The Building Blocks Project

Building Blocks—Foundations for Mathematical Thinking, Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 2: Research-based Materials Development

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What have we been doing? We can hear you ask! The curriculum development is proceeding well.

We have been fully developing, with much help from teachers, two major strands from the domain of Number and two major strands from the domain of Geometry. Each activity takes a long time to write. We sketch out ideas, including “levels of difficulty” for each task. We then carefully consider where in our research-based “learning trajectories” each of these levels falls. We order the tasks according to these learning trajectories and then meet with a large or small group of teachers to get their input. We re-write the activity, then take it out to teachers’ classrooms and try it with a few children. We re-write again. Finally, it’s ready to be programmed. When we work out the programming, we’ll be sending it to all of you to try out in your classrooms. Then…of course…we’ll be re-writing.

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Next Meeting

Our next Western New York meeting for The Building Blocks Project is coming up. As usual, we will be reacting to and re-writing activities. The date is Wednesday, March 22 at 4:30 pm. We’ll be meeting in Baily 209, the Curriculum Center. E-mail or phone us if you can come. Surprise international guest!

For those of you not in our area, we are planning to get software and draft activities out to you for your feedback as soon as we possibly can!

Building Blocks Called “Just What Is Needed” by Journal Science

The prestigious journal Science published an article on efforts to improve U.S. schools. (The picture features our project too. A copy of this article is on p. 3.)
The programming has been delayed by legal considerations. Bureaucratic and legal requirements are always rigorous when universities and the National Science Foundation are involved, but never more than when developing software. We needed to have three more levels than anyone else to get a "waiver of copyright and patent" from every participating organization or department in both universities, from NSF, from...well, you get the idea. This has finally been obtained (just last month), so now we can negotiate with interested publishers. Then, finally, software development can begin!

We'll keep you informed the minute we have more news.

**Professional Development Planning Grant**

*Julie Sarama and Douglas H. Clements*

We are happy to share with you that our other small grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) is in the final stages. The grant, "Planning for Professional Development in Pre-School Mathematics: Meeting the Challenge of Standards 2000," is to develop a plan for teacher enhancement and development—not to actually do the professional development yet (with this type of grant, you make the plan, then you or others ask for funding so as to actually conduct the professional development). We will be spending the rest of this year finishing such a plan to reach and work with the diverse population of early childhood educators.

Some of you may have been randomly selected to help us by completing a survey on important issues in this area. If you receive one (one mailing was done last week; the larger mailing will be in a couple of months), please be so kind as to return it to us ASAP!

To learn more about this project, point your browser to: http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/profdev/

**Thanks for Letting Us In!**

*Gail Brade*

The Building Blocks project would not be successful without the willingness of teachers to allow us to visit their classrooms to test activities with students. We have not yet been able to visit all of the teachers who have volunteered their classes but hope to incorporate more testing sites as the semester progresses. A special thank you goes out to all of the teachers who have adjusted their schedules and activities to accommodate our presence in their classrooms: Arlene Jacus, Barbara Johnson, Carolyn Maurin, Carrie McMullen, Colleen Kelly, Jeanne Cooley, Jennifer Kibler, Josette Lucarelli, Kathy Billiar, Kathy Ransbury, Kay Kempner, Kimberly McAtee, Lena Patterson, Lisa McDermott, Marie Peters, Mary Ellen Bardsley, Paula McGirr, Ruth Hollande, Sandra Campbell-Hill, Sophia Maxick, Sue Lucarelli, Tobian Woods, and the Early Child Research Center at SUNY Buffalo. Your assistance is a valuable asset to the entire Building Blocks team. We look forward to working with your classes as well as others throughout the next semester.

**100 Days of School: Please Help Us!**

Many teachers provide rich math experiences by celebrating the 100th day of school. How many of you celebrate? What do you do? Is there a value only in doing some of this in a computer activity? Would there be a value in seeing 100 objects on computer screen? How about 1000? Should the computer count 1000 objects, quickly?

Please e-mail or write us by regular post with your ideas and reactions. If you prefer talking, just call us. If it is long distance, call or write us and we’ll call you back or call us collect.
**How to Contact Us**

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**New Web Site!**

The Web

If you haven’t visited our Building Blocks Web site yet, please do so! That will also allow us to communicate with you more frequently and more fully. Point your browser to: http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/buildingblocks/.

*Please make sure that we have your e-mail address if you have one.*

Though we may get out an occasional newsletter, it would be much easier to communicate with e-mail.

**Meet New Staff**

*Gail Brade* is a graduate of Canisius College (BA secondary mathematics education) and SUNY Buffalo (UB; Ed. M secondary mathematics education). Over the past ten years, she experienced a number of different teaching situations including 8 years at Holland Central School, 1 year at Mount Mercy Academy, 3 semesters part-time at Canisius College, and 1 year in teacher education at UB. She grew up and lives in western New York. Her hobbies include volleyball, water-skiing, camping, and reading.

*Dave Wilson* is a doctoral student in mathematics education at UB. His background includes 13 years of teaching high school as well as 6 years teaching part time at ECC. He has been involved with issues of mathematics education reform throughout his career. His research interests center on curricular responses to the call for reform and the teaching and learning that occurs within the implementation of these curricula.

*Linda Roycroft* is a doctoral student in mathematics education at UB (BA psychology, BS mathematics, MA mathematics). Over the past four years she has taught algebra, trigonometry and calculus as a TA for the Learning Center and as an instructor at UB. She currently resides in South Wales (right in the middle of the snow belt!) with her husband, two cats, one dog and a bunny.

*Ann-Marie DiBiase* is a doctoral candidate in early childhood education. She is a certified elementary school teacher as well as an instructor for child development at the undergraduate level. She has conducted and published research in the areas of constructivism, moral education and teaching and learning. At present, she is a research assistant on two of the NSF projects.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED