

# Developing Block Play Inside

*'Their simplicity allows for a myriad of different creative combinations, and children can use the blocks according to their experience and development. There is no one way of using them, just many possibilities.'* (Tovey, H 2017 p85: Froebel, cited in Brosterman 1997:p 51.)



## Introduction

This project will be based on the core Froebelian principle of block play. The project is within the younger age of children, age two and three years old. It will set out what has been done in the setting to enhance the use of blocks. The blocks we will be using are 'unit' and 'hollow' blocks.

*The blocks that most settings use now are based on the set of unit blocks developed by Caroline Pratt in 1913 in USA (Provenzo 1983).*

Block area before the project started



The new block area



## Rationale

Block play is an area where children can construct using their imagination and creativity. It allows them to think for themselves, expressing their own ideas. Also, children solve challenges that are presented with blocks, like balancing and positioning.

Before starting the project our block area consisted of about fifty unit blocks, half a set of mini unit blocks and also two trolleys of hollow blocks. Also, in the area were some toddler boxes and small world materials. It was felt that the blocks were used sparingly. Block play was not seen to be used in a sustained way like we had all seen from previous training, so it was felt the area would be a good place to take this project.

Harriet Johnson's (1933) seven stages of block play and engagement from children has been used to observe children in previous cohorts. As a setting we wanted to move beyond the usual two to three stages we saw. Stage one: transporting, stage two: stacking, stage three: bridging, stage four: enclosures, stage five: patterns and symmetry, stage six: naming structures, stage seven: building representations.

## Implementation

The first thing we did was remove all other toys from the area, to make sure the new area was only for the blocks. The area before was very large. The partitions were moved to make the area slightly smaller, but still large enough for many blocks to be built with at once.

Making an order for new blocks was vital, as we had so few before. This meant more children would have access to a range of different blocks within the area. When they arrived each block was carefully positioned, with shadowing on the cabinet to support children to return the blocks when finished. This included the mini unit blocks too.

It was encouraged to have an adult within the area a lot of the time. The role of the adult was to model block play, being alongside the children. *'Froebelian educators facilitate and guide, rather than instruct.'* (Principle poster)

About half way through the project, we added photos of buildings around the world into the area, allowing children to see what real life structures are. We also added photos throughout the term of children using blocks to create their structures.

## Conclusion

In conclusion we have seen a huge impact of this project throughout this term, seeing many children extending their block play. Seeing children bringing their models to life and sharing their lived experiences with us. As we look into the future of this project, we hope to see this continue throughout the year and beyond.

*"To represent: forms of life...forms of beauty...forms of knowledge"* (Tovey 2017: p85).

It was noticed very quickly how much of a key role the adult played in the block area. The adult role consisted of being in the area modelling block play, but also using key questions to extend, observe and also offer the freedom with guidance children need. *'Froebel saw educators as learners and learners as educators. Through studying children adults could gain a deeper understanding of their own lives as well as those of their children.'* (Tovey 2020: p21)

We have seen a noticeable change in the way the blocks have been used, seeing more sustained play. Also, a lot more play within groups of children working together to make their structures.

Throughout the project Harriet Johnson's (1933) seven stages of block play were used to evaluate where children were. It also allowed the adults to model and extend where the children were in their own journey.

Throughout the project we have seen stages two to six being used as each of the children move through their own block play journey.



## References

- Froebelian principles (2021) [Froebelian Principles A3 Poster \(froebel.org.uk\)](https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf)
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