

Block Building Basics II: Sustained, Daily Block Building

Did you ever notice that a few children seem to always end up in (and take over) the block area, while other children within your class seem to shy away? In this workshop, we will learn how sustained, week long experiences in the block area can provide *all* children with a framework for making the most from their block play. We will consider a child's week in the block area as a mirror for the writing process, where children draft, edit, revise, and ultimately, publish their buildings!

Key Concepts:

Providing an opportunity for each child in the class to experience a week in the block area, with careful guidance, scaffolding and support, ensures that all kinds of builders' learning styles are valued.

Introducing the materials slowly, blocks first and carefully chosen accessories later, allows for a deeper consideration of the role of materials in building and construction.

Monday: Just Blocks! *Five children are chosen for the week.*

This is a day for drafting ideas with blocks. You will notice children making many 'starts' on Monday. What they end up with may be very different than what they thought they might be doing. Isn't that often the way when we sit down to compose?

Tuesday: Decoration Day! *The same five children return to the Block Area.*

This is a day for adding accessories. Children may think about what else their building needs to really *become*. In the Writing Process, this may be a time of revision and editing. We add those details that make the work come to life. Children may use any materials from the accessories bins in the classroom. Some children use materials from the art table to further enhance their buildings.

Valuing social play and welcoming others into the block area for collaboration and discussion, promotes the many, emergent literacies within block play: vocabulary development, story telling, problem-solving, etc.

Wednesday: Friends' Day! *Five more children are chosen as partners.*

Children who have been building alone may welcome another friend into their buildings. This is similar to a "peer edit" in the Writing Process. How will a friend see the building? What new ideas will emerge? What connections will be made?

What is the teacher's role in the block area? We can assist our builders through careful documentation of what happens in the block area, for revisiting concepts learned and inspiring new constructions.

Thursday: Finishing Touches! *The teacher spends time with all 10 builders.*

I always make my way into the Block Area to have big conversations about the work that's been happening. In the Writing Process, we call this a Teacher Conference. I photo-document the building, and jot down the rich language I hear from the building partners. I use this information in many ways, as evidence of oral language and social learning, and as a celebration of a fleeting moment.

It's so hard to put the blocks away, and leave beloved work. But having a photo of the work of a full week in the block area is a way to celebrate and remember the work. I make multiple copies: one for our Block Book of special buildings, and others to go home with the builders. This is time consuming, but like all other things in the early childhood classroom, the time you spend is equal to your commitment. The children see my respectful valuing of their time, energy and creativity, and respond with commitment to their work.

Friday: Big Block Clean Up! All builders are responsible for taking down their buildings. The work often takes the entirety of Choice Time, and for the last 10 minutes, may require 'All hands on deck!' help from the rest of the class. This is a good use of time for every builder. Un-building is just a rapid rewind of the building process, and allows for children to re-experience what they've actually done with all those interesting materials. We have many ways of cleaning up our blocks, many rules about how to proceed, which are specific to our Block Area. I modify these procedures as necessary to support the builders' abilities and understandings.



Rebecca Burdett, 2018

rebeccaburdett@aim.com