

# All About HighScope

## 1 Educational Approach

*Practical summaries of HighScope's history, educational approach, and curriculum*

### What is the HighScope educational approach?

HighScope is an “active participatory learning” approach to educating children from birth to young adulthood. Developed in 1962 in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the HighScope approach is now used in tens of thousands of half- and full-day preschools, nursery schools, Head Start programs, prekindergarten programs, child care centers, home-based child care programs, and programs for children with special needs in the United States and around the world. Children and families from many racial, national, religious, and financial backgrounds participate in HighScope programs.

The HighScope approach blends the knowledge from research on child development and learning with practical teaching experience in the classroom and other educational settings. Long-term studies show the HighScope approach promotes the healthy development of children and provides long-lasting benefits throughout adulthood.

### What is HighScope's viewpoint about education?

Children's interests and choices are at the heart of HighScope programs. This approach to education is called “child-initiated learning.” We provide children with a wide variety of materials (books, toys, art supplies, equipment, and household objects) and plan experiences that build on their interests and expand their learning. We also encourage their early development by observing, supporting, and extending what they do. We call this “intentional teaching.”

Children learn best through active involvement with people, materials, events, and ideas.

## Children's interests and choices are at the heart of HighScope programs.

The HighScope approach has been tested through more than 45 years of practical experience in classrooms and other settings in the United States and around the world. This

approach provides teachers with a blueprint for organizing the classroom and playground; creating a consistent, predictable daily routine; and interacting with children in a warm and supportive manner. Every day, the program offers one-on-one adult attention, promises children that they can choose interesting things to do, and gives children a sense of control over themselves and their surroundings.

In HighScope settings, we plan experiences for children that encourage independent thinking, initiative (the ability to make and then follow through on a plan), and creativity. Young children's capabilities develop quickly when they can act on their own ideas, use materials freely, and exercise their imaginations. We also encourage curiosity, decision making, cooperation, persistence (staying with their ideas), and problem solving. Children use these capabilities every day in the program and at home. Children also become familiar with basic ideas in reading and writing, math and science, and other areas that prepare them for starting school. Over time, they develop the necessary knowledge and skills they will carry into their later school years and into adulthood.

## What are HighScope's goals for young children?

- 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 other children and their teachers about what they have done and what they have learned.
- To learn to express their feelings and get along with others in rewarding relationships.
- To gain knowledge and skills in important content areas including approaches to learning; social and emotional development; physical development and health; language, literacy, and communication; mathematics; creative arts; science and technology; and social studies.

## What are the features of the HighScope approach to early childhood education?

- **Active participatory learning** — In the HighScope approach, children are involved in direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. Children carry out their plans and choices by working with materials and interacting with other children and adults. We plan activities and support their learning by using HighScope's 58 key developmental indicators, which are behaviors that reflect the important learning areas for young children.

- **Adult-child interaction** — In the HighScope classroom or center, we establish a safe and caring setting where children can be happy and busy pursuing their interests and learning. We observe and interact with children at their level in order to discover how they think and to encourage each child’s initiative and learning activities. We also share control of all learning experiences and encourage children to solve problems with materials, turn to other children for help, work together, and resolve conflicts together.
- **Learning environment** — Furniture and equipment in the HighScope setting are arranged and labeled in several clearly laid out and easy-to-see interest areas, such as the block area, house area, or art area. Labels can be easily understood by children, for example, a drawing of a hammer to represent the woodworking area or a photo of a paintbrush and the letters *ART* in the art area. This room arrangement allows children to independently find, use, and return the materials they need to carry out their chosen activities. The labels form the foundation on which children can build skills in reading, writing, and math. Children also spend time outside every day experiencing all the physical and sensory properties (sights, sounds, smells, and textures) of the natural environment. Taken together, the indoor and outdoor environments provide children with a full range of learning opportunities.
- **Daily routine** — Each day in a HighScope setting follows a similar schedule of events called the daily routine, which provides consistency and predictability for both children and adults. A daily plan-do-review process (the core of the daily routine) gives children the opportunity to decide what they intend to do, to follow through on their course of action, and then to reflect on their experiences with other children and adults. 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.
- **Assessment** — In HighScope programs, we regularly write down factual notes about each child’s behaviors, experiences, and interests. We use the Child Observation Record (COR), based on these notes, to measure each child’s development. Based on these careful and direct observations, we plan experiences that will encourage children’s growth and development. We also use these notes in parent meetings to help families better understand their children’s development and how they can extend classroom learning at home. To guarantee the continued high quality of the program and its management, we regularly evaluate ourselves and our programs by using the Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA).

Clearly laid out and easy-to-see interest areas give children a sense of control over their surroundings.

## How can families use the HighScope approach at home?

Many of the activities that we do in our programs can also be done by families at home. For example, families can provide many different learning materials, often using everyday objects that cost little or nothing. Families can encourage their children to make plans, carry them out, and talk about what they have learned from their experience. We also suggest that families try to be more consistent and predictable in their routines so everyone in their family knows what to expect.

Each day in a HighScope setting follows a similar schedule of events called the daily routine.

We welcome families to visit their child's HighScope classroom or program. We may also request the opportunity to visit families and their child in their home once or twice each year. From these home and classroom visits, we learn from one another and become partners in promoting the growth of their child. Together, we can listen to, talk to, and play with children in ways that encourage their development and strengthen their learning.

### All About HighScope

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