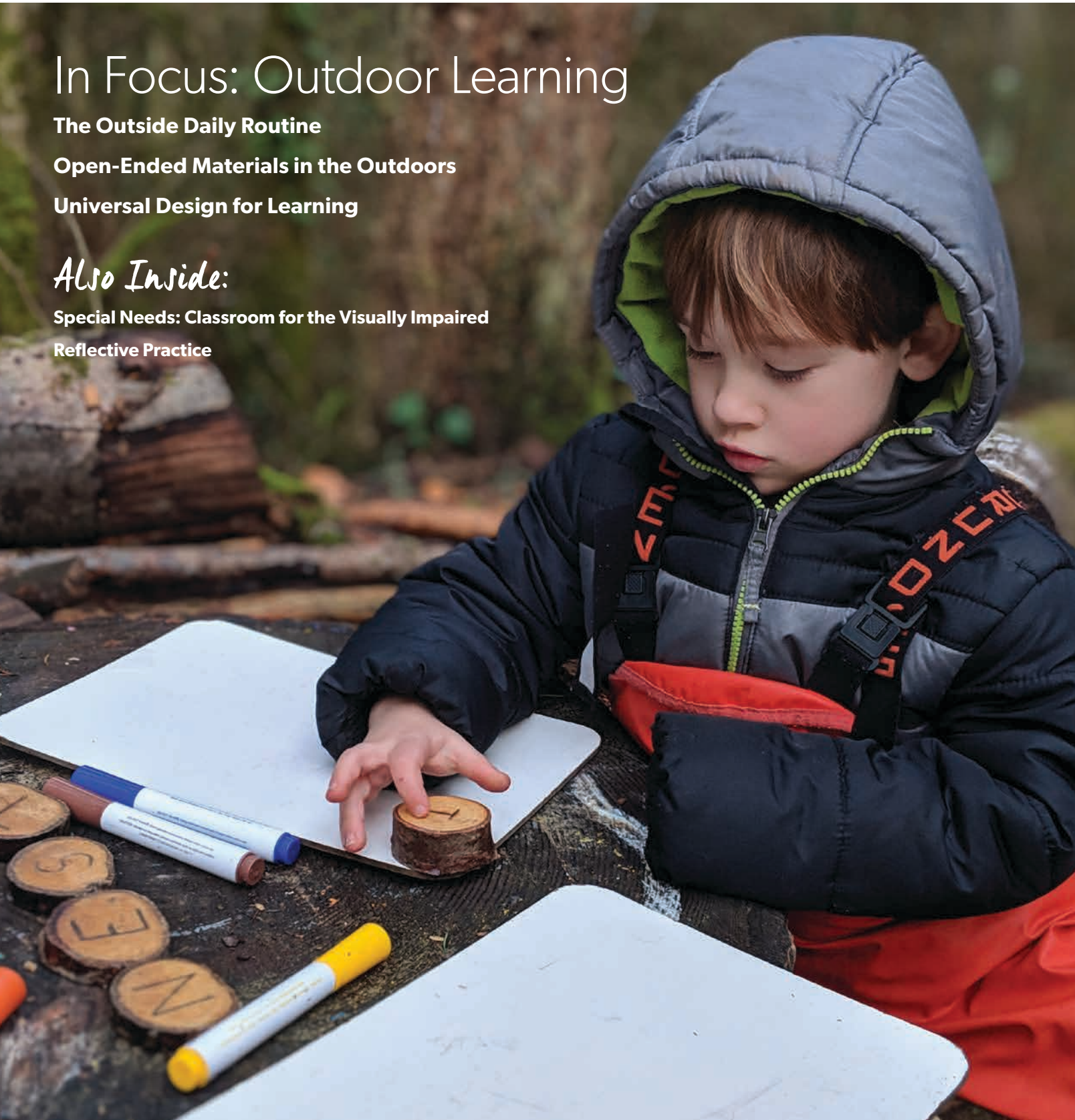
HIGHSCOPE

HIGHSCOPE'S JOURNAL FOR EARLY EDUCATORS Spring 2019

THE Active LEARNER



In Focus: Outdoor Learning

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From the President

The positive impact of the active learning approach has shown us that our most important lessons don't come from a book. Often, our greatest teachers are experience, nature, and life itself. For this reason, among others, we encourage independence and discovery in our classrooms and support children in building skills beyond traditional academic subjects. There is simply no substitute for learning by doing — which is why we have to push boundaries to ensure children have joyful, meaningful learning experiences. In this issue of *The Active Learner*, we're shining a spotlight on teachers, programs, and communities that are going above and beyond to "teach" outside the box.

As educators, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to inspire and lead young learners and to model our own learning for others. Our work covers a wide variety of issues, all of which continue to change. If we expect to be the leaders that our children, teachers, families, and communities deserve, we must continue to learn and grow. The question is, are we willing to break free from our comfort zones, unlearn habits, and challenge systems and standards that might be holding us back? Might we give up some of the familiarity in favor of more innovative approaches to education that may result in positive impacts?

As we strive to be the best version of ourselves and ensure that the young children in our care have the ability to thrive as they move forward in life, I encourage you to push yourself. Explore new strategies that could take you from who you are to who you might become. Be an example and ignite the thrill of lifelong learning.

And HighScope is right there by your side. As we look to our next 50 years, we have a responsibility to continue to grow and evolve. We must model active learning and respond to changing preferences in how people learn, communicate, and access information.

This is the final issue of *The Active Learner* in this format; however, we remain committed to supporting you and the children and families that you serve. We are striving to meet your expectations by building a platform — **The Playground** — that more deeply engages educators, administrators, and families with more interactive and innovative ways to share valuable, relevant content. The next issue of *The Active Learner* will serve as a guide to navigating The Playground as you explore stories, videos, and workshops. We have exciting plans to continue to elevate the voice and experience of early educators and advance the profession. We look forward to our shared partnership educating young minds far into the future. See you on The Playground!

Cheryl Polk, PhD
President

THE *Active* LEARNER

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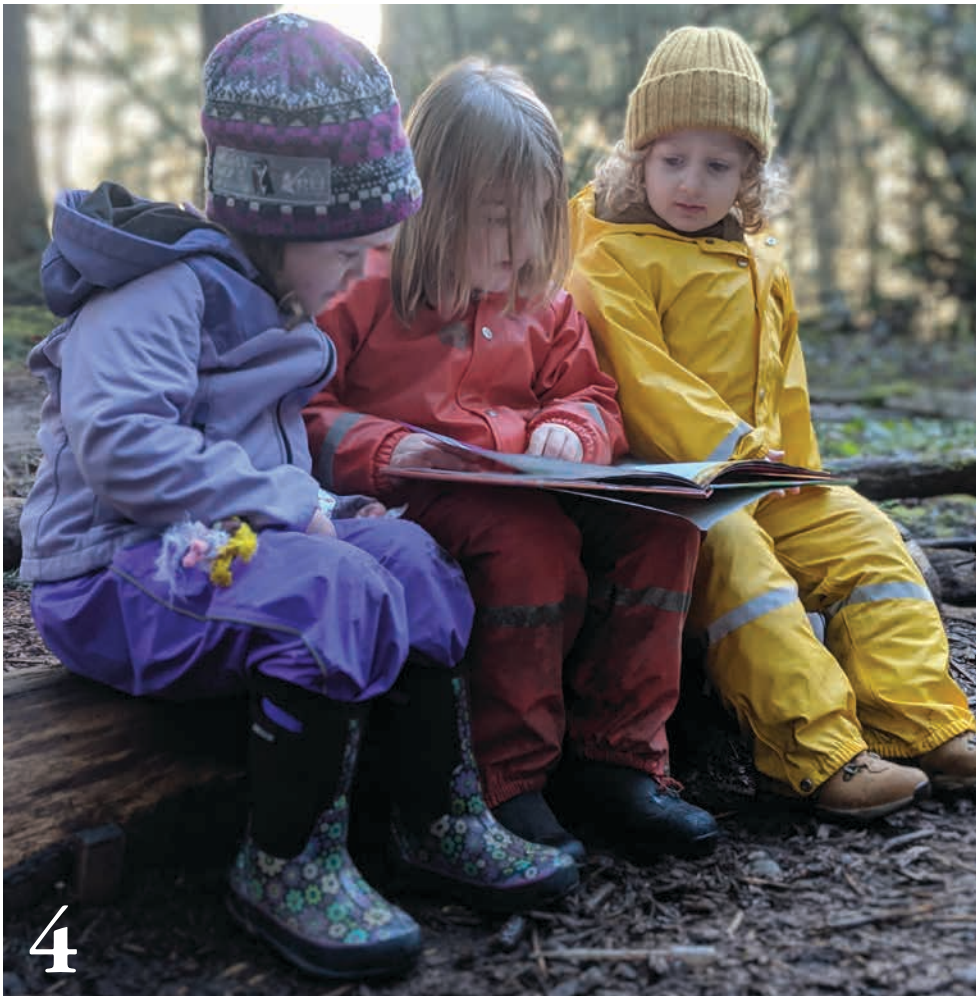

In This Issue Spring 2019

The (Outside) Daily Routine

HighScope in an All-Outdoor Preschool

BY RACHEL FRANZ

If you're looking for a place to optimize active learning with the structure of a daily routine, the answer may be right outside your door.

Outdoor preschools, also called "forest kindergartens," are a growing movement in the world of early childhood education in the United States. Inspired by indigenous practices and European publicly funded outdoor schools, children in these programs spend anywhere from two to six hours outside every day. Tiny Trees Preschool, in Seattle, Washington, uses the HighScope Curriculum in an innovative setting — the *all*-outdoor environment of the city's public parks. Children in these half-day programs are engaged in active learning outside, rain or shine. They receive rain suits and families are given resources with advice on how to dress their preschooler underneath. At Tiny Trees, we subscribe to the traditional outdoor preschool motto attributed to Sir Ranulph Fiennes: "There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing."

USING HIGHSCOPE IN OUTDOOR SCHOOLS

Many people ask us how we meet the requirements of a HighScope program at Tiny Trees Preschool. One of the most important foundations of HighScope is *active learning* — children gaining knowledge about their world through play in an intentional learning environment and interactions with others. Children have opportunities for hands-on, active learning *especially* in the outdoors. Nature provides many manipulatives, choice to move one's body in the way that's needed, and ways for children to be seen and heard in ways that walls can restrict. As the late Erin Kenny, founder of Cedarsong Forest Kindergarten, wisely noted, "Children cannot bounce off the walls if we take away the walls."

Photos on these two pages provided by Tiny Trees Preschool and Liz Boyle, photographer.

Nature offers children an abundance of opportunities for active learning, from big body play to quiet moments in the outdoors.

The outdoors similarly provides amazing platforms for emergent curriculum and planning based on children's interests. For example, one of our parks is on an airplane flight path and the children became very interested in the airplanes. Not only were we able

"Nature provides many manipulatives, choice to move one's body in the way that's needed, and ways for children to be seen and heard in ways that walls can restrict."

to have real interactions with airplanes in context because we were outside, we also were able to have some really in-depth explorations that met numerous learning objectives, such as:

1. **Literacy:** We read and acted out Lucy Cousins' *Maisy Goes on a Plane*, which sparked storytelling about plane rides, dramatic play themes, and interest in reading other plane stories.
2. **Technology:** We used an airplane identification guide and app to learn about where each plane was going. After some exploration and practice, children were able to begin to use the identification guide independently.
3. **Math:** One day, we kept a tally of how many airplanes flew overhead. Together, the children added tally marks throughout the day. By the end of class, we had counted 50 airplanes!
4. **Social studies:** We had a visit from a community member who flies a remote-control airplane in the park every week.

Outdoor preschool emergent curriculum is also influenced by what's happening in nature (e.g., seeing an owl, watching the leaves fall) and in the surrounding community. In addition, because of the preschool's connection to this special place and the people in it, children get real-life opportunities to explore social and environmental justice, such as identifying litter, meeting the community elders that walk in the park, and helping the community gardener.

(continued on p. 31)

Photos on these two pages provided by Tiny Trees Preschool and Liz Boyle, photographer.

Tiny Trees Preschool is an *all*-outdoor preschool in Seattle, Washington, that serves more than 300 children each year. Class is held in public parks around the Seattle area, where children spend four hours in urban or forested spaces in their neighborhoods. Tiny Trees was founded in 2016 with the mission to provide greater access to high-quality preschool education for families through a joyfully muddy childhood. For more information, visit Tiny Trees at www.tinytrees.org.

No Walls? No Problem: Addressing Barriers to Getting Outside

For many early education settings, getting children outside can be a barrier. From the amount of time it takes to get them dressed for the weather to the limitations of a concrete slab to play on, there are many things that block us from providing children with meaningful outdoor experiences. Reframing our thinking around the importance of nature provides us with an opportunity to see that many of our barriers have solutions. Some of the most common barriers include:

"My kid will get sick or hurt." Tiny Trees participated in a six-month study that compared our illness and injury rates to indoor programs. Guess what? Children were no more likely to get sick or hurt in our programs (Frenkel, 2018). Anecdotally, we think children stay healthier outside. Children in outdoor programs also gain skills in assessing risks and planning how to make the safest choices for their bodies.

"Our kids are never dressed right to play in the rain or cold!" Making sure children are equipped for weather is important. We provide rain suits for students to make sure that it is not a barrier for families. Not ready to invest in gear? Start a clothing drive in your community. Plan your longer outdoor events in nice weather to begin your journey toward increasing outside time.

"It's not safe to be outside!" Did you know that being outside is not less safe than it was a few decades ago? Richard Louv (2008), an expert on children and nature, tells us that it's actually false that we have more to worry about now than in the "olden days." Regardless, simple safety measures like counting children regularly, providing brightly colored t-shirts, and having procedures for possible scenarios can help to reduce this perceived fear.

"We just don't have enough time." Yes, dressing kiddos for going outside can take forever, but we know how important it is for them. Recognizing how critical time outside is to how children learn is an important step in creating that time. Now that you know how to do the whole daily routine outside, you don't have to wait for outside time to be outside. One program has required "beyond the fence time," where they make sure to spend time in the neighboring fields and forest. This helps especially when they have other groups using their playground.

A recommended next step: Talk with your teaching team and administrators about your commitment to the outdoors. Identify the barriers you are facing in getting children outside and create a plan for addressing them. Write a letter to your families about the importance of getting kids outside and commit to it. It's also important to consider the families you are serving and their experience and comfort level with the outdoors. How can you partner with families to develop a shared understanding of how children will engage with the outdoors?

References

Frenkel, H. L. (2018). *Illnesses and injuries at nature preschools*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Department of Epidemiology.

Louv, R. (2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder.* Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.

Bringing Literacy Home

Strengthening the Home-School Connection With Literacy

INTERVIEW BY ADAM ROBSON

Critical to early learners' literacy development is a solid foundation that straddles home and school.

It goes without saying that children's learning is optimized when teachers and families can rely on trusted, two-way communication between home and school. We asked two family engagement experts — Iheoma Iruka and Spring Dawson-McClure — to talk to us about the most recent research supporting a strong home-school connection as the means to reduce the opportunity gap for young readers and writers.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PRACTICES THAT YOU RECOMMEND TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE AND LITERACY AT HOME?

Iheoma Iruka: Extensive evidence indicates that some of the most effective strategies parents can use to support children's language and literacy at home are dialogic reading, shared book reading, and practicing emergent literacy skills, as well as just having a language-rich home environment. *Dialogic reading* activities include parents talking with the child about something related to the book and responding and expanding on the child's response and repeating this sequence. *Shared reading* is the act of reading a book to a child with limited interaction. We all love to see children enjoy reading all kinds of books, which is best supported when those they love share that activity with them. Parental engagement in emergent literacy skills includes practicing code-related skills — like letter identification, print concept, alphabet knowledge, and spelling — and comprehension-related skills — like vocabulary and storytelling. It is found that children's exposure to books and engaging in reading and talking at home are positively related to their vocabulary and listening comprehension skills in the early years, which then transfers to literacy and reading ability in the third grade and beyond. In addition, parents who intentionally engaged in teaching specific early literacy skills like letter identification and alphabet knowledge were likely to have children who had higher rates of reading early and stronger reading ability by third grade.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION, ESPECIALLY AS IT RELATES TO LANGUAGE AND LITERACY?

Spring Dawson-McClure: Research on the home-school connection has focused primarily on parents' involvement in children's learning at home and at school, as well as teachers' efforts to engage parents by building authentic relationships, cultivating two-way communication, and partnering with parents to support children's well-being.

The evidence is compelling, especially in the early childhood period — strategic investments and commitments to the provision of systematic culturally relevant and racially conscious parent engagement practices have the potential to reduce the *opportunity gap* for children of color and children from low-income families so that all children can thrive.

"Parents who intentionally engaged in teaching specific early literacy skills like letter identification and alphabet knowledge were likely to have children who had higher rates of reading early and stronger reading ability by third grade."

Iruka: Family engagement has indeed been shown to improve children's literacy skills, but focusing on language and literacy alone misses the larger purpose of family engagement, which is to focus on building relationships with families that support their well-being and ongoing learning, development, and stability, while also ensuring strong relationships between parents and their children. This expanded view of family engagement considers parents' needs as a means to enhance children's language and literacy development, especially during the early years. The HighScope Perry Preschool Project's family engagement program focused on creating a climate conducive to language and literacy development, and that focus included modeling language and incorporating families' culture, traditions, and daily lives into reading activities. But program teachers and staff also helped families get access to resources for employment, housing, health services and other supports for themselves and their children. So, yes, language and literacy development has been a focus, but I want to stress also the critical importance of laying a foundation upon which to build kindergarten readiness and academic success.

There are many ways to engage families as partners in children's learning, including support for language and literacy development at home.

A RECENT REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS (NASEM) FOCUSES ON IMPROVING PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICE. CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THAT?

Dawson-McClure: Essentially, the report focuses on what parents *know* and *believe* about parenting and child development as well as the many different things that parents *do* to raise happy, healthy, successful children. The report concludes that there is clear evidence that specific parenting practices — such as warmth and sensitivity, contingent responsiveness (or serve-and-return), shared book reading, and routines — are associated with positive child outcomes across domains (or whole child development), and that when parents know about certain evidence-based practices, they're more likely to do them. However, the report also underscores the important role of parents' attitudes and beliefs in shaping whether, when, and how parents put knowledge into practice, and urges the field to consider

Iheoma U. Iruka, PhD, is the chief research innovation officer and director of the Center for Early Education Research and Evaluation at HighScope. Dr. Iruka is engaged in projects and initiatives focused on how evidence-informed policies, systems, and practices in early education can support the optimal development and experiences of low-income, ethnic minority, and immigrant children, such as through family engagement and support programs.

Spring Dawson-McClure, PhD, is a psychologist and prevention scientist in the Center for Early Childhood Health and Development, Department of Population Health, New York University School of Medicine. Her research focuses on family-centered, school-based strategies to reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in children's learning, behavior, and health.

parents' beliefs in order to improve intervention impact and reach. As an example, in developing *ParentCorps* as a parent-centered, school-based program, my colleagues and I were committed to *both* ensuring that all parents have access to the latest evidence on parenting *and* placing culture at the center by honoring every family's culture as important and adaptive; incorporating into sessions the values and beliefs that each parent holds based on their identity; providing space for parents to reflect and share their values, beliefs, and goals; and scaffolding parents in assessing the fit and relevance of each evidence-based parenting practice for their family.

Iruka: The NASEM report emphasizes that one element of effective parenting programs is creating culturally relevant programs. In order to do this, programs and schools need to learn about families' culture, traditions, and norms. For example, how do families celebrate birthdays and national holidays? What do families like to do together? What even constitutes a "family" — are family members biological relatives only, or kith and kin? What language or dialect do they speak at home with friends and close family? What hobbies or talents do family members have, and are they willing to share them? These are some questions that can help programs and schools conduct an *asset map* and identify how best to engage with families in their literacy practices.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHAT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND AN ASSET ASSESSMENT ARE, AND WHY THESE ARE SO IMPORTANT FOR LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT?

Iruka: One of the key premises of family engagement is to support and provide information to families. To effectively inform and support families, it is critical that programs and schools understand the needs of families and their children, especially their current knowledge about language and literacy promoting activities. Thus, programs and schools could do a needs assessment with families to examine what their goals are, what programs and supports would be most helpful, and what programs and services they are engaged in and have engaged with in the past. This information could be used to tailor or refer services and programs to families. In addition, families have many assets that could be beneficial for schools, programs, and other families. For example, the parent who works at a garden could help teachers and schools bring nature and outdoor learning to life. Or another parent who knows how to bake can help schools and teachers teach math and science using real-life examples. This co-sharing of teaching responsibilities with families will reduce the burden for schools and teachers to be the "experts," while also acknowledging and valuing the expertise of families and other individuals.

EXPLAIN THE DISPARITY BETWEEN THE MULTITUDE OF EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS THAT WE KNOW ABOUT AND THE RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBER OF FAMILIES WHO ACTUALLY RECEIVE THESE INTERVENTIONS.

Iruka: While there are many interventions that promote effective parenting practices, many families that could benefit from interventions do not receive them for many reasons, this being particularly challenging for families of color, poverty, and those dealing with trauma. The literature focuses on examining how families are capable and able to effectively support and engage with their children; however, it often emphasizes the deficit attitudes and beliefs that others bring when engaging with poor families and families of color. To truly deliver on the promise that all children will have the opportunity to be ready for school and life, ensuring that families are emotionally, socially, and economically stable should be a key focus of family engagement strategies. Families that are emotionally, socially, and economically stable, and not dealing with trauma and discrimination, are more likely to invest in themselves and their child's development, and less likely to be stressed, and more likely to engage and advocate for other families and children in their community.

HOW CAN TEACHERS BEST ENSURE THAT PARENTS ARE EFFECTIVELY ENGAGED IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PROMOTING BEHAVIORS?

Iruka: In order to ensure that parents are effectively engaged in these literacy and language promoting behaviors, it is critical that parental functioning, knowledge, attitudes, and practices are addressed, as has been substantiated in the home visiting literature. Home visiting programs are found to decrease parent stress, depression, and isolation; enhance parenting knowledge of child development; increase self-efficacy in the parenting role; create healthier parent-child relationships and interactions; increase the use of positive guidance and decrease the use of harsh punishment; support children's learning; and increase family self-sufficiency. By being able to address parental stressors and build parental capacity, parents can more intentionally and precisely implement effective language and literacy strategies. Teachers can't support families alone, but they can help to activate the capability and capacity of parents through sharing of information and providing opportunities.

> **"Families that are emotionally, socially, and economically stable are more likely to invest in themselves and their child's development, and less likely to be stressed, and more likely to engage and advocate for other families and children in their community."**

Dawson-McClure: Engaging parents as partners in children's learning *is part of* high-quality early childhood education, and there are many ways that teachers can support parents with language and literacy promotion at home. At the same time, we must acknowledge that this is a whole additional domain of work on top of teachers' responsibility for instruction, classroom management, and responding to children's social-emotional needs. In parallel to policy solutions, some next steps include school leaders finding ways to share responsibility for parent engagement and creating opportunities for relationship building. There is typically such little time for teachers to engage with parents one on one and build an authentic and trusting relationship

Family engagement has indeed been shown to improve children's literacy and communication skills, part of the larger mission of building relationships with families and supporting their well-being and ongoing learning.

in which parents can share their expert perspective on their child's unique strengths, challenges, interests, and joys and their own hopes, goals, and worries. This kind of relationship building is a foundation for ongoing two-way communication that encourages teacher recommendations of language and literacy promoting behavior and effective problem solving if problems arise for children at school.

Efforts to promote early literacy typically aim to enrich the learning materials available at home and enhance parent-child interactions; common recommended activities are shared book reading, dialogic reading, family conversations, visits to libraries, telling of family stories, and practicing specific reading skills such as rhyming and vocabulary.

TALK ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HOLDING HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Iruka: Numerous studies point to the importance of high expectations for children's learning and success. For example, in classrooms where teachers have high expectations for their students, their students are likely to meet this higher expectation and perform better than expected, likely because the teacher provided the best environment and learning approach to support this high expectation. In fact, several reviews have shown that parents who hold high expectations for their children are more likely to provide the environment and resources to help their child succeed. The NASEM report emphasized that viewing parents as equal partners, including involving fathers who are often viewed as a "silent" parent, is a critical element of an effective parenting intervention. That is, the focus for family engagement should not be about doing it for parents but rather doing it with parents. This also means examining how we view certain family members and providing the space and opportunity for "silent" parents to be engaged. There is evidence that fathers uniquely contribute to children's literacy development. The unique contribution of fathers to children's language and literacy development may mean recruiting more male home visitors and family engagement specialists. Most importantly, evidence indicates that the daily routine of book sharing and engaging in contingent [serve-and-return] conversations is instrumental for children's language and literacy development. Having the high expectations that parents can and will do this within their daily functioning would likely result in stronger outcomes for children.

Bringing the Benefits of Nature to All Children

BY KIRSTEN HAUGEN

Increasingly, we hear the call to "Get outside!" How do we ensure children with exceptional physical, cognitive, sensory, or social challenges can fully participate in the outdoor opportunities we provide?

As a special educator involved in nature-based learning opportunities, I view the licensing and legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and playground safety standards as essential, but not sufficient for children with unique challenges. ***Accessibility***, or getting *to* things, is critical, but it's only a pathway to ***participation*** — being *a part of* things. Bringing together the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework with research-based principles for implementing nature-based outdoor classrooms helps us move much closer to supporting children of all abilities to be a part of things — and thrive — outdoors.

UDL is a framework guided by research and focused on the *what*, *how*, and *why* of learning to promote the development of flexible and responsive learning environments and activities.*

- **What?** Include and allow for *multiple means of representation.* To help all children take in information, instructions, and ideas, incorporate spoken and written words, illustrations, diagrams, charts, hands-on models or materials, and physical demonstrations.
- **How?** Invite *multiple means of action and expression.* To fully understand what children think and know, support them to explore and demonstrate their ideas and knowledge with a variety of forms and materials: words, movement, large- and small-scale structures and creations, experiments, performances, and more.
- **Why?** Provide *multiple means of engagement.* To increase children's motivation, sense of purpose, and belonging, ensure your environments, materials, and activities reflect and connect with the diverse range of children's backgrounds, interests, and experiences — or are open ended enough to reflect the child's imagination.

> **"Accessible spaces with a range of activity areas offer children more ways to exercise their motor planning and skills, their competence, and their confidence."**

Looking through this UDL lens, I understand why many children with additional, unique needs fail to fit in or engage appropriately in the limited play options available during conventional recess. Even if they meet ADA requirements, playgrounds dominated by asphalt, turf, and manufactured equipment have a built-in bias toward competitive gross-motor play and "burning off steam," which compounds sensory overload, social challenges, and physical differences. Such playgrounds limit engagement, action, and expression, and can provoke or shut down some children as much as having to sit and complete the same worksheet, at the

Intentional efforts to arrange and balance outdoor areas for a variety of activities allow supervising adults opportunity to observe and support children's plans. Photo courtesy of © Nature Explore.

same time, in the same way as their peers. Supervising adults in this environment typically find their time taken up with intervening and redirecting children rather than observing and supporting their ideas, plans, and imaginations.

Learning and playing in nature-filled outdoor (and indoor) spaces, on the other hand, offers rich benefits for children and the adults who work with them.** With a purposeful balance and arrangement of activity areas, the outdoor classroom engages more children. Visual, physical, and even sensory cues built into signage, pathways, plantings, surfaces, and storage provide multiple means of representation, allowing children to understand the space and opportunities available. Children experience physical movement, challenge, and exertion through climbing, running, and crawling; engage socially through dramatic play and music; explore STEM strategies with block building, water play, or loose parts investigations; and find quieter, contemplative moments for art, reading, or scientific observations.

In these diverse environments, children have the opportunity to thrive in different ways and to practice self-regulation by choosing the mix of physical, cognitive, and social activity their brains and bodies need. Time in nature with supportive, responsive adults promotes good health and fitness, enhances attention span and observation skills, promotes problem solving and resilience, and supports appropriate risk taking. Accessible spaces with a range of activity areas offer children more ways to exercise their motor planning and skills, their competence, and their confidence.

Look at the outdoor spaces available to children in your lives through this dual lens of UDL and research-based outdoor classroom design. How will you expand the activities available, include more open-ended materials, and increase opportunities for engagement, expression, and action?

Kirsten Haugen is a writer and educational consultant with the World Forum Foundation and Nature Explore. She previously worked in early intervention and assistive technology.

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* Learn more at kirstenhaugen.org/inclusion-udl and udlguidelines.cast.org

** Learn more at natureexplore.org/research

Organizing Your Outdoor Space

Making sure that materials are accessible is the first step to promoting full participation by all children in the outdoors. Adapting the find-use-return cycle from the classroom to the outdoor learning environment means creating a similar system of storage and labeling for the outdoor play space.

A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework encourages engagement, action, and expression — and that means a lot of "loose parts" to accommodate children's open-ended imaginations. Luckily, though, most loose parts can be stored outdoors with a simple storage system that will benefit both the materials and the appearance of the playground. In most cases, you can apply the same logic that you would inside the classroom (e.g., store families of things together, like acorns and pine cones and other "seeds" — and label materials in a way that makes sense to children).

A plastic garbage can will provide neat, contained storage for long, lightweight materials like PVC pipe, sticks, bamboo canes, gutters, drain tile, and pool noodles. Drill several drainage holes in the bottom of the cans and find a way to fasten them to the ground, to the shed, or to a fence to ensure stability.

Shelves are invaluable for storing loose parts. Remember that these should be totally accessible to children. Smaller materials, such as pine cones, corks, shells, and twigs can be stored in plastic tubs, while pots, pans, plates, and tubs can go directly on the shelves. If you expect to have an outdoor kitchen, plan on putting some storage shelves nearby.

Of course, some materials are best stored in free-standing piles — for example, rocks just big enough for a preschooler to carry with both hands, or logs. If you begin the pile in the corner of the playground and make a sign, then you can let the other staff as well as neighbors and friends know that you are beginning a rock or log pile and that you welcome contributions (specify the size and other limits).

Organizing your outdoor space — and keeping it organized — requires forethought and habituation, just as organizing your classroom environment does. In no time, though, that forethought will pay off as children enjoy the outdoors, take initiative, and act with independence, confidence, and competence in carrying out their plans.

Adapted from Ask Us *in HighScope Extensions, Vol. 27, No. 2.*

Seeing Without Sight

Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired Adopts the HighScope Curriculum

BY BETSY EVANS

In this inclusion program where half of the children are either blind or visually impaired, children learn each other's strengths before learning about their differences.

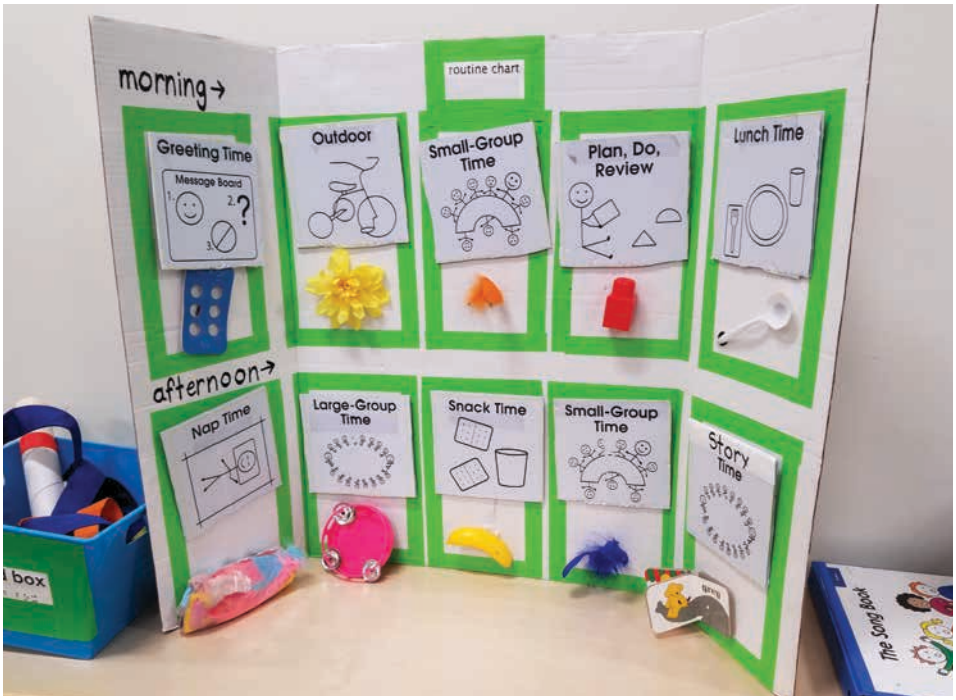
During planning time, Justin, age 3, touches the Lego brick on the toy area sign and says "shakers," indicating that he wants to go to the toy area to use the set of sound shakers. As I approach Justin at work time, he is sitting on the floor in the toy area, surrounded by sound shakers — each a small box containing items that have varied qualities of sound, loud and soft. He shakes each box, bouncing on his folded knees to the beat of his shaking hand. He throws his head back, smiling.

His teacher, Yara, introduces me to him and leaves. I sit next to him on the floor. "My name is Betsy and you are Justin," I say. He replies, "Justin — *J* is for Justin," adding his letter link: "*J* is for jet." I tell him, "My letter link is balloon — *B* for Betsy and *B* for balloon."

"*B* for Betsy," he repeats as he reaches out to touch my sleeve.

I pick up a box and shake it. For a few minutes we shake together, noticing the loud and soft sounds. Yara returns and joins us on the floor. She begins to sing "Bingo" and she and Justin each pick up nearby rhythm sticks to keep the beat. As I join in with sticks, I notice that Justin pauses for a beat when the letter *B* is left out. The adult has subtly scaffolded Justin's activity by including a song that encourages children to keep a steady beat with the sticks, while adding a higher level of difficulty. Justin has happily and easily joined at that level, successfully keeping the beat and anticipating when a beat is skipped (something I am not quite managing).

In the next pre-K class, I sit on the floor by Simone and another girl as they build an enclosure with blocks and place animals inside. A third child comes along and puts his animal on top of Simone's wall. Simone firmly tells him to stop, and he does. She then moves to the sensory table with two animals. The third child follows her and puts his animals near hers. "No!" she says loudly. Elliana, their teacher, kneels down by them: "What's the problem?"



This daily routine schedule includes real objects so that children who are visually impaired or blind can tactilely understand each part of the day.

"I don't want him to play here," Simone calmly answers. Elliana responds, "What can we do to solve that?" Because it is December and there has been a lot of problem-solving practice, Simone quickly gives her solution: "I can go somewhere else." And she does. Elliana explains to the other child, "I think she wants to play alone." He goes back to the block area with his animals.

"After a sighted child asked his mother about what it meant to be blind, she asked, 'Do you know anyone who is blind?' The child, who had been at the Miami Lighthouse for a while, responded, 'No, I never met anyone who was blind.'"

These stories describe play and active learning as you would see it in any classroom that implements HighScope. The children have planned, are totally engaged in play, and are supported by adults who participate in their play, scaffolding children's spontaneous efforts and facilitating problem-solving negotiations when there are conflicts. The one characteristic that is unique in these classrooms is that they are inclusion classrooms at the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Justin is totally blind, and Simone is visually impaired. The complexity of the children's play illustrates the Miami Lighthouse motto: "It's possible to see without sight."

USING INCLUSION AS A FOUNDATION

Inclusion in these Miami Lighthouse toddler and preschool classrooms means that half of the children are either blind or visually impaired and half are sighted children. Interestingly, the children don't initially perceive that they see differently — inclusion is the foundation for an anti-bias curriculum. A four-year-old, sighted child, who had been in the program for a while, overheard his parents talking about being blind. He asked, "Mommy, what is *blind*?" His mom explained to him that some people have problems with their eyes and cannot see, and then asked if he knew anyone who was blind. His answer came quickly: "No, I never met anyone who was blind." Eventually he will learn about the sight differences amongst his peers, but first he will come to enjoy their interests and strengths. He will get to know them as individuals, developing respect for the many ways that each of them is unique, as well as the same.

ADAPTING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND DAILY ROUTINE

Active play is the common denominator in classrooms where individual choices — not differences — are emphasized. Learning is facilitated by the HighScope learning environment containing many areas for play, the HighScope plan-do-review process, and the HighScope framework for large- and small-group time. At Miami Lighthouse, some adaptations have been made to assist the visually impaired and blind children with the daily routine sequence. For example, real objects are attached to the schedule so that children are able to tactilely understand each component, and real objects are used on labels and area signs, along with braille. Planning and recall cards and props include real objects that represent that area (as well as the usual symbol and words), such as a small block for the block area and a real pencil for the art area. In this way all the children are using the same materials, but each is decoding the objects and symbols in a way that is

physically and developmentally accessible to them. Large- and small-group activities are active and hands-on, as they are in all HighScope classrooms. At the Miami Lighthouse, there is possibly even more emphasis on the use of sensory materials — though these materials are frequently used in all HighScope classrooms — such as soft feather boas for moving to music and art materials that are three-dimensional and messy. Miami Lighthouse also has its own music teacher who is regularly in the classrooms playing his guitar, encouraging enthusiastic singing and dancing.

"Teachers add real objects to labels and signs so that all the children are using the same materials but each is decoding the objects and symbols in a way that is physically and developmentally accessible to them."

With this approach, across a variety of classrooms at Miami Lighthouse and in other HighScope programs, young children accept that there are many individual differences in people — this does not surprise or alarm them. How children play, and the choices they make during play, is joyfully original in all classrooms and amongst all children, because all children have unique strengths and interests. During the early years of a child's life, they have much more extensive brain circuitry than they will have even after age five. Their capacity for languages, social skills growth, and sensory input is at its highest potential; therefore, a rich, varied, and interactive environment at this stage is critical. A play-based curriculum facilitated by highly engaged adults who support individual strengths and choices is an inherently effective early intervention approach for learners in inclusive classrooms. Fortunately, there is global understanding of this critical phase of life:

> *"We are convinced that early childhood is one of the most significant and influential phases of life — especially the first 1,000 days. It determines the basis for every child's future health, well-being, learning and earnings potential, and sets the groundwork for young children's emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and for developing competencies, resilience and adaptability."*
>
> Statement by leaders at 2018 G20 summit in Buenos Aires (quoted from ExchangeEveryday, Dec. 18, 2018)

ESTABLISHING A FULLY INCLUSIVE PROGRAM

How did this unique program begin? Miami Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired started in a small building in downtown Miami in 1931. In time, as their mission statement says, they would provide "visual rehabilitation, eye health services, and education that promotes independence to collaborate with and train professionals, and to conduct research in related fields." The school's building and programs have grown rapidly over the years under the leadership of Virginia Jacko, the organization's first blind CEO. During the summer of 2016, six teachers completed the four-week HighScope Preschool Curriculum Course (PCC). A

At Miami Lighthouse, visually impaired or blind children work alongside sighted children and learn that each person has different strengths and abilities.

In addition to using real objects on labels for items, the labels in this classroom also include the name of the object: in words and in Braille.

> Because of the program's inclusive approach, the young children at Miami Lighthouse accept that there are many individual differences in people and this neither surprises nor alarms them.

month later, Miami Lighthouse opened the Lighthouse Learning Center for Children, a prekindergarten program using the first fully inclusive model in the US, with a classroom comprising 50% visually impaired children and 50% with no visual impairment. In addition to the summer PCC, Isabel Chica, Director of Children's Programs, and Liana De Angelis, the Associate Director, have also been trained by HighScope, and more teachers are receiving training this year. This depth of commitment has created an exceptional environment for growth and implementation. Over the last two years, enrollment at the Lighthouse has grown from 15 children to 57, with the addition of a second preschool room and two toddler rooms.

SEEING RESULTS WITH THE HIGHSCOPE CURRICULUM

The new Lighthouse Learning Center for Children chose the HighScope Curriculum because of its active learning, hands-on approach, as well as the daily routine structure that supports learning in an intentional and individualized way. The implementation of HighScope has been validated by research to be a very effective learning model at Miami Lighthouse. A 2017–2018 study by the University of Miami demonstrated "high levels of fidelity to their early childhood inclusion model, as well as observed high-quality instructional practices above the national average." Children demonstrated significant gains in observed positive peer and task engagement, teacher and parent reported interactive peer play, and empathy. The evaluation also demonstrated that teachers in the Lighthouse program rated children as "significantly improving across all three time points across the year" for all [HighScope] COR developmental domain skills.

> **Miami Lighthouse's prekindergarten program is the first fully inclusive model in the United States.**

But the most important validation of all is observing children like Justin and Simone, who are engaged daily in higher-level cognitive thinking and cooperative social interactions as active learners. Play and interactions with diverse people and materials strengthens and extends their given abilities, whatever those may be, and boosts their confidence in themselves as independent learners. As with all active learners, high-quality, early intervention has prepared the children at the Lighthouse school for the joys and the challenges that lie ahead.

Teachers in this program emphasize sensory materials, as illustrated here, where the children are creating a large art mural with finger paint and brushes.

Congratulations to Miami Lighthouse teachers and staff for their commitment to providing such an inspiring model of exceptional environments for young children.

Besty Evans is an educational consultant who specializes in conflict resolution, and a cofounder and current president of Giving Tree School in Gill, Massachusetts. A HighScope consultant for 30 years, Betsy is the author of You Can't Come to My Birthday Party! *and other HighScope titles.*

With expanded operations, HighScope Portugal now provides training beyond its country's borders – in South America and Africa.

Institute News

Portugal

BY LUÍS SILVEIRA RODRIGUES

Education is a hot topic almost everywhere, and HighScope Portugal — which promotes HighScope as a high-quality education program in both Portugal and Portuguese-speaking countries — has been working hard all over the globe. Located in Lisbon, Raiz International Active Learning School is the Demonstration Center that has for 20 years incorporated HighScope and active learning from preschool until 6th grade with remarkable success — and has recently expanded operations overseas.

HighScope Portugal (HSP) has trained teachers from all around the country and, since 2017, has trained more than 160 teachers and aides from several centers of Santa Casa da Misericordia de Lisboa (a nonprofit organization that devotes part of its activity to the support of nursery and preschool and serves a very significant population, mainly with lower financial resources). According to Margarida Rodrigues, HighScope trainer and director of HSP, "Active learning is a centerpiece in the training of professionals; once they discover their potential, they gain an enormous intrinsic motivation to learn more and implement the HighScope Curriculum."

Furthermore, the organization has delivered several training programs for teachers from Mozambique, Brazil, Angola, and Morocco; in the words of one of the participants, HighScope professional learning is a "very useful and very positive and rich experience for professional and personal life!"

HSP has also conducted on-site training programs and conferences for teachers, parents, government officials, and investors in Mozambique and Cape Verde, and online trainings for schools in Mozambique, Angola, and Morocco. "HighScope results shown in several studies, such as the Perry Preschool Study, are so convincing of its impact in children and society as a whole that it becomes quite easy to present them to governments and investors," says Rodrigues.

Developed by HSP for schools or programs with high teacher mobility and few financial resources, the HSP WIP (HighScope Portugal Work in Progress) label aims to ensure consistency and fidelity in HS programs, as well as protect schools' investments in training.

An HSP WIP program commits to weekly coaching for pedagogic responsibility and making an investment in training the whole team, step by step, in the HighScope Curriculum. The designation is also proof that HSP supports the implementation of its curriculum and assesses that implementation through the PQA. Coaching and training are usually done online and, when possible, on site.

"In addition to training teachers throughout Portugal, HighScope Portugal has delivered training programs for teachers in Mozambique, Brazil, Angola, and Morocco."

"This process has enabled institutions with great mobility of professionals and low resources to commit seriously and gradually," says Rodrigues. "While the initial training is essential for professionals to start their HighScope journey, the weekly follow-up assures them that it is possible to do more and better." She adds that "It has been a magnificent journey of sharing cultures and constantly reflecting on HighScope's implementation in very different educational contexts."

Children share materials as they begin small-group time at Kids Kruppa (Maputo, Mozambique).

Children are busy following through with their plans during work time at Raiz (Lisbon, Portugal).

Children and teachers begin the day together by reading the message board at Bee Smart (Rabat, Morocco).

Active learning is the foundation of HighScope Portugal's training of professionals and is evident in all of its training activities.

Infants, toddlers, and preschoolers explore the dirt together at Casa Magica (Luanda, Angola).

Currently, HSP WIP schools are Kids Kruppa in Maputo, Mozambique; Bee Smart in Rabat, Morocco; and Casa Mágica in Luanda, Angola.

HSP has already planned new projects and challenges for the future. For one, it plans on expanding Raiz to 7th through 12th grade in Portugal. It will also support the development of a new project from preschool to 12th grade, in Luanda. Finally, it will introduce HighScope to several schools in Brazil.

"Developed by HighScope Portugal for programs with high teacher mobility and few financial resources, HighScope Portugal Work in Progress aims to ensure consistency and fidelity in HighScope programs."

The experience HSP has developed in diverse contexts over the years has confirmed that children who attend these programs are proactive leaders of their own lives and motivated for their success and that of others.

Luís Silveira Rodrigues is the president of HighScope Portugal.

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Building a Reflective Practice That *Actually* Works

It Really Does Take Time, Practice, and Collaboration

BY MIKE HUBER AND ROSS THOMPSON

Inspired teachers are lifelong learners and build reflective practices by sharing their own experiences and beliefs with each other.

Mike decided to leave the chairs stacked in his preschool class one morning after reading about the importance of allowing children to move freely in Heather Shumaker's It's OK Not to Share and Other Renegade Rules for Raising Competent and Compassionate Kids ***(Penguin, 2012). Throughout the morning, most children simply stood or knelt at the art table to draw and moved on to other activities. Two other children grabbed paper and markers and sat on the floor to draw. One child simply brought a chair over and sat at the table.***

When Mike shared this idea with three preschool teachers, they responded with input based on their own classroom experiences. Joey mentioned that she had a child in her class who seemed averse to drawing when he was at the table. One day he took his drawing to the floor, away from the other children, and spent the next 45 minutes completely engrossed in his own artwork. Tom tried to take the child's perspective, as he usually did. He asked everyone what they thought the child would feel if Joey had told the child to sit back at the table.

This back-and-forth discussion was typical for the four teachers, who were all part of a group that met monthly to talk about big body play — a concept laid out in Frances M. Carlson's book of the same name. As the discussion came to an end, Ross wondered what else he might be doing in his classroom without thinking about the reasoning behind it — just following the existing rules and not questioning if they were truly meeting the needs of the children in his classroom. Everyone agreed to reflect on their own classroom practices and bring their stories back to the group next time.

This scenario was typical of our Big Body Play discussion group that we started seven years ago. We were a handful of teachers from a variety of programs — a nature preschool, a university lab school, a family education program, and a small parent

cooperative — who had been running into each other over the years at conferences. We often found ourselves in conversations about the need for children to move and take risks. We found that our collective conversations seemed to bring a deeper reflective element than when trying to do so independently. After a few years, we decided to meet at a coffee shop once a month. These were open dialogues with invitations to others to join the discussion group. There were usually about five or six teachers each month (along with an occupational therapist or a psychologist). Over the years, we've realized just how much we've grown as teachers from these discussions. We want to share our insights about creating and sustaining a discussion group — the lessons we learned through time, practice, and collaboration — so that other teachers can build a reflective practice that works for them.

THE "UNBOOK" CLUB: LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER, RATHER THAN A BOOK

In the beginning, our Big Body Play discussion group focused on an article or blog post that was emailed to participants ahead of time. It worked much like a book club with an important difference: Even if some participants hadn't read the article, they had examples from their own classroom that touched on the theme. Everyone could be part of the discussion. In fact, the richest conversations were ones that brought stories from the classrooms of all the teachers — the more perspectives, the deeper the conversation. Many, if not most, of our best conversations started with one topic but shifted to a bigger question. Sometimes the initial conversation was just the feeder for a bigger issue that needed to be discussed.

"We were most successful in our discussions when everyone had strong beliefs about children and development but was flexible about how those beliefs affected their teaching practice."

This was probably the earliest lesson we learned: We were learning from each other, not from an author or a consultant. We weren't alone in our experiences, questions, and challenges related to working with children, family, and staff, even though we came from different backgrounds. Some teachers were new to the field, some were veterans, and some were parents or occupational therapists who had never been in a classroom. Together, we learned from each other with give-and-take discussions. Sometimes the person with no classroom experience had the most insightful perspective. Other times, the most veteran teacher had wisdom to share. All participants needed to be willing to reflect on their ideas while also being open to hearing contrasting ideas. We were most successful when everyone had strong beliefs about children and development but was flexible about how those beliefs affected their teaching practice. They had to care enough to speak up while still truly listening to other perspectives and reflecting on what was said rather than simply waiting for their chance to speak again.

Teaching With the Body in Mind Podcast

Teaching With the Body in Mind is a weekly podcast where Mike Huber and Ross Thompson (the two authors of this article), along with early childhood educators Tom Bedard and Joey Schoen, discuss the importance of young children moving for learning. Recent podcast topics include gun play in preschool, the value of boredom, and challenging behaviors — of adults. *Teaching With the Body in Mind* is part of the PlayvolutionHQ podcast network and is available on iTunes, Spotify, Google Play, and other services.

Every month, Tom Bedard, Mike Huber, Ross Thompson, and Joey Schoen (left to right) meet to record their Teaching With the Body in Mind podcast.

We also recognized that the best way to ensure a dynamic discussion was to focus on ideas that excited us, such as letting kids get messy or take risks. Sometimes our discussion would get into practices that didn't seem helpful or developmentally appropriate, but we quickly steered the conversation back to the positive.

AN INCH WIDE AND A MILE DEEP: STARTING WITH A STORY

As we continued our discussion group, we learned that basing the discussion on an article or a blog post wasn't necessary. What was crucial was choosing a specific story to reflect on, which we shared with participants before the discussion. Sometimes the story was a 10-second video; other times someone recounted an incident in their classroom. Having the story shared beforehand via email held each of us accountable for participating in the

With regular trips to "Dirt Mountain" (located next to the preschool), children decide and create their own levels of challenge and risk as their confidence grows with each returning visit. Photo courtesy of Ross Thompson.

upcoming conversation. It also invited each group member to start thinking and reflecting before the meeting started, digging deep into our beliefs around the incident shared.

During the conversation, we would often take on multiple perspectives: the child involved, other children in the class, the teachers, the parents, the administrator, and so forth. Our conversation would circle back to the original story but would also touch on our own experiences. The group wasn't looking for one authority to give us an answer but, rather, to hear the many perspectives from other teachers, and, at times, the validation or answer to the unspoken question, "You've had something like this happen to you, right?"

"Effective teaching does not happen by learning a predetermined set of skills but rather through an ongoing series of reflections."

Over time, we found ourselves referring to our previous conversations and insights. The group had formed something of a hive mind. Some of the ideas shared came from the many readings various individuals brought to the group, while others were simply from our own reflections. Over the course of a few years, we discovered that we were becoming experts on boisterous and risky play.

THE "AHA" MOMENTS: DISCOVERING NEW INSIGHTS

The insights we've discovered that have changed the way we think about our teaching practices — in essence, reflective practice — is what brings us back to our discussion group month after month. There were many great conversations over the years, but each of us has certain moments when disparate ideas crystalized into a new insight. For Mike, one of those moments occurred when he contemplated the barriers preventing some teachers from allowing riskier play:

> *One day, Tom brought up the topic of teachers making decisions based on fear* (Teaching With the Body in Mind *podcast, Episode 32). I had never thought about how much of a role fear plays in teachers' decision making. I had always assumed teachers made decisions based on knowledge. But this made me wonder why some strategies were so difficult for teachers to adopt. This discussion made me realize that teachers aren't going to change their practice, especially around risky play, if they are worried about children getting injured (or about upset parents). This made me reflect on the way I coach teachers. I wanted to make sure I addressed the emotions around decisions as well as the reasoning.*

Here is what Ross had to say:

> *One time, Tom brought a photo of children playing on a ledge in his classroom that was about three feet high. The teacher in me could immediately recognize the rules being "broken" by having children on that ledge; however, after seeing the joy, determination, and excitement on their faces, it got me thinking about the opportunity that would have been missed had Tom made those children get off that ledge. Tom explained there were rules to playing on the ledge. The children were safe; however, they were engaging in risky play. As we had discussed a number of times before, this is one of those opportunities to do a risk-benefit analysis — what level*

Applying a risk-benefit analysis guides teachers to affirm children's risk-taking behaviors when appropriate, and strengthens trust between an adult and child.

of risk was appropriate for this group and was the potential outcome worth children engaging in this kind of activity. In the case of the children in Tom's photo: definitely! That got me thinking about one specific area at my school: a concrete ledge that was near the entrance to the playground. The school rule was that children weren't allowed to climb on it, which is exactly what they wanted to do most days (discussed further in Teaching With the Body in Mind *podcast Episode 12).*

We continued to talk about using a risk-benefit analysis to decide what risks were appropriate for children, which helped me not only take the perspective of the children I worked with but also invited me to ask the question, "What would I have wanted as a child?"

After our discussion that day, I weighed the risks that the ledge presented with the benefits. I decided that as long as a teacher was close by, the ledge was an appropriate place to climb. I was tired of saying no just for the sake of saying no and wanted to start saying YES! I talked to the children about the ledge. We talked about the risks, and I let them know that I trusted them. It actually made my job easier when we went outside. Rather than focusing on what they weren't allowed to do, I celebrated what they could do.

REFLECTION AS AN ONGOING PROCESS: UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE LIFELONG LEARNERS

One of our goals for all children is for them to grow into adults who continue to be lifelong learners. We hope the same is true for us. Teaching is a dynamic art based on relationships. Strategies that have worked with one group of children may not work with another group of children or even the same children on a different day. Effective teaching does not happen by learning a predetermined set of skills but rather through an ongoing series of reflections.

It is easy to let the daily stress of our jobs wear us down, and a discussion group of self-reflective teachers can help alleviate that stress and reignite the passion that brought us into this profession in the first place — working with children. Rather than feeling like a discussion group is one more task we need to do as educators, we look forward to meeting with our colleagues each month and getting back to our classrooms to put what we've learned from those discussions into practice.

TEACHING WITH THE BODY IN MIND: REACHING BEYOND THE DISCUSSION GROUP

As the years went by, there were four core participants in our Big Body Play discussion group: Tom Bedard, an early childhood educator who worked with parents and children for more than 40 years before retiring in 2017; Joey Schoen, the assistant director of a nature preschool; and the two of us. We started presenting at conferences together. Workshop participants would ask to be a part of our discussion group, but they usually lived too far away to make that possible. We decided to turn the discussion group into a podcast (see sidebar on p. 23) so we could reach more people. We moved the discussions to a studio where we each led a shorter conversation (about 15–20 minutes each). This gave us four distinct conversations that could be released as four weekly episodes.

While we are thrilled when people listen to our podcast, we really hope that people will find at least one other person to discuss an episode with after listening to it. It is through regular dialogues like this that we came to our own new ideas, perspectives, and realizations. I think we can safely say that our expertise would not have reached the levels it has without these regular discussion groups with colleagues who were eager to participate in passionate conversation. We hope more teachers will find ways to reflect on their practice and start their own discussion groups to improve their own experiences and those of the children in their classroom.

Mike Huber, MEd, is a supervisor at St. David's Center for Children and Family Development in Minnetonka, Minnesota, and the author of Embracing Rough and Tumble Play: Teaching With the Body in Mind *(Redleaf Press, 2016).*

Ross Thompson, MEd, is a program director and classroom teacher at Wildflower Early Learning Center in Savage, Minnesota. Formerly a cooperating teacher at the Shirley G. Moore Lab School at the University of Minnesota, he remains a course instructor for the university's early childhood program.

How to Create a Successful Discussion Group

Here are some tips to start your own discussion group:

- Have face-to-face meetings, which promote deeper discussion.
- Set a regular time and place for your discussion group.
- Pick a meeting space with a relaxed atmosphere (e.g., a coffee shop, bar, someone's home).
- Invite diverse perspectives.
- Offer a classroom story (or discussion topic or question) before the group meets.
- Keep one another focused on the reflective discussion.
- Be ready for (and embrace when you can) tangential conversations that lead to bigger ideas.
- Share supplemental articles or readings after the meeting.

Open-Ended Materials Belong Outside Too!

BY POLLY NEILL

Just as with indoor play, the more flexible and open ended the materials on the playground, the more opportunities for children to express their creativity and imagination.

The Green Valley Preschool staff is thrilled with the new playground that was built over the summer. There is a tricycle path that goes around the edge of the playground; a "tree house" built around the base of one of the big trees, and a large sand area partially surrounded by a grass-covered berm. Throughout the playground are sound-making fixtures such as a large marimba, a steel thunder drum, bells, wind chimes, and more. There are a couple of places to swing, and a slide is built into one of the hills. It is also beautifully landscaped with shrubs, flowers, and new sod!

The preschool children were excited when they arrived at school, knowing that their new playground was ready — their teachers and parents had been talking about it a lot. At outside time, the children headed out the door, expecting to see a space that resembled the construction site they'd occasionally had glimpses of over the previous month. Instead, they saw the completed playground. They ran around the new space, checking out the musical instruments, trying out the slide, and looking around the tree house. Several of the children turned to the teachers, and one child summed up their feelings by saying "This is cool, but where do we play?" Another said, "What happened to the dirt pile and the big shovels?" "Where did the bulldozer go?" The teachers began to explain, but then another child said, "What about the blue cloth that covered the piles of dirt and sand, and what did you do with all the black plastic pots?" "Yeah, and what did you do with the long pieces of black tubes, the ones with ridges?" The administrators and some of the other adults looked at each other as if to say, "What are these ungrateful children talking about? Don't they appreciate this model play space we built for them?" However, the teachers understood, and one spoke up: "The children are referring to materials they recall seeing on the playground construction site. They prefer play spaces that allow them to be creative rather than those where all the play opportunities have been designed by adults. Such spaces are rich in materials that they can move around, that allow them to manipulate their environment — just as they would during work time inside."

Photo on this page provided by Tiny Trees Preschool and Liz Boyle, photographer.

> Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions. They can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart, and put back together in multiple ways. The child, rather than a manufacturer or other adult, determines how the materials are used.

What the teacher said in the scenario above describes the "theory of loose parts" (Nicholson, 1972, p. 5), which was first proposed in 1971 by the British architect Simon Nicholson and which is receiving renewed attention from early childhood professionals, child play experts, and playground designers. Think of loose parts as occupying the same vital role that open-ended materials play inside the classroom. In this article, we'll explore what loose parts are and why they are important to children's play and learning.

WHAT ARE LOOSE PARTS?

Loose parts are materials with no specific set of directions, and they can be used alone or together with other materials. They can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart, and put back together in multiple ways. The child, rather than a manufacturer or other adult, determines how the materials are used. Unlike with loose parts, children "quickly tire of things with a sole purpose. Once they've mastered the key function of an object — pushing the button to make a figure pop up or climbing a ladder, for example — they are ready to move on. The intrigue and the challenge are gone" (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2015, para. 7). In fact, children are excluded from play by these moving, flashing toys. When children have access to loose parts, it frees their creativity and imagination to change the world around them in infinite ways. It simply boils down to the fact that the more flexible their environment, the greater the level of creativity and inventiveness they express.

In his groundbreaking article "How NOT to Cheat Children — The Theory of Loose Parts," Nicholson writes

> Have you ever noticed that if you leave old junk lying around, kids will almost inevitably play with it? Whether it be old cardboard boxes, wooden pallets, pieces of wood, old tyres [sic], bits of rope or string, kids will use their imagination and ingenuity to make something. This may make your garden look like a junkyard sometimes, but the experience for the kids is invaluable and it will keep them occupied for hours. Don't try and direct the kids in their play, just let them get on with it (Nicholson as cited in Hargreaves, 2012).

Loose parts can be natural or manufactured; and from there, the only limitation is safety, the environment you live in, and the children's imaginations.

BEST TOYS OF ALL TIME

Before we offer you a sample list of loose parts, let me introduce you to "GeekDad," who writes a column by the same name for Wired.com. Typically, GeekDad (whose real name is Jonathan H. Liu) reviews books, toys, gadgets, software, and board games — items that are often quite pricey. However, in one column, GeekDad diverted from the usual and instead wrote a column called "The 5 Best Toys of All Time."

> **When children have access to loose parts, it frees their creativity and imagination to change the world around them in infinite ways.**

Introducing the cast of characters, GeekDad begins with Dirt at number 5, acknowledging what many of us took a while to learn — that a pile of dirt really *is* more interesting to children than the outdoor toys over in the corner. He does point out that "studies have shown that kids who play with Dirt have stronger immune systems than those who don't" (Liu, 2011). Cardboard Tube came in at number 4, according to GeekDad, followed by String, at number 3. GeekDad remarks that sometimes his children will accept scarves or a blanket as substitutes, but what they are really after is String! Unsurprisingly, coming in at number 2 is everyone's favorite — Box! Like GeekDad's other favorites, Box makes this list both because of its versatility and because it is available in so many shapes and sizes. Finally, at number 1 is Stick! Stick is truly a classic toy — in fact, I remember passing an entire summer involved in very active and complex stick-horse play. Like Box, Stick is valued for the nearly infinite forms that it can take. You can even use Stick to draw and write in Dirt, you can insert Stick into Cardboard Tube, you can tie or wrap String around it, and you can use Stick to drum on Box! It should also be added here that Box and Stick are revered members of the National Toy Hall of Fame.

Ball and Puddle. Two classics!

Snow: If you've got it, use it!

WHAT DO CHILDREN GAIN FROM PLAYING WITH LOOSE PARTS?

Let's look a little more closely at the benefits to be gained from playing with loose parts. Over many years, developmental theory has emphasized the importance of allowing young children to manipulate their environment, and loose parts encourage them to do exactly that — creating opportunities for creativity and problem solving. Playgrounds with fixed (stationary) equipment limit both the amount of children's movement and its degree of variability. Fixed equipment can even lead, indirectly, to unsafe behaviors. Prue Walsh, author of *Early Childhood Playgrounds: Planning an Outside Learning Environment,* claims that fixed equipment "often fails to sustain children's usage, leading to boredom, a breakdown in children's behavior, and therefore injury" (Walsh, 2016).

"Over many years, developmental theory has emphasized the importance of allowing young children to manipulate their environment, and loose parts encourage them to do exactly that — creating opportunities for creativity and problem solving."

Like the open-ended materials inside the classroom, loose parts are developmentally appropriate because children will play with them in ways that suit their developmental level. The presence of loose parts also promotes a wide variety of play: exploratory, constructive, and dramatic play, as well as games with rules.

Loose parts lend themselves to innovation and a sense of the unique that will encourage more symbolic (representational) play — a higher level of play.

Loose parts extend the learning environment outdoors, encouraging play that will touch on nearly all the key developmental indicators (KDIs) in the eight HighScope preschool content areas. We have already discussed problem solving and use of resources (Approaches to Learning) and cooperative play (Social and Emotional Development). But what about coordinating large muscles to move heavy materials or using eye-hand coordination to manipulate loose parts (Physical Development and Health); using vocabulary to describe actions (Language, Literacy, and Communication); combining loose parts to create new shapes (Mathematics); pretend play (Creative Arts); gaining knowledge about the natural and physical world (Science and Technology); and making decisions about which materials to use for a project (Social Studies)?

There is a class out on the playground right now — let's go out and see what is going on:

> *Darius and Theo are hammering a couple of the black walnuts they found in the grass. Theo's splits open, and the boys drop their hammers and look inside. Darius says, "You got worms!" Theo looks up and calls to everyone, "Hey, I've got the baby worms in here!" (KDI 51. Natural and physical world).*

Rocks and Play Dough...

...just add Board.

Maggie drags a chair into the sandbox and turns it upside down. Next she puts a couple of the big pots on each leg, grabs a couple of spoons, and starts banging on the pots. When Rosie asks her why she is making so much noise, Maggie says, "I'm the drummer in the band, like my Dad" (KDI 43. Pretend play).

Martino and Hunter each hold an end of a long plank and carry it over and place it across two milk crates (KDI 13. Cooperative play). "Let's see if we can balance on it," says Martino, as he places one foot and then the other foot carefully on the plank (KDI 16. Gross-motor skills).

"Loose parts extend the learning environment outdoors, encouraging play that will touch on nearly all the key developmental indicators (KDIs) in the eight HighScope preschool content areas."

Children gather inside the house they made by hanging several cloths from the tree house. Theresa watches the children come and go and starts counting: "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 — oh wait, Yael is coming out. Now there's 5. Carola is going in — that's 6 again" (KDI 32. Counting).

As you can see, playing with loose parts makes a significant contribution to children's physical, social, and intellectual development. Adding loose parts to the outdoor play space also offers opportunities for parent and community involvement — families and local businesses can contribute safe materials that are no longer used and can be recycled for children's play.

You can introduce loose parts into your playground area through a well-thought out, coordinated effort by the preschool administration, staff, and parents. Safety and risk are often among the first topics raised at meetings about bringing loose parts to a playground. There is a delicate balance between adults' need to restrain children in order to keep them safe and children's desire for the freedom to explore loose parts. In your planning meetings, most of all, emphasize how using open-ended materials outdoors gives children the opportunity to enrich their play in meaningful, positive, and exciting ways.

This article was adapted from an earlier issue of HighScope Extensions, *Vol. 27, No. 2.*

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EXAMPLES OF LOOSE PARTS

Now that GeekDad has helped us to establish the top 5 loose parts, here are some more ideas to get you started:

Natural

- Stones (heavy enough for children to use in construction projects, but too heavy to throw)
- Stumps
- Logs
- Large branches
- Small twigs
- Sand
- Gravel
- Water
- Leaves
- Pebbles
- Sunflowers
- Seeds

Manufactured

- Recycled car and bicycle tires (avoid steel-belted radials)
- Pallets
- Wooden or plastic crates (milk crates are favorites)
- Buckets, tubs, laundry baskets
- Plastic garden pots
- Boxes
- Gutters
- Drain tile
- PVC pipe
- Wood (two-by-fours, four-by-fours, and planks of different lengths)
- Rope
- Chain
- Cardboard rolls and tubes of all sizes
- Large- and medium-sized wooden reels
- Plastic bottles
- Landscape netting
- Ice cream tubs
- Fabric (light-weight)
- Tarps or drop cloths
- Hoops (Hula and others)
- Weather-proof cushions
- Bricks
- Outdoor tools
- Mesh (canvas or metal, with different sized openings)
- Chalk

Location/Season-dependent

(e.g., marine, rural, urban, rivers and creeks, forests, etc.)

- Seashells
- Kelp
- Seaweed
- Beach rocks
- Driftwood
- Hay bales
- Bunches of wild grasses
- Cornstalks
- Tractor tires
- Tractor seats
- Troughs
- Old street signs
- Traffic cones
- Construction debris (thoroughly sorted for safety)
- Hubcaps
- Car parts
- Cattails and other wetland reeds
- River and creek rocks
- Logs
- Spanish moss
- Seed pods, acorns, pine cones of all sizes
- Large ferns
- Palm fronds
- Recycled natural Christmas trees
- Pumpkins

The (Outside) Daily Routine: HighScope in an All-Outdoor Preschool (continued from p. 6)

TAKING THE WHOLE DAILY ROUTINE OUTSIDE

In a typical classroom, most often time spent in nature is reserved for outside time or recess; however, outdoor classrooms like those at Tiny Trees Preschool don't *have* an inside. So, all of the elements of the daily routine are also outside. Here is how it works:

Greeting time: Each classroom has a circle of logs or special tarp to gather on. When it rains, we pop up a canopy or gather under one of the park's picnic shelters. We talk about what to expect for the day and any changes to the daily routine. Tip: Our message board gets affected by the rain. Grease pencils instead of whiteboard markers resist the rain and are more reliable in less-than-fair weather.

Small-group time: Yes, we do small-group time outside! On dry, warm days, children have access to paper, paints, glue, and more project materials for open-ended art possibilities. Pattern blocks, small toys, games, loose parts, and other manipulatives also become part of our small-group activities. Natural materials such as pine cones, rocks, dirt, and sand are paired with tools like magnet wands, containers, forceps, and magnifying glasses.

Our small-group activities take advantage of wide-open spaces and sometimes take us quite far afield. Children are provided with baskets for collecting and then invited to sort nature's treasures by size, shape, color, texture, and more. They search for letters and numbers on signs in the park and journal by the wetlands to capture their experience.

> **"Retraining our thinking around the importance of nature provides us with an opportunity to see that many of our barriers have solutions."**

Plan-do-review: Work time outdoors is full of so much potential! Beyond offering traditional preschool materials such as blocks, toy people, markers, cars, kitchen tools, and more, we also supply baskets of pine cones, rocks, and sticks. Children have the freedom to work on fairy-sized leaf homes or to engage in big body play like running, wrestling, climbing, jumping, and rolling.

Our interest areas also vary from traditional settings. Our house area features a stick fort with fabrics and mud for use with bowls and whisks. Instead of a sand table, we might have a mulch pit or sand box. Our building area not only includes blocks but also large sticks for forts and planks for building catapults and balance beams.

Large-group time: Children and adults come together for our movement and music just like inside. One of our favorite activities is "The Sleeping Bears," where children get to choose an animal to pretend to be. We decide where they sleep and what they do when they wake up. Many of the children's choices are inspired by animals we see in the park. Did you know that squirrels sleep in nests called *dreys*? Our preschoolers do.

Outdoor programs can offer the same structure as their more traditional counterparts — minus the walls. Photo provided by Tiny Trees Preschool and Liz Boyle, photographer.

Outside time: What does outside time look like when you're already outside? We call it "Explore Time" or "Hike Time," which is essentially a time for us to explore a different part of the park each day. This includes hiking to the nearby pond to observe ducks and explore "sink and float," or going to the park's community garden to dig, grow, and harvest. The opportunities for play during this time involve a lot of big body movements and time to connect with what's happening in the community within and surrounding the park.

Our days at outdoor preschool, framed by a high-quality curriculum like HighScope, create a unique opportunity for children to develop confidence, skills, and joy in learning and in life. Educators can honor children by increasing their time outdoors, even by the smallest bit.

Rachel Franz, MEd, is the director of education and former founding lead teacher of Tiny Trees Preschool in Seattle. She is a HighScope Certified Trainer, offering workshops on intentional outdoor learning, anti-bias education in public spaces, materialism in early education, and more.

Liz Boyle, who contributed the photographs that accompany this article, is a program supervisor and professional development coach at Tiny Trees Preschool.

Bringing Outside Time In

BY KENNETH SHERMAN

Outside time is a daily opportunity for children to engage in active, noisy outdoor play. But what happens when they can't go outside due to inclement weather, or when children need to be more active inside the classroom?

1. ARRIVAL/GREETING TIME

If you know ahead of time that you will not have an opportunity to go outside, make that announcement on the message board. This will give children adequate notice about any changes in the daily routine. As the day progresses, it may be necessary to refer children to the message board when they need a reminder about the change in routine.

2. WORK TIME (CHOICE TIME OR FREE TIME)

Work time is the time of day during which children carry out their intentions, play, and solve problems. Encourage children's need to be active by supporting them at their current level of development. One example you might see in our Demonstration Preschool classroom is children jumping from the stairs. Although at first this might look a little scary to some, children are learning to navigate their bodies and fulfill their need to be more active.

3. LARGE-GROUP TIME

During large-group times, encourage children to use their large muscles and be more active. Setting up a miniature obstacle course as a large-group activity is a great way for children to get up and move around the room. Include different ways that children can move their bodies when using the obstacle course and listening to the music selection. You can also have children take turns being the leader and the follower. For example, "Mike, you are the leader — what movement do you want us to copy?" This gives children the opportunity to explore other ideas for movement.

4. SMALL-GROUP TIME

Allow children to stand during small-group time to do their work, especially if it is an art-focused activity, such as painting. You can also think about getting children away from the table, taking their work to the floor or another place in the room. If you are planning to move children to another location for small-group time, always meet at your original place first and let children know where they are going.

Kenneth Sherman is an early childhood consultant at HighScope.

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How Should I Involve the Children?

It can be very frustrating for children when there is a change in the daily routine. You can put a picture on the daily schedule of an event that will take place instead of outside time. For example, if you can't go outside because of the weather, you can put a picture over that part of the daily schedule, letting children know what you will be doing instead at that time of day. Giving children enough notice helps them to be able to shift gears and think of other ideas or make new plans. Giving children their own personal schedule allows them the control that they need to be able to process any change that might be coming.

Movement During Large-Group Time

Experiencing whole-body movement helps children develop control of themselves and a sense of physical coordination. On days when the outdoor space is not available, you can use the open space in your classroom to encourage whole-body movement. One idea is to play music as children gather for large-group time and stretch, bend, twist, and rock to the music. You can also do whole-body yoga and see how children can modify the poses, encouraging them to try out their twisting and bending ideas.

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