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Extensions
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IN THIS ISSUE

Being in Relationship

BY JULIE K. BIDDLE, PROFESSOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP, ANTIOCH UNIVERSITY MIDWEST, YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO

Building and nurturing relationships in an early childhood program is an intentional process that promotes powerful outcomes.

The articles in this issue of Extensions *are adapted from* The Three Rs of Leadership, *by educator Julie K. Biddle (HighScope Press, 2012). In this book, Dr. Biddle looks at leadership within the field of early childhood education as a broad concept that is separated from specific individuals, roles, and responsibilities. She writes that, from this perspective, leadership is a quality of organizations that can be exerted by anyone. In her book, Dr. Biddle examines three interconnected areas of leadership that are critical to organizational success and constitute what she calls "the three Rs":* relationships, reciprocal learning, *and* reflection. *She writes about how educators contribute to the evolution of leadership thinking and leadership action when they enter into supportive relationships with each other; engage in reciprocal learning, co-constructing knowledge with their students, their students' parents, and their colleagues; and reflect on their practice.*

Drawing on her 30-plus years of working in and with schools, Dr. Biddle explores these topics in the context of developmentally appropriate programs that promote and support meaningful learning. As she does so, she examines the evolution of leadership thinking within the field of education, strategies for building and supporting relationships

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within early education programs, practices that encourage reciprocal, give-and-take learning in schools in both formal and informal ways, and guidelines for reflective practice with colleagues and students. Examples are drawn from specific curriculum models, of which HighScope is one, and various early childhood programs that illustrate the ways in which the three Rs of leadership can positively impact teacher knowledge, student learning, and program effectiveness.

In this issue of Extensions*, the excerpts from* The Three Rs of Leadership *focus primarily on the importance of relationships between children, teachers, the school community, and families (feature article), and on reflective practices among members of teaching teams (Classroom Hints).*

The importance of relationships in any organization is common sense to most of us. After all, organizations are made up of people, and being in relationship with others is part of being human. Many of us value the process of developing, nurturing, and sustaining relationships. However, cultivating relationships is arduous work, and many organizations, including educational programs and school systems, fail to provide the support and structures necessary for nurturing strong working relationships. Building healthy and powerful relationships in early childhood programs is an intentional process; they do not develop accidentally or automatically. If an educational organization does not actively nurture the relationships between its stakeholders — encouraging both personal and professional responsibility and accountability — then reciprocal learning and reflective practice will be hard to establish.

Outcomes of Being in Relationship

When we consider the success, sustainability of effort, capacity of program, or leadership of an organization, it is inevitably a reflection of relationships. The various schools I've worked with (i.e., preschool and elementary) have heard me say numerous times, "It's all about relationships!" In fact, four key relationships set the tone in a school: the relationships children have with one another; the relationships between children and teachers; the relationships teachers have with one another; and the relationship between the program's staff and its families. In the remainder of this article, we will look at these different sets of relationships.

Child-to-Child Relationships

An adult's perception of who a child is and what he or she is capable of will in large part determine how children view themselves and, thus, how they view their peers. What is your image of a child? High-quality, developmentally appropriate programs view children as active in their own learning, constructing their knowledge of the world as they interact with people, objects, events and ideas. In HighScope classrooms, children engage in active participatory learning — a process in which teachers and children are partners in the learning experience and children are (co)constructors of their own knowledge (Epstein, 2007).

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When the adult's image of the child is one of strength, capabilities, and power, then children not only are strong, capable, and powerful, they view their peers in the same way. If children are strong, capable, and powerful, then an environment is created that embodies and reflects this image of responsibility.

– *The Three Rs of Leadership*
by Julie K Biddle

Relationships children have with one another are one of four key sets of relationships in a preschool setting.

Montessori educators also view children as strong and capable and responsible for their own learning. They believe children have absorbent minds and sensitive periods and therefore structure the environment to support their psychic development.

By contrast, in poor-quality programs the view of the child is one of a potential citizen who "some day" will have rights and responsibilities; therefore, these programs often place those rights and responsibilities in some distant future for others to deal with. Furthermore, the child is often defined in terms of deficits, deficiencies, labels, and weaknesses. In the Reggio Emilia schools I visited, preschool children worked with materials and tools that many kindergartners are rarely, if ever, allowed to use (usually because of insurance and licensure rules). Three-year-old children used pliers and wire cutters to work with wire; and they used hammers and nails to work with wood. They used felt-tip pens instead of fat, clunky pencils.

When the adult's image of the child is one of strength, capabilities, and power, then children not only are strong, capable, and powerful, they view their peers in the same way. If children are strong, capable, and powerful, then an environment is created that embodies and reflects this image of responsibility. Unfortunately, many of our educational programs operate on the assumption that young children are weak, deficient, and powerless and therefore need to be protected; many of our classroom environments reflect this.

A few years ago I consulted with a preschool program doing an environment audit. Most classroom windows were located high on the wall, so that they were out of the sight line for preschoolers. The children were always standing on tiptoes or pushing chairs against the wall trying to see outside. I suggested placing a one- or two-step box structure in front of the windows so the children could step up and see outside. This idea was immediately rejected due to the "safety code" that was stipulated for licensing. Any view of children that sees

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When adults view children as powerful and capable, children view themselves and their peers the same way.

them as incapable of walking up one or two steps is very limited. Imagine how much joy was lost because these young children could not see out their classroom windows!

Certainly, not all early childhood programs are like this! There are teachers who provide children with opportunities for experimentation. There are teachers who are intentional in preparing children to use materials and tools properly (e.g., safety goggles in the woodworking area). These teachers understand the benefits to students from these experiences. They give attention to how the environment is structured, how it can be used to teach children, and how it can encourage a child's experimentation. These are developmentally appropriate classrooms that demonstrate respect for children, their ideas, curiosities, and capabilities. These are classrooms where meaningful learning takes place.

Children-Teacher Relationships

According to teacher and educator Wendy Schiller, "Teachers make a profound difference in whether a child will have a desire to learn and whether the information learned is valued and used or simply committed to memory. Children look to their teachers as role models. They strive to be recognized by their teachers. They strive to please. Every teacher, every caregiver, holds in his or her hands the power to shape a child's entire future. The teacher-child relationship cannot be underestimated" (Schiller, 2009). When teachers take time to be fully present with young children, a trusting relationship develops. Listening intently to children's statements indicates that the teacher values what they are thinking. Writing down children's comments further shows how important their words are. Children quickly ascertain when they are valued. A child's ability to learn cognitively is tied to his or her social and emotional well-being. Teachers must be intentional in their interactions with children (Epstein, 2007) — in the questions they ask; how they listen to a child's words; and in the kinds of materials they make available to children. Nothing a teacher does in the classroom is more important than interacting with and recognizing a child's need for relationship.

Consider the following scenario. Young children are fascinated by the sticks, twigs, and branches they pick up on their adventures outside. They want to bring them inside. Sticks become all sorts of imaginary things from pointers to parts of a structure, to writing imple-

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As trust is established, a sense of *ourness* develops, which in turn creates the sense of belonging, of team, of family.

– *The Three Rs of Leadership*
by Julie K Biddle

ments, and yes, even to swords and other weapons. The possibilities found in sticks, twigs, and branches are endless. The questions asked and comments made by a teacher about these sticks and twigs offer children the opportunity to verbalize their imaginings. The invitation to children to explore their sticks and twigs within the classroom environment legitimizes the importance of their interests. This kind of inquiry validates children's thinking. A teacher who welcomes sticks and twigs into the classroom sets a very different tone than one who limits children's interests and exploration by requiring them to leave these materials outside.

Teachers who support and encourage children's explorations help legitimize the importance of the children's interests.

As Hohmann, Weikart, and Epstein (2008) remind us, "Adults, like children, have strengths and interests. In a supportive climate, adults' unique capacities and enthusiasms enrich and enliven their interactions with children, laying the foundation for authentic relationships that allow honest, effective teaching and learning to occur." The teacher who welcomes sticks, twigs, and small branches into the classroom opens up many possibilities for rich interactions, dialogue, and inquiries with her students. They continue: "Since teaching and learning are socially interactive processes, it is imperative that adults share their best, most genuine selves so their effect on children is positive and sustaining. The immediate experience of the reciprocity and mutual respect inherent in authentic relationships supports and encourages trust…The memories of such relationships continue to guide children long after they have moved on to other relationships with adults and peers in other learning settings" (p. 57).

A study group colleague once commented, "Children are going to amaze us every day. We'd better be prepared for it." Being fully present, intentional in our preparation, and actively listening and interacting with our children permits the building and nurturing of strong relationships between young children and their teachers. The relationship between a child and his or her teacher cannot be minimized. This relationship more than almost any other is the foundation for how young children navigate their educational journey. [Others have written extensively about this key relationship. Of note are Epstein (2009), Collaborative for the Advancement of Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), and Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL)].

Being in Relationship, continued

Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships

Teachers must offer one another trust and respect in order to establish strong and positive relationships. However, trust and respect cannot develop between people unless they are able to get to know one another. In other words, teachers will not learn to trust and respect other teachers if they are isolated from one another. Certain strategies support the building of trust and respect.

In supportive team relationships, adults view one another as valuable resources for educating children and working with others.

Structures like peer learning, an entry-year mentoring program, daily common planning time, study group meetings around a topic of interest, and peer observations not only build trust and respect but also enhance relationships between and among teachers. In peer learning, for example, individuals or small groups of peers spend time observing and discussing one another's teaching practices. An entry-year mentoring program typically pairs teachers new to a program (usually in their first year of teaching, but not always) with a more experienced staff member. In some preschool programs, the supervisor or director acts as the sole mentor to new teachers; in others it is the responsibility of the "lead" teacher. In other cases, the program has personnel responsible for various aspects of the program. On occasion, a program director oversees the professional development of staff and curricular aspects, while a second director handles all the managerial and fiscal issues. Regardless of the program structure, a primary purpose of a mentoring program is to provide support to the new staff member. A study group or a book group is a form of professional development typically focused on a central theme or text. In each of these structures teachers enter into conversation about issues they have in common. They learn about one another in a deeper, and sometimes more personal, way and often expose professional vulnerabilities to their peers. This connection builds trust and respect.

The more individuals interact with one another, the easier it is to develop an unconditional good will toward others. The more unconditional good will is practiced, the more likely it is that trust is established between colleagues. As trust is established, a sense of *our*ness develops, which in turn creates the sense of belonging, of team, of family. A strong unity of purpose is evident, and coming to consensus in decision-making becomes easier (see Bryk & Schneider, 2003, for further discussion about trust in organizations).

Being in Relationship, continued

3 Key Signs of Strengthening Relationships

When relationships among teaching team members become stronger, you will begin to see these signs:

- Conversations become more positive.
- Collaboration increases.
- Conflict is not viewed negatively but rather as a point of possibility.

At Central Avenue Elementary, a school that I worked with, strong teacher-to-teacher relationships helped produce high teacher efficacy as well as a sense of ownership for the work of the school. This ultimately generated improved performance by everyone. Getting to this point is not easy and takes time. Individuals must spend time actively listening to one another. They must work through conflict agreeably, and actions and words must be consistent with one another.

It becomes evident that relationships among teachers are strengthening when three key things happen. First, conversations become more positive. The blaming of others for current situations is over (i.e., "It's not my fault. I didn't have anything to do with…") and is replaced by statements like, "How are we going to deal with this situation?" Second, collaboration increases. People choose to work together. They realize the value of others' ideas and seek them out. And because of this, collegiality improves. And third, when conflicts arise, people agree to disagree with one another agreeably and often arrive at a collaborative solution. Conflict is not viewed negatively but rather as a point of possibility. Individuals consciously exhibit good will toward others. Strengths and accomplishments are recognized and celebrated more often. In supportive team relationships, adults view one another as valuable resources for gaining a broader perspective on educating children and working with others. Though the process of developing supportive relationships may take time and commitment, in the long run it allows teams to work effectively together through the daily ups and downs of life with children (Hohmann, Weikart & Epstein, 2008, p. 95).

The Relationships Between School and Community

One of the greatest struggles school personnel have is getting families engaged in the educational process. It is essential to establish a strong working relationship with parents and families of the children in your program, and there are ways to reach out to families and encourage their involvement.

Family members, just like their children, know when a program values them and welcomes their ideas. Unfortunately, not all family members have had positive experiences in school settings. It behooves educators to see that the family's experience during their child's school years is positive, especially their early experiences since the early childhood program is often the family's first entry point into their child's educational journey. In order to do this, program staff must be welcoming, open to parents' questions and ideas, and willing to engage in reciprocal relationships with families — that is, each learning from the other. In the relationships between practitioners and families, "there is mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals" (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 23). They are partners in educating their young children.

How can programs establish family-friendly practices? How can educators welcome parents? Relationships between programs and families begin by opening up the program

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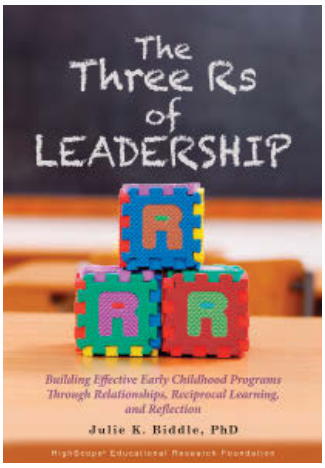
The Three Rs of Leadership

In *The Three Rs of Leadership*, Julie K Biddle, PhD, redefines the concept of *leadership* in early childhood education, proposing a model of shared responsibility among school stakeholders. In this revised perspective, leadership is not tied to a single leader but is instead a *quality* of organizations that can be exerted by anyone. When educators enter into supportive *relationships* with each other; engage in *reciprocal learning* with students, parents, and colleagues; and *reflect* on their practice, they contribute to the evolution of leadership thinking and leadership action.



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to family members and inviting them in. Program personnel welcome family members each morning and at the end of each day as children arrive and depart from the program. Teachers openly communicate with families and listen carefully to what they say. "One way to build trusting relationships is to see yourself and others as members of the human family" (Hohmann, Weikart & Epstein, 2008, p. 82). We offer the same kinds of behavior to our families that we do to our coworkers: trust, respect, unconditional good will, time and lots of communication. In HighScope programs, teachers learn about children and their families and traditions through home visits, participation in community life (e.g., attending neighborhood events, getting to know community leaders), and reaching out to families in various ways, such as setting up a parent library, hosting potlucks and picnics, and sharing child activity logs with parents. Parents are invited to share special talents and traditions with children in the program, attend monthly workshops about the curriculum, and participate in field trips and other events (Epstein, 2007).

The schools of Reggio Emilia set a good example in this regard as well. Their image of the parent is as formidable as their more widely recognized image of the child described earlier. Reggio Emilia educators tell visitors to their programs, "Parents must feel constantly invited" (from personal seminar notes, 2004). And so, in Reggio Emilia schools, parents are involved with meetings, workshops, parties, city childhood councils (each council consists of all school personnel, elected parents, and other citizens), and daily agendas. In many of their programs, parents' written comments and opinions about the environment and program are documented and displayed. Open communication is valued for the purposes of learning and improving the program.

In HighScope programs, teachers learn about children and their families through home visits, participation in community life, and inviting parents to participate in class field trips and other activities.

Being in Relationship, continued

Dr. Julie K. Biddle is an associate professor at Antioch University Midwest in Yellow Springs, OH, where she teaches in both the early childhood and educational leadership programs. From 2004 to 2011, Dr. Biddle was a member of the HighScope Board of Directors, serving as Chair during her final year on the Board.

The recipient of the 2011 Irene Bandy-Hedden Early Childhood Leadership Award for conceptual leadership given by the Ohio Department of Education, Dr. Biddle has served on various state early childhood/special education consortia, local child advocacy organizations, and the board of directors of the Miami Valley Child Development Centers' Head Start agency. She was a consulting reviewer for the *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* and editor of two other educational journals. For several years Dr. Biddle was president of the Learning Community Project, a nonprofit organization leading whole-school improvement initiatives. Her education career spans over 35 years in preK-12 schools as teacher, administrator, and consultant.

Similarly, a hallmark of Head Start is its strong commitment to parent involvement. From its inception, families have played a critical role in their children's learning. Head Start programs provide multiple opportunities for participation. As a result, there is strong evidence supporting the impact of parent-focused programs on the cognitive growth of children (e.g., see Oyemade, Washington, & Gullo, 1989; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1993; Chang, Park, Singh, Sung, 2009; Epstein, 2009). Establishing relationships with families creates increased opportunities for reciprocal learning between home and school.

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CLASSROOM HINTS

Reflective Practice Among Colleagues

BY JULIE K. BIDDLE

The culture of an organization often sets the tone for the building of relationships and the creation of spaces for reciprocal learning. Organizational culture also mitigates either for or against the possibility for reflective practice among colleagues. If organizations choose to support strong relationships and reciprocal learning, then it is likely that reflective practice is a value as well. When an organization sets aside time every day for planning and reflecting, the likelihood of incorporating it into a daily routine increases. In some organizations (e.g., HighScope programs and the municipal preschool programs in Reggio Emilia) daily team planning is stressed. The length of time needn't be long, but if it is seen as a standard part of the day, the organizational culture legitimizes and respects reflective practice. This article looks at how teachers and teaching teams usefully reflect on their practice.

Teacher as Researcher

The best teachers "aren't good just because of what they do in their classrooms for six hours a day, they're good teachers because of how they live their lives 24 hours a day. These teachers live a life filled with learning, thinking, reading, and debating. Because inquiry is an important part of their lives, inquiry becomes an essential part of their classroom" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.27). As a researcher, the teacher is a co-constructor of knowledge with her students. This relationship permits reciprocal learning and frames the opportunity for research or inquiry about the classroom actions and interactions. As researchers, teachers use the inquiry process or scientific method. That is, they engage in thoughtful reflection about what the behaviors and words of children mean. They hypothesize about what is going on, what is being said, and why. They test out various hypotheses, interpret findings, redefine, reframe, rethink the situation, try out new strategies, and continue the cycle of hypothesizing and testing ideas multiple times before, during, and after working with their students. This inquiry process – alternating action with evaluation and interpretation – is filled with uncertainties and ambiguity but is the essence of entering into reflective practice, as it promotes responsiveness to children's thoughts, actions, and curiosities that is respectful of their capabilities.

I had a second grader one year who seemed incapable of sitting still. I often thought about what I should do with Oliver. I hypothesized about reasons for Oliver's fidgety behaviors. I tested these hypotheses by trying a variety of strategies (e.g., rewarding his sitting still with things he enjoyed). None of the things I tried seemed to work very well. Not only was I becoming frustrated, but so was Oliver. Finally I decided to include Oliver in the problem solving. We brainstormed ideas together and came up with a simple, but workable solution. Oliver could stand or move about, as he needed, as long as he didn't disturb the learning of others. The use of inquiry with Oliver transformed my practice from then on. Whenever I was confronted with a puzzling situation with a child I engaged them in solving the problem. This practice was both responsive to and respectful of children's capabilities. This use of inquiry works with colleagues too, especially in constructively dealing with conflict because the focus of the inquiry remains on the problem, not the person(s).

Valuing inquiry and shared problem solving often involves a shift in a teacher's perspective and way of being, just as my practice changed after working with Oliver. Teachers must move away from long-held assumptions about what teaching is (i.e., one-way transfer of information, or maintaining control) and embrace the idea that children are active participants in their own learning. A teacher's primary focus must be on the child rather than the con-

Classroom Hints, continued

tent. The locus of power shifts, as what goes on in the classroom is now a shared responsibility between teachers and students. As teachers exercise thought-filled practice and critical reflection about and with their students, they begin to know more about how children think, feel, and interpret the world around them.

As a researcher, the teacher brings her own subjective lens and set of hypotheses to the inquiry process. But as the teacher tests her hypotheses and dialogues with colleagues, she remains open to whatever the data may show, even if the results contradict previous assumptions. This is an important component of reflective practice. Through the inquiry process one can "get outside the situation" and look at what the data says, permitting a greater objectivity. In my example with Oliver, as long as my feelings (and his) were bound in the situation, it was difficult to problem-solve alternative strategies. Only by getting outside the situation could I calmly examine alternative explanations and solutions. When emotions are removed, then defenses that come with them are absent, and there is more openness to change and transformation of practice can take place.

Action research is used both as an individual teacher, collectively with colleagues, and with students. What differentiates action research from mere research is that each round of reflection is followed by specific action, then re-evaluated (re-researched) and, if necessary, the action is modified. When I realized my initial strategies with Oliver were not working, I took action and problem-solved with Oliver about what we might do. I then confirmed that the agreed upon change was effective for Oliver, the rest of the class, and for me by documenting what happened after the change was made. Keeping careful records of the inquiry process supports a revisiting and reframing of the learning process and permits more informed and greater intentionality in a teacher's planning for additional learning opportunities.

Documentation

Documentation is part of the inquiry process. Inquiry begins with teacher observation of and active listening to children. During these observations (or shortly afterward), the teacher documents what she observes. She then studies the documentation, both individually and with colleagues. She hypothesizes about what her students are thinking and what their intentions are. She then plans her next steps. She may provide a material to help build on their interests, or she may choose to do nothing at this point. She continues to observe and document, to study the documentation, and to hypothesize about her students' intentions and ideas and what to do next. The teacher is more intent on the children's questions rather than her adult planned activities.

• • •

As teachers engage in both creating and sustaining the cycle of inquiry, documentation, and critical reflection, various perspectives are shared through dialogue. This dialogue can and should occur during peer coaching sessions, in both vertical and horizontal work groups, in study groups, and at staff meetings. The time and space for colleagues to talk with each other; to share ideas, insights, and information about the learning-teaching experiences in their respective classrooms; and to raise and answer questions together is invaluable to the development of strong relationships. When relationships are strong, communication increases, and conflicts typically decrease. As more and more teachers act as researchers within an organization, the culture of classroom inquiry begins to permeate the organizational culture as a whole. This begins to live out what praxis is all about, namely, reflection (leadership thinking) and action upon the world (of learning and teaching) in order to transform it.

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NEWS BRIEFS

HighScope Hosts Chinese Educators

In early August, 14 visitors from the PuDong District of Shanghai, China, traveled to Ypsilanti to learn about the HighScope Curriculum. Among the visitors, five were administrators of early childhood education from the Pudong Department of Education, overseeing about 300,000 preschool children (aged 3–5). The other nine were principals of key preschool programs, with each one serving more than 1,000 children.

Between Sunday, August 4, and Thursday, August 8, the visitors attended training sessions and visited early childhood programs that employ the HighScope approach. Training sessions covered active learning, key developmental indicators, plan-do-review, small-group time, large-group time, adult-child interaction, observation and assessment, and adult learning and coaching. The training was facilitated by Shannon Lockhart, HighScope Senior Early Childhood Specialist, and Suzanne Gainsley, Director of the HighScope Demonstration Preschool. The group also joined a session on large-group time that was being held as part of the regular Preschool Curriculum Course (PCC) offered at HighScope in Ypsilanti. During this session, both groups of trainees enjoyed interacting with one another and noticed how their questions and concerns were much the same, Lockhart said. The visitors were also involved in the COR Advantage training and were particularly interested in how the instrument is used to collect reliable data from teachers, she added.

Site visits made by HighScope's Chinese guests included trips to Gretchen's House in Ann Arbor, a program serving middle- and upper-income children; Early Learning Children's Community, a center connected with Lansing Community College that uses a mix of HighScope and Reggio Emilia; and Perry Nursery School, a HighScope-certified program in Ann Arbor serving low-income, single-parent families.

Nan Mastie, Client Relationship Specialist in HighScope's Educational Services Department, accompanied the visitors on the site visits. She said that many of the questions the visitors asked centered on budgets, teacher requirements, licensing, safety, how to serve at-risk children, and how small-group time is carried out in a HighScope program. "They were having a hard time visualizing what small-group looks like," Mastie said, adding that they weren't used to seeing children working in small groups with individual sets of materials. The visitors were able to observe a small-group time in action at Perry Nursery School and then build on that experience during the training on small-group time following the site visit, she said.

HighScope's visitors from Shanghai, China, visit Perry Nursery School in August.

This is the fourth group of visitors from China that HighScope has hosted over the past three years. Other groups have included early childhood educational officials from the China Ministry of Education and the provincial department of education; professors from major teachers' universities across the country, including Beijing, Shanghai, and Nanjing; and preschool program directors and teachers.

Save the Date for the HighScope Conference!

Save the date for HighScope's 2014 annual international conference. The conference will take place from May 7-9; preconference sessions will be held on May 5 and 6.

Over the coming months, keep an eye on the HighScope website, **highscope.org**, for details.

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