



FOR INFORMATION April 2019



‘Loose Parts’ in Foundation Units – 2019

Members of the *Loose Parts Outdoors Special Interest Group* of Sheffield teachers led by the outdoor specialist, Professor Jan White, came up with the following list of ways that we refer to loose parts in the EYFS classroom. They also developed a list of things that might be considered as ‘loose parts’ although this list is not exhaustive. Finally, they considered the characteristics of loose parts and the educational theories supporting their use in EYFS provision:

What are ‘loose parts’?

- Junk (1919 McMillan The Junk Heap)
- Stuff – doesn’t fit into categorised boxes (the Right Stuff)
- Bits
- Open-ended resources
- Intelligent materials (Reggio)
- Scrap Play/Materials (waste)
- Free – cost and **use** of

Examples of things that are Loose Parts:

- Tyres
- Buckets
- Wheels
- Crates
- Boxes
- Planks/decking
- Rope/string
- Stones
- Barrels
- Wood/stumps
- Fabric
- Pans
- Coat hangers
- Drain pipes
- Cable reels
- Pegs
- Natural materials

Characteristics of Loose Parts

- Can use one thing to be something else? **Symbolic** (*Dual Representation*)
- Use is dependent on the **user's intention** (*Affordance*). Does it matter if they have a plan first? (*emergence of play and ideas*)
- "Part" (is this important?) – can be **used with** something else – connected (*parts/components and wholes*) (*assemblage*)
- **Child role** in the 'part' element of loose parts – is the child itself a part? (*Assemblage; new materialism*)
- **Other child/children** could possibly be a part(s) – or does a part need to be inanimate? (*people and relationships as loose parts*)
- **Physical things** – tangible – do they have to be there in the real world? (*what about materials and fluids?*) (*ideas as Loose Parts*)
- **Unlimited** possibilities – or at least lots/several possibilities – what the child knows/has ideas about is less than the full potential (*fields of action*)
- Does a Loose part have to be **mobile and moveable**?
- **Open-ended** – so fixed climbing frame could be transformed – **flexibility**
- Support **different kinds** of play – construction, imaginative, investigative etc. – **usefulness in play** (*Affordance*)

What the research says:

The Health, Safety & Wellbeing Team recently carried out a piece of work with Scrapstore, Bristol. We were asked to look at the accident / violent incident statistics for the Schools that had purchased a Scrapstore.

The statistics were analysed to look at the number of accidents / violent incidents prior to the Scrapstore and after it was introduced. The evidence showed that the number of accidents and children's inappropriate behaviour in general was reduced following the introduction of Scrapstore.

Research suggests that children take great delight in using "loose parts" in new and physically inventive ways, including:-

- Children were more active when they were able to **manipulate playable objects** and move them around the whole space. If they were confined to strictly 'zoned' areas, they moved less.
- **Storage** should be organised to encourage children to collect and transport loose parts around the playground, rather than for 'convenience'. For example, children are more physically active if the hollow blocks they want to play with are located some distance from the area they want to play with them in.
- **Abundance and generosity** in loose parts was crucial for communication and social skills, in addition to physicality. Where children had access to large quantities of loose parts (for example, dozens of pots and pans for a mud kitchen or a couple of large boxes of dressing up clothes) they were more likely to play collaboratively and to communicate with one other and nearby adults.
- The **length of time** children were outdoors affected the intensity and frequency of their activity. When they knew they had a short time outdoors, children very often displayed frenetic, disconnected movements. Whilst these are an essential part of the day's physicality 'menu', limiting children's time outdoors prevented them from becoming deeply engaged in their play. Longer periods of time outdoors appeared to encourage children to vary their movement choices and to collaborate and occupy the whole space.

Evidence also showed that this type of activity reduced the number of accidents and helped to improve children's behaviour in general

Children like to play with 'unusual' loose parts items. Since there was little or no funding available to make significant improvements outdoors, it was necessary to make the most of **free and found objects**.

Using Loose Parts Safely

'Loose parts' can be used for a number of activities e.g. moving, stacking, carrying, adapting, re-shaping, burying, etc. However we do not recommend that items such as milk crates, plastic boxes etc are used for climbing on; particular care needs to be taken because these items are made of plastics that can become brittle and can lead to young children getting their feet trapped when they are continuously used for standing / climbing on. With regards to bread crates, these items could be used for stacking and creating structures, we would however discourage climbing on these structures.

If items such as ladders are used for climbing, these **must** be secured in place so that there is no movement of the ladder. The children **must be closely** supervised at all times when climbing.

Checking loose parts before and during each session

The loose parts need to be safe enough for children to use and it is important that a system is established to ensure that any new items are checked prior to use, regardless of where or how they were sourced.

You need to consider potential risks such as:

- Entrapment of fingers and head
- Loose bits which may come off /choking hazards
- Chemical / contaminants concerns – batteries, leaky components etc
- Electrical concern – wires and circuits, plugs etc
- Sharp items
- Likelihood of splintering or shattering
- Flammability of materials
- Bacterial infection through damp, wet storage or stagnant water
- Suitability / general condition of the item
- Tyres should be thoroughly cleaned with an antibacterial solution and checked (inside and out) for any spikes / sharp areas prior to use

Below are some of the actions needed to manage these risks:-

- Sand down sharp edges or splintery wood
- Remove protruding wires, staples or nails
- Wash and clean resources
- When an item is beyond repair or hazardous it is removed immediately
- Tyres present a fire hazard; therefore they should be stored safely and away from any source of ignition.
- Ensure items, especially heavy ones like tyres are stored correctly to reduce the potential for these toppling onto children

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact:-

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