

Creating Challenges with Loose Parts: Developing Critical Thinking & Persistence

What are *loose parts*? Where do we find them?

They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

Loose parts can be natural or synthetic. Some examples of loose parts for use in play:

- sticks & leaves
- stones & shells
- buttons & beads
- feathers
- tubes
- caps & containers
- pinecones
- ribbon & bows
- “gems”
- seeds & scorns
- washer & nuts
- &...

Why have *loose parts* available to children?

There are many reasons why play spaces should include a multitude of loose parts, including:

- Loose parts can be used any way children choose.
- Loose parts can be adapted and manipulated in many ways.
- Loose parts encourage creativity and imagination.
- Loose parts develop more skill and competence than most modern plastic toys.
- Loose parts can be used in many different ways.
- Loose parts can be used in combination with other materials to support imagination.
- Loose parts encourage open-ended learning.
- Children choose loose parts over fancy toys.

What *challenges* can we offer to children with *loose parts*?

- How tall a tower can you make?
- Can you build a bridge?
- What can you make using 10 pieces?
- Can you make a pattern? Can someone figure it out?
- How many ways can you sort these?
- Can you arrange these to create letters or other shapes?
- Or...?

Why offer *challenges* to children with *loose parts*?

When children are given a challenge with loose parts:

- They have an opportunity to develop *persistence* in searching for and finding solutions.
- They use *critical thinking* skills.
- They experience *multiple perspectives* surrounding the same challenge.
- They *communicate* their ideas and understanding in a variety of ways.

Resources for finding out more about loose parts

- Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children (2015) by L. Daly & M. Beloglovsky
- Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play in Infants & Toddlers (2016) by L. Daly & M. Beloglovsky
- Children’s Imagination: Creativity Under Our Noses (2014) by U. Kolbe
- [The Learning in Loose Parts \(2015\) by H. Fox & S. Wirth](#)