NYC Pre-K Explore Building Blocks Curriculum Expectations

BUILIDING BLOCKS ELEMENT	EXPECTATION	HELPFUL HINTS
Whole Group Activities	There is one whole group for each day of the week. Complete all five. On weeks when there are fewer than five program days implement the Monday-Thursday activities. On weeks with only three program days implement the Monday, Tuesday and Thursday activities.	While typically done during a whole group meeting these can be done anytime the entire class is together (i.e. during transitions).
Small Group Activities	There are two activities per week. All children participate in at least one small group each week. If possible, do both small groups. Work with your Explore coach to determine which activity to implement first each week. Take notes on each child for at least one of the two small group activities. Use the Small Group Record Sheet for note taking.	Invite children to do the small group activity. Generally, children are very excited to work in small groups with a teacher. If a child declines to participate, consider how to adapt the materials or bring the activity to an area the child especially enjoys. Be careful to respect the math objective of the activity and be sure to only change materials, not objectives. Work with your Explore coach to make these types of changes. Create simple note-taking codes for the Small Group Record Sheets that help capture what children are doing and make sense to your teaching team. Save completed Small Group Record Sheets for two purposes: 1. To individualize instruction for each child. Reflect on these sheets when completed and refer back to them when teaching similar activities or math skills. 2. To use with your Authentic Assessment System. These sheets contain evidence of children's learning. Use them when completing Authentic Assessment checkpoints.

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Hands on Centers	Available every day during classroom Center Time.	Be sure to inform the children of the Hands on Center activity each day before Center Time begins. Engage with children in these activities during Center Time.
Computer	All children play Building Blocks computer games at least once a week.	Computer time should be limited to 15 minutes a day and may not exceed 30 minutes a week. In order to track participation, use a sign-in sheet or waiting list for the children to use.
Family Letter	Send home weekly; encourage families to complete the suggested activity with the children.	Consider when to send the letter home. Will it be a preview for the upcoming week or a wrap-up?
Math Throughout the Year	Implement as many of these activities as possible.	These activities are intended to "mathematize" the day. They draw children's attention to the math around them and build on the math skills studied each week
Reflection	Ongoing, but especially the last day of the week.	Use questions such as "How do you know?" "Why?" and "Tell me about…" to help children reflect on and solidify new learning. See below for additional information on reflection.

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REFLECTION

When children talk about their thinking using their own words, they build critical thinking and language skills. Allowing children to discuss what they did during a math activity helps build mathematical reasoning and develops social skills such as turn taking, listening, and speaking.

"How do you know?" is a powerful reflection question. Early in the year children may or may not answer you and often cannot provide reasons for their answers. They may shrug their shoulders and say, "I don't know," "Because," or, "Because I'm smart." As the year progresses, children become accustomed to explaining their ideas. Their answers give more insight into their mathematical thinking. For example, one child identified an open shape, a "V," as a triangle.

Teacher: "How do you know that's a triangle?"

Child: "It has three sides." She runs her finger along the two sides and runs her finger along the open space, as if there is a third side.

Teacher: "But there's no line here (pointing to the open space)."

Child: "Because they forgot to draw it."

Without asking questions, this teacher may have assumed the child could not recognize shapes. Asking the question showed that the child had a budding understanding of triangles but did not yet understand that shapes need to be closed, and that the third line must be visible. Young children who have such discussions with teachers and with each other begin to question and correct each other. For these reasons, we recommend that you incorporate time for reflection into your classroom mathematics activities. The following are effective prompts:

- How do you know?
- Tell me about. . .
- Why?
- How is that the same?
- Show me how…
- How is that different?

GENERAL TIPS

Suggestions for Successful Implementation:

- Plan ahead. Review the Big Ideas and Learning Trajectories and read Teaching for Understanding as well as the Objectives and directions for all of the weekly activities in advance.
- Prepare students for what is ahead. Gather the new materials coming up in the next week or two and lay them out, encouraging children to play with them and explore what they can do with them *before* using them in specific activities.
- For some activities, consider varying the size of the group as needed. Some whole group activities could be done with half of the class at a time. While typically done with 4 children, some small group activities can be conducted with slightly smaller or larger groups of children.
- Assign computer games for the upcoming week on Friday afternoon.
- Work together. Building Blocks is intended to be implemented by all members of the teaching team. Consider how each member of the team can contribute to implementation.

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Coaching Day:

- Your Explore coach is there to help. Consider how s/he can be most helpful. Ask your coach to help you with specific Building Blocks components you find difficult. Providing your coach advance notice about this will help him/her tailor support.
- Your Explore coach can be most effective if s/he sees Building Blocks in action in your room. What elements of Building Blocks will your class be doing when your coach arrives? Are there ways you can show your coach more implementation?
- Gather and review your Small Group Record Sheets prior to your coach's visit. This will help maximize your time together.
- Gather the materials for any activities you would like to review with your coach in advance and bring them to your coaching meeting.

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