



High/Scope program briefing paper

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Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide background for a seminar about the High/Scope program which will be delivered for the staff of the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) by Joan Brink from High/Scope.

Background

Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) interest in High/Scope is framed by one of its key strategies which is to support early childhood professionals working with children to do that work well. ECA does this in a range of ways, for instance:

- Its quality assured publications program which promotes evidence-based practice – hard copy and web based;
- Its conferences and seminars
- Its work on teaching and qualification standards
- Its advocacy for qualified staff including teachers, improved staff–child ratios, a career structure and improved remuneration for people working in early childhood services.

ECA is not an apologist for any particular pedagogical approach. Its commitment is to programs based on evidence which reflects the best of what we know about how children grow and learn. High/Scope is one such program.

High/Scope is the curriculum approach underpinning the Perry Preschool Project which has been so highly researched. It is this and other research into the Chicago Parent Child Centres and the Abecedarian Project which provided the evidence for the arguments of Heckmann and others about the benefits of investment in early childhood education. According to Heckmann:

It (quality early childhood education) is a rare public policy initiative that promotes fairness and social justice and, at the same time, promotes productivity in the economy... http://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2006/01/heckman_investi.htm (Retrieved September 2008)

Another factor in ECA's interest in the High/Scope methodology arose from a reading of the Ellen Galinsky

retrospective analysis of the three programs mentioned above. That 2006 paper *The Benefits of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs: What Makes the Difference?* http://www.ced.org/docs/report/report_prek_galinsky.pdf (Retrieved September 2008) took a retrospective look at these three programs in an attempt to identify what they did that had such long term benefits for children.

All three programs analysed by Galinsky targeted children from backgrounds generally not associated with successful participation in the social, economic and political life of the society. However, what was apparent to ECA was that the features of successful programs that were described in this analysis matched closely the findings of the Effective Participation Preschool Education (EPPE) and Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) projects that are part of the longitudinal research being undertaken in the United Kingdom. One key difference between the sample for the EPPE/REPEY projects and those studied by Galinsky was that the EPPE/REPEY sample was not restricted to low SES groups.

The implication of this is that the elements of quality early childhood programs are the same for all population groups.

Another thread to ECA's interest in this work comes from some thinking ECA has been doing about the lack of recognition and respect for early childhood professionals. Notwithstanding that this fact is fundamentally linked to the quality, qualifications remuneration and the existence of a career structure in this sector, it would be too easy to simply gloss over this issue in this way.

One of the key characteristics of any profession is that its members are able to make the direct connection between what they do and the outcome of their intervention. As well as this, they are able to talk coherently about this nexus to the recipient or client (in this case the parent) of their service.

Because the number of qualified early childhood teachers in our services is limited, the staff has little capacity to engage in these significant professional conversations and talk explicitly about outcomes. As well as this, early childhood professionals have traditionally been better at socio-emotional learning than cognitive learning (EPPE/REPEY). Early childhood staff do the very best they can – but in a context where many

are unqualified, they do not have the knowledge and insights necessary to make the important connections between what children are doing, what they are learning and what they need to do next to support children's emerging strengths. The capacity to make these connections and to talk about them with clients is the mark of a professional.

A provider of multiple early childhood services told ECA's CEO that in a recent survey parents said that

'.....they knew their children were happy but they did not know what they were learning'

and at the same time the teachers were saying

'...they had lost their way'

The High/Scope methodology is of interest because of its explicitness about the program's intentions in regard to children's learning, the clear link between each element of the program and that learning, the willingness of teachers to evaluate their own effectiveness as teachers in terms of the gains made by children against very explicit learning goals. As well as this, ECA was impressed at High/Scope's openness about this with families – their commitment to engaging with families in open, respectful and interactive ways about what their children were doing, saying and learning and what they were going to do next to support their learning. Finally High/Scope's theoretical underpinnings are robust.

High/scope began when developmental theory was in the ascendancy. Notwithstanding this, it has systematically rethought its foundations and practice through the lens of social cultural theory and social constructivist thinking. In doing this it has held to the strengths that developmental theory has embedded in its methodology. As Sarij Blatchford, leader of the EPPE/REPEY research in response to a question about the openness to the strengths of different theoretical approaches that was apparent in the literature review in the EPPE Final Report said *"We need to stand on the shoulders of our giants and learn from them all"*.

ECA's interest in High/Scope crystallised when funds became available from a charitable organisation to promote the take up of the High/Scope and Reggio Emilia methodologies in Australia. At the time when ECA applied for the funds they were only available for work associated with High/Scope.

The project was a natural extension of ECA's commitment to high quality programs for children. It gave a number of experienced high calibre early childhood teachers working in childcare the opportunity to undertake training with High/Scope in the United States and bring that learning back to their own work in Australia.

For the majority of those participants the experience caused them to rethink their practice.

It was the most inspirational experience I have had since entering children's services. ECA has to take a leadership role in bringing High/Scope to Australia

—Ros Cornish, CEO Gowrie Tasmania.

I just have to change the way I do things in my service — I have no option but to do so. I have to work out how to do this, the money, so that the children and my staff can reap the benefits of this remarkable experience. It is such an opportunity to make a real difference to what happens every day in children's services in this country.

—Judy Radich, Director Cooloon Children's Services.

As mentioned previously, ECA is not suggesting High/Scope as the single pedagogical approach. ECA is suggesting, however, that this Program has much to offer early childhood services in this country.

High/Scope 1962 – 2008: A very brief history

Although the High/Scope approach is now used in settings for all children from birth to five years of age it was originally developed to serve at-risk children from poor neighbourhoods in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In 1962 David Weikart, Director of Services for Ypsilanti Public Schools initiated the Perry Preschool Project later known as the High/Scope Perry Preschool Study. The goal of the program was to improve the intellectual, social and emotional learning and development of young children who might otherwise not succeed in school.

High/Scope continues today as an independent non-profit organisation promoting the development of children worldwide. It undertakes research, curriculum development, training and publishing, and its programs are replicated in whole or in part in education centres around the world.

One of the drivers for the original High/Scope program was the desire to refocus the existing 3-5 year old curriculum to give greater emphasis to intellectual development and active learning. The new program emphasised cognitive, language AND social and emotional development, and engaged in a direct way with families through weekly home visiting.

The original theoretical foundation for the High/Scope program was Piagetian — that is, it was developmental in its orientation. That focus carries through to the present but has been enriched by the learnings from socio-cultural theories, which have positioned teachers more strongly as active participants in children learning processes. High/Scope sees children's development and learning as *naturally cultural*.

The elements of the High/Scope program have remained fairly constant overtime. Notwithstanding that, it has expanded to cover the full age range from birth to five in the general population. It bases its approach on four guiding principles:

- Engaging children in interactions with people materials and events
- Involving children in planning, carrying out and reflecting on intentional activities. The plan–do–review is integral to the High/Scope program. It encourages children in the process of talking and forming mental images about what they have been doing. This is the metacognition, which is associated with high quality and effective programs (EPPE)
- Provide a play-based curriculum based on a variety of appropriate active learning experiences
- Provide consistent support for children's decision making.

The High/Scope program has five main curriculum content areas:

- Approaches to learning;
- Language, literacy and communication;
- Social and emotional development;
- Physical development, health and well being; and
- Arts and sciences (which includes mathematics, science and technology, social studies and the arts).

Within these areas 58 key developmental indicators have been identified. These are the building blocks of thinking and reasoning at each stage of development. The KDI's (Key Development Indicators) focus on the broad areas of knowledge and skills that lay the

foundation for further learning — High/Scope educators need observable evidence of these in order to evaluate program effectiveness and plan what next for the children. The KDI's are kept in mind as educators set up the environment, plan activities, interact with children and talk with families about what their children are saying and doing. The KDI's are the basis of High/Scope's Child Observation Record (COR). (Epstein 2007).

So, in summary children who are immersed in a High/Scope curriculum participate as active learners in a supportive classroom community where intentional teachers and learners share control and where children develop initiative and pro-social dispositions which positively affect their subsequent learning and life decisions.

High/Scope's strengths

In regard to children

- Its absolute respect for children.
- It is focused on the whole child — intellectual, social, emotional and physical growth and well-being.
- It clearly positions children as independent, active, experiential and resourceful learners whose motivation and choices are at the heart of the program. Every element of the program intentionally reflects this view of children.
- It is a truly strengths-based program — it focuses on what children can do rather than what they cannot do.

About teaching (Note: in some languages the word teaching includes learning)

- High/Scope foregrounds teaching as an intentional activity and the expectation that teachers teach and that they know what they are trying to achieve. High/Scope finds no place for didactic teaching — to learn children must experience the world first hand (Epstein 2007).
- It sees teaching as a team task which includes professional conversation daily about staff observations of children's learning, how this relates to the program and team planning about what next.
- High/Scope balances responsive and teacher directed learning. Teacher planned small and large group work are elements of the program — EPPE and other research lists group work as features of high quality programs.
- Authentic relationships between children and adults and the importance of sustained shared thinking are integral to the program and the achievement of its goals for children.

About Key Development Indicators

- High/Scope spells out in detail the learning expectations identified in Key Development Indicators (KDI's) and is clear about how each part of the program contributes to children learning.
- KDI's are structured around the notion that learning is gradual and cumulative and generally moves from the simple to the more complex. The KDI's are used to provide evidence that children are developing the knowledge skills, understandings and disposition to learn considered to be important for them now and into the future.
- High/Scope is also explicit in assessing through daily observations children's learning against the KDI's and planning what to do next to support their emerging capacities.
- The KDI's have been written to be universal e.g. children everywhere sort objects — what is sorted, how and when it emerges in children's play may vary but that fact that things are sorted is common. The assertion of this commonality is informed by research.
- The whole of the curriculum (everything in the program) is focussed around the KDI's. As a result teachers know what they are doing and why.
- The mapping of staff observations against KDI's provides important information in targeting staff development — no observation in a particular learning area would often mean the staff has little capability in the area rather than that children are not doing, for example, math or science related activities.

About being explicit and transparent

- There is something quite empowering about the explicitness of the High/Scope program. It is open to scrutiny. There is an inherent respect for the professional in this, but at the same time there is unwillingness to compromise on the commitment to learning outcomes for the children in the program.
- The detail of the program and thinking behind it is exposed and so provides a strong platform to provide support for program leaders and/or early childhood practitioners (trained and untrained) working in those services.
- The place of families as senior partners in the program is quite hard-edged. Because the KDI's are so detailed and explicit and all elements of the program are geared to support their emergence,

staff observations of children are deeper and more focussed. Talk with families is more meaningful and this greatly affects parents' understanding and engagement with the program — it opens up enormous opportunity for respectful partnering with families and greatly increases parents' confidence in what is happening in the service.

- There is a strong and explicit recognition of the significance of the '*funds of knowledge*' that children and their families bring to the program.

The concept of learning as naturally cultural: A part of the High/Scope methodology

The High/Scope approach is sensitive to the reality that learning is socially and culturally constructed. High/Scope is unequivocal that children need to be culturally strong — know where they come from and who they are (Kruse). High/Scope sees no tension between this and the obligation of the teacher to ensure that children have access to culturally valued knowledge which will underwrite their future successful participation in the social, economic and political life of the society. The program has its origins in this commitment. To this end the program has been successfully implemented in South Africa, Singapore etc.

ECA believes that there is merit in looking at the KDI's and identifying the evidence of their achievement in particular contexts — that is, contextualising to culture and place the evidence of achievement. For instance, under mathematics and science what would the evidence of the KDI around observing or classifying or exploring materials or drawing conclusions or communicating ideas look like in an isolated Aboriginal service. That is, not conceding the elements of the COR but providing culturally/location derived evidence of achievement.

It really is not that these children don't make investigations, for example, into size, quantity, categorisation, patterns, space and sequence, which are all important for maths and fall into the mathematical domains of classification, seriation, number, space and time. It is that adults (parents/carers) do not see them or understand them as such. How exciting and challenging would it be to find examples of all of these (indeed all of the COR) in children's play in Aboriginal services and communities, document them and use these to support staff in these services.

There is much said about children from these communities being learners and indeed about them being literate in their own worlds, and this is undoubtedly the case. What is of interest here is the possibility of real work mapping these culturally-based and valued learnings against the concepts and knowledge dispositions that underwrite successful participation in mainstream Australia, and then as teachers and communities asking the question ‘What next?’ in the children’s programs.

It is important to note here that High/Scope is one, not the only, model of a high quality early childhood program. There is no tension between socio-cultural theory, emergent curriculum or indeed Reggio Emilia and the High/Scope program. However High/Scope has been the subject of ongoing internal and independent evaluation for the last 40 years.

Comparison between the High/Scope approach and the findings from the Effective Provision of Preschool Education Study (EPPE) – Final Report

‘The EPPE definition of “effectiveness” is based on child outcomes, which was understood as a necessary but insufficient component of quality on its own. High quality provision is related to child outcomes but also to the quality of child care and pedagogical practices that is offered as well. The report shows how the actual practices in the settings vary in important ways. The findings show that good outcomes for children are linked to early years settings that ...’ (Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Taggart, B. Sammons, P., Melhuish, E, & Elliot, K. (2003). *Technical Paper 10 – The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Intensive Case Studies of Practice across the Foundation Stage.*

London: DfEE / Institute of Education, University of London.
<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/schools/ecpe/epe/epe/epepepubs.htm>
retrieved September 2008

The aim of the intensive case study analyses which is the subject of Technical Paper 10 was to tease out the specific pedagogical and other practices that are associated with achieving ‘excellent’ outcomes compared to those centres with ‘good’ or more ‘average’ outcomes.

EPPE/REPEY, the Galinsky Analysis and High/Scope

The following table looks at the correlation of the finding of the EPPE study and the Galinsky retrospective analysis and the High/Scope Program.

**Comparison between finding of EPPE and Galinsky retrospective analysis
and
The correlation of the High/Scope Program with these findings**

EPPE	Effective programs have strong leadership at manager and room level and long-serving staff (three years plus).
Galinsky	There was a clarity of focus – the leaders were highly trained professionals who were very intentional about what they wanted to accomplish and built support for the accomplishment of these goals. Teachers were paid more than other teachers which ensured continuity and stability over the four years of the initial program and staff remained the same.
High/Scope	Strong and informed pedagogical leadership essential to the High/Scope program.
EPPE	Effective programs view cognitive and social development as complimentary and do not prioritise one over the other.
Galinsky	The interventions were focused on the whole child – the child’s intellectual, social, emotional and physical well being.
High/Scope	The program fully integrates social physical and cognitive development.
EPPE	Effective programs provide a strong educational focus with trained teachers working alongside and supporting less qualified staff.
Galinsky	Teachers were better educated and better trained (and better paid than the average teacher) and there was a strong focus on ongoing professional learning.
High/Scope	The High/Scope program, all of it, has an educational focus. It assumes qualified early childhood teachers in leadership positions and assumes high level pedagogical understanding in the person who has the leadership of the program in the room.
EPPE	Effective programs provide children with a mixture of practitioner initiated group work and learning through freely chosen play.
Galinsky	Mixture of responsive teaching that extended and elaborated on what the children were learning/doing/ play and direct teaching which was also engaging.
High/Scope	High/Scope balances responsive and teacher-directed learning. Teacher-planned small and large group work are elements of the program. Children are free to make choices and decisions, adults support children’s self initiated learning rather than being focussed on controlling behaviour, children and adults develop confidence and children develop feeling of competence.
EPPE	Effective programs provide adult–child interactions that involve ‘sustained shared thinking’ and open-ended questioning to extend children’s thinking.
Galinsky	The relationship between the teacher and the child is seen as central to the child’s learning.
High/Scope	High/Scope is an active learning context where children and adults are active and interactive, form partnerships in conversations, problem solving etc. Teachers form authentic relationships with children – adults share their interests with children, respond attentively to children’s interests, give children specific feedback, ask and respond to questions openly and honestly, limit questioning and provide encouragement. Teachers are seen as intentional actors.
EPPE	Effective programs have practitioners with good curriculum knowledge combined with knowledge and understanding of how young children learn.
Galinsky	Expert knowledge of how children learn and about the curriculum were fundamental in the Galinsky analysis.
High/Scope	The High/scope program is very explicit about how children learn and that learning emerges from child initiated and teacher led activities. It is also unequivocal about the need for a sophisticated curriculum and has given a great deal of emphasis to the intentionality of the teacher and to supporting that across all curriculum domains.

**Comparison between finding of EPPE and Galinsky retrospective analysis
and
The correlation of the High/Scope Program with these findings**

EPPE	Effective programs have strong parental involvement, especially in terms of shared educational aims with parents.
Galinsky	The programs analysed by Galinsky aimed to connect home and the service/school and to create lasting relationships.
High/Scope	Because KDI's are so detailed/explicit and all elements of the program are geared to support their emergence, staff observations of children are deeper and more focussed. Talk with families is more meaningful and this affects greatly parents' understanding and engagement with the program – it opens up enormous opportunity for respectful partnering with families and greatly increases parents confidence in what is happening in the service.
EPPE	Effective programs provide formative feedback to children during activities and provide regular reporting and discussion with parents about their child's progress.
Galinsky	The interaction with families was a key element in all programs.
High/Scope	The High/scope methodology requires that teachers' observations are linked to Key Development Indicators (KDI's) and that what happens next in the program is based on this information. This information gained in this process is a key part of the discussions and feedback to parents about children's progress.
EPPE	Effective programs ensure behaviour policies in which staff supports children in rationalising and talking through their conflicts.
Galinsky	All teachers in the projects were highly trained early childhood teachers with degrees.
High/Scope	High/Scope has a six step strategy for doing, where talking through a solution is central – the purpose is for children to see conflicts as problems to be solved.
EPPE	Effective programs provide differentiated learning opportunities that meet the needs of particular individuals and groups of children bilingual, special needs, girls/boys etc.
Galinsky	There is no real comment on this in these studies.
High/Scope	High/Scope has done significant work on ensuring their programs are accessible to children with special needs etc.
EPPE	Effective programs engage children in thinking about their thinking – metacognition.
Galinsky	Does not comment on this.
High/Scope	The plan-do-review process is a key element in this program – this process fosters metacognition.
EPPE	In effective programs the qualifications of service leaders and provision of pedagogical leadership was very important – leadership mattered.
Galinsky	There was a clarity of focus – the leaders were highly trained professionals and were very intentional about what they wanted to accomplish and built support for the accomplishment of these goals across the whole organisation.
High/Scope	High/Scope programs are lead by highly trained early childhood professional leaders

The conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that High/Scope evidences all of the elements of the quality early childhood programs that have been identified.

High/Scope in Australia

High/Scope has had little take-up in Australia which seems strange given its status in the research. There are a number of reasons for this.

Program fidelity

The High/Scope program is an integrated curriculum, in which all elements of the program are seen as part of the curriculum, and necessary if the program is to achieve the promised outcomes. As a result the High/Scope Foundation has been very keen to maintain the integrity of the High/Scope brand. Services cannot label themselves as High/Scope services if they have not done extensive High/Scope training and had their service accredited by High/Scope, and reaccreditation is required regularly.

This requirement for brand and program fidelity and its cost has significantly undermined any effort that individual services might make to become High/Scope accredited services.

It is possible to do shortened training in the High/Scope approach covering only aspects of the program which was what the Australian contingent did. High/Scope also has a range of Institutes across the World which provide High/Scope training locally and which have High/Scope accredited trainers and services attached to them.

High/Scope is a Model Program

There is, in Australia, resistance in principle to the notion of a model program. This has at least two elements. There is a view that model programs are inflexible and that this undermines the professional decision making of teachers and other educators. There is also a perception that a model program necessarily undermines the capacity of the program to be responsive to the community in which it is located.

High/Scope is clear that all aspects of its program are essential to the delivery of the researched outcomes. These include the focus on supporting play and children's interests; the commitment to active learning; child choice and sharing control with children; the focus on children's strengths; the focus on the environment including the materials and resources used; the plan-do-review sequence; the six step problem solving approach to social conflict; the flexible but predictable daily program; the regular small and large group activities; the KDI's and the COR; the focus of teachers on authentic relationships with children and families; the intentionality of the teacher and the daily professional

conversations between staff; and the fact that the program is lead by a degree qualified early childhood teacher.

The elements of the High/Scope program reflect the evidence about effective early childhood programs, hence their concern with fidelity.

The same requirement for programs to reflect the evidence about effective high quality programs should be the goal of programs in all early childhood services.

However, the High/Scope program is not, nor can it be, a recipe. Recipes are only successful if the uniformity of the ingredients can be guaranteed. Children, families and the teachers and others who work with them do not/cannot come as quality controlled packaged ingredients. Although the elements of the program are predetermined, they cannot specify the detail of how these are realised each day and across the weeks. This will and must be dependent on the children and communities that use the program and the qualities, skill and knowledge of the staff that lead and implement it. This is in much the same way as there is a very detailed understanding, based on the evidence, about how to set a broken arm. What will determine exactly how this is done is the nature of the particular break and the skill, experience and knowledge of the doctor.

High/Scope is a program in which professional knowledge, judgement and flexibility are crucial if the program is to respond to the needs of children and families in particular contexts.

Highly qualified, competent teachers can and will develop their own programs but, in the current environment in children's services in Australia, such people are few and far between. Only one state, NSW, currently requires that teachers lead services.

Resistance to the High/Scope program based on the proposition that it is a prescriptive, model program also arises from the recognition that programs must be responsive to their communities.

Effective programs respect the cognitive and cultural needs of young children by encouraging intellectual challenge in programs and connections with children's prior learning. Children are entitled to culturally valued knowledge of two kinds: that which enables them to retain and build identity and connection to their cultural roots, including access to the languages of their culture/s; and that which will enable their future participation in the economic, social and political life of their wider community.

It is suggested that what follows from this is that a model as detailed as High/Scope cannot make provision for this essential. This is not the case.

High/Scope sees parents as the senior partners in children's learning and is rooted in the belief that children construct their own learning on the basis of what they already know. This is not a linear view of learning. It recognises that learning is socially constructed and that this is a complex multilayered process which has a strong cultural connection that goes beyond superficial symbols. High/Scope programs are based on the following propositions '*Culture is a system of internal values not an ethnic label*' that '*Children use their own cultures as an entry point to other cultures*' and that '*families are a frame for understanding children*'.

Importantly High/Scope makes real demands on the professionalism of staff which is expressed in the intentionality of their work with children and the way they engage with parents and families. Every aspect of the program reflects this commitment. The commitment of the High/Scope program to explicitness about children's emerging strengths, what this means for children's learning and what the staff will do next provides a more inclusive and respectful space from which to engage with families. It also has the potential to transform parent's appreciation of their own contribution to children's learning as they see the processes described by staff acted out by children in different ways in their home environment.

Think about this:

A child (Ella) makes a mobile with a glad wrap tube – she ties coloured strings on it and puts bottle tops only on the end of each one.

The staff member shows this to the parent when they come to collect the child – the parent says, 'Well isn't that lovely'.

The staff member says, 'Yes it is and look how Ella has put all the pink strings together, the white strings together and also the oranges ones'. She is beginning to sort things according to sameness – this is part of learning about classification which is so important in learning mathematics. We will give her lots of opportunities to sort and classify in the program over the next little while. She was so engaged and focused with this process which in itself is a great achievement'

For the parent this is real information and importantly it gives them a different lens through which to see what their child is doing at home.

There has been a lot said about linking the home and service and the importance of the partnership with parents – the capacity to engage with parents in the way described recognises parent's fundamental commitment to their children's learning. The commitment of the High/Scope program to explicitness provides an inclusive space within which to engage in serious ways with families.

The place of cognitive learning

The clear focus on both cognitive and social and emotional learning could also create some problems in accepting the worth of the High/Scope program in Australia. From the beginning High/Scope was clear that it wanted its curriculum to give greater weight to cognitive learning and to integrate it with social and emotional learning. At the time, and this remains the case, early learning programs had a strong focus on social and emotional learning. Recent research by Glenda McNaughton in Cullen (2005), commented on the under emphasis of content/discipline knowledge in many early childhood courses at all levels in early childhood programs and professional education in Australia.

High/Scope is as unequivocal and explicit about its commitment to cognitive growth as it is to growth in all other areas of development. The description of Key Development Indicators (KDI's) across all areas including approaches to learning, social and emotional growth, science and the arts etc, and the use of these as a tool to evaluate the meaning of child observations and then plan what is next at a level of explicitness which is not common in early childhood programs in this country. Although observing and planning are featured as part of program development in many early childhood programs in Australia, it is much less focussed than what occurs in High/Scope programs.

Many people working in early childhood services in Australia have limited qualifications and many are unqualified. The result of this is that many have little or no knowledge of how the foundations of mathematics, science, technology, literacy and thinking emerge in children's learning and so cannot be intentional in supporting their development. This is an enormous challenge to the claim of quality early childhood services in this country.

The Key Development Indicators (KDI's)

The explicitness of the Key Development Indicators (KDI's) also poses challenges to the Australian early childhood community. There are two key reasons for this. One is a concern that the indicators could imply an ages and stages approach suggesting that children develop in a uniform way according to age. The other is a concern that the indicators could be used by governments and/or parents to assess the effectiveness of programs and so cause a *'teach to the test (the KDI's)'* or *"tick and flick"* approach to programming in early childhood services. Perhaps a third reason is, as mentioned previously, that many teachers and other people working in services do not have sufficient understanding of the way children grow and develop in areas other than social and emotional learning to be confident about working intentionally in other domains.

High/Scopes KDI's are a flexible system built on the premise that children generally develop along a continuum. Some develop at a much faster pace than others, some at a much slower one. Children with special needs will progress or not across this continuum at their own pace and capability level. The KDI's enable the teacher to focus on children's strengths, assess the evidence provided by their observations, ask the question 'What do I do next to enhance this child's emerging capabilities?' and then talk to parents in meaningful ways about what their children are saying and doing and what this means for their learning.

The KDI's are unashamedly based in notions about children's development (developmentalism) which is not the same as belief in ages and stages. They are also consistent with a social constructivist approach to teaching and learning because they are about children's emerging strengths and not about rigid expectations based on age. The KDI's articulate the commitment and obligation of educators to ensure that children have access to the culturally valued knowledge which will underwrite the successful participation in mainstream society in the future.

The concern that the KDI's might be used by external bodies to assess the effectiveness of the programs derives from the movement toward national testing that has emerged in Australia and the traditional resistance of early childhood educators to external testing. This is not a resistance to notions of monitoring and assessment of children's progress as an integral aspect of effective programs. It is a real concern that being explicit in this way exposes children to external and decontextualised assessment, and exposes services to evaluation of their

effectiveness based on the outcomes of such testing. This is a real issue. However its resolution is not *'throwing the baby out with the bath water'*. The issue of external testing, if it arises, has to be resolved on its own merits.

I also suspect that the pressure for such testing would be less if authorities, parents and others were confident about their children's learning and if early childhood staff were able to talk more confidently to parents about the cause and effect between their interventions and what their children are learning.

High/Scope is individualist with little focus on collaborative learning

There is also a perception arising of out the incorrect view that High/Scope is framed within an ages and stages approach which suggests that collaborative learning is not a focus in High/Scope programs. This, of course, is misinformed. Teaching and learning are social activities which are shaped by the cultural and social context within and outside the service. The recognition that children and families bring with them funds of knowledge is fundamental to the way the program is put together in particular settings. This has been commented upon in other parts of this paper

Collaborative play and learning and indeed collaborative adult work is central to the High/Scope approach. This is seen throughout the program but most visibly in the commitment to collaborative group work and the intensive cooperation between children and children and adults as they develop and resolve joint projects — the work in progress sign is a feature of High/Scope settings. The ownership of the room is shared so responsibility for its good order is a collective one. The High/Scope problem solving approach to social conflict (where the children and the adult talk through the problem and find a way through it) is a skill fundamental to a democratic society and, indeed, to the mini-society that exists within an early childhood service. As well as this, the absolute commitment seen in High/Scope curriculum to building authentic and collaborative relationships between adults and children and the children themselves in a context of shared control where problems are solved together is the essence of a collaborative process.

High/Scope is unequivocal that its observations need to focus on particular children, including how they engage in relationships and collaborative work with the children and staff in the service. These observations help staff to build up a picture of children's strengths and support them in making decisions about what is next.

High/Scope seeks explicitly to strengthen children's emotional well being and interpersonal and social competence, as a basis for engagement with learning and so children can come to contribute to a caring and democratic society.

High/Scope is all or nothing program

The all or nothing mantra is another aspect of the resistance to High/Scope. This claim is both true and not true. It is the High/Scope program as a whole which evidences what the research says about effective early childhood programs. High/Scope is unequivocal about this. It means that the researched benefits of participation in the High/Scope program cannot be guaranteed unless the program as a whole is implemented.

However, High/Scope itself provides short courses and resources focussed on elements of the program. This recognises that each of the elements implemented on its own would enhance a program. This has been evident in the work undertaken in services by the Australian contingent who participated in some High/Scope training in 2007. The following are some of the reflections of the staff who have been implementing elements of the High/Scope approach in their programs (Connor, 2008).

Organising the space and materials to reflect High/Scope principles:

- *It's amazing what complex structures they are now making ... and how collaborative they are. We challenge children to persist, to work together and to solve problems for themselves.*

Daily routines – one service focused on greeting times:

- *Parents have commented that their child seems more articulate and reflective and more aware of their experiences and achievements.*

Children's planning:

- *Having a plan helps children to be more purposeful during their time in the program.*
- *The planning time has helped staff to focus on children's intentions and follow up with pertinent questions.*

Structuring the day:

- *Having clear intentions in the small and large groups gives staff more confidence and children get more out of the experience.*

- *Most importantly children enjoy the closer relationships and the time with an adult than they might have had before.*
- *We know all the children better because we spend more deliberate time with each child and we can see what each child can and can't do and we can plan to build on their interests..."*

Using the Child Observation Record (COR):

- *Using the COR as a guide to observing children and planning their next learning has made me conscious about the range of things it's important for children to come to know. I have seen gaps in my program and noticed aspects of learning that particular children need help with. We can take more accurate helpful observation notes now we know exactly what to look for. The What Next books have been really helpful.*

Resolving social conflicts – Staff have been amazed at how readily children have taken to this process:

- *In the beginning it was hard to get children to listen and solve the problem ... But now children can fast track to a solution because they have learnt the language and internalised the process. Children around the dispute have started to offer solutions and the children in the disagreement are starting to realise that other children have ideas ... Children have learnt the language of feelings and to understand someone else's point of view.*

Building independence:

- *The idea of letting children solve their own problems didn't seem too different; we've always tried to do that; but letting the child have a go seemed so time consuming and I expected them to get frustrated. Now I try to be more patient and I think we have both been surprised when the child can put on clothes, clean up, find materials ... We now encourage them to ask a friend – letting others help is valuing their competence ...*

Some staff members were concerned about how children's interests can be used as opportunities for children's learning if adults are in charge of planning. However, when they were encouraged to reflect on what was actually happening in the program ... they saw there were good reasons for doing things differently.

- *Having a group of boisterous, noisy boys who did not seem to settle to any activity or respect any equipment lead to organising the environment and establishing quieter more purposeful small-group learning and teaching. The boys concentrated in a way unseen before and soon began asking ‘When’s group time’?*

However, notwithstanding the clear benefits to their programs of implementing elements of the High/Scope approach, the Australian practitioners who trialed these aspects of the program are aware that High/Scope is an integrated approach and works best when core aspects are implemented in a consistent and coordinated way. They have come to realise that creating an environment for learning is a prerequisite, but that planned intentional interaction of adults with children is even more vital and that shared control is an essential element of such interactions.

They learnt too in the implementation phase here in Australia that leadership and staff support for the changes are essential in implementing a program such as High/Scope — indeed this would be the case for any change to curriculum, pedagogy and ways of operating. Without service and pedagogical leadership the staff would not have had the mentoring that they needed to make the changes described. There is no doubt that the project would have benefitted greatly had more than one person from each service been able to go to High/Scope. The research makes this clear.

There is a potential to trivialise the High/Scope Program — to see it as didactic and prescriptive because of its explicitness. To do this is to miss the robustness of its methodology and indeed the inherent sophistication of the requirements it places on teachers and others working with young children. Yes, High/Scope does spell out the parameters of its approach and within this teacher’s are free to work to their strengths, to make professional decisions about how best to engage with particular children based on their knowledge and understandings of the children.

What does High/Scope offer in the Australian context?

As a nation we want children to grow up culturally strong, knowing who they are and where they come from and we want them to be able to participate fully in the social, economic and political life of the mainstream community. Given this then, our children’s services must be engaged in the task of providing the experiences that will underwrite the development of the foundation knowledge

in literacy and communication, science, maths and technology etc, social and emotional capability and the disposition to learn that are the foundation for these outcomes. These outcomes are unachievable without qualified, knowledgeable and capable people in services who can engage intentionally with children and communities in making progress towards these outcomes.

We know too that the structural foundations for quality and effective programs are a stable and qualified staff led by an early childhood teacher, high staff: child ratios and group sizes which are conducive to learning, and the development of the high calibre relationships based on trust which underwrite children’s healthy development.

The experience of the Australian contingent who undertook very limited High/Scope training in the United States and then implemented some elements of the program in their own services suggests that the program has much to offer Australia.

They are firmly convinced that the benefits of their experience with the High/Scope model have outweighed the tensions and challenges on the way. Ironically the most obvious potential barriers that had been anticipated by staff — altering the fluid nature of the program to implement a more structured routine — is an aspect staff now feel has been the most beneficial (Connor 2008).

Staff say they have never known the children so well. They know what to look for, their observations are more purposeful and they have valuable discussions with the children, families and other staff.

The staff use of language and talk has been the biggest change. We have been reminded to use open-ended questions sparingly, to listen more attentively rather than take control of the conversation. We’re reminded to share control with the children.

The main change has been increased intentionality by staff. This focus on “learning” rather than on “the activity” has the potential to lift care out the ‘minding’ into ‘education’.

Learnings from High/Scope

- High/Scope provides a positive framework for working in services where the numbers of qualified staff are not high but where there is some pedagogical leadership and service support.
- High/Scope publications are excellent it would be a pity to reinvent the wheel and publish Australian editions of these. There is other more important work to be done with any available funds.
- High/Scope is an exemplar program based on research evidence. It should be referenced in any material promoting evidence-based programs.
- The success of this program suggests that services be required to demonstrate as part of the Quality Assurance process the degree to which their programs reflect the evidence about quality and effective programs. It is important that training is provided to support services in doing this.
- PSC's and other organisations providing professional support should be encouraged to develop their capability around the High/Scope program and indeed other evidence-based programs.
- The explicitness of the High/Scope program — not simply the COR and KDI's provides real support to services which are struggling to find ways forward. It is notable how in the ECA project, staff found that the system and explicitness of the approach to taking observations of children helped them to know the children more deeply and work intentionally with each child.
- Bravely consideration should be given to the development of KDI's and a COR for use by services to support their work with children. Ethically this work should be done in collaboration with High/Scope.
- Consideration should be given to the development of examples of the descriptors of the High/Scope KDI's which can be seen in the everyday lives of many Aboriginal communities. There is some interest in Western NSW in doing this.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a professional development program which would induct service providers and people working with children in using KDI's or similar to monitor their programs, assess children's strengths and plan what is next on the basis of these judgements.
- Consideration should be given to sending to High/Scope a delegation of early childhood professionals managing or providing support to Aboriginal early childhood services. The intention would be to undertake a program similar to the one which ECA undertook in August 2007.
- Consideration should be given to developing a High/Scope accredited program which could then provide High/Scope training in each state under the auspices of the PSC's, LGCC's or ECA, which could be a source of inspiration for services. The outcomes of this program could then be tracked and linked to AEDI in those areas. There are some service providers who have already expressed interest in High/Scope such as KU Children's Services, Gowrie Tasmania, Cooloon Children's Services and The Dorothy Waide Centre in Griffith. It is these services which should be used to trial the program, as commitment is an essential ingredient in its effectiveness.
- In any work around High/Scope efforts would need to be made to ensure the KDI's and COR are not used inappropriately to test children or tick boxes.
- Consideration should be given to referencing the High/Scope program as a source of support for people who are struggling to reach accreditation standards in areas related to program development and relationships and interactions.
- Consideration should be given to a document with the details of other programs that reflect the evidence about effective early childhood programs as a source book for people working in early childhood services.

ECA is looking toward developing a series of leadership conferences which would look toward some intensive professional development over three to five days, with a second element within six months. Our planning is to work with Universities to do what is necessary to ensure that such courses get standing toward a Master's Program and/or perhaps credit in a Bachelor degree in early childhood.

The business plan for this initiative is currently in progress and, provided the financial projections are fine, ECA will proceed with this initiative. Exposure and training in the High/Scope program would be a significant element in these conferences.

Conclusion

Again it should be noted ECA is not an apologist for any particular pedagogical approach. Its commitment is to programs based on the evidence and which reflect the best of what we know about how children grow and learn. High/Scope is one such program.

The resistance to High/Scope is in some cases based on ignorance and in others on belief that the program has not kept pace with new thinking and the new socio-cultural theorising which has provided such useful insights into our thinking about early childhood. This is not true.

The most compelling outcome of the work by the Australian contingent who went to High/Scope is that they found that the explicitness of the High/Scope program and methodology liberated them to teach with intention, to engage more effectively with the children and to know them more deeply.

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