

## **What Is the HighScope Approach to Early Childhood Development?**

The HighScope Educational Research Foundation is an independent nonprofit organisation established in 1970 in Michigan, USA, focused on improving the development of children through education. It works globally by developing early childhood curricula, training teachers and caregivers, conducting research, and publishing educational materials. At its core, HighScope aims to strengthen both learning and life outcomes for children by equipping the adults around them—teachers, parents, and communities—with practical tools and proven methods.

HighScope is best known for its approach to early childhood education built on “active participatory learning.” This means children learn by doing—through hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas—rather than by passive instruction. Children are encouraged to make choices, carry out their own plans, and reflect on what they have learned, supported by adults who guide rather than control. A key feature of this approach is the “plan-do-review” routine, which helps children develop independence, responsibility, and confidence. The curriculum also focuses on broad development areas such as language, mathematics, social skills, creativity, and physical growth, using clear developmental indicators to track progress over time.

At ChildVision, this HighScope model is strengthened in two important ways. First, it is grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, where teachers are trained not only to develop children holistically but also to faithfully teach Biblical truth and model a Christ-centred life. This shapes both the worldview of the child and the culture of the preschool. Second, ChildVision adds an asset-based community development approach. In many rural South African preschools, there are little or no funds to buy educational materials. Instead of seeing this as a limitation, teachers and parents are trained to create learning resources from locally available and recycled materials. This makes the model practical and sustainable, while also forming a mindset of responsibility rather than entitlement. Children grow up seeing adults use what God has provided, work together, and build something meaningful, which strengthens both their development and the wider community.

The HighScope curriculum is built around active learning, where children take initiative, make plans, stay engaged, solve problems, and reflect on their experiences. It begins with how children approach learning—developing independence, curiosity, and the ability to think clearly. Alongside this, strong emphasis is placed on social and emotional development, helping children build a healthy sense of identity, manage their emotions, relate well to others, and resolve conflict. Physical development and health are also central, with children strengthening both large and fine motor skills, learning to care for their bodies, and practising healthy habits. Language and communication form another key area, where children grow in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing, while also developing confidence in expressing ideas.

The curriculum also equips children with foundational academic and life skills. In mathematics, they learn numbers, counting, patterns, shapes, and problem-solving. Through creative arts, they express themselves in art, music, movement, and imaginative play. Science and technology encourage observation and understanding of how the world works, while social studies help children understand people, community roles, the environment, and basic concepts of time and place. Altogether, HighScope develops the whole child—thinking, reasoning, relating, and creating—so that learning is not passive but something children actively do and understand.