

Erasmus + Loose parts play

Module 2: The value of loose parts play in schools

Module summary

This module introduces the value of loose parts play (LPP), including environmental and classroom benefits. It is the second module of six in the curriculum, but it can also be offered as a stand-alone session. A basic understanding of loose parts play, as well as personal experience in loose parts play is required. The module offers opportunities for personal reflection and practical experience as well as theoretical input.



Target group: This module is for all staff working directly with the children. It offers a deeper understanding of why loose parts play is important.

Previous training/experience required to attend: Basic knowledge of loose parts play - principles of LPP and some personal experience.

Length: 3 hours

Module 2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, participants will have:

1. have explored the value and benefits of loose parts and unstructured free play
2. have been introduced to and discussed the ideas of intrinsic, instrumental and institutional value
3. be able to explain or demonstrate how loose parts play can contribute to a creative learning environment (without compromising on the principles of play)
4. mapped the environmental benefits of a loose parts play project
5. created their own loose parts play 'messages' and communication resources.

Learning Indicators: a deeper understanding of the benefits of loose parts play; ability to explain and to communicate clearly about loose parts play; enthusiasm about creating play opportunities for children to support their enjoyment of school; willingness to communicate with different stakeholders.

Resources required: flipchart, marker pens, pens, paper, computer/laptop, projector, video of loose parts play, loose parts (natural and man-made), creative resources



Manual: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7



Tools: 17, 20, 22

Trainer notes

Let participants know that the module will include both theoretical knowledge and personal exercises. Explain that personal attitudes can greatly influence how we implement a programme, so continuous reflection on practice is necessary.

This module includes watching a video together, so it is advised that at least the second part of the session is indoors. Have copies of the manual available.

Suggested icebreaker: Electric finger

Time: 10 minutes

The aim of this activity is to create a playful atmosphere and energise participants, and to begin reflection on the value of loose parts play.

Ask participants to form a circle. Ask everyone to raise their left hand around shoulder-height, with their palm facing upwards, while their right hand is at the same height, but with the index finger pointing downwards.

When everyone is ready and waiting, explain the game. On the count of three, everyone will have two tasks: to catch the index finger of their neighbour on the left, while avoiding having their finger caught by their neighbour to their right. This needs a lot of concentration and skill! Make sure that everyone is ready, then start the game. Do a couple of rounds.

When you start, a burst of energy is released. After the game, make a connection with loose parts play – this is the excitement that children feel when they are playing.

Introduction

Time: 5 minutes

Resources needed: flipchart, marker pens, the content of the module written up beforehand.

Introduce the content of the module to the participants to make it easier for them to follow the programme and make connections.

Trainer notes: Write up the content of the modules on the flipchart beforehand.

Activity 1 The value of loose parts play

Time: 20 minutes

Resources needed: Flip chart papers, colourful range of marker pens.



Manual: 3.1,3.2



Tools: 17, 20, 22

Ask participants to form groups of three to five people. Hand the groups flipchart paper and markers and ask them to create a 'mind map' about the benefits of loose parts play. Write 'Benefits of Loose Parts Play' in the middle, and think of all the different areas it can have a positive effect (such as: benefits to the child, to parents, to schools, etc.).

Encourage participants to think about personal examples: When they were children and had the opportunity to play freely, possibly with loose parts, how did they feel about it? As professionals working with children, or as parents, what do they observe when their students or children play with loose parts? Allow time to discuss and write ideas on the mind-map.

The participants are likely to come up with a wide range of benefits. Ask each to present and display their ideas to the whole group and see if everyone has the same or have more to add.

Trainer notes

Make sure to set the time frames clearly and remind participants during the discussion, as they might get carried away otherwise.

There is an example of a mind-map in the manual which you could show if people are unsure what is expected.

Activity 2: Value triangle

Time 20 minutes

Resources needed: Flipchart, marker pens.



Manual: 3.1

Introduce the concept of the Value triangle to the participants, then place the previously prepared flipchart sheets of the Value Triangle on the floor (see Trainer input). Ask participants to think back to their previous discussion and identify which group the benefits they identified belong to – intrinsic, institutional or instrumental. Ask them to write these benefits on the appropriate paper (or you can also ask them to write each benefit on a separate post it paper and stick it to the appropriate value).

Lead a discussion about the different benefits, making sure that participants understand the difference between the categories and can connect them to their own experiences.

Trainer input: from manual section 3.1

One way to think about benefits of LPP is to use the 'value triangle' as a starting point (see figure 3 in the manual). The three points of the 'triangle' are the intrinsic, institutional and instrumental value of play.

- Intrinsic value of play is all about children's enjoyment of their self-organised play, the pleasure they get from it which offers the motivation to keep playing.
- Instrumental value can be found in things like children moving more and being more physical activity; increased prosocial behaviour, reduction in conflicts and the development of social and emotional skills; better problem-solving skills, self-regulation and self-confidence; reduced stress, and boredom.
- Institutional value comes from happier play times with fewer incidents, making them easier to supervise; quicker and better settling into class after playtimes; better attention and on-task behaviour in class; and positive parent reactions.

Children learn better when they are healthy and happy.

All three forms of value are interrelated and are important. However, if intrinsic value is low, the other two will be as well. Instrumental and institutional value stem from intrinsic value.

Trainer notes

Prepare the flipcharts with the three points of the Value triangle beforehand: on one paper write “Intrinsic value”, on the next “Institutional value” and on the third “Instrumental value”.

Activity 3: Film on loose parts play

Time: 25 minutes

Resources required: Computer, projector, film on loose part play (for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqi1KyJJeKg>) **Link to Gdansk or other project films**



Manual: 3.1, 3.2



Tools: 17, 20, 22

Present a film showing the benefits of loose parts play.

After watching the film, lead a discussion about what they saw. How do these real life-examples compare to the benefits they have collected in their small groups? Have they heard anything new? How are they feeling about this?

Trainer notes

Make sure to set up and check the technical aspects in advance, including the audio. Check the LPP project website for you could use and if possible, download the material.

One of the examples provided here is from a Play Pod programme in the UK – this is a programme which provides a storage space in a school, where they can store loose parts.

Watching a film can help people to understand the benefits of loose parts play on a deeper level, as opposed to just talking about it. Seeing the children being lost in play can evoke memories, put a smile on people’s faces. It can show the vision. If you are showing this to a group where loose parts play is not embedded in the culture yet, be prepared for comments such as “Yes, it might work in the UK, but it will never work here.” To counterbalance these, make sure to collect examples from your country about similar programmes.

This may be an appropriate point for a break in the session. Let participants know if refreshments are available and when and where to meet after the break.

Energiser: What is this object for?

Time: 10 minutes

Resources needed: a variety of loose parts play items, both natural and man-made for example, a twig, pinecone, chestnut, scissors, bottle, etc.

Ask participants to form a circle. Have your loose parts objects beside you. Take out the first object and give it to one of the participants. Ask them to use their imagination to suggest what that object might be – we are not looking for its actual function, but what it might be! Maybe this twig is a sword? Or a magic wand? Ask the first person to say what this object is while also showing with a gesture and then pass it on to the next person, who can suggest something else. When an object has finished a round, introduce the next object and so on. Have 3-4 rounds with different objects.

After the game, note that this is how play works – anything can be anything else!

Tutor notes

Some people might find this game a little difficult, as it requires thinking quickly on the spot with other people looking at them. Make sure to create a fun, friendly atmosphere where people are not judged, as it helps improvisation. Let participants know its ok to pass if they can't think of anything.

Activity 4: Creative classroom and sustainability

Time: 40 minutes

Resources needed: The objects from the previous game, flipchart paper, marker pens.



Manual: 3.4, 3.5, 3.6

Ask participants to form small groups of two to three people. Give each group some of the objects from the previous game. Ask them to think of as many examples as they can about why it is useful to have that object in the play space. Draw their attention to how it can contribute to a creative learning environment, as well as whether it has environmental benefits. Give them a couple of minutes, then ask them to present their lists to the others.

Explain to the group that in order to foster a creative learning environment, adults often need an extra reminder to shift their perspective about learning and playing. The little game previously aimed to represent this: we have objects that are used for certain activities, but if we open our eyes to the potential they have, we discover they can be used for much more. Remind the group about all the benefits you have talked about so far – and help them recognise there might be some more!

After this explanation ask the pairs or small groups to share with each other their personal attitude and challenges they might have about having loose parts play or unstructured times in their lessons. It can be difficult for some to let go of the notion that learning can only happen when pupils sit quietly by their desks. Encourage participants to discover whether they have such difficulties and what they might need to shift from this position. Also ask them to think about ways together they can bring loose parts play in the classroom without compromising loose parts play's core values, that is being a freely chosen, child-led activity.

Finally bring the group together and ask them to share what they talked about. When talking about possibilities for loose parts and classroom time, look for examples in section 3.5 of the manual if needed. For example:

- Sketchbook and journal time
- Storytime
- Add to the range of resources available for children to choose in loose parts play
- Respond to children's ideas
- Making loose parts available in the classroom.

Finish up this discussion by pointing out the environmental benefits of loose parts play. Explain that just as with learning and playing, our attitude can make a difference in the environment as well. It is all part of a sustainable attitude: we are striving for creating a space, where we recognize value in both different objects and different activities.

Trainer notes

If the atmosphere is right, you can also ask the small groups to present the benefits of their object in a more artistic form, such as through an improvised poem or a little dramatic play – but don't spend too much time on this.

Activity 5: Create your own messages

Time: 30 minutes.

Resources needed: A3 and A4 paper, creative tools and materials e.g. glue, tissue paper, clay, scrap materials.



Manual: 3.7

Remind the group that so far you have explored the intrinsic, the institutional and the instrumental value of loose parts play, as well as the classroom and the environmental benefits in this module. Tell them that now they will have the chance to create a little promotion for their future loose parts play programme!

Ask them to form small groups. Their task will be to talk through what they have heard so far and identify two or three of the benefits that are the most important to them.

Give each group paper and creative tools (marker pens, felt pens, glue, colourful papers, scrap materials, etc.) and ask them to present these messages visually.

Invite participants to be creative: they can draw or write, but also create a small model, write a poem, etc.

Also let people know they can work individually if they prefer.

At close, invite participants to present their work to the others.

Trainer notes

If your group is from the same institution, this exercise can be functional value as well – participants can create posters that they can actually use in their school or setting.

Activity 6: Presentation and discussion: benefits of loose parts play

Time: 15 minutes.

Resources needed: flipchart, marker pens.



Manual: 3.4, 3.5, 3.6



Tools: 17, 20, 22

Arriving towards the end of the module, it is time to bring all the information together.

Give a short input about the value and benefits of loose parts play and facilitate a discussion about it among the participants. Encourage them to share their own attitudes and reflect on their own personal experiences. What value play has to them, personally? How different is the perspective of a child and an adult in this matter?

Trainer notes

Make sure to prepare your presentation in advance, writing up the key points on a flipchart beforehand.

Closing

- Thank everyone for their participation.
- Return to the learning outcomes you introduced at the beginning of the module to check with participants if they have been achieved.
- Ensure participants know arrangements for any other modules they can participate in.
- Create an opportunity for participants to set their own personal goal or task to carry out as a result of the session.
- Plan a short evaluation exercise to check satisfaction with the training content, the training style, the venue and arrangements.
- Provide contact details as appropriate.



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