



Sticks & Stones Education

Presents

Loose Parts Play: A Theory

“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.”

Simon Nicholson, Architect

The Theory of Loose parts is a theory of design proposed by the Architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970s. Nicholson believed loose parts empower creativity. This theory has been embraced by the early childhood education community. Loose parts are open-ended materials that do not have a specific purpose and can be used in a myriad of ways. They can be used on their own, or in combination with other parts. The elements can be designed and redesigned in endless ways, as children manifest their creativity through designing their own play.

Loose parts can be made of any material, natural, synthetic or a combination of the two. They can be natural elements from a garden, such as twigs, leaves, sticks and stones. They can also be elements that are repurposed such as cardboard boxes, milk bottle tops, lids, or plastic containers. They can also be resources traditionally found in a learning environment such as wooden blocks, marbles, buckets or craft materials such as pompoms, match sticks, and paddle pop sticks.

Why are loose parts a fantastic addition to your early learning environment? Loose parts will provide children with countless opportunities to create, design and learn. Children will be able to drive their own learning through the many open ended elements you provide.

Some examples of loose parts are:

Sticks, stones, branches, leaves, tree slices, tree cookies, seed pods, pine cones, gumnuts, wooden off-cuts, stumps and logs, gravel, sand, repurposed plastic materials such as yoghurt tubs, cans, bottle lids, bottles, large and small boxes of wood or cardboard, crates both of plastic and wooden, fabric, rope, string, tyres... and the list could go on.

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