

Loose Parts

If you have ever watched children using buckets as hats, sticks as wands, or fabric that becomes long mermaid hair, you have witnessed the natural motivation of a child to discover and recreate the world around them. The authenticity that arises when children are provided open ended materials, such as loose parts, is supported when they have opportunity to choose, construct, and invent using their own ideas and imagination.

Discovery and wonder are limitless when we add loose parts to early learning and child care environments. Loose parts are materials or natural objects that have no defined purpose and can be moved, put together, taken apart, and combined with other materials (Nicholson 1971). Loose parts allow children to experiment and create in ways that foster hope and wonder and allow their imagination to soar. In using loose parts, children can express their individuality and incorporate their cultures, community, and home language, which creates a sense of identity and safety in their learning environment (Daly and Beloglovsky 2018, 8–11).

The addition of loose parts supports educators and care providers to recognize, understand, and value the cultural identity of the children and families in their early learning programs. When educators and care providers incorporate loose parts into their environment, they are encouraging a variety of learning opportunities that support children’s development by:

- encouraging children to try new ideas and discover new concepts
- fostering children’s creativity and imagination
- developing problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills
- building self-awareness and self-confidence
- understanding feelings, empathy, and a sense of personal responsibility
- supporting fairness, equity, and equality through playing with others



Figure 1: La P'tite Académie Church Pt., Nova Scotia



Figure 2: Pre-primary Program Halifax, Nova Scotia



Figure 3: Health Park Early Learning Centre Sydney, Nova Scotia

Recognizing children as competent learners who are capable of interacting with their indoor and outdoor environments, can create a space for them to feel confident to engage and explore. (Nova Scotia 2018, 9). This image of the child allows educators and care providers to be intentional in their interactions with children and in the design of the play space and materials.

Materials should be selected with intention, be inviting in presentation, and enhanced often to support children as they scaffold their play (Daly and Beloglovsky 2016, 20–22). Educators and care providers collaborate with families and the community to help build relationships and create programs that incorporate meaningful interactions using loose parts. Building strong relationships with families and the community supports educators and care providers in creating spaces that are reflective, inclusive, and rich in diversity.

“The wider the range of possibilities we offer children, the more intense will be their motivations and the richer their experiences.”

Loris Malaguzzi, *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Childhood Education* (1993, 79)

Some suggested loose parts to get you started:

- **Natural materials:** rocks, sticks, pinecones, acorns, logs, tree cookies, leaves, bark, driftwood, shells, seeds, flowers, sand, mud, water, moss, etc.
- **Outdoor enhancements:** tires, planks, various lengths of material/ tarp, rope/string, buckets, spools, piping and connectors, pallets, milk crates, blocks, etc.
- **Indoor enhancements:** wine corks, unbreakable mirrors, bottle tops, gems, paper tubes, pom poms, buttons, wooden rings, fabrics, hollow blocks, etc.



Figure 4: Jane Norman College
Truro, Nova Scotia



Figure 5: Jane Norman Family Home Agency
Truro, Nova Scotia



Figure 6: Garderie Les Petit's Poussin's Daycare
Cheticamp, Nova Scotia

Books

- *Inspiring Spaces for Young Children* (DeViney, Duncan, Harries, Rody, and Rosenberg 2010)
- *Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children* (Daly and Beloglovsky 2014)
- *Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play with Infants and Toddlers* (Daly and Beloglovsky 2016)
- *Loose Parts 3: Inspiring Culturally Sustainable Environments* (Daly and Beloglovsky 2018)
- *Loose Parts 4: Inspiring 21st Century Learning* (Daly and Beloglovsky 2019)
- *Loose Parts Play - A Beginner's Guide: A Practical Handbook for Educators and Parents of Children Aged 0-5* (Williams and Stevens 2019)

Online Resources

- *Loose Parts Play: A Toolkit* (Inspiring Scotland 2019):
<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Loose-Parts-Play-web.pdf>
- "How Not to Cheat Children: The Theory of Loose Parts" (Nicholson 1971):
https://cdn.ymaws.com/mnaeyc-mnsaca.org/resource/resmgr/docs/super_saturday_2018_handouts/burwell_-_the_theory_of_loos.pdf

"Learning with loose parts, especially culturally related items, is definitely a way to continue learning about our community and its history."

Amy Chaissons, Director Garderies Des Petits Poussins, Cheticamp, NS

"These loose parts, often referred to as intellectual materials, promote critical thinking, problem solving, and let children's natural inquisitiveness shine."

Jane MacKenzie, Jane Norman College, Truro, NS

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www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nselcurriculumframework.pdf.

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