

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURE ARTICLE:

Going From Me to We: Social Studies in Preschool
page 1

CLASSROOM HINTS:

Social Studies and COR Advantage
page 11

TRAINER-TO-TRAINER:

Defining Social Studies in Early Childhood
page 16

SPECIAL EDUCATION:

Helping Young Children Understand Diversity
page 18

ASK US:

page 20

NEWS BRIEFS:

page 21

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Going From Me to We: Social Studies in Preschool

BY POLLY NEILL, HIGHSCOPE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

During the first week of an online course on COR Advantage (HighScope's online assessment tool for children from birth to age 6), we ask participants which of the HighScope Curriculum content areas they are most anxious about learning, and Social Studies is most often at the top of the list. Why? Because many teachers are uncertain about what social studies actually looks like in action in an early childhood classroom. In this article, we'll first discuss definitions of social studies; then we'll talk about how to recognize social studies learning in the preschool classroom, which we'll do by considering each of the KDIs in the Social Studies curriculum content area.



What social studies "looks like" in the classroom is any number of things that have to do with diversity, community roles, decision-making, geography, history, and ecology.

Defining Social Studies

Several publications define what social studies consists of in early childhood programs. In her article *Social Studies in Today's Early Childhood Curricula*, Gayle Mindes states that current "social studies curricula can support children as they solve classroom and social issues as well as investigate neighborhood and community problems with the goal of enhancing understanding and civic awareness

“...the early childhood classroom often gives children their first sense of the wider social community and how they fit within it.”

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Jennifer Burd
Adam Robson
Editors

Nancy Goings
Publications Assistant

Nancy Brickman
Director of Publications

Sherry Barker
Membership Manager

Carrie Hernandez
Director of Marketing and Communication

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and pride” (Mindes, 2005, p. 14). Other educators see social studies as the central focus of an integrated curriculum, in which teachers “are able to tap into children’s natural curiosity about the larger world” (D’Addesio, J., Grob, B., Furman, L., Hayes, K., and David, J., 2005, p. 50). It is about interdependence; that is, it is “the complex and intertwined relationships between people, their environment, and their needs” (ibid).

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defines social studies as

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence.... The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. (NCSS, 2010, p. 1)

While this definition may sound too abstract or complex for preschoolers, the learning that forms the foundation for “civic competence” takes place throughout the day in early childhood programs. Two facets of early childhood development make children particularly ready for this subject. One is their growing awareness of social norms and customs, sometimes referred to as “socialization.” The other is their use of emerging classification skills to identify things that are the same and/

or different. In other words, preschoolers are primed to learn about how people sort and navigate their way through the wider social world.



Social studies is a natural part of the preschool day. For example, children learn about social studies as they familiarize themselves with the daily routine.

Social Studies and the Preschool Classroom

As it is outside their family environment, the early childhood classroom often gives children their first sense of the wider social community and how they fit within it.

Children are keen observers from birth; by the time they walk through that preschool door, they are on the lookout for everything this new environment has to offer. Children learn about social studies as they participate

in decision-making in the classroom, familiarize themselves with the daily routine, learn to use the recycle box, find the door to the bathroom, and meet a child with

“The materials in the classroom interest areas, the interactions among the children, and the different parts of the daily routine all contribute to children’s learning about the six key developmental indicators (KDIs) that make up the Social Studies curriculum content area — diversity, community roles, decision making, geography, history, and ecology.”

braces on her legs (Townsend-Butterworth, D., n.d.). In concert with their social and emotional development, social studies helps children take those first steps outside themselves, recognizing that while they are unique individuals, they also share many similar feelings and concerns with the other children and adults they meet. In learning about all the different facets that make up social studies, children are learning what it takes to build and maintain a community.

The materials in the classroom interest areas, the interactions among the children, and the different parts of the daily routine all contribute to children’s learning about the six key developmental indicators (KDIs) that make up the Social Studies curriculum content area — diversity, community roles, decision making, geography, history, and ecology. Next, we will consider each of these KDIs and how they are expressed through children’s play in the preschool classroom.



As they play together, children learn how people have different interests, backgrounds, and abilities.

Social Studies Learning and the KDIs

KDI 53. Diversity: Children understand that people have diverse characteristics, interests, and abilities.

Many well-meaning early childhood programs address diversity with holidays or traditional foods or clothing. However, a Japanese kimono, an Indian sherwani, or a necklace of cowrie shells in the house area; two books about Kwanza in the book area; hummus and pita for snack; and a dreidel in the toy area do not lead to

“Our goal as educators is to treat diversity as the norm, not the exception. Therefore, an effective approach to diversity is to represent it in the daily lives of people” (Epstein, 2012, p. 28).

children’s increased awareness of diversity. In the HighScope Preschool Curriculum content area book, *Social Studies*, Ann Epstein writes, “Our goal as educators is to treat diversity as the norm, not the exception. Therefore, an effective approach to diversity is to represent it in the daily lives of people” (Epstein, 2012, p. 28) — that is, rather than presenting it as a museum exhibit. Children begin to become aware of similarities and differences when they are quite young (e.g., parents and strangers, gender) and their primary sources for their ideas about diversity are their families and (increasingly) the popular media (p. 23). Since our goal is that children will treat others fairly and equally, we must make it a practice to model this behavior in our own language and behavior. Teachers can use matter-of-fact words to describe children’s observations of differences and can stay neutral to the words children use rather than scolding them for being insensitive to differences:

Child: “Why does Lana have those metal things on her legs?”

Teacher: “Those are called braces, and Lana needs to use them to make her legs stronger and to help her walk.”

Child: “Hey, Kobe’s dad only has one arm!”

Teacher: “Kobe’s dad has one arm; you and I each have two. Sometimes kids get anxious when they see something different. Do you think that’s how you are feeling?”

Prepare a class photo book for children to look at that will help them become aware of the wide variety of characteristics present among the families in your class.

Use a family survey to encourage family members to share family traditions; you might inquire about parents’ hobbies, favorite foods, and occupations. Extend an invitation to family members to demonstrate their talents or hobbies for children in the



During pretend play, children learn about community roles and others’ interests and family backgrounds.

“Teachers can learn much about children by taking on supporting roles in children’s pretend play, and also by supporting and extending their knowledge about family roles.”

classroom. Home visits are also a good opportunity to gather information about families. Finally, make sure you have materials in your interest areas that reflect children’s home cultures.

KDI 54. Community Roles: Children recognize that people have different roles and functions in the community.

Often when teachers think about “community roles,” they think about the typical occupations people hold in the wider community, such as police officer, grocer, and beautician. But even before children look out into the community for people whose jobs or positions attract them, there are members of their own household who have featured roles that hold plenty of fascination. These are the roles that children take on in their pretend play. Teachers can learn much about children by taking on supporting roles in children’s pretend play, and also by supporting and extending their knowledge about family roles.

- For a surprising number of young children, the vacuum is one of the most bewitching tools in the house, and many children become interested in the idea of becoming a “vacuumer.”

In the house area, Kyra pushed a long block back and forth across the floor and said she was the “vacuumer.” Holly, her teacher, said, “Vacuuming is a big job. I vacuum at my house too.”

- When they are able to help Grandpa or Aunt Shannon with repairs around the house, children not only learn about tools and tool safety, they also feel a sense of accomplishment.

Billie and Sam are in the woodworking area getting ready to build a boat. “Don’t forget your safety goggles,” said Sam to Billie.

As their world expands, children see and become more interested in the roles of people outside of their family. They begin to understand that those people have “jobs.” Children frequently have favorite people they look for when they go out for a walk or drive; many children are attracted to traditional favorites, such as firefighters, large equipment operators, and police officers. Others may dream of becoming a train engineer, a member of a ship’s crew, or the bass drum player in the marching band. The following anecdotal notes show how some teachers observed children’s growing interest in the work that people do:

“In order for children to learn to function as a community, they have to recognize and accept (sometimes reluctantly) that the individual does not always get what he or she wants but that all members of the group have the right to be heard and express their opinions.”

- *At snacktime, Josh said to Benny, another child, “Benny, on the way to school I saw E-3, my favorite green fire truck at my grocery store. Did you know that firefighters buy groceries and fight fires?”*
- *During their pretend play as bicyclists, Mira said to Katie, “Jane, a police officer, rides her bike past our school every day. One day she stopped by to visit and showed us everything she carries in her bike pack. I asked if she got tired riding her bike all day.”*
- *Several children admire Maggie, the school custodian. Three-and-a-half-year-old Leslie commented, “She carries a lot of keys on her key chain — I want to be like her.”*



During message board time, children talk about the day and contribute to classroom decisions.

- *After a trip to a pizzeria, the children were excited about becoming pizza makers — “Then we can add all the pepperonis we want.”*

As part of learning about community roles, children also learn that people can have more than one role. For example, Desmond’s dad is a drummer in a band who came to school to play his drums and then let the class play the drums. Moya’s mom is a dance teacher, and when she came in for large-group time, everyone danced together.

KDI 55. Decision making: Children participate in making classroom decisions.

In order for children to learn to function as a community, they have to recognize and accept (sometimes reluctantly) that the individual does not always get what he or she wants but that all members of the group have the right to be heard and express their opinions. In her 2012 book *Social Studies*, Ann Epstein describes it like this: “When preschoolers help to identify group problems or opportunities, generate and agree

“It should come as no surprise, then, that research shows that when children are involved in the decision-making process they are not only more likely to go along with the decisions, but they will also encourage their peers to do so” (Elias et al., as cited in Epstein, 2012, p. 45).

on solutions, carry out their ideas, and evaluate whether they are working, they are experiencing democracy in action” (Epstein, 2012, p. 45). Contrast the effectiveness of guidelines established this way with classroom rules arbitrarily established by the teacher in which the children have had no voice. It should come as no surprise, then, that research shows that when children are involved in the decision-making process they are not only more likely to go along with the decisions, but they will also encourage their peers to do so (Elias et al., as cited in Epstein, 2012, p. 45). Below are some examples of what decision making looks like in the classroom.

- *Frank and Zanni’s class has a new guinea pig, and yesterday each table group picked a name for it. Today during Message Board they are going to vote for the name they like best by dropping a button in the basket labeled with that name.*
- *This morning’s message let the children know there were new materials in the classroom: long, sturdy cardboard tubes in different sizes. The teachers asked the children if they had ideas about which area we should put them. Jonah said, “art area.” Danae suggested, “In the house area to use as crutches.” Adja said, “No, they have to go in the block area — they belong there with the cars!” Felicia said, “I’d like to have them outside.” The teachers explained that if the tubes were outside, they might fall apart if it rained, since the tubes are made from paper. The teachers wrote the three remaining areas on a piece of paper and the children made a mark under the area they thought was best. When the vote was over they got a surprise! The block area and house area received the same*



When children think about different parts of the classroom as they are planning where they will play, they are engaging with geography KDIs in the Social Studies curriculum content area.

“Young children are born explorers, curious about the space around them and the objects, structures, and physical features that are contained within that space.”

number of votes! “What should we do now?” asked one of the teachers. The kids talked to each other and Yael spoke up and suggested, “Put some in the house area and some in the block area – that works, doesn’t it?”

KDI 56. Geography: Children recognize and interpret features and locations in their environment.

Young children are born explorers, curious about the space around them and the objects, structures, and physical features that are contained within that space. As soon as they develop enough to become mobile, they are off – to finally discover what’s behind that door, find out what’s under that chair, and learn where Mom goes when she disappears around the corner. The following anecdotes illustrate what geography looks like and sounds like in the preschool classroom.

- *During snack, Tito said, “I’m helping my dad build a garage right next to my house.”*
- *Bianca responded to Tito, “I think we go past your house on the way to church, and I saw your new garage – is it the one with no roof?”*



Showing that they understand the concepts of past, present, and future, at recall time children talk about what they did during the day and sometimes mention what they will do the next day.

- *During recall, Louie said, “I made a treasure map that had the house area, art area, toy area, and the sink on it. Then Gareth and me went to the block area to build a ship so we could go look for the treasure.”*

As children develop a sense of spatial awareness, they are beginning to understand about direction and location.

- *“Guess what? I found the missing puzzle piece; it was across from the puzzle shelf and under Wendy’s table.”*

“HighScope’s daily routine is particularly effective for helping children become familiar with the idea of sequence, or the order of events — particularly current, recent, and upcoming events.”

- *“When it rains hard, we go to the gym. We have to walk down the hall, around a corner, and down some steps to get there.”*

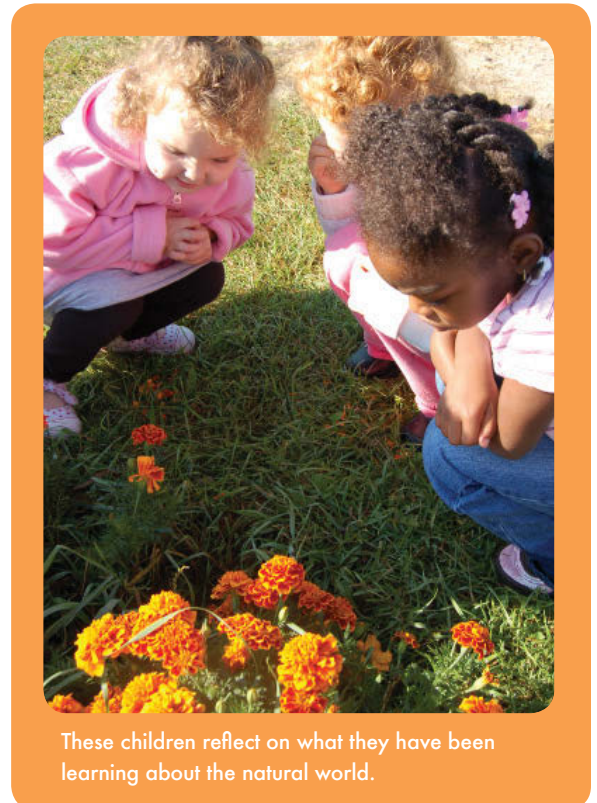
Wherever children turn when they take those first few steps through their front door, it’s likely that they will be having an experience in geography.

KDI 57. History: Children understand past, present, and future.

To make history meaningful to young children, it is wisest to frame it within their present experiences:

- *At recall time, Brook said, “I play with cars tomorrow in the block area.”*
- *During message board, Elijah read the message “We have two stay-at-home days. No school tomorrow.”*

HighScope’s daily routine is particularly effective for helping children become familiar with the idea of sequence, or the order of events — particularly current, recent, and upcoming events. When you keep a large, clear, visual representation of the daily routine at the children’s level, this allows them to not only keep track of where they are (e.g., large-group time) but what they will be doing next (planning). They can physically mark where they are in the sequence by moving a clothespin to the next part of the day.



These children reflect on what they have been learning about the natural world.

- *During planning time Katie said, “I’m going to play in the block area with Carlie like I did yesterday.”*
- *During snacktime, while discussing the rest of the day’s routine, Brodie said, “Next is small group, then we go outside.”*



Polly Neill is an early childhood specialist at HighScope Educational Research Foundation. She is the author of the HighScope book *Real Science in Preschool: Here, There, and Everywhere*, and contributing writer to *Multicultural Programs* and *Small-Group Times to Scaffold Early Learning*, both from HighScope Press. She also develops and facilitates HighScope online courses. Polly holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in anthropology.

KDI 58. Ecology: Children understand the importance of taking care of their environment.

Ecology is listed under social studies because it deals with people’s responsibility for taking care of the environment — our relationship with, and how, we impact the environment. While most people regard ecology as outdoor-focused, it is also a habit practiced indoors, for example, in an early childhood classroom. Occasionally children come to preschool already familiar with the practice of recycling and are helpful in getting others into the habit too.

- *Shamir collected his paper scraps and put them in the recycle box. He noticed that Leslie was throwing hers in the waste basket and said, “Hey, don’t put it there; put it in this green box with the arrows that go in a circle. Then they can make it into something else and we don’t have to cut down the trees.”*
- *During snack, Kai said, “Save your applesauce cups so that we can use them as paint containers in the art area.”*
- *Jayla chose a small piece of construction paper and said, “I don’t need a big piece because I only want to cut a small heart.”*

• • •

Of the nine content areas that make up HighScope’s curriculum content, only social studies focuses on children’s role in building and forming communities. As they take those first tentative steps into a world that does not revolve around them and learn to practice respect and responsibility toward the people, practices, and natural world they come into contact with, children just might find that being a “we” can be a lot more fun than just being a “me.”

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CLASSROOM HINTS

Social Studies and COR Advantage

BY SUZANNE GAINESLEY, SENIOR HIGHSCOPE EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST AND DIRECTOR OF THE HIGHSCOPE DEMONSTRATION PRESCHOOL

Most of the people who had been using HighScope's child assessment instrument, the Child Observation Record (COR), have now switched over to COR Advantage. While the process of collecting anecdotes remains the same, the items have changed, and so anecdotes have to be scored under different, and sometimes entirely new, categories in COR Advantage. This takes some “relearning” on the part of experienced “old” COR users. One of new categories in COR Advantage is Social Studies. I must admit that while substitute teaching, I too had the experience of being uncertain about where to score certain anecdotes. And when I used the COR Advantage Anecdote Status report to check the progress of my anecdotal entries, Social Studies was the category with the most gaps. The Anecdote Status report shows the number of anecdotal notes a teacher has entered for each item for each child so that, looking at the report, a teacher can see which items have more anecdotes and which have fewer. I reviewed the Social Studies items in COR Advantage and realized I had missed many opportunities to take social studies anecdotal notes, simply because I hadn't recognized when engagement with this category was occurring in children's play, in the questions they asked, and in their growing understanding of how their corner of society works. The purpose of this article is to remind myself and others of the ways we can be more aware of children's social studies learning and to provide opportunities that support and extend it in the classroom so we won't be left with holes in our COR Advantage records.

Item FF. Knowledge of Self and Others

Let's start with item FF. Knowledge of self and others. Of the social studies items, this is the one that I feel teachers are most aware of. Young children begin learning about others by focusing on one personal attribute at a time, usually an obvious visible one, such as gender, size, or skin color (Epstein, 2012). Based on one trait, children decide who is the same as or different from themselves. As their knowledge of their own personal characteristics expands and they gain the ability to hold more than one attribute in mind at a time, children begin to notice more similarities and differences



between themselves and others. We know that children's initial ideas about themselves and other people are influenced not only by their own experiences but also by the values and attitudes of their parents, other family members, and, increasingly, by social media. By preschool, many children already have an idea about which personal traits are deemed desirable by societal norms. When we look at the specific levels in COR Advantage item FF, Knowledge of self and others, we are reminded of what we need to do to nurture children's self-acceptance and broaden their knowledge and appreciation of others.

Here are some ideas to support levels 3–7 (approximately early to late preschool or kindergarten). These ideas are meant to inspire interactions and conversations with children that in turn lead to rich COR Advantage anecdotal notes.

Level 3: Child plays or talks about family or community roles.

- Ask parents to share the names and relationships of important people in their child's life (e.g., stepsister, nanny, Poppa). Ask children about their family members and refer to these people by name and relationship when they come into the classroom so other children learn who they are (e.g., “Jonas, how is your sister Clara?” or “There is Myah's abuela. Her grandma is picking Myah up today.”)
- Make a classroom family book with pictures of children's family members. Include your own page so you can introduce your family members to the children.
- Talk about the jobs family members do. Ask parents about specific things they do at work. Add uniforms, work attire, and

props that reflect the things parents use at work. Share stories about the things you do when you are not at school.

- Take field trips to local businesses or municipal services. Talk to the owners or employees beforehand, tell them about the things children may find interesting, and discuss how the children can explore the workspace safely and without disrupting operations. If possible, bring back materials from the business or service that the children can use in their pretend play.

Level 4: Child identifies similarities or differences in people’s personal characteristics.

- Provide dolls with different ethnic characteristics. Describe these traits as you play with the dolls (e.g., say something like “I’m going to put a hat on my baby with the curly hair” or “These dolls all have different colored skin — some are lighter and some are darker”). Model using descriptive and nonjudgmental terms.
- Play “I spy a child.” Describe a child’s personal characteristics (for example, their physical traits, the languages they speak, the things they like to do) and have children guess who you are describing.
- Read a variety of stories depicting people of different cultures and ethnicities. Ask children to find similarities and differences between the characters in the book and themselves.

Level 5: Child compares his or her own and others’ family characteristics.

- Compare photos on children’s family book pages, pointing out the similarities or differences in family makeup.
- Read stories that depict families that are similar and different from the families you serve (nontraditional families, extended families, families where a language other than English is spoken at home). Ask children how the families in a story are the same or different from their own family.
- Have children draw pictures of their families and describe their family members. Talk about how your family or other children’s families are the same or different from theirs.

Level 6: Child voices a sense of belonging to a community.

- Take photos of familiar buildings in children’s neighborhoods or communities (e.g., grocery store, gas station, water tower). Create a photo album or tape the photos on blocks to use in the block area.

- Take field trips to local businesses and talk about why people need such businesses in their communities. Provide props (and materials to make props) so the children can incorporate these businesses into their pretend play.
- Talk about upcoming community events such as festivals or parades. If families attend these events with their children, encourage them to share photos or mementos of the experience.

Level 7: Child takes personal responsibility for making sure others are treated fairly and with respect.

- Read stories that address social conflicts between people and ask children for suggestions for resolving the problems.
- Create social stories with children as a way to address situations in the classroom that involve respecting others. Ask questions like “What can you do to help in this situation?”
- Acknowledge when children solve their own problems. Ask them why they decided to solve the problem a certain way.

Item GG, Geography

The next COR Advantage social studies item is GG, Geography. I thought I would have difficulty scoring this item. But when I put aside my adult perspective on geography, and focussed on the geography



of the preschool classroom, I saw that I could write many anecdotal notes — particularly for the lower levels — just by watching children navigate their environment and participate in the plan-do-review process. Supporting the higher levels required a bit more planning and creativity. Here are some ideas for supporting geography levels 3–7:

Level 3: Child uses symbols to help retrieve or put away materials or to identify the actual location of interest areas.

- Label your classroom interest areas and refer to both the area name and the area symbol during planning and recall time. To help children who are English language learners (ELL), make labels in both English and the language(s) they speak.
- Ask children to name or point to the symbol of the area they wish to play in and watch to see if they go to that area.
- Watch children put away toys at cleanup time. Ask them how they know where toys go on the shelves. Notice if they point to or indicate that the label helped them know where to put toys.
- Ask children to help you label shelves for classroom materials. Again, use language(s) in addition to English when appropriate.

Level 4: Child reads a simple familiar map, such as a map of the classroom.

- Create a simple map of the classroom. At planning time, have children point out on the map where they will play.
- Draw a partial map of the classroom, and have children help you complete the map by telling you features of the classroom to add (such as a missing interest area, doors and windows, shelves or cubbies, and so on).
- Draw a map of the playground, and indicate on the map where children will find new materials to play with.
- Create an obstacle course indoors or outdoors. Draw a map of the

course and help children read the map so they know how to move through the course.

Level 5: Child knows how to navigate around a familiar building.

- Encourage children to draw a simple map of their own house.
- Take walks around your school building or a familiar building such as the local library. Ask children to direct you back to your starting point or lead you to a specific location (such as the lunchroom, the lobby, or an older sibling's classroom).

Level 6: Child describes the location of familiar landmarks.

- Using the community pictures taped on blocks mentioned as an idea in item FF, level 6, encourage children to arrange the blocks so as to replicate your community. Talk with children about where buildings are located in relationship to other buildings in the community (e.g., the food co-op is near the fire station, and the school is next to the park).

- Take photos of landmarks around your school building, school grounds, or neighborhood. Ask children to describe where they have seen those landmarks.

Level 7: Child interprets a map of an unfamiliar location.

- Create a map of a new school building for children transitioning out of preschool. Attach photos of identifiable landmarks to the map, such as a hall drinking fountain, the main office, or a wall mural.
- Collect simple maps from a zoo, amusement park, or other popular venue (available online) for children to use in play. Talk with children about the symbols used on the map and how to interpret the map to find a specific location (such as the monkey house, rest rooms, or the parking lot).



Item HH, History

The third COR Advantage item in Social Studies is HH, History. This is another area where teachers will find anecdotal note taking opportunities during conversations with children. Children enjoy hearing stories about when they were younger and like to share their own memories about past events. Their ideas about time revolve around the sequence of those personal events (e.g., “First it’s my birthday, and then it’s my brother’s”). Through our conversations with children, we can link time concepts such as yesterday/tomorrow and before/after to specific, concrete events. How convenient that our HighScope daily routine provides an automatic framework for talking about sequence and events — current, past, and future. Following are some concrete ways to help children develop this abstract concept.

Level 3: Child uses words such as *yesterday* or *tomorrow* to refer generally to things in the past or future.

- Make an album of classroom photos and talk about when those events took place (e.g., a long time ago, not long ago, yesterday, last week).
- At planning time, remind children of previous ideas or plans (e.g., “I remember that yesterday you played with Aaron.”)
- Refer to the daily routine chart during transitions to identify the



parts of the day that have passed and the parts of the day that still need to occur. Note to children that the routine was the same “yesterday” and will be the same “tomorrow.”

Level 4: Child uses words such as *yesterday* and *tomorrow* correctly.

- At planning time or recall time, ask children if they remember what they did “yesterday” or might do “tomorrow.”
- Use countdown games such as removing a link from a paper chain as a visual way to anticipate a future event. For example, create a five-link chain to count down the five days before an extended winter break.



- Engage children in conversations about upcoming plans or the sequence of previous events.

Level 5: Child shares a story about him- or herself or family that happened farther back than in the immediate past.

- Share stories with children about things you did as a child. Ask “Did you ever do that?”
- Talk about or draw pictures of things you and children did on a vacation or on the weekend.
- Ask children to bring in photos of themselves as babies to prompt conversations about their early memories.

Level 6: Child interprets photos or illustrations as representing past or future time periods.

- Share photos of yourself as a child. Point out the differences between objects and styles in the photos and modern versions.

- Select books that represent past and future time periods. Ask children why they think the story takes place in a different time period.

Level 7: Child creates (draws and/or writes) a timeline to show personal events in a sequential manner.

- Take photos of a class field trip or throughout a typical day. Have children arrange the photos in order of their occurrence. Have children add their own drawings to the beginning or end of the sequence to show what they were doing before or what they did after the events in the photos.
- Have children illustrate their own “daily routine” cards for their typical day (e.g., breakfast, school, piano lessons, dinner, bed).

• • •

The ideas presented in this article, and similar ones you will think of, are not far removed from what you are already experiencing with children. The term “social studies” gives us a new lens for looking at them and appreciating what children are learning about the people, locations, and timeframes in their world. The HighScope Curriculum and adult-child interaction strategies naturally encourage conversations between children and teachers. Adding conversation starters like photos of children and families and branching out into the community are sure ways to inspire more conversations specifically related to social studies.

Reference

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Suzanne Gainsley is an early childhood specialist at the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Also a HighScope certified trainer and teacher, she first began teaching at the HighScope Demonstration Preschool in 1998. She has also worked with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary school children in various settings as a teacher, parent, and volunteer. Gainsley is the author of *From Message to Meaning: Using a Daily Message Board in the Preschool Classroom*; co-author of two books in the Teachers’ Idea Series (from HighScope Press) – “*I’m Older Than You. I’m Five!*” *Math in the Preschool Classroom* and *50 Large-Group Activities for Active Learners*; co-author of *Preschool Activities for Family Child Care and Activities for Home Visits: Partnering with Preschool Families*; and a contributing writer for *Small-Group Times to Scaffold Early Learning*, also in the Teachers’ Idea Series.

TRAINER-TO-TRAINER

Defining Social Studies in Early Childhood

BY SUZANNE GAINSLEY AND POLLY NEILL

Children engage in social studies learning naturally in their play; this 80-minute workshop will help participants both recognize children's social studies learning and develop strategies for expanding exploration of social studies content in the classroom.

What You Will Need:

- Chart paper and markers
- NCSS goal written on chart paper (see Opening Activity)



Objectives (5 minutes)

1. Tell participants that, by the end of this workshop, they will be able to
 - A. Describe what social studies looks like in early childhood settings
 - B. Share ideas for active exploration of social studies content

Opening Activity (15 minutes)

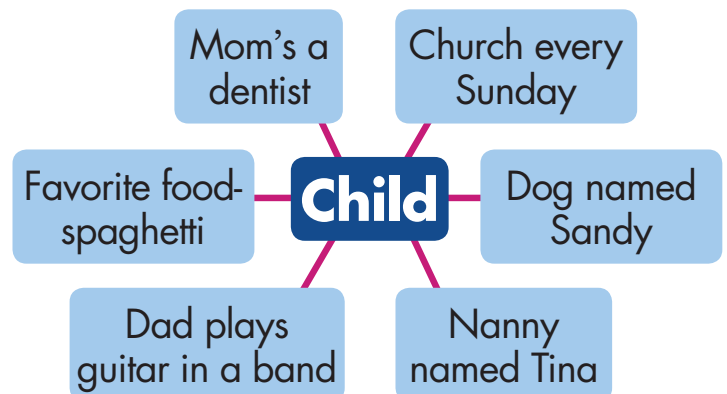
2. Share the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) goal for social studies learning (write this ahead of time on chart paper):

“The aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence — the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life.” (NCSS 2010)

3. Have participants work in small groups to create an early childhood goal for social studies based on the NCSS goal. Each group should write their goal on a piece of chart paper to share with others.
4. Discuss the similarities among the generated statements.

Central Ideas and Practice (45 minutes)

5. Share the following language from The HighScope Curriculum *Social Studies* book: “The goal of social studies is to help children grow beyond their internal and individual focus to become aware of the principles that govern the social world around them” (Epstein, 2012, p. 12).
6. It is helpful to learn about the lives of the children in your classroom. Ask the whole group for ideas on how to gather this information (e.g., home visits, surveys) Ask the following questions and write the answers on chart paper:
 - What information do you find helpful to know?
 - What questions do you ask?
7. Introduce a webbing activity that can be used to help teachers visualize the information they know about the children in their classroom, such as family members, interests, food, pets, transportation, and holidays celebrated (see example web, below). Have participants create a web for a child in their classroom.



8. Briefly introduce the six social studies key developmental indicators (KDIs):
 53. *Diversity*: Children understand that people have diverse characteristics, interests, and abilities.
 54. *Community roles*: Children recognize that people have different roles and functions in the community.
 55. *Decision making*: Children participate in making classroom decisions.
 56. *Geography*: Children recognize and interpret features and locations in their environment.
 57. *History*: Children understand past, present, and future.
 58. *Ecology*: Children understand the importance of taking care of their environment.

9. Divide participants into six groups and assign each group one of the Social Studies KDIs. Have each group brainstorm ways to support their assigned KDI in the classroom (activities and adult-child interaction strategies). Post and share with the whole group.

10. Turn back to the sample child web and choose ideas from the activity and strategy list generated in step 9 and determine how they would apply to the sample child. For example, knowing that religion is important to the child's family, you might ask the parents for a photo of their place of worship that you could add to an album of community buildings; or you might find out how they celebrate holidays, so you are able to incorporate that information as you talk about diversity in family traditions and celebrations.

Application Activity (10 minutes)

11. Using the webs they drew for a child in their classroom, have each participant choose three ideas from the list of ideas generated for the KDIs in step 9 and state how they could use those ideas to support the child. Have them add those ideas to their web. Ask participants to share their ideas with another participant.

Implementation Plan (5 minutes)

12. Ask participants to select one of the ideas they added to their child web and write down the steps they will need to take to implement that idea.



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SPECIAL EDUCATION

Helping Young Children Understand Diversity

BY TERRI MITCHELL, SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS
ADMINISTRATOR, CANYONS SCHOOL DISTRICT, SANDY, UTAH

Awareness of diversity is an ongoing factor in the lives of all young children; however, it has a unique meaning for children with special needs. As they grow and develop, they will experience life differently from typically developing children. Children with special needs may face significant challenges that can present themselves as a physical disability, a communication disorder, or social or emotional delays. In this article, we will examine how young children with special needs accept diversity. In the HighScope Curriculum, diversity is found under the Social Studies content area as key developmental indicator (KDI) 53: Children understand that people have diverse characteristics, interests, and abilities.

In a preschool classroom, there are many differences and similarities among the children. Basic similarities may include children's interests, such as what they like to play with, favorite songs, popular movement activities, and social interactions. Basic differences may include height, skin or hair color, communication styles, levels of social experience, ability to express needs and wants, and social behaviors. As children begin to recognize some of these similarities and differences, they are taking the early steps toward understanding the idea of diversity. Children learn to see similarities and differences as positive and natural through the reactions and interactions of the adults who support them.



Hannah and Jeremy

Let's look at a scenario involving three-year-old Hannah. Hannah has a significant physical and cognitive disability. This disability prevents her from being mobile and requires that she have supportive seating and a wheelchair for movement. Hannah does not yet converse using words but is able to communicate her likes and dislikes through her facial expressions and body movements. In this scenario, it is work time; Hannah is in her adaptive seat near the block area, watching children build up the blocks and knock them down. Each time the blocks fall, she grins with a gentle laugh as her legs and arms move. Jeremy notices this about Hannah and tells the nearby adult that Hannah likes blocks just as he does. The adult recognizes an opportunity to discuss some of the similarities that Jeremy and Hannah share. She acknowledges Jeremy's astute observation and confirms that Hannah likes the falling blocks, and she wonders if they have anything else in common. As Hannah continues to respond with smiles and movement, Jeremy and the teacher talk about what other things the two children both enjoy. Jeremy and Hannah discover that they like laughing, moving to music, being outside and, of course, watching blocks fall. This becomes a powerful interaction for both children. Jeremy learns he can connect with Hannah in ways both of them enjoy. Hannah learns that she can trust Jeremy and feels more comfortable with him as they participate in this shared experience.

Acknowledging Basic Differences and Similarities

As adults it is our responsibility to support children as they begin to converse and share their experiences both about things they like to do and things they are able to do. By acknowledging children, and letting them know that their work has value, adults support and foster children's good feelings about themselves, about who they are, and about what they can accomplish.

When recognizing differences between themselves and others, it is often the communication or behavioral differences that young children notice first. I have heard young children label other children as "babies" — saying, for example, "He doesn't talk." How adults facilitate conversations around these simple differences can impact children's perceptions and their acceptance or nonacceptance of their

classmates. Explaining that some classmates “talk” using pictures, their hands (sign language), or gestures helps all children understand that, although there are differences in communication, everyone still has a way to communicate their wants and needs.

Behavioral differences can be challenging for adults, but they can also be challenging for young children to relate to or understand. Dan Gartrell states, “When I understand, I accept that each child is worth all the time she or he needs. Because I accept what is, I put my energy into effective teaching, not into struggling against the reality that children are children” (Gartrell, 2003.) This approach also applies to helping young children understand the similarities and differences of their peers who may struggle with self-regulation or emotional competence. Providing behavioral supports while supporting a diversity of needs can help young children learn to accept that peers are learning and growing just as they are.

Abby’s screaming and throwing of items onto the floor as she struggles with transitions may isolate her from her peers and their understanding of her needs. Sometimes adults ask peers to ignore children who have behavioral challenges — perhaps by saying something like “She is okay...just focus on what you need to do.” However, adults understanding Abby’s needs and development can support her peers by helping them understand their basic similarities — the things they might have in common with Abby: “Have you ever had a sad day? Have you ever cried about things that are hard? Sometimes having a sad day means you cry. Abby is just letting us know she is sad.”

In these ways, adults can facilitate positive conversation around how people are the same and/or different from themselves. Adults do this by commenting on specific attributes or accomplishments without defining one as better than the other. For example: “You are a wonderful muffin maker – I love the muffins you make! I don’t like to cook, but I love gardening.” In this manner, adults can model positive acceptance of differences for children.

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Being aware of opportunities to support *all* young children during discussions of basic similarities and differences helps to develop a community of acceptance and respect. And this kind of community is a great place to learn and grow!

Reference

Gartrell, D. (2004). *The power of guidance*. Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning/Cengage; Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).



Terri Mitchell is a HighScope field consultant and currently serves as the Early Childhood Administrator in Canyons School District in Sandy, Utah. Prior to joining Canyons, Terri was an educational specialist for the Utah Personnel Development Center, where she directed the training initiatives for early childhood

special education classrooms across the state of Utah. Terri is a certified teacher in special education and early childhood special education. She has contributed her expertise in instructional coaching, assessment, and systems change to the development of several high-quality early childhood programs. She co-authored the book *I Belong: Active Learning for Children With Special Needs* (HighScope Press).

ASK US

BY ANN S. EPSTEIN*

At holiday times we try to include many different traditions, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa, and we host special guests from other countries who talk about their cultures, but how can we include diversity in our classroom every day?

– A Classroom Teacher

There are many ways to include diversity every day throughout your classroom. You can do this by making sure that the equipment and materials of the learning environment reflect the children's homes and community. Families can often contribute many of these items. In addition, consider ways to represent diverse cultures in the activities and events you plan. Here too, reaching out to family and community members can enrich the options you offer. For example:

- In the house area, provide clothes and tools used in various jobs, cooking utensils and empty food containers from various ethnic cuisines, and equipment used by people with disabilities.
- On a regular basis, serve food from different cultures at snacktime and meals.
- In the reading area, feature books and magazines with illustrations of people from diverse cultures, people performing nonstereotypical jobs, and families of varying composition and background.
- Hang reproductions of artwork from around the world at children's eye level throughout the room. Include simple instruments from different traditions in the music area. Listen to and move to music from different genres and cultures.

- Take field trips to stores and outdoor markets that serve the local population and to festivals that celebrate the community's diversity.
- Celebrate holidays and traditions that are observed by families and are meaningful to children. Celebrate special occasions that arise for children, such as the arrival of a new baby sister.
- Learn more about families and their traditions through home visits; family surveys; and casual conversations with family members at dropoff and pickup times, parent-teacher conferences, and family potlucks and gatherings.

By learning about children's families, and by reflecting their family culture and the community in the classroom environment and the activities you plan, children will experience diversity in everyday and meaningful ways!



*The material in this column was adapted from *Social Studies*, by Ann S. Epstein, HighScope Press, 2012, pages 28–31.

NEWS BRIEFS

Congratulations to Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships Preliminary Grantees!

This is an exciting award! If you are a recipient, you are now ready to tackle the formidable and rewarding task of expanding high-quality care for infants and toddlers to promote a lifetime of positive outcomes. HighScope can help you choose curriculum resources, professional learning services, and assessment instruments to expand the high-quality early learning and development opportunities for infants and toddlers and prepare children for the transition into preschool. Click [here](#) for details about how HighScope can help.

COR Advantage Update

We are pleased to announce that the latest update to COR Advantage was completed on January 27, 2015. In an effort to respond to customer feedback, we have created new lesson planning features that are immediately available to all COR Advantage customers.



Updates to the Lesson Planning feature:

- Activities can now be typed directly into Lesson Plan Sections. The user is given the option of adding the activity for one-time use, or saving it for future lesson plans.
- A new interface, Manage Planner, allows users to view, edit, and delete user-created activities all in one location! Included is a tab to manage classroom areas created by users.
- Print options were updated to include “print *Lesson Plans* for multiple days”; “print the *Individualized Lesson Plan*”; and “print the *Activity Report*.” Additionally, “print *Lesson Plan now*” includes scaffolding.
- The colors displayed in the Lesson Plan interface have been replaced with alternating white and light gray to improve readability and eliminate confusion with the Lesson Plan Section colors.
- User-created Activities are now deleted when a teacher leaves the school and is no longer associated with a classroom.

Add Reminders has been moved to the bottom of the Lesson Plan interface for easy access.

- Scaffolding boxes have been added to the Add/Edit Activity screen interface.
- Scaffolding in the Lesson Plan can now be expanded or collapsed.

March–April Conferences

Look for HighScope at these upcoming conferences:

- **March 4–6:** Michigan Head Start Association 24th Annual Early Childhood Training Conference, Ann Arbor, MI
- **March 4–7:** 2015 CAEYC Annual Conference and Expo, Sacramento, CA
- **March 29–April 2:** 42nd Annual Head Start Conference and Expo, Washington, DC
- **April 23–25:** MiAEYC 2015 Early Childhood Conference, Grand Rapids, MI

HighScope International Conference

The 2015 HighScope International Conference will be held May 6–8, with preconference sessions May 4–5. This year’s conference theme is “Bringing Cultures Together in Early Learning.” Alicia Lieberman (left), director of the Early Trauma Treatment Network (ETTN), will speak at the opening address. For information on preconference sessions, main conference sessions, and special events (including a silent auction and scheduled visits to the HighScope Demonstration Preschool), visit highscope.org/2015conference. Preconference workshops are \$180–\$230 per person and early-bird conference registration is \$425 (\$475 per person after April 3). Preconference sessions include



- More than Pat-a-Cake and Peekaboo: KDI-Inspired Activities for Infants
- Journey Through the Day in a HighScope Elementary Classroom
- HighScope’s Best Practices for Coaching Teachers
- Meaningful Math Throughout Your Preschool Day
- From Simple to Complex — Supporting the Development of Planning and Recall Times Throughout the Year
- Best Practices for Dual Language Learners
- Thinking, Tinkering, and Toddling: Planning Toddler Activities Around the KDIs
- Being With Babies: Tuning In and Scaffolding Infant Development
- Playful Teachers, Playful Children
- Language, Literacy, and Communication Throughout the HighScope Daily Routine
- Adult-Child Interaction – Let’s Kick It Up a Notch!
- COR Advantage (With Online Component)

Look for registration to open in March for the 2015 HighScope International Conference!

Music and Literacy Kit Released in Partnership With Discount School Supply

Our partnership continues to grow with Discount School Supply, and we're excited to announce our newest materials kit that correlates to the HighScope book *Making Connections: Movement, Music, & Literacy*. This supplement kit includes *Making Connections* and the accompanying CD, musical instruments, seven classic children's story books, and much more that will keep your preschoolers or early elementary children moving and singing as they develop literacy skills. For a complete list of components included in the Making Connections: Movement,



Music, & Literacy Curriculum Supplement Kit, visit our [online store](#).



Coming Soon From HighScope Press — *Make Room for Boys! Helping Boys Thrive in Preschool*

A few years ago, Gerin Martin and Sandy Slack set out to discover what made the boys

in their preschool classroom tick. They knew that the needs and interests of boys often differ from those of girls, and they learned that the environment of many preschool classrooms — their own included — puts boys at a disadvantage. Their research led to some surprising discoveries, and after years of speaking to packed houses about how to accommodate the needs of boys, their much-anticipated book, *Make Room for Boys! Helping Boys Thrive in Preschool*, is finally here! This newest installment in the Teachers' Idea Series provides the answers to questions like *Why do boys need to move around so much?* and *How can I accommodate active boys without shortchanging the other children?* Above all, *Make Room for Boys!* is full of strategies and activities that help teachers create an environment that promotes active learning for *all* children, boys and girls. Look for it in late March.

Corral-Terrazas and Hyde Appointed to HighScope's 2015 Board of Directors

We're excited to welcome Gloria Corral-Terrazas and Bette Hyde to the 2015 HighScope board of directors. **Gloria Corral-Terrazas** serves as Assistant Executive Director at First 5 San Diego, where she oversees San Diego County's Quality Early Learning efforts for the First 5 San Diego Commission, along with other initiatives for children five and under and their families.



Dr. Bette Hyde has served as the governor-appointed Director of the Department of Early Learning (DEL) for the state of Washington since 2009. Bette's focus is on creating one statewide early learning system that prepares all children for school and life. She strongly believes that school readiness means ready schools, ready children, ready families, and ready communities.

Visit highscope.org for a complete listing of HighScope's Board of Directors.

Popular HighScope URLs

Here are some popular URLs for information at our website.

For information on the preschool curriculum:

highscope.org/preschool

For information on the infant-toddler curriculum:

highscope.org/infant-toddler

For information on training:

highscope.org/training

For information on the HighScope Membership Association:

highscope.org/membership

To view Web Clips videos:

highscope.org/webclips

For information on state alignments:

highscope.org/alignments

For frequently asked questions:

highscope.org/faq

For information on COR Advantage:

coradvantage.org

Manage your HighScope Membership

It's time to log in to your HighScope Membership Association account to review your preferences and update your contact information so we can stay connected. HighScope Membership shares information on best practices, strategies, activities, advocacy updates, and research from the field of early childhood education. Keep connected by ensuring your address and preferences are up to date. Manage your membership at highscope.org/membership.