

Stages of Block Building:

All children progress through specific stages as they use blocks in play. Knowledge of these stages helps teachers provide the materials and questioning that will nudge children forward in their abilities.

Stage 1: *Carrying blocks:* Blocks are carried around but not used for construction. At this stage, children simply love to touch, feel, move, carry, hold, drop, pack and repack. (Generally, very young children or very inexperienced builders)

Stage 2: *Building Begins:* Children mostly make rows, either horizontal (on the floor) or vertical (stacked). There is much repetition in this early building pattern, which is basic functional play with blocks. (approximately around age 2-3 years)



Stage 3: *Bridging:* children create a bridge (or passage-way) by using two blocks to support a third. (approximately three years of age)



Stage 4: *Enclosures:* children place blocks in such a way that they enclose a space. Bridging and enclosures are among the earliest technical problems children solve when playing with blocks, and they occur soon after a child begins to use blocks regularly. These spaces are often called cages in a zoo or pet store. In this stage, children will want to add additional accessories such as figures for dramatic play or gems to use as food for the animals, etc. (approximately four years of age)



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Stage 5: Complex Structures: With age, children become steadily more imaginative in their block building. They use more blocks and create more elaborate designs, incorporating patterns, symmetry and balance into their constructions. Children may incorporate several different block

accessories as their play becomes more involved. (approximately 4 or 5 years of age)

Stage 6: Complex Structures with Elaborate Dramatic Play: Naming of structures for dramatic play begins and engagement in elaborate dramatic play scenarios occur. Before this stage, children may have named their structures, but not necessarily based on the function of the building. This stage of block building corresponds to the “realistic” stage in art development. Children use blocks to represent things they know, like cities, cars, airplanes, and houses.



Resources:

Wardle, Francis. (2002) Introduction to Early Childhood Education: A Multidimensional Approach to Child-Centered Care and Learning. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

The Block Center. The Institute for Childhood Education, L.L.C. www.WeEducateTeachers.com

Pictures are of block structures created by K and Pre-K children in Union Public Schools.

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