



LOOSE PARTS PLAY

Created in collaboration with NU's Human Services Department

TYPES OF LOOSE PARTS:

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|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| - Cardboard boxes | - Wooden planks |
| - Toilet paper/paper towel rolls | - Chalk |
| - Plastic bottles | - Paper |
| - Plastic containers | - Fabric (old sheets) |
| - Rope | - String Clay |
| - Blocks | - Twigs |
| - Sand | - Water |
| | - Tape |

WHAT ARE LOOSE PARTS?

Loose parts are open-ended materials that can be manipulated, used in more than one way and can be used independently or with other materials. Loose parts are ubiquitous; they can be manufactured for a specific purpose, recycled, or found in nature, making them inexpensive and relatively easy to find and collect.

WHY LOOSE PARTS?

Loose parts play provides children with opportunities to engage in more complex, multi-sensory play. The temporary nature of loose parts enables frequent addition and disposal of items. This constantly provides children with new challenges and opportunities for different types of play including dramatic, constructive, creative, and cooperative play.

Loose parts play develops:

- ❖ Gross-motor skills
- ❖ Fine-motor skills
- ❖ Hand-eye coordination
- ❖ Language & communication
- ❖ Creativity & problem solving
- ❖ Student agency

LEADING LOOSE PARTS PLAY

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Space and location: Loose parts play is most effective in outdoor environments because it is a non-constrictive space, is typically more expansive and contains more unknowns compared to indoor play spaces.

Quantity: Too many items can be overwhelming and over-stimulating for the children, but too few can limit play opportunities. The optimal quantity will likely differ based on students in the class and can also depend on available space.

The play area should encourage children to interact with the materials and each other, with minimal to no adult intervention. Loose parts play should cater to and encourage child-led play.

Intentionality

Loose parts must be intentionally placed to provoke creativity and curiosity and avoid chaos. Consider placement by:

Sensory appeal – like color, shape, pattern, texture, etc.

Function – how children engage with the material

Theme – Nature, crafts, wet, dry, etc.

LOOSE PARTS PLAY

SAMPLE OUTLINE FOR THE PLAY SESSION

1. Gather loose parts
2. Intentionally set up the play space
3. Invite students to play in their own manner
e.g. **“You are invited to play with anything you want in any way as long as you and those around you are safe.”**
4. Allow the students enough time to explore different materials and play methods
5. Debrief on what students made and/or did. Conduct a discussion on the play session as this can instill pride and foster a sense of agency.
6. Clean up the play space

Emphasizing Free Play

Loose parts offer opportunities for unstructured, child-directed play that is not dominated by adults. Loose parts allow children to have autonomy in choosing what to play and how to play, which is critical for opening up possibilities to develop sense of self, civic engagement and social capital. Therefore, as an adult, you should take a step back and play a supporting role during the session.

Other Notes:

- ❖ It is a good idea to give your programming site a head's up before you do anything especially messy/potentially chaotic with the students. This qualifies as both.
- ❖ Loose Parts Play should be given a comfortable amount of time.
 - Consider arriving to set up early.
 - Or staying late to clean up.
- ❖ Be sure to *clean-up* afterward – as completely as possible. Have volunteers work on clean-up while other lead the debrief.
- ❖ Consider conducting Loose Parts Play at the start, middle, and end of the semester.
 - How did the students' reaction to Loose Parts change?
 - What changes were there to the sorts of items they created?
 - Did your students enjoy it?