

Loose Parts Theory

'Less Toys More Materials'



Children are highly creative beings whose imaginations are in full swing during the early years. Providing an environment that is rich in loose parts, materials and everyday items sparks the imagination and creates many possibilities for children's expression. Loose parts are a vehicle for children to express and test their developing ideas, theories and experiences in life. A simple tube can be a star catcher in a galaxy one day and a tunnel for ants to cross a raging river the next!

Toys on the other hand can typically be one dimensional and often have a shelf life in terms of their purposed function – once mastered children rarely go back to them for their intended purpose. Don't get me wrong, some types of toys are very versatile and can complement loose parts play well, eg lego, however the emphasis here is they can supplement loose part play.

Loose parts was first coined by a British architect Simon Nicholson who believed that every human being has the potential to be creative and loose parts in an environment invite immense imaginative possibilities.

So what exactly are loose parts? "They are beautiful found objects and materials that children can move, manipulate, control and change while they play. Children can carry,

combine, redesign, line up, take apart and put loose parts back together in almost endless ways" (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2016). The NQS emphasis in element 3.2.2 that materials, resources and equipment can be used in multiple ways, are flexible and can be adjusted! Loose parts certainly fit this element!

What to consider:

- Collect materials from your community, families, local business and your own environment.
- Find ways to sort and store for ease of access and use.
- Set the learning space as an invitation for children. Create a sense of curiosity, wonder and intrigue. Positioning materials in particular ways to provoke play is an important role of the educator.
- Viewing and treating loose parts as a precious resource for play will mean children will too.

"Educators create the environment, children create the experience"

Blooms taxonomy positions '**creating**' as the highest form of thinking. Open-ended materials provide the platform for critical thinking not to mention that loose parts are the most sustainable and accessible resource we can provide!



Two Play Scenarios

“The Humble Train”

Toys VS Loose Parts



Toy Train Set

While I am a keen fan of the everyday train set (find me a child who has not loved train sets at some point) I am beginning to see some of the limitations they create when compared to loose parts play. Train tracks connect in only one way, and they ultimately join up to make a completed track. This is typically how children approach playing with these toys. Start there and finish here. We are all familiar with ‘*Thomas the Tank Engine*’, which is how the humble train track became more commercialised. Each of the trains featured in the Thomas set have particular characters and roles, which are reinforced through various other mediums such as books and TV programs. They tell children HOW these trains should behave and this is taken on through their role play – in a way it is already prescribed, the characters already developed. So simply, it LIMITS creativity and places a cap on the possibilities in play.

Loose Parts Train

A child can express their experience and interest in many creative ways. In this case a child with a keen interest in trains constructs a train with loose parts. Using rectangular wooden pieces as the carriages and many other materials to make the engine.

- A horn to sound ‘when I’m coming’
- Front pedals so I can put the engine brakes on
- A button to open/close the carriage doors at the station.

I notice that the experience is a whole body one, hands telling the story, words expressing the functions, movement to interact with each part of the train. Others are invited to board the train and the narrative starts to become imaginative when one says “we are off to the moon” – the train can fly! WOW there are now so many possibilities!

Bottle tops, buttons, tubes, fabric, reels, tyres, recycled home items, pots, wood, leaves, stones, sticks, funnels, wool, tiles, kitchen utensils, mats, boxes, foam, jars, containers, fallen objects, lids

+ INCLUDE ITEMS for JOINING – tape, pegs, bulldog clips +