






Building Knowledge About Blocks






Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess O'Driscoll, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

1

Objectives

-  Recognize the benefits of block play
-  Identify block area materials and how to set up the center
-  Discover how you can support children's learning






Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess O'Driscoll, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

2

Why is block play important?

- Blocks are a simple, creative, and fun material that provide such valuable learning experiences for young children. Block play is open-ended and stimulates learning in all developmental domains; cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language.
- Block building is ideal for learning because it involves the whole child, while providing an environment that encourages and enhances problem solving.

Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess O'Driscoll, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

3



What children learn:

- Spatial concepts
- Math concepts
- Science concepts
- Problem solving & reasoning
- Motor skills and hand-eye coordination
- Social & Emotional Skills
- Imagination & Creativity
- Language and Literacy

Tom Wolf, Governor
Hedberg, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



4



(Early Childhood Videos, 2013)

Tom Wolf, Governor
Hedberg, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



5



What is a block?

- Blocks are geometric shapes with smooth sides that do not connect and can easily fall over when stacked.
- Blocks are building materials that do not restrict children by having to fit pieces together in a special way, but challenge children to carefully place and balance materials to create a variety of structures.
- Blocks do not include small blocks, sometimes called table blocks (with sides less than two inches in length), or any size of interlocking building materials that fit together. These are considered fine motor materials.



Tom Wolf, Governor
Hedberg, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



6



Which one is a block?



A. Color Cubes



B. Building Bricks



C. Large Hollow

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teressa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



7



Which one is a block?



A. Nesting/Stacking Cups



B. Large Foam



C. Log Builders

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teressa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



8



Which one is NOT a block?



A. Wooden Units



B. Magnetic Tiles



C. Carboard

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teressa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



9



Types of blocks

- Unit Blocks (wooden, plastic, cardboard, hard foam)
- Large Hollow Blocks
- Homemade Blocks (can be made from food boxes, cardboard boxes, plastic containers, tissue boxes, wood cut into block shapes, etc.)
- Cloth or vinyl covered soft blocks (typically used with infants or young toddlers)

*ECERS-3 Note – Only two types of blocks are considered; unit blocks and large hollow blocks.



10



Block Accessories (appropriately-sized)

People



Animals



Vehicles



11



Accessories should...

- Add to, rather than detract from block play
- Not be types that would disrupt or take attention from block play

Accessories should not...

- Be stored together in the same container or in other areas of the classroom
- Interfere with or interrupt block play

Certain toys are **not** considered block accessories and should not be stored with blocks, such as:

- Fine motor toys
- Toy buildings or dollhouses
- Woodworking tools
- Big trucks



12

Are these vehicle and animal accessories in the block area?



Do these trucks count as a block accessory?



13

Setting up a block center

- **Space:** The ECERS-R recommends that the block play area should be large enough to allow at least three children to build sizeable structures. Plus, don't forget about room for you!
- **Location:** This center should be spacious and set up in an area that is free from other distractions and out of traffic. Additionally, block play is more vigorous and louder than other classroom areas and should be located by other more active/loud centers (e.g., dramatic play, music) and not near quiet classroom areas (e.g., cozy, books, listening).
- **Surfacing:** Provide a stable, flat surface for building. A rug will not only help to define the area, but it also helps to reduce noise and provides a comfortable work surface.
- **Storage:** Place the blocks and additional materials in storage containers on low, wide shelves that give children easy access. Blocks and accessories should be separated by type and labels used should include both the words and picture of each material.
- **Number of blocks:** This varies depending on the age and ability of the children. For toddlers, at least three sets of blocks should be accessible, each containing 10 or more blocks. For preschoolers, that build larger structures, at least two types should be provided, but a larger number of each should be available for each child allowed in the block center at the same time.

14

Are these pictures showing a special block area?



15



(Community Playthings UK, 2018)

Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



16



(Better Beginnings, 2015)

Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



17



But what does block play look like?



Tom Wolf, Governor
Hess Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



18



How block play may look for school-agers

As children get older, their block building becomes more involved. They have the dexterity and patience to build more intricate structures. Block play for school-age children may include:

- Planning their structure before carrying it out
- Building larger, more elaborate structures
- Adding additional details to their structures, such as stairs, tunnels, and long bridges
- Adding pieces to their structures for decoration

***ERS Note** – This SACERS-U item is titled "Blocks and construction." This item looks to see that school-age children have access to both blocks and interlocking construction materials. Blocks do not need to be separated into a different space and the area can contain fine motor building materials.

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



22



How can I support children's block play?



- Provide ample time for open-ended exploration
- Get down on the floor and build with them
- Use roleplay with the people and other accessories
- Encourage cooperative building
- Describe, explain, and expand on what children say and do
- Have conversations with the children, respond with thoughtful feedback, and add new vocabulary

- Challenge children to think by asking open-ended questions
- Make connections with other areas of learning and children's real lives
- Let the children take risks and let their block structure fall over!
 - This allows you opportunities to encourage them to keep trying and to problem solve

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



23



Supporting block play at each age level

- **Infants** – Provide language by narrating what they are doing with, and how they are using, the blocks. Promote their large muscle development by placing a soft block on the floor, several feet from a crawling baby. Make it a game and encourage the child to crawl to get the block.



- **Toddlers** – Allow toddlers to get the blocks themselves and help put them away. Give toddlers lots of space for block play, so they can move around without tripping or falling into their blocks.

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



24



Supporting block play at each age level (cont.)

- **Preschool** – Store blocks in an area where preschoolers can reach them easily and put them away. Give preschoolers toy people, animals, and vehicles to use during block play. Make a place for preschoolers to save their block buildings to add to them another day. Keep block buildings safe from younger children who may try to knock them over.
- **School-age** – Give school-age children free time to build with blocks in any way they want. Ask school-age children to help preschoolers with block building. Show children pictures of bridges and buildings. Ask if they would like to try building the same bridges or buildings with blocks.

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kara O'Leary, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



25



Incorporating other concepts into blocks

Yes, it is important to create an area specific to block building, with all the needed space and materials. This helps to organize and enhance children's play and clean up.

But as you work with them, you can expand on their play based on what they are doing, and keep the attention focused on block play.

- Math
- Art
- Language

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kara O'Leary, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



26



(Better Beginnings, 2015)



Tom Wolf, Governor
Kara O'Leary, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services



27



Resources

- Let's Talk Quality Blog: <http://letstalkqualitypa.com/>
- Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI): <https://www.ersi.info/>
- Ten Things Children Learn From Block Play: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2015/ten-things-children-learn-block-play>

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

28



Reference Videos

- CommunityPlaythingsUK. (2018, January 03). *Foundations: Teacher's role in block play* [Video file]. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=suCn1PInm90
- BetterBeginnings. (2015, June 12). *Blocks center with eudora | arbetterbeginnings.com* [Video file]. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPk4vFq_1Y
- EarlyChildhoodVideos. (2013, January 30). *Importance of play* [Video file]. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnH4Ijen70I

Additional Resource Video

- Sutt, R. [Robin Sutt]. (2014, March 12). *Cde103 observation block building towers* [Video file]. Retrieved from www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIXbHfn65fw

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

29



Young children learn not by being told but by constructing knowledge through actions with objects in the physical world and interactions with other children – And the way they do this is by playing.

~ Jones and Reynolds – The Play's the Thing

Tom Wolf, Governor
Kasey Ortega, Acting Secretary of Education | Teresa Miller, Secretary of Public Services

30