
Supporting Fine Motor Skills with Inclusive Block Play

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Block Play: It’s Not Just for Boys Anymore,” from Child Care Exchange. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand that increasing participation in block play offers children important and unique opportunities to develop fine motor skills.
- ◆ Reflect upon current practices and determine ways to promote gender inclusion and equity in the block area and in other areas that have been previously stereotyped as just for boys.
- ◆ Design an action plan to incorporate all children into all areas of the classroom based on children’s interest.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ Use the questions below to guide your reflection and action plan to support children to be comfortable in the classroom to fully participate in all areas, regardless of their gender identity, to develop fine motor skills.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust activities as needed to support fine motor skills.

“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters around the world to be brave – to embrace the strength within themselves and realize their full potential.”

Malala Yousafzai

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ Children learn and continuously develop key fine motor skills in block play through grasping the blocks as well as stacking them. Observe how children use their fine motor skills as they build and play with blocks.
 - What are some ways you've seen children use their fine motor skills as they play with blocks? If there are children who prefer to play in other areas, how are they developing their fine motor skills?
 - Think about your daily schedule. When and for how long are children able to access blocks? Is this enough time for them to engage deeply and practice using fine motor skills? If not, how you can adapt your daily schedule or learning space to encourage all children to visit the block area during the day?
 - What types of building materials and toys (e.g., wood blocks, small Legos, larger foam blocks) do children prefer to use? How do these different materials help children practice fine motor skills in different ways?

- ◆ The article asks you to consider how societal expectations affect the types of play children participate in. Intentionally increasing access for children to all areas in your classroom reduces the likelihood of children stereotyping or segregating themselves into groups.
 - Consider how the children in your care, specifically girls, may benefit from having more opportunities for block play.
 - How are you challenging societal expectations in your environment to ensure that all children get the opportunity to develop various skills in all areas of play?
 - Are there other areas in your classroom that you are seeing children separate themselves? How can you address it?
 - How can you ensure that every child feels welcome into all areas of play?

- ◆ The article offers many ways to incorporate all children into play in the block area. An example includes modifying the learning environment to make the block area more accessible to girls.
 - How can you arrange your classroom and provide choice for children to encourage them to engage in block play?
 - Where can you make improvements? How can you incorporate block play or building into other areas of your learning space?
 - How can you encourage children to invite each other into block play?
 - What additional support or resources (i.e., building materials and toys) do you need to ensure all children have access to block play? How will you get those?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children's fine motor skills:

- ◆ **Source:** New York Times
- ◆ **Article:** Breaking Gender Stereotypes in the Toy Box
- ◆ **Link:** <http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/well/family/gender-stereotypes-children-toys.html>
- ◆ **Description:** This article discusses opportunities that children have, and the skills children gain from different types of play, with the focus that stereotypes are encouraged further.

- ◆ **Source:** Texas Child Care Quarterly
- ◆ **Article:** Promoting Positive Gender Development
- ◆ **Link:** https://www.childcarequarterly.com/spring18_story1.html
- ◆ **Description:** This article explains how children's gender identity could be promoted by early childhood classrooms.

- ◆ **Source:** Miss Jamie, OT
- ◆ **Blog:** Promoting Fine Motor Skills on the Playground
- ◆ **Link:** <https://missjaimeot.com/promoting-fine-motor-skills-playground/>
- ◆ **Description:** This occupational therapy resource focuses on the fine motor skills gained from playing outdoors on the playground.

- ◆ **Source:** Georgia Public Broadcasting
- ◆ **Article:** Lego Says it will Work to Rid Its Toys of Harmful Gender Bias
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.gpb.org/news/2021/10/13/lego-says-it-will-work-rid-its-toys-of-harmful-gender-bias>
- ◆ **Description:** This article shares how the Lego corporation is working on promoting more inclusive play through building bricks play.

- ◆ **Source:** The OT ToolBox
- ◆ **Blog:** Fine Motor Skills with Building Blocks
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.theottoolbox.com/fine-motor-development-with-building-blocks/>
- ◆ **Description:** This article provides details on the different types of fine motor skills gained during block play.