

WHAT IS THE HIGHSOPE CURRICULUM?

HighScope's educational approach emphasizes "active participatory learning." Active learning means students have direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. Children's interests and choices are at the heart of HighScope programs. They construct their own knowledge through interactions with the world and the people around them. Children take the first step in the learning process by making choices and following through on their plans and decisions. Teachers, caregivers, and parents offer physical, emotional, and intellectual support. In active learning settings, adults expand children's thinking with diverse materials and nurturing interactions. Through *scaffolding*, adults help children gain knowledge and develop creative problem-solving skills.

HighScope uses the term *scaffolding* to describe the process whereby adults support and gently extend children's thinking and reasoning. Scaffolding is a term introduced by developmental psychologist Jerome Bruner and is based on the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky referred to the zone of proximal development as the area between what children can accomplish on their own and what they can do with the help of an adult or another child who is more developmentally advanced. HighScope teachers carefully observe children so they know when and how to enter this zone. Children must be secure and confident in what they already know before they are ready to move to the next level. When HighScope says adults support and extend children's learning, it means that the adults first validate, or support what children already know, and then, when the time is right, gently encourage them to extend their thinking to the next level.

HOW DOES THE HIGHSOPE APPROACH DIFFER FROM OTHER EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS?

The HighScope educational approach is consistent with the best practices recommended by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start Program Performance Standards, and other guidelines for developmentally based programs.

Within this broad framework, however, HighScope has unique features that differentiate it from other early childhood programs. One is the daily plan-do-review sequence. Research shows that planning and reviewing are the two components of the program day most positively and significantly associated with children's scores on measures of developmental progress.

A second unique feature is our curriculum content, the social, intellectual, and physical building blocks that are essential to young children's optimal growth. Our content areas are organized in eight main categories that correspond to state and national learning standards; the categories are (1) Approaches to Learning; (2) Social and Emotional Development; (3) Physical Development and Health; (4) Language, Literacy, and Communication; (5) Mathematics; (6) Creative Arts; (7) Science and Technology; and (8) Social Studies.

WHAT ARE HIGHSOPE'S GOALS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

Within these preschool content areas are 58 Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs). The KDIs are statements of observable behaviors that define the important learning areas for young children. HighScope teachers keep these indicators in mind when they set up the environment and plan activities to encourage learning and social interaction. They also form the basis of HighScope's child assessment tool, called COR Advantage.

HighScope is a comprehensive educational approach that strives to help children develop in all areas. Our goals for young children are:

- To learn through active involvement with people, materials, events, and ideas
- To become independent, responsible, and confident — ready for school and ready for life
- To learn to plan many of their own activities, carry them out, and talk with others about what they have done and what they have learned
- To gain knowledge and skills in important academic, social, and physical areas

HighScope provides children with carefully planned experiences in reading, mathematics, and science. For example, curriculum materials and staff development in the area of literacy are compatible with the latest findings from research and practice. Our key developmental indicators in mathematics and our COR Advantage assessment items are aligned with the early childhood standards of the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics.

Social development is another important learning area in HighScope programs. Studies continually demonstrate that children in HighScope classrooms show high levels of initiative. Teachers further support social development by helping children learn how to resolve interpersonal conflicts. The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development stresses that all these areas of academic and socio-emotional growth are essential for school readiness.

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE THAT THE HIGHSOPE APPROACH WORKS?

More than 40 years of research shows that HighScope programs advance the development of children and improve their chance of living a better life through adulthood. National research with children from different backgrounds has shown that those who attend HighScope programs score higher on measures of development than similar children enrolled in other preschool and childcare programs.

HighScope is perhaps best known for the [HighScope Perry Preschool Project study](#), which compared low-income children who attended our program with those who did not. As adults, preschool participants had higher high school graduation rates, higher monthly earnings, less use of welfare, and fewer arrests than those without the program. In addition to benefiting the individuals who attended preschool, these results show that preschool leads to savings for taxpayers: for every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood education, society saves \$13 in the cost of special education, public assistance, unemployment benefits, and crime. Research also shows that HighScope training with teachers and caregivers is highly effective. In a national study, teachers with HighScope training had higher quality programs than did similar teachers without such training. Higher quality programs were in turn linked to better developmental outcomes for children.

WHAT DO TEACHERS DO IN A HIGHSOPE PROGRAM?

In HighScope programs, adults are as active in the learning process as children. A mutual give-and-take relationship exists in which both groups participate as leaders and followers, speakers and listeners. Adults interact with children by sharing control with them; focusing on their strengths, forming genuine relationships with them, supporting their play ideas, and helping them resolve conflicts. Adults participate

as partners in children's activities rather than as supervisors or managers. They respect children and their choices, and encourage initiative, independence, and creativity. Because adults are well trained in child development, they provide materials and plan experiences that children need to grow and learn.

WHAT DOES A HIGHSCOPE PROGRAM SETTING LOOK LIKE?

The space and materials in a HighScope setting are carefully chosen and arranged to promote active learning. Although we do not endorse specific types or brands of toys and equipment, HighScope does provide general guidelines for selecting materials that are meaningful and interesting to children. The learning environment in HighScope programs has the following characteristics:

- Is welcoming to children
- Provides enough materials for all the children
- Allows children to find, use, and return materials independently
- Encourages different types of play and learning
- Allows the children to see and easily move through all the areas of the classroom or center
- Is flexible so children can extend their play by bringing materials from one area to another
- Provides materials that reflect the diversity of children's family lives

WHAT HAPPENS EACH DAY IN A HIGHSCOPE CLASSROOM?

HighScope classrooms follow a predictable sequence of events known as the daily routine. This provides a structure within which children can make choices, follow their interests, and develop their abilities in each content area. While each HighScope program decides on the routine that works best for its setting, schedule, and population, the following segments are always included during the program day.

PLAN-DO-REVIEW TIME

This three-part sequence is unique to the HighScope approach. It includes a 10–15-minute small-group time during which children plan what they want to do during work time (the area to visit, materials to use, and friends to play with); a 45–60-minute work time for carrying out their plans; and another 10–15-minute small-group time for reviewing and recalling with an adult and other children what they've done and learned. In between, "do" and "review," children clean up by putting away their materials or storing unfinished projects. Generally, the older the children, the longer and more detailed their planning and review times become. Children are very active and purposeful during "do" time because they are pursuing activities that interest them. They may follow their initial plans, but often, as they become engaged, their plans shift or may even change completely.

SMALL-GROUP TIME

During this time, a small group of ideally 6–8 children meets with an adult to experiment with materials and solve problems. Although adults choose a small-group activity to emphasize one or more particular content areas, children are free to use the materials in any way they want during this time. The length of small group varies with the age, interests, and attention span of the children. At the end of the period, children help with cleanup.

LARGE-GROUP TIMES

Large-group time builds a sense of community. Up to 20 children and 2 adults come together for movement and music activities, storytelling, and other shared experiences. Children have many opportunities to make choices and play the role of leader. Daily large-group times include an opening activity in which children and teachers gather around a message board to "read" messages in words and pictures about the events of the day

OUTSIDE TIME

Children and adults spend at least 30 minutes outside every day, enjoying vigorous and often noisy play in the fresh air. Without the constraints of four walls, they feel freer to make large movements and experiment with the full range of their voices. Children run, climb, swing, roll, jump, yell, and sing with energy. They experience the wonders of nature, including collecting, gardening, and examining wildlife. During extreme weather or other unsafe conditions, teachers find an alternative indoor location for large-motor activity.

TRANSITION TIMES

Transitions are the minutes between other blocks of the day, as well as arrival and departure times. Our goal is to make transitions pass smoothly since they set the stage for the next segment in the day's schedule. They also provide meaningful learning opportunities themselves. Whenever possible, we give children choices about how to make the transition. For example, they may choose how to move across the floor on their way to small-group time. With consistent daily routine children know what is going to take place next, and it is not unusual for them to announce the next activity and initiate the transition.

EATING AND RESTING TIMES

Meals and snacks allow children to enjoy eating healthy food in a supportive social setting. Rest is for quiet, solitary activities. Since both activities happen at home as well as school, we try to respect family customs at these times as much as possible. Our main goal is to create a shared and secure sense of community within the program.

HOW DOES HIGHSOPE HELP CHILDREN LEARN HOW TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS?

Conflict is inevitable during the course of children's play, whenever they become frustrated or angry. This does not mean children are bad, selfish, or mean. They simply have not yet learned how to interpret social cues, understand other viewpoints, or match their behavior to the situation. To help children learn how to work out their disagreements together, HighScope teachers are trained to use a six-step process to solve problems and resolve conflicts:

1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions or language — a calm manner reassures children that things are under control and can be worked out to everyone's satisfaction.
2. Acknowledge feelings — Children need to express their feelings before they can let go of them and think about possible solutions to the problem.
3. Gather information — Adults are careful not to make assumptions or take sides. We ask open-ended questions to help children describe what happened in their own words.

4. Restate the problem — using the information provided by the children, the adult restates the problem, using clear and simple terms and, if necessary, rephrasing hurtful words.
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together — Adults encourage children to suggest solutions, helping to put them in practical and concrete terms. We accept their ideas, rather than impose our own, thus giving children the satisfaction of having solved the problem.
6. Give follow-up support as needed — Adults help children begin to carry out their solution, making sure that no one remains upset. If necessary, we repeat one or more steps until all the children return to their play.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In all early childhood programs, children have conflicts over space, materials, and friendships. Learning how to find solutions that work for everyone is an important learning experience for young children. Given that adults are not always effective at social problem solving, it is no wonder that this area poses a substantial challenge for young children. It is also a major concern among practitioners, many of whom have not been trained to deal with this daily occurrence. Refer to the following strategies to learn how you can help young children resolve disputes.

CURRICULUM STRATEGIES THAT SET THE STAGE FOR PROBLEM SOLVING

1. **Provide a consistent, predictable routine.**
2. **Encourage children's language development.**
 1. Be warm and positive in conversations.
 2. Describe and imitate children's actions.
 3. Read books about feelings.
 4. Talk with children about feelings.
3. **Play in partnership with children.**
 1. Get down on children's level and engage play on their terms.
 2. Encourage learning about feelings during play.
 3. Help children resolve problems that arise during play.

SIX STEPS IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS

- **Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.** Place yourself between the children, on their level.
- **Acknowledge children's feelings.** Say something simple such as "You look really upset." Let children know you need to hold any object in question.
- **Gather information.** Ask, "What's the problem?" Do not ask "Why" questions.
- **Restate the problem.** "So the problem is..."
- **Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together.** "What can we do to solve this problem?"
- **Be prepared to give follow-up support.** Acknowledge their accomplishments (e.g., "You solved the problem!") Stay nearby in case no one is happy with the solution and the process needs repeating.

HOW CAN FAMILIES USE HIGHSCOPE AT HOME?

Families at home can also do many of the activities that HighScope teachers offer in their programs. For example, parents can provide many different learning materials, often using everyday objects that cost little or nothing. Parents can encourage children to make plans, carry them out, and talk about what they have learned from their experiences. They can try to be more predictable in their routines so children know what to expect. In addition, they can use the steps of conflict resolution to help children resolve disputes with siblings and friends. HighScope classrooms welcome visits from parents and encourage them to participate in field trips and other special events. We are especially eager for parents to share things about their families and culture so they can be incorporated into the program's daily routine. In addition, staff hold regular workshops to help parents understand child development and how it is fostered at school and home. Teachers and caregivers conduct at least one home visit and two conferences with parents each year to share what is happening in the program in general and with their child in particular. In sum, HighScope regards parents and teachers as partners in promoting children's learning.

HOW DOES HIGHSCOPE ASSESS CHILDREN?

HighScope assesses children's development with comprehensive observations rather than narrow tests using COR Advantage, HighScope's research-validated child assessment tool that spans from infancy through kindergarten. Observing a broad range of behaviors over several weeks or months gives us a more accurate picture of children's true capabilities than tests administered in one-time sessions. Using the content areas as a framework, teachers record daily anecdotes describing what children do and say. Two or three times a year, they review these anecdotes and rate each child at the highest level he or she has demonstrated so far on 34 items in eight areas of development — Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies — plus 2 items for English Language Learning. Children's COR Advantage scores help teachers design learning opportunities tailored to their level of development. COR Advantage is also used to explain children's progress to parents during conferences. Instead of only giving parents abstract scores, teachers share anecdotes illustrating what their children are doing now and how they will continue to grow. HighScope has also used this assessment instrument in state and national research projects to investigate the effectiveness of our educational approach and to compare it to other curriculum models.