

Learnings from High/Scope: Enriching everyday practice

Jenni Connor



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Membership, publishing and general enquiries

Early Childhood Australia Inc.
PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
T: (02) 6242 1800
F: (02) 6242 1818
Sales line: 1800 356 900 (freecall)
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
publishing@earlychildhood.org.au

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About the author

Jenni Connor lectures in Early Education and Care at the University of Tasmania and is a freelance writer and researcher. She has conducted studies into young children's emotional health for COAG, and the use of Dreaming Stories in early childhood programs for SNAICC and Early Childhood Australia.

Jenni has written a number of books for Early Childhood Australia including *Everyday learning about maths* (with Denise Neal) and *Your child's first year at school: A book for parents* (with Pam Linke), and is respected for her expertise in literacy learning and teaching. She regularly presents at conferences nationally and overseas, and is a subject-matter expert for primary english and literacy with the Learning Federation.



Introduction

Most early childhood educators associate High/Scope with the impressive results of the Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993) which demonstrated the long-term benefits of quality preschool programs.



The High/Scope Perry Preschool study has since followed the lives of 123 African Americans born in poverty and at high risk of failing in school (Schweinhart, Barnes & Weikart, 1993). The study found that adults at age 40 who had attended the Perry Preschool program at ages three and four had significantly higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not attend preschool. This rigorous longitudinal study has provided persuasive evidence that public investment in the early years of children's lives pays off in benefits to the individual and society (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation continues today as an independent non-profit organisation promoting the development of children and youth worldwide. The Foundation undertakes research, curriculum development, training and publishing, and its programs are replicated in educational centres around the world.

High/Scope bases its educational approach on four guiding principles:

- ◆ Engage children in stimulating interaction with people, materials, events and ideas.
- ◆ Involve children in planning, carrying out and reflecting on intentional activities.
- ◆ Provide a curriculum based on a variety of appropriate active learning experiences.
- ◆ Provide consistent support for children's personal decision-making.



'Active participatory learning' is the essential core of the High/Scope educational approach. 'Active learning means students have direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas' (Epstein, 2008b).

The High/Scope Curriculum drew on the progressive educational philosophy of John Dewey and the developmental theories of Jean Piaget, but acknowledges that young children are capable of operating at higher levels of understanding and competence than Piaget appreciated at the time.

The High/Scope model now also reflects the work of sociocultural theorist and educator Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky emphasised the vital role of adults—parents, caregivers and teachers—in providing emotional support and interacting intentionally to extend children's language and learning.

High/Scope continues to update its curriculum as new findings in the area of cognitive–developmental research become available.

“Active participatory learning” is the essential core of the High/Scope educational approach.’



Trialling High/Scope in Australian settings

In 2007, representatives from five Australian early childhood services travelled to Michigan, US, to gain first-hand understanding of High/Scope and to investigate which aspects of the approach might apply to their contexts. The centres represent different geographical areas and cultures. Two are in inner Sydney, one in rural New South Wales and two in Tasmania. Four are long day care centres and one is a preschool.

The Australian educators learned the five key ingredients of 'active learning' (Epstein, 2008a):

- ◆ **Materials**—abundant supplies of interesting materials are readily available to children. Materials are appealing to all the senses and are open-ended—that is, they lend themselves to being used in a variety of ways to expand children's experiences and stimulate their thought.
- ◆ **Manipulation**—children handle, examine, combine and transform materials and ideas.
- ◆ **Choice**—children choose materials and play partners, change and build on their play ideas, and plan activities according to their interests and needs.
- ◆ **Child language and thought**—children describe what they are doing and understanding. They communicate, verbally and non-verbally, as they think about their actions and modify their thinking to take new learning into account.
- ◆ **Adult scaffolding**—'scaffolding' means adults both support children's current level of thinking and challenge them. Adults encourage children's efforts and help them extend or build on their work by talking with them about what they are doing, by joining their play and by helping them learn to solve problems that arise.

The educators were asked to trial aspects of the High/Scope approach in their centres in Australia and to document their findings. The practitioners primarily involved in the research were those working with children aged three–five years, although in some centres there was 'spillover' of ideas to staff in other rooms.

The practitioners selected the following aspects of High/Scope to investigate:

- ◆ Organising the environment for active learning.
- ◆ Establishing daily routines, including large- and small-group activities.
- ◆ Engaging children in a plan-do-review cycle.
- ◆ Developing children's capacity to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

Learnings from High/Scope: Enriching everyday practice

High/Scope programs offer an integrated approach to early childhood education based upon encouraging children's learning through active participation.

Author Jenni Connor was part of a group of Australian early childhood practitioners who examined the High/Scope approach and applied it within their centres.

Learnings from High/Scope: Enriching everyday practice provides practical experiences of the High/Scope approach in Australian settings, demonstrating its ability to:

- create a positive and productive learning environment
- build children's willingness to explore solutions to problems
- improve the quality of children's interactions with staff and other children
- encourage staff to engage in professional dialogue.

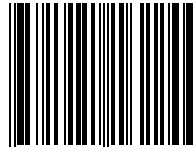
International evaluations of the High/Scope curriculum indicate that it produces high-quality results across a range of desired outcomes. *Learnings from High/Scope: Enriching everyday practice* provides powerful evidence of the value of this comprehensive educational approach.



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PO Box 7105 Watson ACT 2602
T: (02) 6242 1800 F: (02) 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

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