Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children

We have often marveled at the long hours children can spend playing with simple materials like boxes, rocks, shells, sand, or water. Our observations have led us to question the conventional wisdom of providing children with sophisticated toys. As you have probably noted yourself, children are often more interested in the packaging than in the toys themselves.

Children usually prefer play that stimulates their curiosity and gives free reign to their imaginations and creativity. We believe that one of the best ways to enhance their natural curiosity is to introduce a wide variety of the materials we call "loose parts" into their play settings.

What Are Loose Parts?

In early childhood education settings, loose parts mean alluring, 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. The materials come with no specific set of directions, and they can be used alone or combined with other materials. Children can turn them into whatever they desire: a stone can become a character in a story; an acorn can become an ingredient in an imaginary soup. These objects invite conversations and interactions, and they encourage collaboration and cooperation. Put another way, loose parts promote social competence because they support creativity and innovation. All of these are highly valued skills in adult life today.

Loose parts possess infinite play possibilities. They offer multiple rather than single outcomes: no specific set of directions accompanies them; no single result is inevitable. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces are meant to be fitted together in a specific way to make a single picture, loose parts can be joined in many ways. A scarf, for example, can become a blanket to swaddle a baby, a platform for a picnic, a fishing pond, a cover for a fort, or a veil covering the face of a bride.

Origin of Loose Parts

Children for generations have used found materials in their play from rocks and sticks to tin cans and wire. In his article “How NOT to Cheat Children: the Theory of Loose Parts,” the British architect Simon Nicholson coined the term “loose parts” to
describe open-ended materials that can be used and manipulated in many ways (1971). Nicholson saw people of every age as potentially creative. Environments, he believed, offer many ways for children to interact with variables such as gravity, sounds, chemical reactions, concepts, words, and people. For Nicholson, the richness of an environment depended on the opportunities it provided for making connections. “In any environment,” he writes, “both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”

Take, for example, a beach: it is filled with loose parts—rocks, shells, beach glass, plants, feathers. When children play in such a setting, they can move around, making use of any or all of the found objects, devising spaces and structures that can entertain them for hours. This isn’t only fun but it also helps them develop higher levels of critical thinking and creativity.

When an environment is rich in loose parts, children are likely to discover multiple ways to manipulate them and new ways of thinking or processing the knowledge learned by playing with the materials. Children can use flat tree cookies to serve as a sturdy base for a tall tower, stepping stones to lead them safely across an imaginary river filled with hungry alligators, a steering wheel for their race car, or a lily pad to shelter frogs. They become more creative and flexible in their thinking while satisfying their ever-growing curiosity and love for learning.

The Value of Loose Parts

Children prefer loose parts. Anyone who has watched children play with toys or playground equipment knows that they quickly tire of things with a sole purpose. Once they’ve mastered the key function of an object—pushing the button to make a figure pop up or climbing a ladder, for example—they are ready to move on. The intrigue and the challenge are gone. A stick is a richer choice than a slide because it can become a fishing pole, a spoon for stirring a concoction, a magic wand, or a balance beam for snails. Loose parts offer almost numberless variables, prompting children to create their own stories.

With so many materials available for ECE classrooms, you need to make choices that maximize children’s development and make sense financially. Today, teachers are often expected to provide classroom materials out of their own pockets. Happily, loose parts can often be had for free, and they offer a bonus: they encourage you, and the children’s parents, to reuse, renew, and recycle. Write a note to the children’s families asking them to collect potentially rich materials around their homes to add to the classroom. Provide a list of suggested items (small boxes, jar lids, buttons, fabric). Also, post your list in the classroom or distribute it at school events.

Loose Parts Support the Curriculum

Math
Children acquire their first math skills and numerical concepts when they manipulate small loose parts, like blocks and bottle caps, by sorting and classifying, and combining and separating them. They learn one-to-one correspondence when they make connections among loose parts. Once they begin integrating loose parts into their games, you commonly hear them start to count and see them arranging the parts in specific sequences, patterns, and categories by color, type, number, and class. Loose parts lend themselves to classification. The concept of measurement becomes clear when children play with tools like cups, sticks, funnels, and sifters. Measurement, equivalency, balance, spatial awareness, conservation, and logical classification are precursors to higher mathematical skills that loose parts readily support.

Physical Science

Loose parts help children investigate and actively construct ideas and explanations about physical properties of the nonliving world. Children gain deeper knowledge of how things work when they can experiment with stacking boxes, tubes, and bottles. They can also test multiple hypotheses involving gravity, force, weight, distance, and height with these materials.

Language and Literacy

Loose parts promote language development when children use them as props to engage in rich conversations and storytelling with peers and adults. Describing the items they manipulate, children can test new, complex words and engage in productive arguments that increase their critical-thinking skills. They make connections between loose parts, the books they have read, and the stories they have heard.

Creativity

Children often express their ideas and feelings through art, music & movement. When loose parts are added to your art center, they offer children invitations to draw, sculpt, collage, explore, and extend their ideas. Movement possibilities with loose parts such as scarves, hoops, and ribbons are endless, and provide opportunity for children to improvise. Musical play often means hitting items as hard as possible to see how they sound, and loose parts offer almost limitless opportunities to explore sounds that can be exuberant, random, noisy, and chaotic or quiet, gentle, and focused. When you provide loose parts and have an open mind about how they may be used, the children will surprise and delight you with what they create and learn.
PLEASE READ!!  Important First Aid & CPR Information  PLEASE READ!!

According to the Child Care Organizations Act (1973 P 116) caregivers are required to renew/update their CPR training every 12 months and that First Aid training be renewed/updated every 36 months (DHS, TA Manual, pg. 84).

It is required by the American Heart First Aid and CPR Instructors that those who are renewing their First Aid/CPR credential:

- Bring their expired card to training
- Repeat the FULL First Aid and CPR course if card has been expired for more than 40 days
- Pre-pay your class to reserve a space, as spaces are at a premium
- Remember there are NO refunds for those who do not show up for class without a 24 hour cancellation notice. **To cancel a class call: 517-548-9112—24 hours in advance.**

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**First Aid and CPR Classes!**

*For Parents, Early Childhood Personnel and the Public!*

**CPR and First Aid (Full) in Livingston County**
July 14—6:00 p.m.—10:00 p.m.

**CPR Renewal ONLY in Livingston County**
By appointment for month of July

**CPR and First Aid Renewal in Genesee County**
July 14—6:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.

**CPR Renewal ONLY in Genesee County**
By appointment for the month of July

Call 517-548-9112 to REGISTER

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**PLEASE BRING YOUR OLD CPR CARD WITH YOU TO CLASS**
In keeping with its goal to meet the growing need for qualified early child care and education staff, the CDA Council administers the Child Development Associate® (CDA) National Credentialing Program. The CDA Program is designed to assess and credential early childhood education professionals. The Council recognizes and credentials professionals who work in all types of early care and education programs - Head Start, Pre-K, Infant-Toddler, and Family/Group child care.

Child Connect for Family Success is NOW accepting applications for the 2015-16 CDA Scholarship Program. Call 517-548-9112 for an application. The deadline for applications is July 17th. Our CDA Scholarship program is funded by Livingston County United Way in collaboration with Great Start Livingston.

Why should I participate in Great Start to Quality, Michigan’s Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System?

This is a common question at Child Connect for Family Success. Our staff came up with the Top 8 Reasons of why we think you should be a part of Great Start to Quality:

8. Provides data that supports why families say they love your child care program.
7. Research shows that implementing quality standards impacts children’s learning.
6. Guides you in making intentional choices about your program.
5. Highlights the quality services you offer that go above and beyond what is required by licensing.
4. Demonstrates to staff, family and the community your commitment to quality child care.
3. Proves you believe that there is always room to learn and grow.
2. Offers access to FREE coaching and consultation support that is designed to meet your programs unique and individual needs.
1. We all want Michigan to be the BEST place for children to learn and grow!

To learn more and get started today, call your Quality Improvement Specialist:
Kim Schemansky at 517-548-9112 in Livingston County
Becky Zoromski at 810-407-7285 in Genesee County
Marian Krippes, owner of Hummingbird Hollow Family Child Care announced her retirement from the early childhood profession at our June 16th Family & Group Support Group. Marian is a 5 Star Family Provider who has directed her own program for the past eight years and has served in various capacities in early childhood for a total of “40 plus years!”

We congratulate Marian and wish her success as she looks forward to new adventures in the years to come. We celebrate YOU!
Have Some Crazy Summer Fun! Make Bubble Snakes!

1. Cut bottom off of water bottle.
2. Place sock securely over the bottom of water bottle.
3. Dip sock into bubble solution.
4. Blow bubbles! Have fun!

Submit your favorite summer fun ideas to Child Connect for Family Success so we can all share them!

Make Summer Safe for Kids

Warm weather brings more opportunity for outdoor activities. Whether they are young children or teens, keep your kids safe and healthy while they enjoy the summer fun.

Left “Click” on the picture to the left for important safety information from the CDC.
2015 Child Connect Platinum Members:

Julie Aramian, Director
First Presbyterian Children's Center

Kristin Zarycki, Director
IXL Learning Center, South Lyon

Melissa Sell, Director
IXL Learning Center, Howell

Jennifer Lapa, Director
Little Howeller's

Courtney Buchanan, Director
IXL Learning Center, Hamburg

Jodie Hutcheson, Director
Creative Kids Learning Center

Jo Anne Hatto, Board Member

Resounding Resources

Call 517-548-9112 To Register Today!

“I’ve Got Rhythm!” three (3) hour distance learning will give you a new understanding about the importance of music and movement in early childhood. This learning experience is for child care providers, parents, foster parents, grandparents. If you want to improve your child’s developmental outcomes, this class is for you!

Edible Water Beads for Sensory Play

“Click” on the picture below!

Set out buckets of colored water (made by diluting paint, or adding food coloring to water) and provide water pistols or spray bottles, which the children can fill and re-fill with different colors of paint. Summer Fun!
Congratulations 2015 CDA Recipients!

Child Connect for Family Success along with Livingston United Way and the Livingston Great Start Collaborative congratulate 36 CDA Recipients! A celebration event was held on June 8th at the Howell Opera House—enjoy a few of the pictures!