

Reading Assignment

Understanding Work Time



Understanding Work Time

Work time is the time of day during which children carry out their intentions, play, and solve problems. In this section we explain why work time is such an important part of the HighScope daily routine, where children play during this time, what children do during work time, and how adults support them effectively. The following recreation of several scenes from an actual work time in one HighScope preschool program illustrates the dynamics of this part of the plan-do-review sequence.

It is work time. Rosie is “reading” a story to Holly, an adult. Kathryn is folding a cardboard roof for her birdhouse. Nearby, Cayden searches for just the right paper for creating baby bees, while Dominic “writes” out tickets for a show Kari and Yusef are staging in the block area. Will and Max have converted the rocking boat into a “net fishing” boat, and they are talking with Ann, an adult, about what they might



Understanding Work Time (continued)

use for their net. “It’s got to have holes,” Will says, “but not too big holes or the fish will get out.”

Joseph adds more blocks to his house. “No fire, yet,” he tells Maddie and Athi. “It’s not ready.” Athi and Maddie have propped the steering wheel between three cushions for their fire truck. Since Joseph’s house isn’t ready for a fire, they consult a road map for other fires. Over in the sand, Yen pauses to watch Chris fill cardboard tubes.

“Hey! Watch this, Caroline!” Caroline turns from her computer screen to Sara’s and laughs with Sara as she makes a balloon come out of a drawer pictured on the screen. Hearing their laughter, David and Santiago look up from arranging their small blocks. In doing so, David glances at a set of tumbling gnomes, decides to use them in his play, and then gathers up some pipe cleaners and a kaleidoscope to complete his selections.

What Is Work Time and Why Is It Important?

At work time, children carry out a **purposeful sequence of actions** they have thought about and described during planning time, while also following through on new ideas and plans that arise as they play. As they work independently and with other children and adults, children play with purpose and concentration, solving problems they encounter. During these activities, their developmental progress is reflected in observable behaviors called **key developmental indicators (KDIs)**.

■ Children carry out intentions.

Work time in the HighScope Curriculum is the “doing” part of the plan-do-review process. Children transform their initial plans into concrete actions, discover new ideas, make choices, select materials,

Understanding Work Time (continued)

and finish what they have started. The most obvious reason for work time is to provide children with the immediate opportunity to put into action the ideas they have indicated at planning time. Making plans is just the beginning; at work time, children select materials, find a place to start, and get started, critical steps that lead children to view themselves as *doers*.

■ Children play with purpose.

While work time is *purposeful*, it is also *playful*. John Dewey (1933) recognized the value of playfulness in the education process: “To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition” (p. 286). Similarly, educator Michael Ellis (1988) discusses the signifi-



Understanding Work Time (continued)

cance of play as a medium for learning and development: “The propensity to play is a biological system for promoting rapid adaptation to threats to survival that cannot be predicted. . . . Playfulness is a critically important characteristic of humans. . . . Play has brought us to where we are now both as a species and as individuals and will be the basis for our future adaptation to the unpredictable future” (pp. 24–25).

It is clear that children discover and make sense of their world through playful pursuits. HighScope’s work time promotes children’s innate desire and need to explore, experiment, invent, construct, and pretend — in short, to *play*. Through the HighScope planning process, children give conscious direction to their play. When children carry out their plans at work time, their activities have both the concentration and seriousness of work, and the enjoyment and spontaneous creativity of play.

■ Children participate in a social setting.

The social context of work time becomes evident as we observe children working in self-selected pairs and groups. Even children working alone are generally aware of others. Because of its social nature, work time may be noisy, even boisterous, at times. As children carry out their plans and comment on the pursuits of their peers, there is a constant, comfortable hum of conversation, laughter, and noise brought about by children’s industrious use of materials.

■ Children solve problems.

Children’s work-time pursuits are self-generated, influenced by new ideas, and likely to lead to unforeseen events and problems — the baby doll is too big for the bed, the paint drips, the sand runs out through the holes in the cup, the blocks topple.

Understanding Work Time (continued)

Further, what children think is going to happen often does not — the marker will not mark on foil; the roof board that fits over one part of the house does not fit over another; Anika wants to be the doctor, not the mommy. As educator Doris Fromberg (1987) notes, in these situations children may be caught “between surprise and familiarity, partial resemblance and partial difference, what they expect and what they find” (p. 45). Encountering and dealing with such unexpected difficulties can lead children to a new and more complete understanding of physical and social realities.

■ **Children construct knowledge as they engage with curriculum content, as described by the KDIs.**

The KDIs for early learning fall under eight major categories: **Approaches to Learning; Social and**

Emotional Development; Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies. The KDIs within these content areas generally occur as a natural part of children’s self-initiated activities at work time. The KDIs reflect what children are learning about themselves and the people, materials, ideas, and events of their world:

- “Hey, ‘sock’ rhymes with ‘clock.’ So does ‘knock, knock!’” (24. Phonological awareness — a KDI in **Language, Literacy, and Communication**)
- “Let’s pretend I’m the mom and you’re the baby, and we’re going to the farmers’ market.” (43. Pretend play — a KDI in **Creative Arts**)
- “Look where I climbed. I’m taller than even you!” (36. Measuring — a KDI in **Mathematics**)

Understanding Work Time (continued)

- “No, not that button. I need one that’s just the same as this one for her other eye.” (46. Classifying — a KDI in **Science and Technology**)
- “He’s cryin’ ’cause Ellie’s got the truck, and he wants it for his garage.” (10. Empathy — a KDI in **Social and Emotional Development**)

In other words, at work time preschool children construct their own knowledge. They initiate active, hands-on experiences that enable them to construct the kinds of knowledge and capacities represented by the HighScope KDIs.

■ Adults observe, learn from, and support children’s play.

By observing, supporting, and entering children’s play in the appropriate spirit, adults have the opportunity to discover the special interests of individual children: how they think and reason, whom they



Understanding Work Time (continued)

Children Construct Knowledge

Through their work-time pursuits, children's self-initiated plans become self-educating experiences:

- **Building social relations** — “Joey let me play with him. He’s my friend.”
- **Developing initiative** — “I can mix the paints I need.”
- **Finding out about how things work** — “Watch me! I can put this wheel right back on!”
- **Discovering mathematical relationships** — “There’s one for this kitty and one for this kitty but, oops, this kitty doesn’t get one. Wait, I will find you another one, kitty.”
- **Learning to represent one thing with another** — “This block is my bed.”
- **Using language to communicate** — “Be quiet, baby, while I read you this story ’bout Jack and the big beans.”

Understanding Work Time (continued)

Work Time — What and Why: A Summary

What It Is and Why It Is Important

- Children carry out intentions.
- Children play with purpose.
- Children participate in a social setting.
- Children solve problems.
- Children construct knowledge as they engage with curriculum content (as reflected in KDIs).
- Adults observe, learn from, and support children's play.

like to play with, how they use what they know to solve problems. **In fact, the insights adults gain about children at work time guide them in their interactions with children throughout the day.** Research on children's play backs up this claim: "The development of a child's play ability parallels development in all developmental areas; thus, observation of a child's play can give insight to overall development" (Sponseller 1982, p. 232).

Adapted from: Epstein, A. S., & Hohmann, M. (2012). The HighScope plan-do-review process. In N. A. Brickman, J. Burd, J. Tangorra, & M. Weiner (Eds.), *The HighScope preschool curriculum* (pp. 275–278). Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.