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# Embracing HighScope: Questioning the “Rules”

BY HOLLY DELGADO, HIGHSCOPE DEMONSTRATION PRESCHOOL TEACHER

In the world of early childhood, buzzwords and phrases such as “best practice,” “developmentally appropriate,” and “intentional teaching” are heard frequently. As an early childhood teacher with ten years of experience, I pride myself on being an intentional teacher who has employed developmentally appropriate best practices at every opportunity. According to my



The transition to using the HighScope Curriculum has given me a new perspective on my teaching practices and beliefs.

line of thinking, if the curriculum and assessments I am using are research based, then the way I am implementing them must also be developmentally appropriate. However, as I now reflect on my early years of teaching, I wonder whether I truly knew then what those buzzwords meant, and whether my assessment of my own teaching practices was correct. Or had I, unaware, been implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum in a way that made it less so? In this article, I describe how learning to use the HighScope Curriculum has allowed me to break many of the old rules I was living by and replace them with beliefs and practices that have given those buzzwords new meaning.

## From “What” to “How”

My transition to the HighScope Curriculum over the past year has confirmed what I have known about my students all along: children are active learners who need hands-on experiences with real materials. But as I learned more about HighScope, I found myself wondering if I had truly been maximizing every learning opportunity for the children in my classroom.

## Scaffolding

As adults employ various strategies to support children, they use *scaffolding* where appropriate. HighScope uses the term *scaffolding* to describe the process whereby adults support and gently extend children’s thinking and reasoning. 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.

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Much like my college education, the curriculum I had been using provided me with the “what” of teaching; what developmental domains my lesson plans should be centered around, what skills and knowledge my children were expected to attain, and — perhaps my biggest take-away from my curriculum materials — what learning centers should be present in my classroom for my students to achieve success. Only after I had been trained in HighScope, and had taken time to reflect on my many years of teaching, did I recognize I had been missing the most crucial element of working with children, one that the curriculum I had been using hadn’t taught me — that is, the “how”: how do you interact with children and differentiate instruction in a way that encourages success for each student? How do you facilitate problem-solving skills and conflict resolution in a way that builds independence and fosters resilience? And how do you, as a teacher, use your curriculum resources and classroom materials wisely to ensure you are intentionally meeting not only the individual needs, but also scaffolding (supporting and gently extending) the development and interests of each child enrolled in your classroom?



Children are active learners who need hands-on experience with real materials.

## Becoming a Learning Partner

According to *Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool* (Epstein, 2014), to achieve active participatory learning, children and teachers should be “partners in shaping the learning experience” (p. 8). This was something I had always implemented during work time and outside time, but I now asked myself what it would look like during other parts of the daily routine. In particular, how would this work during whole-group activities? After all, I believed teacher-directed portions of the day were essential to making sure I was “really” teaching and my students were “really” learning. Over the course of this past year, teaching in the HighScope Demonstration Preschool classroom, I realized that, as educators, we tend to follow a set of unwritten rules — for example, that materials should remain in the area in which they are housed or that

“I realized that, as educators, we tend to follow a set of unwritten rules — for example, that materials should remain in the area in which they are housed or that children should sit on their bottoms when on the rug for large group.”

## PUBLISHER CREDITS

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children should sit on their bottoms when on the rug for large group. Since implementing the HighScope Curriculum, however, I began to question many of these “rules.” Does it matter if Leila chooses to lie on her stomach or Esaiiah prefers kneeling to sitting on his bottom during message board? Isn’t it more important that everyone can see and is actively participating? Why shouldn’t the play dough tacos be allowed on the rocket ship in the block area? Don’t astronauts need food on the moon, too?

Upon further reflection, I realized we even go so far as to provide children each of the movements expected for certain fingerplays and songs. Most adults would likely perform “The Itsy Bitsy Spider” in nearly the same way; however, since implementing the HighScope Curriculum, I’ve come to learn that a child’s interpretation of a spider climbing up a waterspout and the rain falling down on him looks much different, and is definitely more fun, than the fingerplay we all know.

Additionally, I’ve realized that expecting children to move their fingers from thumb to pinky in the expected way may disadvantage those children who lack the fine-motor dexterity needed to make this motion. Since being trained in HighScope, I catch myself more closely examining and questioning the status quo; I recognize that my job as an educator is to make intentional decisions that are mindful of child choice.



Children need to be supported in their creativity, ideas, and abilities. I have found this to be much more important than following the unwritten “rules” in our heads, such as keeping materials in a particular area or having children sit on the floor in a particular way.

Another unwritten “rule” I used to follow was to limit the number of children allowed to work in a certain area of the classroom. By doing this, I thought I was establishing a method of classroom management. Since space was limited, I could avoid potential conflict if, for example, I only allowed four children at the sand and water table at the same time. What I didn’t fully realize was that, by doing so, I was also eliminating opportunities for learning and problem solving. Now, instead of limiting the number of children who can work in an area, I make sure I am aware of where in the classroom potential conflicts may arise due to the number of children interested in that particular area. Proactively, I observe where children regularly play and make sure there are plenty

“I support children in their efforts to express their intentions, to understand the intentions of others, and to find a solution for conflicts that arise.”

of materials available. Where possible, I also enlarge the play space by moving shelves, adding workspace, or switching areas to a larger part of the room.

During planning time, when eight children make a plan to work at the sand and water table, I also make a plan to be there to provide support in resolving conflicts as they arise. I’ve come to realize that my role isn’t to avoid or prevent the potential for conflict but, rather, to help children articulate their needs, recognize the needs of others, and assist in resolving conflicts. Then, as we work at the sand and water table — teacher and eight children — we will discuss potential solutions to problems as they arise. We’ll look at where we have positioned ourselves around the table and talk about the space each child needs and how that can be accommodated; we’ll consider the possibility of placing additional bins of water on the floor or on another table, to increase access to water; and we’ll talk about the materials each child needs. If some children need materials that are already being used by others, we’ll talk about how these children can accomplish their plan with other resources. In this situation, children may pose a turn-taking solution, or children who need more personal space or less distraction while they work may choose to make a new work-time plan and return to the sand and water table later. Ever since I first began implementing the HighScope Curriculum, I have felt my role in these situations to be much clearer: I support children in their efforts to express their intentions, to understand the intentions of others, and to find a solution for conflicts that arise.



At the sand and water table, my co-teacher Kenneth imitates children who are carrying out their plans and sharing space and materials.



## Steps in Resolving Conflicts With Preschoolers

1. Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions.
2. Acknowledge children’s feelings.
3. Gather information.
4. Restate the problem.
5. Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together.
6. Be prepared to give follow-up support.

Learn more at

[highscope.org/conflict](https://highscope.org/conflict)

## Conflict Resolution

Over the course of this year, one of the HighScope strategies I have become very familiar with is use of the six steps to conflict resolution. Although I had always approached conflict calmly and acknowledged children’s feelings, after being trained in HighScope, I recognized the importance of all of the steps, especially gathering information. As adults, we often make assumptions about what we see children doing. For example, one day in the block area of the Demonstration Preschool, two children — Santiago and Bryce — were yelling and pulling on opposite sides of a steering wheel. As I approached and attempted to process the situation, I assumed both children wanted to drive the car they had created. After stating to the children that I had heard them yelling and that I thought they sounded angry, I asked what the problem was.



I have found the six steps to conflict resolution to be very important in the classroom this year. With these steps, adults can support children to feel empowered in finding their own solutions to problems.

As it turned out, Santiago simply wanted to move the steering wheel to another place on the car; he was worried that if the steering wheel remained where it was, they would drive the car into the wall. However, until we worked through the steps of conflict resolution, Santiago was unable to explain this in words; his natural instinct was to simply move the steering wheel and, like me, Bryce wrongly assumed that Santiago was taking the steering wheel away from him because he wanted to drive, too. By using the steps of conflict resolution, Bryce, Santiago, and I were able to discuss the problem and come up with a solution together. In this situation, the needs of both children were compatible, but the children needed time and adult support to work through the problem. If I had simply required that they take turns, something often

“For me, work time is the time of day when I can really focus on building relationships with the children in my class.”

viewed by adults as the obvious solution, one or both children would have been unable to carry out his plan. Now, after using the six steps, and with the car headed in the correct direction, the two boys sat side by side discussing more important matters — specifically, what they were planning to buy once they reached Target.

### **Playing and Scaffolding at Work Time**

Work time has always been the time of day that I enjoy the most. I love being able to play with children, getting down on their level and following their lead. For me, work time is the time of day when I can really focus on building relationships with the children in my class. After a year in a HighScope classroom, I now realize that, prior to implementing HighScope in my teaching, my daily goal often was to get around to every child and ask as many questions as I could about what the children were doing, in order to collect enough anecdotes for assessment. At the same time, menial tasks, such as sanitizing the table for snack, monitoring the paint and glue usage, making sure every child got to the bathroom, and thinking about our next activity, often weighed on the back of my mind. In trying to check off each task on my list, I was missing the most important component of work time — being fully engaged with the children during play.

Now, having arranged the classroom and our daily routine with thought and intention, having implemented a child-centered approach to problem solving and conflict resolution, and having created a collaborative environment in which the children and the teacher share control, the HighScope Curriculum allows me the opportunity to immerse myself in play. That’s not to say I don’t still have days when I feel like I’m spending a vast amount of time supporting conflict resolution, but such days are definitely fewer because I’m more present in children’s play and because I have provided opportunities for children to feel in control of their time in the classroom, including developing their own ability to resolve conflicts.

Rather than flitting around the classroom or worrying about the little things, I now allow myself to become fully engaged in the children’s play while simultaneously scaffolding their learning via my interactions with them. For example, one morning when I entered our toy area, I found Beckett and David laying the magnetic tiles side by side on the ground. They had created a long line of tiles approximately five feet in length. After joining in their play, adding more tiles to the line, I noticed Beckett lying down next to the structure; so, I simply asked, “I wonder how many tiles long you are?” From there, the learning concepts present in our play increased exponentially. We counted tiles, measured children using unconventional units, and discussed accuracy of measurement, including the need to place one’s feet exactly at the bottom of the structure. We wrote our names on sticky notes and placed them on the structure to

“Like so many others, I believed the praise I was providing children was enhancing their self-esteem. It didn’t even cross my mind that this could be backfiring on me....”



Work time is an important time for building relationships! Observing, commenting, and following children’s lead supports the children as they pursue their interests.

mark how tall we each were and invited other children over to determine their height. Because I was fully present in the play, I was available to gently extend the children’s learning to a higher level and to collect numerous anecdotes in multiple areas of development, including approaches to learning, social and emotional development, mathematics, and science and technology.

### Praise Versus Encouragement

Perhaps one of the concepts most foreign to me upon learning the HighScope Curriculum was the idea of praise versus encouragement. Although I had always

cringed when I heard my colleagues make arbitrary “good job” or “way to go” statements, I often found myself linking praise to children’s specific achievements or activities. For example, I may have said, “I like the way you used all of those colors on your painting,” or “Great job pedaling the Big Wheel all by yourself!” Like so many others, I believed the praise I was providing children was enhancing their self-esteem. It didn’t even cross my mind that this could be backfiring on me and encouraging children to rely on extrinsic praise, adult validation, and achievement of an expectation rather than intrinsically motivating children to succeed at their own level of development. Without realizing it, I was placing a future expectation not only on the child I praised but also on any other children who may have heard my praise of that child’s actions.

After learning the value of encouragement over praise, I now wondered whether the boy I had praised in the art area chose to use multiple colors of paint from that point forward (instead of following his own plan) because of me, or whether the girl on the Big Wheel never moved to a larger bicycle out of fear she wouldn’t be able to pedal it correctly and do a “great job.” I then wondered about my absence of praise for the other children, and how it might be even more detrimental — did the girl who was only using blue paint or the boy who still needed to push the bike with his feet feel unsuccessful when I praised the others?

Surprisingly, this was not as difficult a habit to break as I had originally expected. During my first few months as a HighScope teacher, I was keenly aware of my use of praise, but because I had already been linking praise to something specific, I simply

“As I made the transition from praise to encouragement, I began to use statements like ‘You used a lot of different colors on your painting.’”

needed to drop the praise component. As I made the transition from praise to encouragement, I began to use statements like “You used a lot of different colors on your painting,” or “You pedaled your bike all the way around the climber.” These statements simply reflect the work of the child rather than my opinion of it. It takes the focus off of me and keeps it on the children, where it should be. It also helps children to focus on their own abilities, ideas, and reflection, allowing them to make intentional choices, carry out their ideas, and think about them whether I am present or not.

Now that this process is much more natural for me, I have begun to take my encouragement a step further: I engage in conversations — often asking children to talk about their own work, posing questions like “We only have red, yellow, and blue paint out. I wonder how you made that shade of purple?” In doing so, I am able to have a much more authentic conversation with children, and I encourage them to evaluate their own work. With the shift from praise to encouragement, I have drawn the focus away from the product and redirected it to the process.



While learning the finer points of praise versus encouragement, I started by commenting on children's work in statements that simply reflected the work of the children rather than any opinion I may have had of it.



“HighScope has provided me with the ‘how’ of teaching. However, HighScope also gives me a foundation; it answers the ‘why’ of early childhood education.”

## A New Understanding of Old Rules

| Old Way of Thinking   | New (HighScope) Way of Thinking  |
|---|--|
| Children focus best when they sit still and listen. Quiet bodies make for active minds. | When children position and move their bodies in ways they find comfortable, they are more free to learn.                     |
| Make sure materials stay in their respective classroom areas during play (choice) time. | Materials can be moved between areas to support children’s play, and then returned to their own areas at cleanup time.       |
| Teach children the “correct” movements and fingerplays to accompany songs and chants.   | Encourage children to invent their own movements and fingerplays to songs and chants.  |
| Keep the classroom materials orderly. Mess is distracting for children.                 | Play can be messy. Be a partner in children’s play. There’s plenty of time to clean up later.                                |
| Limit the number of children who can play in any area.                                  | Allow all children who request it to play in an area. Provide ample materials and, if necessary, move or enlarge the space.  |
| Avoid social conflicts and/or resolve them for children.                                | Allow conflicts to arise naturally during play and help children learn how to resolve them.                                  |
| Praise enhances children’s self esteem and motivates them to learn.                     | Praise makes children rely on external motivation. Encouragement builds internal motivation and an inherent desire to learn. |

### Embracing the “How” and “Why”

As mentioned earlier, HighScope has provided me with the “how” of teaching. However, HighScope also gives me a foundation; it answers the “why” of early childhood education. Since the 1960s, the HighScope Educational Research Foundation has been conducting research and evaluating the HighScope Curriculum on a number of levels. According to *Essentials of Active Learning in Preschool*, both internal and external research shows that young children enrolled in well-designed HighScope programs perform higher “on measures of the academic and social skills needed for school success” (Epstein, p. 23). Thus, I know that the changes I have made in my teaching practices have a significant impact on the children in my classroom, both in the short term and the long term.

Gaining an understanding of why this is so important — that is, why implementation of the HighScope Curriculum is effective — has helped me commit to the changes I’ve made. Since finding HighScope and fully investing myself in implementing the curriculum, I have opened myself up to examining my own teaching processes. Over the



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past year, those buzz phrases of “best practice,” “developmentally appropriate,” and “intentional teaching” have become much clearer to me. I not only understand what those words mean but I am also practicing them on a daily basis.



Having learned the long-term benefits of HighScope for children, it feels especially good to be able to support children in their active learning discoveries every day!

#### Reference

Epstein, A. S. (2014). *Essentials of active learning in preschool: Getting to know the HighScope Curriculum*. 2d.Ed. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.

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## CLASSROOM HINTS

# Implementing HighScope

BY HOLLY DELGADO



Getting started with HighScope might seem like a daunting task, but beginning with a few basic changes can keep you from becoming overwhelmed in the process. Making some changes to your classroom learning environment and daily routine can be a great place to begin. In this article, we'll explore some ideas for doing just that!

### Organize and Label Your Classroom Environment

HighScope early childhood classrooms are often recognizable upon entry. They are typically divided into the following interest areas or learning centers: art area, block area, house area, toy area, book area, and sand and water area. Additional areas, such as a woodworking area, music area, writing area, or computer area may also be present at various points throughout the school year, but it is important to limit the number of total areas so children do not feel overwhelmed.

Remember that math and science learning take place throughout the classroom and don't need their own separate area. Each area is denoted with signage and referred to using simple names and pictures that are easily understandable by



young children. For example, accompanying the words "Book Area" may be a realistic picture of a book.

In addition to labeling each interest area, all materials located within a HighScope classroom should be grouped according to function and labeled. A variety of types of labels should be present throughout the classroom and can include text, actual objects, photographs, drawings, tracings, catalog or magazine pictures, etc. Labels should be present both on the container holding the materials and the shelf on which it's stored.



In addition to enhancing classroom organization, labeling encourages children to independently retrieve and replace materials in the correct location. Further, pairing pictures with words serves the purpose of enhancing literacy development.

### Use Letter Links



Alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness are typical learning goals of all early childhood programs. They are key developmental indicators (KDIs) in the HighScope Curriculum content area of Language, Literacy, and

Communication. Young children often begin making phonological connections via the sounds and letters of their own name and the names of their peers. Letter links pair the initial sound of a child's name with a phonetically corresponding object (one whose initial sound matches the first sound in the name); for example, Holly and helicopter or Kenneth and kite. Pair children's name with a letter link to help children develop phonological awareness as well as to be more independent in the classroom. Letter links can be used in many places in the classroom, such as on cubbies, on a sign-in sheet, on a small group list, on individual artwork, on planning and recall tools, or on the message board. You can learn more at the [HighScope letter links website](#).





### Read a Message Board at Greeting Time

Message board is a whole-group opportunity that takes place shortly after everyone has arrived. This time is used to share information with the children about any changes or special activities happening that day, as well as upcoming events, such as weekends or field trips. For example, the message board might be used at greeting time to introduce new materials — such as new colors of paint added to the art area, or cornstarch added to the sand and water table. Or it may be used to tell children that a specific material that was used the previous day in small group is now available in the toy area. Message board time could also be used to discuss a problem that affects the whole class, such as safety concerns on the playground or difficulty transitioning from work time to cleanup time. Together, you and the children can develop potential solutions to the problem.

Messages should be written simply, using pictures, words, familiar symbols, numbers, drawings, and real items, to allow children at various levels of literacy development the ability to “read” them and



participate in the corresponding discussion. In addition to preparing children for that particular day, message board is an opportunity to build literacy development as children begin to recognize numbers, letters, and words, particularly their own name, the names of their peers, and the names of the interest areas. It can also be an opportunity to introduce rhyming (the last syllables of words) and alliteration (the beginning phoneme of words) as well as build classroom community.

Schedules permitting, encourage parents to stay for message board as well. With an introduction from you as the teacher at the beginning of the year, this could open up a great way for parents to

reflect on the day with their child at pickup time: “I remember from reading the message board that oil pastels were added to the art area. I wonder if you used them today?”

### Implement the Plan-Do-Review Process

A hallmark of the HighScope Curriculum is the plan-do-review process. This process provides children an opportunity to think through and make choices about what they are going to do, implement those ideas, and then reflect on their activities. Via the plan-do-review process, HighScope teachers are helping children “gain confidence as thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers” (Epstein, p. 13).

The first step of the process is “plan” — planning time is the part of the daily routine when children communicate their ideas of where they will work, who they will work with, what materials they want to use, what they want to do, and how they will go about doing it. Depending on the developmental levels of the children in your classroom, as well as their familiarity with the planning process, children’s planning strategies will move on a continuum from concrete to abstract and from few details to highly developed



or multiple plans. At the beginning of the school year, as children are just beginning to become familiar with the various interest areas and the materials available in each area, you may choose to drive a planning “train” or to be a planning “snake,” moving throughout the classroom as a group, stopping in each area so children can see what is available and make individual plans; then you can drop children off in each area according to their interests. As children become more familiar with the materials, perhaps your strategy will remain concrete and will require children to go out into the classroom, retrieve an item they want to work with, and bring it back to the table to use in making a plan. Eventually, as children develop, plans become more complex and detailed, and your planning strategies can become more abstract — such as having children throw a bean bag on the area card corresponding to the area in which they wish to work, and having them describe their plan. Or you might have children plan using a puppet. When children have finished making their plan, they can start on it right away.





The “do” component of plan-do-review is typically known as work time. This part of the daily routine encourages children to carry out their plan and to play with a purpose. This 45- to 60-minute portion of the day gives children the opportunity to freely engage with materials, interact with peers, problem solve, and expand their knowledge and skills in all areas of development. During work time, adults should be observing children’s learning, immersing themselves in the play of the children by following children’s lead, and gently extending children’s play via scaffolding. Work time ends with children and adults working together to clean up the materials used and placing them back into their correct, labeled locations.

Immediately following work time and cleanup, the final step of the process is “review,” or recall time. This is an opportunity for children to reflect, not only on what they did during work time but also on what they learned. Initially, recall strategies may need to be concrete. A “mystery bag” of items used by the children and collected by the teacher during cleanup time can be used; as items are removed from the bag, one at a time, the children and teacher can discuss both who used the object and how it was used. A digital camera or tablet can be used



as another concrete strategy; the teacher can take pictures of children engaged in play during work time, and the children can reflect on those pictures via discussion during recall time. As children become more comfortable with the recall process, strategies can become more abstract — for example, children can draw pictures or make play dough representations of what they did during work time. Similarly, games such as “recall ball” or “recall hopscotch” require abstract thinking as children talk about their work experience when they catch the ball or hop onto an area card.

### Reflect on the Process

However you choose to begin your transition to the HighScope Curriculum, remember — just as for the children, it is the process, not a product, that is most important. Thus, take time throughout your transition to self-reflect on your journey as a teacher. If you enjoy writing, keep a journal about the changes you have made and children’s reactions to them. Take pictures to help you remember the “before” and “after” conditions. If you prefer to think, do some self-reflection on your commute to and from work. If talking through the process with others is most beneficial, seek out a mentor who already implements HighScope to fidelity or a fellow teacher who is on the journey of transitioning to HighScope with you; set aside time to talk in detail about your experiences with the HighScope Curriculum, examining not only your reactions, but your children’s reactions to the changes that are occurring in your classroom environment.

Regular self-reflection will not only increase your confidence and competence in implementing the HighScope Curriculum but will also encourage you to acknowledge the work you have already done; to consider the children’s growth, development, and reaction to the changes you are making; and to continue to build on what is already working as you develop both short- and long-term plans for the future of your classroom and the children you teach.

## TRAINER-TO-TRAINER

# “We’ve Always Done It This Way!” Exploring and Making a Plan for Change

BY CHRISTINE SNYDER, HIGHSCOPE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

In this 75-minute workshop, participants will reflect on a change they have made in their life and how this felt. They will discuss the articles in this issue of *Extensions* in relation to the HighScope wheel of learning, and reflect on how Holly made changes, as discussed in her articles. Finally, they will identify changes they would like to make in their classroom and the support they will need to accomplish this.

### Materials needed:

- Copy of this issue’s lead article (one for each participant)
- Copy of this issue’s “Classroom Hints” (one for each participant)
- Copy of the HighScope Preschool wheel of learning, found at the end of this article (one for each participant)
- Index cards (one for each participant)

### Objectives (5 minutes)

By the end of this activity, participants will be able to

- Identify challenges and concerns that exist when making changes, such as implementing a new curriculum.
- Identify “first steps” to making the change to a new curriculum.



### Opening Activity (20 minutes)

1. Ask participants to silently reflect on a change they have had to make in their life not related to the classroom. Have them consider the following questions:
  - How did you feel about making the change prior to its happening?
  - What support did you have or would like to have had during the process of making this change?
  - How did you feel after the change was complete?
2. Have participants share their experiences with a partner or a small group.
3. As a large group, have participants share some general thoughts about how they felt before and after a change as well as the support needed to make a change happen.
4. Guide participants in elaborating on features of the process, including initial hesitations or excitement, how others assisted in making the change, and the outcome of the process.

### Central ideas (15 minutes)

5. Have participants read through the handout you made of this issue’s lead article, and ask them to discuss the following questions in their small groups:
  - What changes did the author make as a HighScope teacher? In particular, how did her thinking about the “rules” governing best practice change?
  - What did she observe in the classroom before versus after she made each change?
6. Support a whole-group conversation about the author’s perspective, and invite participants to make connections to their own feelings about a change in the curriculum or making small changes in the classroom. As participants share, be sure to acknowledge their feelings and their unique perspectives.

7. Ask participants to take a look at the HighScope wheel of learning and discuss the following questions in their small groups (for those who are entirely new to HighScope, it may be beneficial to review the areas of the wheel together first):

- Which components of the HighScope wheel of learning stand out for you?
- Which components are you most familiar with?
- Which components do you have questions about?

Have participants share some examples of their knowledge or experience with the wheel and its components. It may be supportive and helpful to offer your own background and initial implementation of a few HighScope topics.

### Practice (15 minutes)

8. Have participants use the lead article and the HighScope wheel to do the following with a partner:

- Compare Holly's stories (and the curriculum components mentioned) to the HighScope wheel and answer the following:
  1. How did the changes Holly made fit into the HighScope wheel?
  2. Why do you think Holly started with those changes?
  3. What changes might she attempt next?

9. Discuss these ideas as a whole group. Invite participants to share how they might feel making the changes that the author made. Ask them to consider why she highlighted those changes and to think about the ones they themselves are interested in exploring. Continue to acknowledge their feelings and perspectives about these new ideas and making changes in their classrooms.

### Application (15 minutes)

10. Ask participants to get into small groups and do the following:

- Review the chart Holly created (found in the lead article on page 9) to organize her thoughts about her "old ways of thinking" and her "new ways of thinking."
- In their table groups, have participants create a chart of their own "old ideas" and "new ideas" after reading about Holly's experience.

Invite a few participants to share their ideas with the overall group. Invite them to include any additional changes they would like to make, beyond the information presented in the article, to further incorporate the HighScope Curriculum in their classroom.

### Implementation (5 minutes)

11. Ask participants to

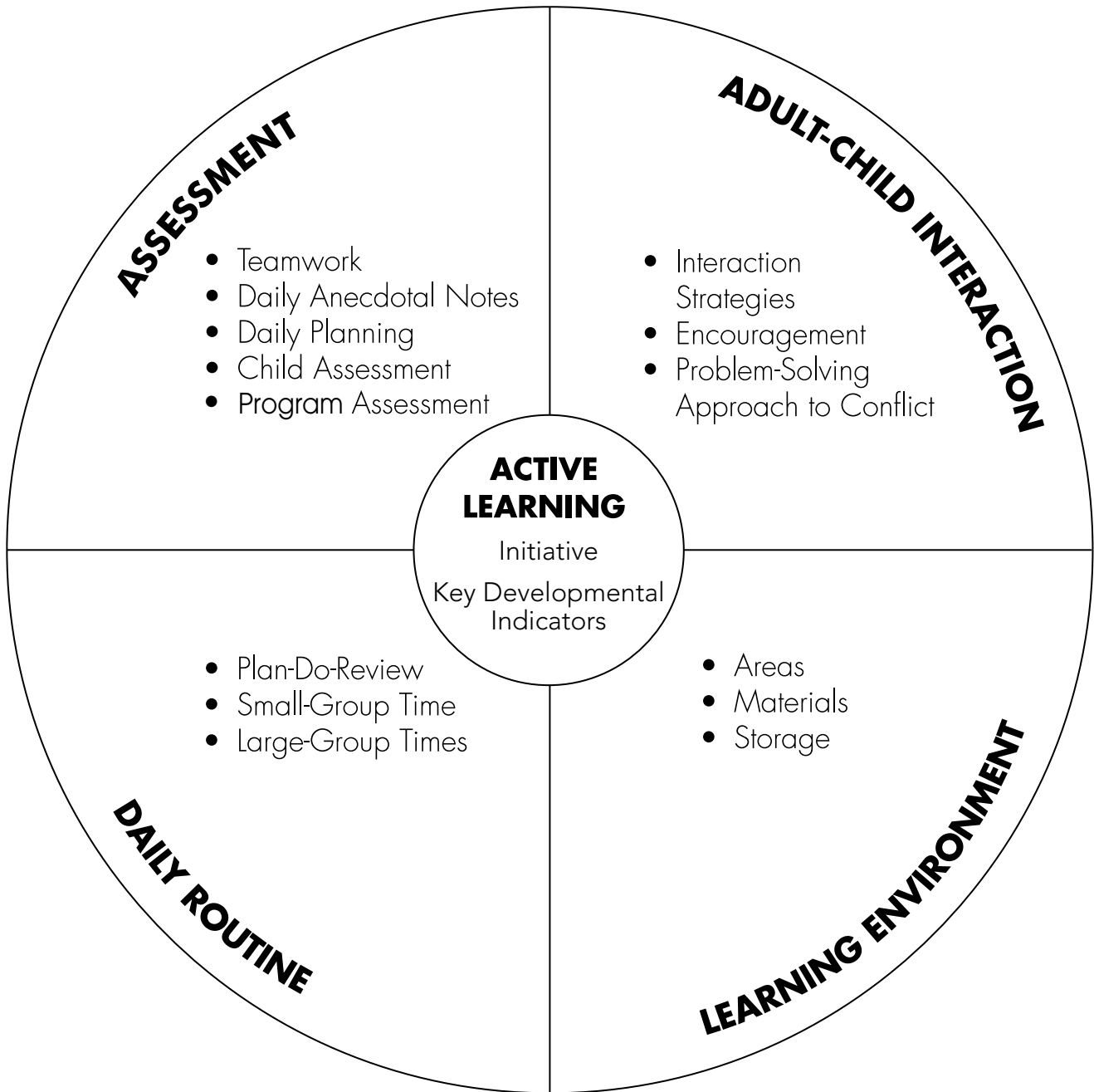
- Review the Classroom Hints article handout.
- Highlight or circle all the ideas they would like to implement in their classroom.
- On an index card, write down one idea from the Classroom Hints handout that they would like to start with.
- Write down what support they will need and who will provide it for them. (Remind participants that it might be helpful to think back to the opening activity and the ideas people had for the type of support that was beneficial to them during the process of change.)

12. Remind participants that this implementation plan is meant to help them collect their thoughts and decide where to start using the information they obtained from this training. Emphasize that not all changes can be made at once. Determining where to start, and then reviewing or evaluating each change before proceeding with the next one, helps create feelings of success and a positive outcome. Remind participants to acknowledge, as they go, what's working and what adjustments may be needed.



Christine Snyder is a HighScope Early Childhood Specialist. She has worked with young children for 17 years in a variety of settings. She enjoys the ways in which children are genuine, playful, and creative. Christine holds a master's degree in early childhood education from Eastern Michigan University.

# High Scope Preschool Wheel of Learning





## SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Supporting Children With Special Needs As They Begin Preschool

BY JAN DOWLING, HIGHSCOPE FIELD CONSULTANT AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE-PATHOLOGIST,  
ALPINE SCHOOL DISTRICT, AMERICAN FORK, UTAH



When children with special needs began attending preschool, they are spending several hours a day in a new place. It's not the same as their home — they are in a new and unfamiliar environment inhabited by adults and children they don't know. They may not understand where they are or why they are there, and it may take many weeks or even months before they are completely comfortable. They need acknowledgment, respect, and support — all the same things that we adults benefit from when we begin an important new experience.

## Adapting to Change

Consider this scenario — you've just been given some good news and... some bad news. The good news is that you are getting a new class in a new building and getting a huge raise! You are excited to go to your new building and get to work. The catch...your class will be in a country called Idanhilyct. Idanhilyct is a small country that, although near your home, you've never been to. You are unfamiliar with and unsure of the landscape, facilities, provisions, food, and customs. You've never met any of the citizens there and have no idea if they are nice, stern, or if they like new people who are different from them. You do know that you don't speak their language, and you wonder how you will communicate with them. You are more than a little nervous. Will you have what you need? Will you like it? How will you navigate the new environment? Will you be ignored? Will anyone help you?

Think, for a few minutes, about what you will need. You're probably hoping that the community will be supportive of you as you adjust. You're hoping they'll anticipate your needs and make sure you have what you need to succeed. But you also require a way to communicate with them. And you'll want your basic needs met in a way that's comfortable for you as you adjust.

These are the same needs and wants that children with special needs — and all children — have when they are adjusting to preschool. The environment, people, and language are new to them — and we can help them adjust and thrive. The following strategies will help you do this.

## Strategies for Supporting Children's Transition to Preschool

To establish a positive climate in the preschool environment, HighScope recommends a number of strategies to create these conditions. Among them are sharing control between adults and children and focusing on children's strengths. These two strategies will prove particularly valuable when introducing children with special needs to their new preschool. Finally, consistency in the daily routine provides the familiarity and security children need to learn, explore, and take risks.

**Sharing control.** “Sharing control means children and adults take turns being the leader and the follower, the speaker and the listener” (Epstein, 2014, p. 29). To share control with children, the adults participate with them on their terms, taking cues from them, sharing their interests, and planning ways to give them control.

Share control with the children by following children's lead, imitating their actions, and playing by using materials in the same way they use them. Be sure to slow down, pause, and wait as you talk and interact with children.

**Focusing on strengths.** “Learning occurs best when children are motivated by their own goals and interests” (Epstein, 2014, p. 30). Instead of focusing on what the children *can't do*, begin with what they *can do*. Although children with special needs have areas of delay, the best way to facilitate their growth is to pay attention to their

interests and take note of their strengths, keeping these in mind when you and your team plan for the next day. You will find that children's motivation to learn becomes intrinsic, or built in.

Like many of their typically developing peers, children with special needs will look for ways to communicate with you. Some may communicate with gestures or signs, and some may have little or no communication at all. Children often initiate communication by simply looking for reassuring physical contact; or you may find that they respond to acknowledgments of their efforts – a simple nod, a smile, or a comment that shows you notice what they are doing.

**Providing a consistent daily routine.** Providing a consistent daily routine gives children the security they need to feel confident about exploring their new environment. Photographs and pictures can be effective visual aids for helping children understand the order of their new daily routine. Sequencing charts are useful because they use photos or illustrations to familiarize children with the daily routine, the hand-washing process, or the easiest way to put on snow clothes, to give a few examples.

Provide support as children make choices during planning time. Pictures or other representations also help children make choices at snacktime or let you know what they need during work time. Some children may want to try a device designed to communicate ideas, such as a “talking” picture frame on which a child can touch a picture so that a recording tells you what the child wants to communicate. For example, when a picture of a train is pressed, the message says, “I want to play with the train.” Some children may benefit from even more concrete strategies, such as walking with you to each interest area to survey the materials in each and choose where to play. As children become more familiar with the learning environment, you could try asking them to go get something they want to play with during work time.

With a little thought and imagination, you will be able to think of ways to represent almost everything you communicate throughout the day and find opportunities for all of the children in your class to participate. Using a variety of ways to communicate will not only help children feel more comfortable but it will reduce frustration – both theirs and yours – as children not only begin to understand the value of communication, but also feel safe enough to risk trying to communicate.

### Setting up a thoughtful learning environment.

It is important to help children with special needs feel comfortable and at ease in their new environment. Keep pictures from their home in different areas of the learning environment and provide food with which they are familiar. Offer children plenty of ways to express their choices and needs during the day and throughout the learning environment. You may need to adapt the environment to help a child navigate in a wheelchair or be able to reach an item, if he or she has a physical impairment. Give children your patience and support as they adjust to their new “home away from home.”



As you recall the mixed feelings you have had during times of significant change in your life, you will be able to help children with special needs adjust to all of the changes of preschool and give them a way to communicate. The rewards will be beyond price, as you witness the growth in children who entered the program timid and uncertain, knowing you have made a difference in their lives. You may notice some changes in yourself as well!

### Reference

Epstein, A. S. (2014). *Essentials of active learning in preschool: Getting to know the HighScope Curriculum*. 2d.Ed. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.



Jan Dowling is a HighScope Field Consultant and a Speech-Language Pathologist for Alpine School District in American Fork, Utah. She has worked with children with special needs for more than 15 years, working in inclusion preschools, and in self-contained classes at the elementary and secondary levels. She is co-author of the book *I Belong: Active Learning for Children with Special Needs*, published by HighScope Press.

Learn more at  
[highscope.org/specialneeds](https://highscope.org/specialneeds)

## ASK US

BY HOLLY DELGADO

***We've recently begun using the HighScope Curriculum in our school. How can we best explain these changes to the parents and families we serve?***

— A Preschool Teacher

Families — understandably — often hold high expectations for their children, wanting them not only to succeed but also to excel in a school setting. In turn, they have high expectations of the teachers they entrust to care for their children. Fortunately, HighScope is founded on the belief that if we meet all children at their current developmental level and scaffold their learning from there, children can and will succeed. When we focus our conversations with parents on their child's strengths (rather than perceived weaknesses), they will begin to trust that we truly have their child's best interest at heart.

Explain to parents that young children learn best through play, especially when they pursue their own interests with support and guidance from adults. Ask what kinds of materials and activities their children enjoy at home. Say further that HighScope creates an emotionally nurturing environment in which learning can thrive, and that children learn social and emotional skills (such as how to play with others and resolve conflicts) along with academic readiness skills (such as literacy and math). Explain that HighScope has decades of research showing that the curriculum works! Invite parents to ask questions and visit the classroom.

Throughout the year, find opportunities to link children's work back to learning and the HighScope Curriculum:

- On a parent bulletin board, post pictures of children engaged in activities during various parts of the day, and explain how what the child is doing directly relates to a key developmental indicator (KDI).
- Send weekly updates home about small-group lessons, and provide parents with simple activities they can do with their child at home to extend a particular lesson.
- Share your daily anecdotal notes with parents on the COR Advantage (Child Observation Record) Family Network.
- Focus on a particular area of development in your monthly newsletter; provide observations on how you are supporting learning in that particular area of development in the classroom and provide at-home activities for the parents to do with their child.
- If schedules permit, invite parents to stay for message board and/or large-group time.

- Set child goals with the parents. At the beginning of the school year, talk candidly about what parents' expectations are for the school year. Maintain an ongoing conversation with parents about their child's progress throughout the school year; informally touch base during arrival or departure times and revisit these goals during more formal parent-teacher conferences or home visits. Make connections between the parents' goals and what is occurring in the classroom.
- Remember to focus on the child's strengths when talking with your parents; although it's cliché, the saying is true: "A parent doesn't care what you know until they know you care."




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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Registration Open for the 4th Annual CEEE Conference

The 4th Annual Conference for Early Childhood Research and Evaluation will be held on October 16, 2015, in Ypsilanti, Michigan. This year's theme is "Assessing Children's Progress in Early Education and Intervention: Challenges and Innovations in Diverse Contexts." Linda Espinosa, PhD, will give the opening address. Invited speakers are Rachel Brady, PT, DPT, MS; Hiram Fitzgerald, PhD; Michael Lopez, PhD; Richard Lower, MA; Sherri Oden, PhD; Kyle Snow, PhD; Christina Weiland, EdD; Christine Maier, PhD; Beth Marshall, MA; and Lisa Wasacz. Approval for Michigan State Continuing Education Clock Hours (SCECHs) for participants is pending. The conference is sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education and the M&M Fisher Foundation. Register now at [highscope.org/2015CEEEconf](http://highscope.org/2015CEEEconf).



### Juanita González Receives David P. Weikart Achievement Award

At a breakfast on May 7, 2015, during the annual HighScope International Conference, the HighScope Educational Research Foundation presented the David P. Weikart Achievement Award to Juanita González, pictured right, with HighScope President Cheryl Polk.



The award is given annually to a person outside of the HighScope staff who the Foundation feels has demonstrated exemplary dedication to HighScope's vision and mission. This year's award was presented to Juanita González in recognition of her dedication to excellence in implementing the HighScope Curriculum; her outstanding achievements in training teachers, including bringing the HighScope PCC course to more than 300 teachers in Mexico and strengthening the rigor and fidelity of the trainings offered; her effective leadership, which revitalized and stabilized the Instituto HighScope México AC; and her efforts to expand the reach of the Instituto to educators both in her own locale and distant regions, so that more children will have the dispositions and knowledge they need to learn, grow, and be successful in life.



### HighScope to Launch Pilot Elementary Program

HighScope is expanding its early childhood programming to include kindergarten through third grade. The Foundation has been working with Eagle's Nest Academy in Flint, Michigan, for two years to prepare for this fall's school opening. Dr. Reginald Flynn, Eagle's Nest founder, said he believes that the children in his community will benefit from an elementary program that continues developmentally appropriate active learning into the elementary grades. HighScope will be working with the Eagle's Nest staff during the month of August and throughout the year to develop the elementary model. For more information, visit [eaglesnestflint.org](http://eaglesnestflint.org). If you are interested in receiving updates on Eagle's Nest and HighScope Elementary, contact Cathy Albro, Director of Elementary Education, at [calbro@highscope.org](mailto:calbro@highscope.org).

### Staff Holds Work Party for Demonstration Preschool Playground Improvements

On Tuesday, June 30, about 25 HighScope staff members rolled up their sleeves and went to work on the Demonstration Preschool playground. The idea? To put in new open-ended equipment, materials, and landscape features that would give children opportunities to interact with their ideas, the environment, and each other.

Between 1 and 3 p.m., staff painted, sanded, nailed, weeded, and dug to create the following:

- A colorful hopscotch board made from cement pavers, to be embedded in the playground pea gravel.
- Work tables made from large wooden spools that were sanded and weatherproofed.
- A wooden box for storage of loose materials.
- A renovated garden bed.
- A "path" of paving stones and log lengths embedded in the ground for children to play on and around.
- A "sound board" – a wood board attached to a length of fence to which numerous items (e.g., baking pans, mesh baskets, golf tees) were attached that children can tap with other objects or hands. Additionally, lengths of PVC pipe were attached to the board that children can tap, run a stick across, or use as a "telephone," with one child speaking into one end and another listening on the other end.





The idea for the work party came from recently retired Senior Curriculum Development Director Ann S. Epstein – June 30 was her last day of work, and this was something she wanted to get underway before she left.

“Instead of a big party, I wanted to do something that would benefit the preschool kids. I actually opened it up to EC (HighScope’s Early Childhood department), and they suggested a whole bunch of great things that they’d been wanting to do for a long time,” she said. By the end of the work session, the new sound wall was already being explored by a child – Ann’s grandson, Oscar.



### Online Training Courses Announced for 2015–2016

HighScope offers interactive, web-based course work in which participants join an e-learning community, take part in group discussions, and receive individual attention from the instructor. Course work can be accessed and completed anywhere, anytime — and students maintain close contact with their instructor and classmates. See the 2015–2016 schedule at [highscope.org/onlinetraining](http://highscope.org/onlinetraining).

### New Shipping Special

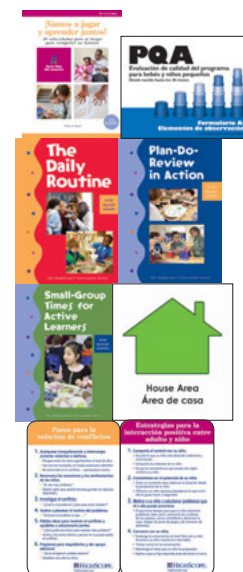
We listened to your feedback and are offering a new shipping special! For orders under \$500, flat rate shipping is now just \$9.99. Shipping is free for orders of \$500 or more. Certain restrictions apply. This pricing is for standard UPS Ground in the contiguous US and excludes the HighScope Excellerations® Sand and Water Play Station and Storybook Sets. Take advantage of this offer in our online store at [highscope.org](http://highscope.org).



### HighScope Press Offers More Spanish Titles

See the online store at [highscope.org](http://highscope.org) for details on these new offerings!

- *Let’s Play and Learn Together: 30 At-Home Activities to Share With Families*, available in English or Spanish
- *Infant-Toddler Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA), Form A: Observation Items*, now available in Spanish
- DVDs now with English and Spanish subtitles: *The Daily Routine*, *Plan-Do-Review in Action*, and *Small-Group Times for Active Learners*
- Classroom Area Signs: Now available in medium-size, 8½” x 11”, in English or English-Spanish
- Conflict Resolution or Adult-Child Interaction Wallet Cards



### Look for Us at These Upcoming Conferences!

- October 1–2:** Young Child Expo, Spokane, WA
- October 16:** The Center for Early Education and Evaluation (CEEE) Early Childhood Research and Evaluation Conference, Ypsilanti, MI
- October 16–17:** Conference of the New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC), Meadowlands, NJ
- November 18–21:** Michigan Collaborative Early Childhood Conference, Dearborn, Michigan
- November 18–21:** National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conference, Orlando, FL
- December 2–4:** ZERO to THREE 30th National Training Institute (NTI), Seattle, WA

# SAVE THE DATE

HighScope’s 2016 International Conference

May 10–12, 2016

Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center

