

Loose Parts Play



The Power of Loose Parts Play

Loose Parts Play Theory

Loose-parts play theory is proving hugely popular.

The original theory, proposed by Simon Nicholson in 1971, simply states that in any environment, 'the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it'. In short, any resource or environment that offers multiple possibilities (or variables) has intrinsically greater play value and contributes more to the development of creativity and imagination.

The theory does not specify that natural resources are better than constructed ones or that wood is better than plastic, merely that if children can use resources in a variety of ways, both intended and unintended, then the intrinsic play value is increased.

This is important because it is all connected to how children develop the ability to process information and ultimately solve problems. The ability to solve problems following a logical series of steps is clearly a useful skill. However, when faced with a problem that falls outside of our previous experience, or that cannot be solved by logical steps, we need a different type of thinking. This way of thinking relies on our ability to use intuition, creativity and imagination.



Loose parts play develops skills across the whole curriculum. It is child-led, and helps children strengthen their independence and sense of self. It helps children observe, enquire, investigate, construct, deconstruct and engage with both others and the world around them.

Here's how loose parts meet each of the seven areas of learning:

Personal, Social and Emotional Development – Independent play, making choices about what and how to play, sharing resources, playing alongside others.

Physical Development – Fine and gross motor skills, learning how to lift and carry.

Communication and Language – Speaking with other children during shared play, new language and vocabulary.

Mathematics – Concepts such as shape, size, sequencing, sorting, counting, combining and measuring.

Literacy – Mark making and storytelling narratives during play.

Understanding the World – Using loose parts during role play; stones in the kitchen, wooden blocks as cars, testing ideas and theories.

Expressive Arts and Media – Opportunity to explore media and materials, application of loose parts for creativity and art.



Loose parts play has many benefits, both for the child and for the adults involved in it. For example, it is low cost and easy to set up. Also there have been quite a bit of research into its effects that have discovered positive findings.

Loose parts play is timeless, and its benefits will have been the same in the past as they are now. However, many of those benefits are especially important in the modern age, as childhood is impacted heavily by a range of issues.

Loose parts play has never been so important. There are many issues that impact on childhood in the modern age such as:

Technology

Less family time for many families

Less space/ability for children to play outside

Children's time is often micro-managed

Loose parts play offers many advantages in countering some of these issues.

These include:

It develops imagination

It connects children to reality and the real-world

They get to set their own agenda in their play

They create their own games and narratives

They interact with others and talk about their experiences

It creates language-rich play where vocabulary and conversation are at the forefront

And this really only is the starting point!

Loose parts is one of the most frugal systems of early learning.

Examples of places to source loose parts:

Speak to local businesses to see if they would support you in providing crates, pallets, cable reels, gutters, or anything else you can think of

Visit charity shops or junk-yards

Ask for donations of loose parts from families or friends

Look out for bargains on free sites.



Loose parts play offers a way of surrounding children with the same kind of resources day in day out, but that can be used in a multitude of exciting ways.

Loose parts play is mostly child-led, and this has a tremendous impact on independence. Children get to set the agenda, think up their own ideas, and just generally think for themselves. They become masters of their own universe, makers of their existence. It is great for them to think for themselves, believe in themselves.

Because there is no-one to tell you how to use the things you are playing with, it supports the need to develop your own ideas. Children come up with ideas, take on roles, speak in different voices, build imaginary objects, and inhabit fantastical worlds.

Most toys in the modern age have a definite purpose or function. From computer games, to electronic toys, to plastic figures, what to do with toys is clear and children aren't given any licence to explore their own ideas. This is not the case in loose parts play. When all you are faced with are a few stones and some sticks, for example, you need something to bring it all to life. That something is your own creativity!

Through Loose Parts Play, children start to see possibilities in objects...They become characters of settings.

They become magical tools or symbols of power. They represent other fantastical things. Objects change into other things, but that takes creativity and imagination. Using Loose Parts Play, children construct, manoeuvre and transport a range of objects. They balance, sort and position objects - the perfect formula for gross and fine motor development.

There will always be obstacles to overcome in loose parts play. Things will fall over, or not be long enough, or be too heavy, and you have to think to get past these issues.

Risky play provides many benefits. There is a strong practical link between loose part and risky play, and many loose parts learning has a low-level of risk that you should be aware of. For example, children build towers and structures outside using different materials, and then they will climb or walk along them. They explore difficult terrain, such as muddy ground, steep inclines, or maybe climb limbs of branches. This could be searching for loose parts, or using loose parts as part of their play, for example using a stick as walking stick, or following a 'map' made of loose parts.

Risky play provides a thrill for children in encountering danger through many controlled ways. It helps them develop emotionally and psychologically.

Children take on roles and learn about the world and those around them. They develop in confidence and self-esteem, and start to understand that they are capable of great things. There is a strong link between loose parts and stories and storytelling. Children can use loose parts to be characters that they invent or from a story they know well. As they act out stories and dialogues, they expand their knowledge of how the world works, and how people react emotionally to different situations.



During loose parts play, children ask questions, create a narrative, taking on roles or voices, talking through ideas, negotiating and imagining.

Loose parts play develops skills across every area of learning. It is a wonderful cross-curricular activity. For instance, children can learn about maths through creating patterns with objects, by counting objects, sorting, creating transitional art and counting the parts. They develop skills in literacy by creating characters from loose parts, as they act out narratives from stories, or parts of books using random objects. Children learn fine motor skills in manipulating loose parts. They develop conversation and vocabulary skills as they interact with others. They engage in art and design by building, creating, and making pictures with objects. They learn about the world by examining natural loose parts, and seeing how things float, roll, stack, and many other skills.

Loose parts play supports many skills in early learning including:

Independence – It supports children developing their own ideas, and having a sense of autonomy over their learning

Imagination – Children develop ideas, narratives, stories and more

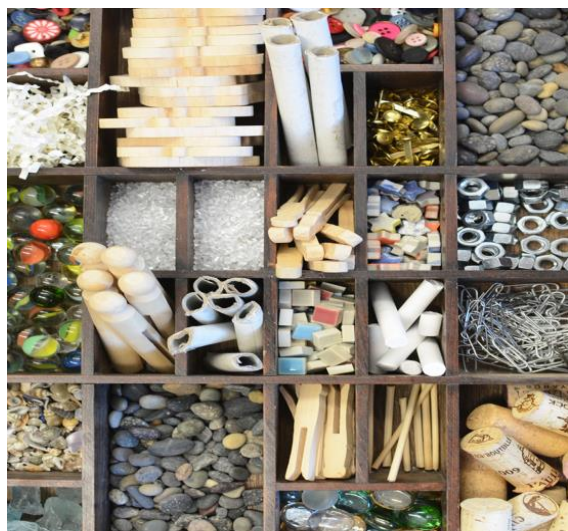
Total engagement – They can often be found in a state of pure involvement which is a brilliant state of learning to be in

They experiment with objects and the world around them

They begin to make sense of the world



Tinkering trays are a fantastic way of presenting loose parts and so simple to make; find a tray and fill it with a selection of resources.



It's also fun to give the children empty picture frames and let them create their own transient arrangements



The possibilities are endless and really only limited by your imagination. Once you're in the right mind-set, everything becomes a loose part! The key thing to remember is that materials must be open ended, that is they have no pre-determined rules for use and can be made, moved, moulded, manipulated and morphed into any number of things using only imagination.

The list of loose parts is endless but can include:

Household items like cotton reels, curtain rings, blocks, beads, buttons, balls, tubes, tins, pots, springs, washers, marbles, bangles, tiles, pegs.

Natural resources such as stones, straw, mud and pine cones, sea shells, feathers, pine cones, leaves, sticks, horse-chestnuts, acorns, sand and water.

Fabrics such as scarves, ribbons, laces, scrunchies.

Modelling materials like clay, playdough, kinetic sand and slime.

Plastic and synthetic resources definitely have a place too - including Lego, bunchems, stickle bricks, and magnatiles

Building materials and tools - planks, nails, hammers

Scrap materials - old tyres, off-cuts of guttering, cardboard tubes

AND ... random found objects.