits. Also, we looked into the personal advances the mothers gained from participating in the program.

An analysis of the parents' socio-economic background showed that they matched the profile of parents for whom HIPPY had been introduced: on the average, they had low levels of education, were in low positions in the labour market. On the average, they were more often unemployed or worked part-time, lived in smaller dwellings and had more children than Germans.

Parents' motivation for participating in the program primarily was improving their children's proficiency in German and preparing them for success in school. In addition, they strongly aspired for (astoundingly) high educational levels for their children.

Basically, the children themselves made some or even quite remarkable progress in their proficiency in German as well as in their social skills and cognitive capacities during the two years during which they were enrolled in the program. However, the higher their competences were on the outset, the more they gained at the end – children whose performances were meager in the beginning, did also make some progress, but did not achieved as much progress as those with good or medium foundations in the dimensions mentioned above.

In the course of participating in the program, the percentage of children displaying good language competences in German rose from 22 to 54%. Also, our findings indicate that HIPPY promotes the children's pre-literacy since parents are required – and most of them did this quite eagerly – to read the HIPPY storybooks to them. Reading books to their children and other means of everyday communication have resulted in a *rather balanced bilingualism*: the exclusive use of the language of origin has been largely reduced and a much greater emphasis has been placed on reading and talking to them in either German or both languages. By helping children to master the German language, HIPPY also contributes to build up their self-esteem as

well as their social skills which, in turn, are a prerequisite for interacting with peers and adults.

The daily HIPPY activities with the child were mostly prepared and carried out by the mothers (94%), but in the course of time spent in the program other family members also shared in carrying them out. At the end of the second year, their sole realization by mothers went down to 82%. Over time, these activities were increasingly taken seriously, mothers had to struggle less for finding appropriate time slots and the frequency and regularity became more stable. All these facts indicate that HIPPY became better integrated into family life.

As already expected from the literature on previous HIPPY studies, attendance to the bi-weekly group meetings proved to be a sore spot of the program. Virtually none of the mothers attended all meetings – merely 5% of them attended in at least 90% of all meetings. The reasons were manifold, but in most cases, time constraints – due to both family tasks and work obligations – were cited by the interviewees.

According to home visitors' assessments, the work atmosphere during home visits was good, interruptions by others during training sessions decreased over time. Mothers acted quite well during role playing, although one quarter of the mothers in the second year still experienced difficulties with role reversals.

Mothers reported that they gained a lot of self-confidence and a higher self-esteem from participating in the program: 73% of them said that their self-confidence increased largely, 88% of them indicated that HIPPY largely contributed to an improved perception of self-efficacy, and 44% answered that they became more secure in their interactions with the child. Also, they increasingly sought contact with the kindergarten educators and increased their frequency of attendance in parent-teacher conferences.

Thus, it is mothers, too, who profited from HIPPY – it can be considered a building block of their integration into German society.

For summing it up: when carried out as a two-year program – and thus in accordance with the rules – HIPPY is an effective and efficient home instruction program. In contrast to pure language training programs, HIPPY addresses all significant dimensions of child development and actively involves the children's families, especially the mothers.

The author of this summary, Dr. Kurt P. Bierschock, is a sociologist, social worker and researcher with the State Institute of Family Research at the University of Bamberg. The final report of the study (authors: Dr. Kurt P. Bierschock, Andrea Dürnberger and Dr. Marina Rupp) is available (in German only) for download at:

[http://www.ifb.bayern.de/imperia/md/content/stmas/ifb/materialien/mat\\_2008\\_3.pdf](http://www.ifb.bayern.de/imperia/md/content/stmas/ifb/materialien/mat_2008_3.pdf)