

Week 4 Reading Assignment

Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences



Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences

HighScope uses the term *scaffolding* to describe the process whereby adults support and extend children's thinking and reasoning. *Scaffolding* is a term introduced by developmental psychologist Jerome Bruner (1986) and is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky referred to the *zone of proximal* development as the area between what children can accomplish on their own and what they can do with the help of an adult or another child who is more developmentally advanced. HighScope teachers carefully observe children so they know when and how to enter the zone. Children must be secure and confident in what they already know before they are ready to move to the next level. When HighScope says adults support and extend children's learning, it means that the adults first validate, or support, what children already know, and then, when the time is right gently encourage them to extend their thinking to the next

level. Therefore, scaffolding means to both support children's individual levels of development (or where they are currently) *and* to provide gentle extensions as they move to the next developmental stage.

Scaffolding is an essential component of early education because young children develop along a continuum; children, even those of the same chronological age, vary in their development and ability levels. For this reason, when considering interactions, organize children's behaviors into early, middle, and later developmental levels. Pay attention to what children observe, do, and say. Careful consideration of what children *can do* helps make intentional decisions about interactions with each child.

Scaffolding is on-the-spot, intentional interactions to support and extend children's learning that is broken down into four steps:

Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences (continued)

Step 1: Identify the content area

Think about children's interests and what they like to do. What do your anecdotal notes tell you about what children are doing and the types of materials they are choosing and how are they using those materials? At the same time, what will be the curriculum content focus? What areas of learning can be introduced and/or combined with children's interests?



Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences (continued)

Step 2: Consider children's developmental levels

Think about the developmental range of your children. Anticipate how individual children at each developmental level (earlier, middle, and later) will respond to the activity and how they might use the provided materials. What does each of your children know about or have experience with the content focus? Understanding children's abilities at each level will provide valuable insight for determining support and extension strategies.



Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences (continued)

Step 3: Provide support at children's current level of development

Once you have an understanding of what children might do and say during the activity, you can plan how you will support their current levels of development.

These strategies include:

- Watch what individual children do and imitate their actions
- Comment on children's actions (e.g., "you're banging")
- Describe what children are doing (e.g., Greta is crawling to the shelf")

- Respond to verbal and nonverbal communication
- Try out children's suggestions
- Acknowledge children's interactions
- For verbal toddlers: Ask them to describe what they are doing (e.g., "I wonder what you're making")

Repetition of existing skills is a necessary part of child development to secure brain connections and mastery of the skill. Likewise, acknowledging children's current abilities strengthens your authentic relationship with them and boosts their self-confidence.

Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences (continued)

Step 4: Offer gentle extensions

Throughout your supportive interactions, there will be natural opportunities to provide gentle extensions, meaning subtle ways to broaden children's engagement and developmental growth. This can be as simple as handing a heavier material to an infant, to saying to a toddler, "I wonder how tall you can stack your blocks?"

These strategies include:

- Offering additional materials
- Posing simple questions
- Suggesting new ideas to try
- Asking children for additional ideas

- Referring children to one another
- For verbal toddlers: asking them to explain their thinking (e.g., "Tell me how you got that in there.")

When offering a gentle extension, it is important to observe children's responses. They may take interest in the opportunity or continue with their own idea. Pushing them to advance before they are ready can make them lose interest, discourage their initiative, and weaken their trust in your dependability to support their efforts. Accept their engagement or dismissal of your suggestion. This will help you determine whether to return to step three or continue with step four.

Steps for Scaffolding Infant's and Toddler's Learning Experiences (continued)

By following these scaffolding steps, you can engage in meaningful, responsive interactions with children while encouraging their growth and development.

Modified and updated 2022 from *Lesson Plans for a Strong Start: The First 30 Days for Toddlers*, Snyder; *Key Developmental Indicator Scaffolding Cards*, Epstein, Marshall, & Gainsley; and *The HighScope Preschool Curriculum*, Epstein & Hohmann.

