

Get A Bigger Carpet! I'm Making A Track!
Do preschool teachers value block play?



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The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not preschool teachers value block play. An extensive review of the literature did not reveal existing data that explored this specific question, but did suggest five consistent variables which *indicated* value of block play:

- **Attitude** toward and prior **experience** with blocks
- Amount of **time** in the classroom allotted for block play
- Amount of **space** allotted for block play
- The quality and quantity of **materials** provided, and
- Teacher **involvement** with children in the block center.

This project set out to investigate these five variables and whether or not early childhood educators see the connection between providing a high-quality block center and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

A BRIEF Who's Who in the History of Blocks:

Frederick Froebel

Maria Montessori

Patty Smith Hill

Caroline Pratt

John Dewey (who said America was suffering from "Froebelolatry")

The General Stages of Block Building (initially from the 1930s)

Stage 1: Transporting and carrying blocks.

Stage 2: Creating either vertical (stacked) or horizontal (on the floor) rows.

Stage 3: Bridging, the connection of two blocks with a third that connects the two.

Stage 4: Enclosures, both with and without a roof.

Stage 5: More elaborate structures with an emphasis on balance and patterns.

Stage 6: Naming of structures. (Perhaps done previously, but wasn't related to the function of the construction).

Stage 7: Representational construction pulling from a child's experience.

Linking BLOCK PLAY to the Developmental Domains of DAP:

How block play contributes to COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT:

How block play contributes to LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT:

How block play contributes to SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

How block play contributes to PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT:

OVERVIEW OF CONCLUSIONS:

100% of the respondents self-reported valuing block play

91% self-reported that blocks are an **essential** part of an early childhood curriculum

Yet photographs and survey results provide evidence of classrooms having minimal **space**, minimal **time**, and minimal **materials** for children to engage in block play and only about half of the respondents reported having enough time to get **involved** in children's block play.

There was a disconnect between reported teacher beliefs and what was actually observed in the classrooms.

There were various program and perception issues (whether perceived or actual) that lead to said disconnects, for example:

- The “inherited room” issue
- The “need to stay on schedule” issue
- The “children need to explore other areas” issue
- The “they are just playing” issue

This particular project revealed that even though a classroom might **lack** materials, space and time, the teacher in the space could still very well value block play.

All which brought up the question: where would an effective intervention need to take place? The direct care level? The owner/administrative level?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW UP AND FURTHER RESEARCH:

83% of the respondents report that they would attend a training on the importance of block play.

Would a professional development session that specifically addressed: The *ideal* amount of time, the *ideal* number of blocks, *ideal* supplementary materials, and the *ideal* amount of square footage, and, the *actual* connections between block play and the four domains of developmentally appropriate practice lead to teachers making specific environmental changes within their classrooms that would reflect their self reported value and understanding of the importance of block play?

OR would this proposed training need to target the owner, director, administrative level for those changes to actually occur?

AND it would be of further interest to see if there are measurable differences between Family Child Care (where they are typically the owner/operators) and Preschools and Centers (where they aren't).



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