



*SCAFFOLDING BLOCK PLAY WITH
OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT
CHILDREN IN THE CONSTRUCTING
OF KNOWLEDGE*

Teachers can encourage children to think deeply about their experiences with blocks and materials.

The way in which a teacher responds can help children make connections and create meaning during their block play.

The first step is to observe children with intent.

Through focused observations of children in the block area:

- we are offered openings into the children's worlds
- we can observe many rich applications of academic skills
- provides us with opportunities to see the meanings the students have created and the questions with which they are struggling

These observations provide next steps in planning by revealing to us an insight of how to expand the children's learning and how to nudge them forward through the asking of open-ended questions and /or the arrangement of materials. (Harriet K. Cuffaro, Block Building: Opportunities for Learning)



To unlock the benefits of block play, the children need social interaction from adults as well as peers. (Block Play Constructs a Math Mind, sixtysecondparent.com)

By giving children lots to talk about by asking questions, making I wonder or I notice comments, or directing their attention to specific content or skills, the block center can be an exciting environment in which to gain deeper understandings of their world. (The Block Center. The Institute for Childhood Education.)

Block play is an excellent time to use the *Strive for Five* or the *Feedback Loop* techniques to scaffold children's construction of knowledge:

- Teacher responds to a student's action, comment or performance by engaging the student in a sustained back-and-forth exchange
- Intention is guiding the student toward the constructing of further understandings
- Teacher asks open-ended questions to create a learning moment that facilitates higher level of understanding.
- Teacher persists in these efforts to promote further learning and thinking on the part of the student rather than supplying the answer.

(Pianta, La Paro, Hamre: CLASS Manual)

Strive for Five: continue questioning through at least five questions, the majority being open-ended, to guide students toward deeper thinking and engagement in the activity

Examples of open-ended questions to ask during block play:

- What would happen if ...
- What else could you try...
- What else is another way to...
- How could you change...
- What might explain...
- I noticed...
- Tell me about...
- How would you...
- How is _____ and _____ the same? Different?
- How can you use _____ differently?
- How did you...?



Emily is building a tower. She said the wood slices are the guards.



Questions related to Measurement:

- If both buildings have the same number of blocks, what makes this one taller?
- How can we determine whose building has more blocks?
- How can we verify (make sure) that _____ is taller/shorter/same as _____ (keep asking questions to guide toward measuring with standard or non-standard unit)?

Concepts of Structures:

- How can you make sure _____ (animal etc) doesn't escape?
- What will the people do in your building?
- What happens when it rains on your house/castle/hotel etc.? What can you do to help the people inside stay dry?
- What do the people need inside of the _____, outside of the _____? How can you build those items?



Questions related to Shapes/Patterns:

- How can you extend this into a pattern?
- Describe the shape
- How do we know it is a ... (circle, square, etc.)?
- If we turn the shape upside down/sideways etc., now describe the shape- how do we know it is still a ... (circle, square, etc.)?
- How can we estimate/guess the number of blocks used?
- How is _____ the same or different?
- What do you think is similar to this structure (or shape)?
- How can you use the blocks to make one big _____ (shape)?



Concept of Balance:

- Why doesn't your tower fall down?
- How can we use these blocks to make something really tall that doesn't fall down?
- How can we use these blocks to make something that is really long?
- How can you make a bridge that goes over part of the structure?



Adding in Literacy:

- How will people know that this is a _____? (guide toward adding of materials that symbolize that type of building or using paper and markers to make a sign for the building/structure)
- How can we use blocks to retell the story that we read at group time? What structures do we need to build? What else is needed to show the setting?



Concepts of Ramps:

- Which container moves down the ramp fastest/slowest?
- What is same/different?
- What doesn't move and why?
- How can you change the _____ to have it move faster?
- What can you add to the ramp to slow down the movement?
- What angle of the ramp makes it go faster/slower?
- How can you compare...?
- How is this ramp the same/different as...?

