

High Scope: A Constructivist Approach



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The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation is a nonprofit organization that sponsors and supports the High/Scope educational approach. The program is based on Piaget's intellectual development theory. High/Scope provides broad, realistic educational experiences geared to children's current stages of development, to promote the constructive processes of learning necessary to broaden emerging intellectual and social skills (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1989).

High/Scope is based on three fundamental principles:

- Active participation of children in choosing, organizing, and evaluating learning activities, which are undertaken with careful teacher observation and guidance in a learning environment replete with a rich variety of materials located in various classroom learning centers
- Regular daily planning by the teaching staff in accord with a developmentally based curriculum model and careful child observations
- Developmentally sequenced goals and materials for children based on the High/Scope "key experiences" (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1989)

Basic Principles and Goals of the High/Scope Approach

The High/Scope program strives to

develop in children a broad range of skills, including the problem solving, interpersonal, and communication skills that are essential for successful living in a rapidly changing society. The curriculum encourages student initiative by providing children with materials, equipment, and time to pursue activities they choose. At the same time, it provides teachers with a framework for guiding children's independent activities toward sequenced learning goals.

The teacher plays a key role in instructional activities by selecting appropriate, developmentally sequenced material and by encouraging children to adopt an active problem-solving approach to learning....This teacher-student interaction—teachers helping students achieve developmentally sequenced goals while also encouraging them to set many of their

own goals—uniquely distinguishes the High/Scope Curriculum from direct-instruction and child-centered curricula (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1989).

The High/Scope approach influences the arrangement of the classroom, the manner in which teachers interact with children, and the methods employed to assess children.

The Five Elements of the High/Scope Approach

Teachers create the context for learning in the High/Scope approach by implementing and supporting five essential elements: active learning, classroom arrangement, the daily schedule, assessment, and the curriculum (content).

Active Learning

The idea that children are the source of their own learning forms the center of the High/Scope curriculum. Teachers support children's active learning by providing a variety of materials, making plans and reviewing activities with children, interacting with and carefully observing individual children, and leading small- and large-group active learning activities.

Classroom Arrangement

The classroom arrangement invites children to engage in personal, meaningful, educational experiences. In addition, the classroom contains three or more interest areas that encourage choice.

The classroom organization of materials and equipment supports the daily routine—children know where to find materials and what materials they can use. This encourages development of self-direction and independence.

The teacher selects the centers and activities to use in the classroom based on several considerations:

- Interests of the children (e.g., kindergarten children are interested in blocks, housekeeping, and art)
- Opportunities for facilitating active involvement in seriation, number, time relations, classification, spatial relations, and language development
- Opportunities for reinforcing needed skills and concepts and functional use of those skills and concepts

Arranging the environment, then, is essential to implementing a program's philosophy. This is true for Montessori, High/Scope, and every other program.

Daily Schedule

The schedule considers developmental levels of children, incorporates a sixty- to seventy-minute plan-do-review process, provides for content areas, is as consistent throughout the day as possible, and contains a minimum number of transitions.

The plan-do-review process is an important part of the High/Scope approach and is one worthy of your particular attention. The plan-do-review is a sequence in which children, with

the help of the teacher, initiate plans for projects or activities; work in learning centers to implement their plans; and then review what they have done with the teacher and their fellow classmates.

Assessment

Teachers keep notes about significant behaviors, changes, statements, and things that help them better understand a child's way of thinking and learning. Teachers use two mechanisms to help them collect data: the key experiences note form and a portfolio. The High/Scope Child Observation Record is also used to assess children's development.

Curriculum

The High/Scope curriculum comes from two sources: children's interests and the key experiences, which are lists of observable learning behaviors. Basing a curriculum in part on children's interests is very constructivist and implements the philosophies of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky.

A Daily Routine That Supports Active Learning

The High/Scope curriculum's daily routine is made up of a plan-do-review sequence and several additional elements. The plan-do-review sequence gives children opportunities to express intentions about their activities while keeping the teacher intimately involved in the whole process. The following five processes support the daily routine and contribute to its successful functioning.

Planning Time

Planning time gives children a structured, consistent chance to express their ideas to adults and to see themselves as individuals who can act on decisions. They experience the power of independence and are conscious of their intentions. This supports the development of purpose and confidence.

The teacher talks with children about the plans they have made before the children carry them out. This helps children clarify their ideas and think about how to proceed. Talking with children about their plans provides an opportunity for the teacher to encourage and respond to each child's ideas, to suggest ways to strengthen the plans so they will be successful, and to understand and gauge each child's level of development and thinking style. Children and teachers benefit from these conversations and reflections. Children feel reinforced and ready to start their work, and teachers have ideas of what opportunities for extension might arise, what difficulties children might have, and where problem solving may be needed. In such a classroom, children and teachers are playing appropriate and important roles.

Key Experiences

Teachers continually encourage and support children's interests and involvement in activities that occur within an organized environment and a consistent routine. Teachers plan for key experiences that may broaden and strengthen children's emerging abilities. Children generate many of these experiences on their own; others require teacher guidance. Many key experiences are natural extensions of children's projects and interests.

Work Time

This part of the plan-do-review sequence is generally the longest time period in the daily routine. The teacher's role during work time is to observe children to see how they gather information, interact with peers, and solve problems, and when appropriate, teachers enter into the children's activities to encourage, extend, and set up problem-solving situations.

Cleanup Time

During cleanup time, children return materials and equipment to their labeled places and store their incomplete projects, restoring order to the classroom. All children's materials in the classroom are within reach and on open shelves. Clear labeling enables children to return all work materials to their appropriate places.

Recall Time

Recall time, the final phase of the plan-do-review sequence, is the time when children represent their work-time experience in a variety of developmentally appropriate ways. They might recall the names of the children they involved in their plan, draw a picture of the building they made, or describe the problems they encountered. Recall strategies include drawing pictures, making models, physically demonstrating how a plan was carried out, or verbally recalling the events of work time. The teacher supports children's linking of the actual work to their original plan.

This review permits children to reflect on what they did and how it was done. It brings closure to children's planning and work-time activities. Putting their ideas and experiences into words also facilitates children's language development. Most important, it enables children to represent to others their mental schemes.

Providing for Diversity and Disability

The High/Scope curriculum is a developmentally appropriate approach that is child centered and promotes active learning. The use of learning centers, active learning, and the plan-do-review cycle, as well as allowing children to progress at their own pace, provides for children's individual and special needs. High/Scope teachers emphasize the broad cognitive, social, and physical abilities that are important for all children, instead of focusing on a child's deficits. High/Scope teachers identify where a child is developmentally and then provide a rich range of experiences appropriate for that level. For example, they would encourage a four-year-old who is functioning at a two-year-old level to express his or her plans by pointing, gesturing, and saying single words, and they would immerse the child in a conversational environment that provided many natural opportunities for using and hearing language (Educational Programs: Early Childhood, 2007).

Many early childhood programs for children with special needs incorporate the High/Scope approach. For example, the Regional Early Childhood Center at Rockburn Elementary School in Elkridge, Maryland, operates a full-day multiple-intense-needs class for children with disabilities and typically developing peers and uses the High/Scope approach. The daily routine includes greeting time, small groups (e.g., art, sensory, preacademics), planning time (i.e., picking a center), work time at the centers, cleanup time, recall (i.e., discussing where

they “worked”), snacks, circle time with stories, movement and music, and outside time (Regional Early Childhood Center, 2007).

Further Thoughts

The High/Scope approach represents one approach to educating young children. Whereas Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf are European based in philosophy and context, High/Scope puts into practice the learning-by-doing American philosophy. It builds on Dewey’s ideas of active learning and teaching in the context of children’s interests.

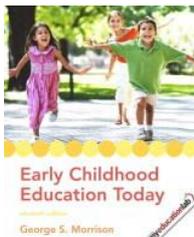
High/Scope is widely used in Head Start and early childhood programs across the United States; High/Scope research has demonstrated that its approach is compatible with Head Start guidelines and performance standards.

There are number of advantages to implementing the High/Scope approach:

- It offers a method for implementing a constructivist-based program that has its roots in Dewey’s philosophy and Piagetian cognitive theory.
- It is widely popular and has been extensively researched and tested.
- There is a vast network of teacher training and support provided by the High/Scope Foundation.
- It is research based and it works.

As a result, the High/Scope approach is viewed by early childhood practitioners as one that implements many of the best practices embraced by the profession.

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