



St Hugh of Lincoln

R.C Primary School

The seven stages of block play

All children seem to pass through seven stages in block play, which Harriet Johnson has documented.

The youngest children learn through their senses, so a young child may be seen unconsciously stroking wooden blocks, enjoying the feel and shape (in a way never seen when handling plastic). It is fascinating to observe a child's development, from a toddler carrying blocks around, to a four-year-old builder of highways and towers, and eventually to the five year old and his peers planning and building castles and caves for knights and dragons, then acting it out in dramatic play. The rate at which children pass through these stages depends on their exposure to block play. Even an older child coming into contact with block play for the first time will begin at the earliest stages. In her book *The Art of Block Building* Harriet Johnson has listed these stages. To summarise:

- **Stage 1:** Applies to the very young child, under two years of age. Blocks are carried around, not used for construction.
- **Stage 2:** At approximately age two or three, building begins. Children mostly make rows, either horizontal on the floor or vertical (stacking).
- **Stage 3:** Bridging: two blocks with a space between them, connected by a third block.
- **Stage 4:** Enclosures: four blocks placed to enclose a space.
- **Stage 5:** Age three to four. When facility with blocks is acquired, patterns and symmetry can be observed.
- **Stage 6:** Age four to five. Naming of structures, with names relating to function of building.
- **Stage 7:** Beginning at age five, buildings often represent actual structures children know from real life or stories. Strong impulse to dramatic play around the structures.