



# Getting Started with *LOOSE PARTS*

A GUIDE THAT WILL INSPIRE  
& SUPPORT EDUCATORS  
TO FEEL CONFIDENT USING THESE  
MAGICAL MATERIALS



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# What are Loose Parts?

LOOSE PARTS ARE OBJECTS THAT SPARK CURIOSITY, INNOVATION, CREATIVITY, QUESTIONS, PROBLEMS, IDEAS, AND EMOTIONS.

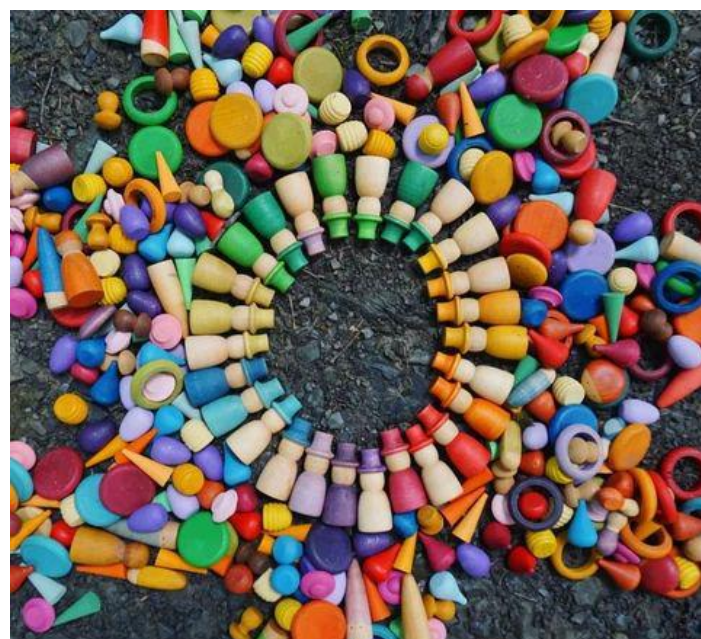
This is why children are so naturally drawn to these beautiful and engaging items. Children are scientists, always asking questions in their play and conducting investigations to discover the answers. Some of their questions may be...

- "I wonder what will happen if I place this object on the edge of the slide?"
- "How do cars roll?"
- "I wonder how that building is so TALL?"

Loose parts such as wood planks, tires, and boxes would provide the opportunity to create their own slide and discover speed and distance. Providing pots and pans, mud, water, and leaves would create the opportunity for a child to create concoctions and explore different mixing and cooking methods. Building with blocks, large pieces of wood and tin cans would allow for exploration into building vertically and discovering balance, structure, and engineering.



The term loose parts was coined by Simon Nicholson and he discusses how creativity is not only for the gifted, that everyone is creative when provided environments with the right kind and number of variables. Nicholson suggests many different variables beyond physical materials, such as chemical reactions and fire. Loose parts can be manipulated, transported and transformed. For children to make sense of their world this is key, and loose parts provide endless opportunities for their innate curiosity and wonder to aid in their development.



# *The Power*



## OF LOOSE PARTS

## ACROSS THE DOMAINS OF LEARNING



1.



### *Literacy*

**How do milk lids, boxes, and shells help a child's literacy skills?**

These items provide opportunities of rich language to be used, such as ridges, smooth, indigo, gigantic, fold, hard, ocean, recyclable, ect. Just as there are endless possibilities with these items, there are endless ways to describe them, increasing your vocabulary.

2.



### *Social*

**How will glass stones, q-tips, juice lids, and tiles aid a child in their social skills?**

While creating with these items children engage in complex social situations that involve opportunities for problem solving, negotiating, listening to others ideas, collaborative projects, and dramatic play.

3.



### *Cognitive*

**How will cardboard tubes, rain gutters, and scarves develop a child's ability to make decisions and develop math skills?**

Play is filled with decisions and math skills, such as stacking cardboard tubes to make it balance, creating a ramp system with rain gutters to discover speed and distance. Children use deep critical thinking skills to observe and evaluate which objects will work best for their questions they are discovering.

# *The Power*



## OF LOOSE PARTS

## ACROSS THE DOMAINS OF LEARNING



4.  PS

### *Senses*

**How do glass bottles, cardboard tubes, tree stumps, grass, and sand help with a child's senses?**

Loose parts come in all shapes, sizes, weights and are visually appealing, have different sounds, textures, and tastes! A mixture of these items help our children develop their sensory systems which also aid with behaviours and self-regulation.

5.  T

### *Physical*

**How will giant boxes, tires, glass stones, leaves, and fabrics help a child's gross and fine motor skills?**

These items all provide many different opportunities to be manipulated, transported, and be creative with. Carrying a wood plank develops arm, shoulder and back muscles, while creating with glass stones develops fine motor skills such as the pincer grasp. All of these skills help with writing later!

6.  PS

### *Emotional*

**How will leaves, sticks and bubble wrap aid in a child's emotional development?**

Connecting with nature's loose parts is a naturally calming tool. Working through aggression by jumping and popping bubble wrap is a strategy but also provides sensory input into muscles and joints that helps children self-regulate. Seeing yourself in mirrors while playing allows you to see and begin to recognize emotions in yourself and others.



- Lisa Daly & Miriam Beloglovsky

- WOODEN BEADS
- POPSICLE STICKS
- WOODEN RINGS
- NAPKIN RINGS
- CANDLE STICKS
- JEWELRY BOXES
- SPOOLS WOODEN
- PEGS BOWLS
- PALLETS CABLE
- SPOOLS
- UPCYCLED
- CHAIR LEGS
- KITCHEN UTENSILS
- WOODEN DOWELS
- WOODEN CRAFT PIECES
- OLD PICTURE FRAMES
- TREE STUMPS
- WOOD COOKIES
- BLOCKS
- SCRAP PIECES
- CLOTHES PINS
- UPCYCLED BANISTER
- WOOD PLANKS



# *Glass and Ceramics*

"The very fact that children spend so much energy and time on a behaviour that has no overt obligation to doing it is the very thing that makes it so important and the very reason that should be uppermost in our minds whilst we advocate for it." - Marc Armitage

- COLOURED GLASS
- STONES
- MOSAIC TILES
- FROSTED
- GLASS MARBLES
- BOTTLES
- VASES
- CERAMIC HOUSEHOLD ITEMS
- DECORATIVE BOWLS
- SEA GLASS
- PRISMS
- GLASS TILES
- NAPKIN RINGS
- MIRRORS
- FLOOR SAMPLES
- DECORATIVE TRAYS



# *Metal*

"Creativity - the playing around with the components and variables of the world in order to make experiments and discover new things & form new concepts." - Simon Nicholson

- JUICE LIDS
- MASON JAR LIDS
- SCREWS
- BOLTS
- WASHERS
- NAPKIN RINGS
- KITCHEN UTENSILS
- PLANT POTS
- COINS
- KEYS
- LICENSE PLATES
- TIN CANS
- BOTTLE TOPS
- TIN FOIL
- SODA CAN TOPS
- METAL HANGERS
- PAPER CLIPS
- METAL BASKETS
- METAL RACKS
- JEWELRY
- SERVING TRAYS
- WIRES
- RAIN GUTTERS



# *Fabrics*

"The natural connections children make to formal learning through the use of open ended and naturalistic resources should be a motivation to all adults to ensure that these are freely available to young children both indoors and outdoors" - Eric Erickson

- STRING
- YARN
- RIBBON
- FELT
- ROPE
- MESH
- CURTAINS
- TABLE
- CLOTHS
- LACE
- FOAM
- BURLAP
- SCRAP MATERIALS
- OLD CLOTHING
- OLD SHEETS
- THREAD
- FAKE GRASS
- FAKE PLANTS
- FAKE FLOWERS
- CROCHET
- FABRIC SAMPLES
- TARPS
- BLANKETS
- CARPET SAMPLES
- LEATHER
- SCARVES
- TIES
- SILK
- TWINE

- STRAWS
- PLASTIC CUPS
- FILM REELS
- FILM CANISTERS
- MILK LIDS
- SEWING SPOOLS
- BOTTLES
- HANGERS
- DVD'S
- SHOWER HOOKS
- POKER CHIPS
- DOMINOS
- CRAFT MATERIALS
- PLASTIC JEWELS
- SEQUINS BEADS
- CONTAINERS
- PVC PIPE
- BREAD BAG TIES
- CLIPS
- BRACELETS
- JEWELRY
- BALLS
- HAIR ROLLERS
- HULA HOOPS
- CELLOPHANE
- RAIN GUTTERS



# *Packaging*

"Almost all creativity involves purposeful play." - Abraham Maslow

- BOXES
- CARDBOARD
- TUBES
- CORKS
- BUBBLE WRAP
- PAPER
- CARDBOARD  
PIECES
- EGG CARTONS
- PAPER ROLLS
- RIBBON WHEELS
- YARN SPOOLS
- CARDBOARD  
RINGS
- ENVELOPES
- NEWSPAPER /  
FLYERS
- FOOD  
PACKAGING
- GIFT BOXES
- EXTRA LONG  
CARDBOARD  
PIECES
- GIFT BAGS
- PAPER BAGS



# *Natural*

"Our sensitivity to nature, and our humility within it, are essential to our physical and spiritual survival." - Richard Louv

- STICKS
- LEAVES
- TREE
- STUMPS
- WOOD COOKIE
- ROCKS
- SHELLS
- MOSS
- DIRT
- WATER
- DRIED FLOWERS
- DRIED FRUIT
- SEEDS
- ACORNS
- PINE CONES
- CONKERS
- GRASS
- SAND
- BARK
- GRAVEL
- MULCH
- PINE NEEDLES
- VANILLA BEANS
- CINNAMON
- STICKS
- DRIFTWOOD
- HERBS
- SPICES
- GARDEN ROCKS



## *Other VARIABLES*

""With all these things all children love to play, experiment, discover and invent and have fun." - Simon Nicholson

- SMELLS
- ELECTRICITY
- MAGNETISM
- GRAVITY
- GASES & FLUIDS
- CHEMICAL INTERACTIONS
- FIRE
- COOKING
- SOUND
- MUSIC
- MOTION
- PEOPLE
- ANIMALS
- PLANTS
- WORDS
- CONCEPTS
- IDEAS



# *Frequently asked Questions*

## How do I introduce loose parts into my program?

Start slow and with only a couple items. For example, choose 2-5 types of variables but have a few of each for playing with; (20 milk lids, 5 boxes, 4 scarves).

This allows for the children to explore independently or as a group and go deeper into their ideas without you or them being overwhelmed. Then work your way up!

## What if the children transport or remove the items?

Go with the flow! Transporting, adding, and removing items is apart of their ideas. Think of our homes and work spaces, we like to move around items to explore our ideas and make our space work for us.

Children like to connect their learning and stories by going back and forth between learning areas with these variables. Think of it as they are connecting the dots in their learning!

## What if the children don't play with the variables?

Oh man can this be frustrating for us as educators, especially if we have spent hours planning...been there! What I have learnt most is that children need TIME to explore their learning environments and the materials in them. What might have been a strong interest one day, hour, minute, can quickly change! Children have so many ideas and they will explore them all of we give them the time to do so. With that said, leave out the setup/baskets for days, weeks and see what happens. David Hawkins discovered that children need MONTHS to make connections in their play!

## How do I encourage clean up?

Respect what you can leave out for them to return too, and make sure each item has a home. You can label baskets or shelves or be okay with items ending up back on a shelf. I am also an active partner during cleanup to role model!



# *Tips and Tricks* Cheat Sheet

## Inspiration

Need an idea, or want to build your collection, print or keep this guide as an ebook on your device for easy reference. I will often flip through and be inspired by the vast list and grab just the variable I was needing in a invitation to play, provocation or environment setup.

## Educating Others

Having your fellow educators, parents and Admin understand the importance of these magical materials is so important. The Power of Loose Parts pages are designed for quick easy reference that can be printed and posted in your parent area, included in your welcome packet or even included in your newsletters!

## Professional Development

Are you a leader in your school that is supporting educators to embrace loose parts? Use this guide as inspiration alongside playing with loose parts. Create a display of loose parts and have a category sheet displayed!

## Quotes

On each category page I have included an inspirational quote with regards to play and loose parts. Reflect on these quotes and have a collaborative discussion with fellow educators as to how it shows in your practice, image of the child and their play.



# Resources

Starting your loose parts journey is exciting and of course many more questions will come as you go deeper into the process. Just remember that the main concept of Nicholson's theory is for people to invent, explore, discover, play and have fun with loose parts! To continue learning, listed below is a variety of resources that include more videos, books, and podcasts that I have used myself to further my own knowledge.

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## MORE LOOSE PARTS RESOURCES TO GET YOU STARTED

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<https://www.fantasticfunandlearning.com/math-and-loose-parts-play.html>

<https://fairydustteaching.com/2016/10/loose-parts/>

<https://thecuriouskindergarten.blog/category/loose-parts/>

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### Other Resources

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<https://loosepartsnatureplay.libsyn.com/>

<https://www.decoda.ca/read-all-about-lit/loose-parts/>





# ***Thank You . . .***

I am thrilled you have chosen to inspire and support your learning journey.

You are now on your way to discovering, educating and feeling confident in becoming a loose parts enthusiast!



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