

The HighScope Approach

HIGHSCOPE is a national leader in the field of early childhood training and research. Founded in 1970, the nonprofit foundation is headquartered in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Five basic principles form the framework of the HighScope approach.

ACTIVE LEARNING: Children learn best, say experts in the HighScope approach, “through active involvement with people, materials, events, and ideas.” Active learning is fundamental to the HighScope educational approach. It has five key ingredients:

Materials. A variety of interesting materials are readily accessible to children.

Manipulation. Children are free to move, handle, explore, and work with the materials.

Choice. Children have opportunities to set their own goals and select materials, activities, and play partners.

Language from the children. Children communicate, verbally and nonverbally, what they are doing and what they have done.

Support from adults. Adults encourage the children’s efforts and help them extend or build upon their work by talking with them about what they are doing, by joining in their play, and by helping them learn to solve the problems that arise.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: In the HighScope classroom, every effort is made to create a safe, comfortable, and uncluttered environment where children can play freely, either alone or with friends. Throw rugs, soft chairs and cushions create cozy surfaces. Rooms are filled with light, colors and textures. Clearly laid out interest areas are organized around specific kinds of play and are identified with simple names that make sense to children—house area, block area, toy area, book area. Children learn to sort materials by appearance or purpose, arrange them by size, match them by number and so on.

Materials are open-ended, meaning that children can use them in many different ways instead of one “correct” way. Materials such as family photographs and cooking utensils reflect children’s everyday lives. Dolls and play figures look like people in the community. The outdoor space is also inviting, with natural plant life, open areas for moving freely and sturdy climbing equipment.

ADULT/CHILD INTERACTION: Many teachers believe that as long as children are handling materials, they are engaged in active learning. Manipulation of materials is essential, of course, but

by itself does not constitute active learning. Adults plan the kinds of experiences children need in order to grow in all areas of development. Children are also most likely to become engaged in learning and achieve higher levels of social, cognitive, and language functioning when adults form partnerships with them. Adult partners are responsive and interactive rather than directive and controlling. A give-and-take relationship exists, with children and adults both participating as leaders or followers, teachers or learners, speakers or listeners.

By sharing control of the day’s activities, children learn how to take responsibility for themselves and one another; develop confidence in their ability to set the course of their own learning; and practice solving child-size problems in age appropriate ways, knowing there is backup support if needed. Sharing control does not mean letting children take over and run wild. Adults balance the freedom children need for exploration with the limits necessary to guarantee their safety and well-being and to support their individual mental and social development.

DAILY ROUTINE: Each day in a HighScope setting follows a schedule of events called the daily routine. This routine provides consistency and predictability for both children and adults. One regular part of the routine—the daily “plan-do-review” process—gives children the opportunity to decide what they intend to do (plan), to follow through on their course of action (do), and then to reflect on their experiences with other children and adults (review). Large- and small-group experiences are also part of the daily routine, along with the fellowship of sharing a snack or meal and the fun of being outdoors.

CURRICULUM PLANNING & ASSESSMENT: Teachers and other caregivers regularly write notes about children’s behaviors, experiences, and interests. Each child’s development is then measured on the HighScope Child Observation Record. Experiences that encourage children’s growth and development are planned around these careful observations. Teachers also use these notes to help parents better understand their children’s development and to make suggestions about how to extend classroom learning at home. To strive for continued high quality, programs can also be evaluated with the HighScope Program Quality Assessment (PQA) through the Community Foundation’s Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP). Call 237-9740 for more information.

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