



Loose Parts Play

a manual



Loose Parts Play: a manual

Enhancing Personal Capacity Building and Climate Awareness of
Pupils in Schools

Erasmus+ Loose Parts Play Partnership Project 2020-2023



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



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1. Welcome



Photo credit: GratoSfera, Poland



Section one provides background information about the Erasmus+ loose parts play project, its origins, aims and the partners involved. It introduces the manual with suggestions to help you navigate and use it alongside the loose parts play toolbox.

In this section we also consider play as a right of children. Schools have an important role to respect, protect and fulfil that right. By doing so we support other rights of children including their rights to education, health and participation.

1.1 Erasmus+ Loose Parts Play

The Loose Parts Play Project was funded by the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme, *Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices*, from 2020 to 2023.

The formal title *Enhancing Personal Capacity Building and Climate Awareness of Pupils in Schools* reflects the main goal - to assist schools to develop an effective environment for children's play, as well as to involve their communities in this endeavour. Through involving the community (parents and other stakeholders) the school strengthens its connections with them and the commitment of the community towards the school.

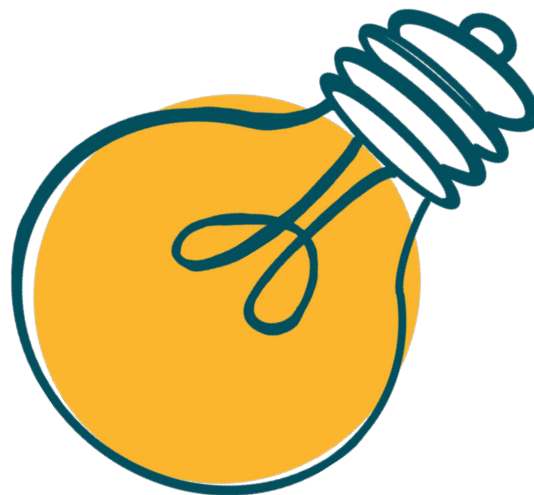
The project objectives are:

- to increase sustainable thinking by introducing recycled items as resources for children's play (loose parts)
- to enhance the play environment, quality of play and creativity of pupils
- to assist schools to introduce the concept of loose parts to parents and to the community.

The project has four outputs:

- **Manual and toolbox.** These complementary resources are designed to help schools use loose parts in their premises and to guide them through all the necessary steps. Partner schools in each of the countries were responsible for piloting these resources ahead of publication.
- **Training course for teachers.** This modular course is based on the piloted manual and toolbox, with training for trainers allowing a wider reach for the whole project
- **Research.** The research element of the project showcases the impact of using play-work approaches and loose parts play in schools. Supported by researchers from universities in each partner country, the research included pre-, mid- and post-assessments in the pilot schools. The research resulted in a collective research paper with policy recommendations in English, with shortened versions translated to all partner languages, as well as a set of national-level publications. All these results will also be presented at national conferences.





The Loose Parts Play Project grew from previous partnership projects including Children's Access to Play in Schools (CAPS: Play-friendly Schools¹). This project established quality criteria for the Play-friendly Schools Label. Introducing loose parts play is a practical way of becoming more play-friendly and you will find reference to the quality criteria within this manual.

The project brings the same playwork approach to supporting play built over three previous Erasmus+ projects (VIPER,² ARTPAD³ and CAPS).

Environment and sustainability are new areas this project is investigating through reusing materials (loose parts) for play and education in a dynamic process. We hope to support schools and school staff to work with children in a creative, empowering and sustainable way. Reusing materials is an important topic in waste reduction and environmental activism as one of the most potent routes to waste-reduction.



Our project targets some of the UN Sustainable Development Goals:

- responsible consumption (by reusing materials)
- gender equality (through freely chosen play children are empowered in their actions as well as playing together; loose parts play lends itself to a gender-friendly atmosphere)
- climate goals (by increasing reuse, waste-production decreases).

Educational systems, cultural and policy contexts vary between countries. The manual and toolbox are designed to provide guidance and tools that you can adapt to the context where you work.

1 Play-Friendly Schools (playfriendlyschoools.eu)

2 Leonardo Innovation Transfer project 'Volunteers in Playwork – Employment Routes' (VIPER)

3 Achieving Resilience Through Play and Drama aimed to support children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in formal and non-formal education with the help of freely chosen play and drama. <https://artpadproject.eu>

Project partners

The project partners have worked collaboratively across all the outputs, with one partner leading on each. The partners are an NGO and school from each country: Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Scotland.

Rogers Személyközpontú Oktatásért Alapítvány, Hungary

Iskolánk tanulóiért Alapítvány, Hungary

www.rogersalapitvany.hu

FUNDACJA GRATOSFERA, Poland

Szkoła Podstawowa nr 5 im., Poland

www.gratosfera.pl

TANDEM n.o., Slovakia

Majthényi Adolf Primary School, Slovakia

TANDEM, n.o. (tandemno.sk)

East Lothian Play Association, Scotland

Windygoul Primary School, Szkocja

www.elpa.org.uk

1.2 Introducing the manual

The purpose of the Loose Parts Play Manual is **to support schools to introduce loose parts play into their daily routines, enhancing children's opportunities before, during and after the school day.**

Abundant evidence is now pointing to the benefits of play in schools and that the introduction of loose parts brings even more benefits and richness to the experience. Physical activity is increased, children enjoy playtime more with fewer accidents and arguments. Play becomes more complex, varied and creative. Children are more involved and immersed in play, with fewer barriers to children of different ages, genders, abilities and play preferences playing together. In schools with loose parts play, staff report more engagement and enthusiasm in lessons back in the class.

The Loose Parts Play Manual offers advice, information, case studies and examples from schools, nurseries and other children's settings from four countries across Europe. It draws on real experience ensuring the manual is practical in nature, realistic about the challenges and optimistic about the opportunities.

We hope that you will find the manual a helpful and friendly companion to guide you along the path to a successful loose parts play project. Although primarily aimed at schools and other education settings, we

hope the manual will be equally useful whatever your setting (school, nursery, childcare, youth club, holiday playscheme etc.).

Introducing loose parts play creates opportunities for the whole school community to become involved whether that is parents and carers, staff, the local education system or businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Importantly, it is a process that children and teenagers can be fully involved in from the start. It nurtures children's participation, with opportunities to look after and develop the project.

The overall purpose of the manual is to help you to:

- introduce loose parts play into your school or setting
- develop an effective environment to support play
- work through typical steps on the journey to a loose parts play project
- find information or organisations who can assist you
- sustain your use of loose parts as an ongoing and integral part of ongoing routines



You might not need to read the manual from start to finish – some people will find it more helpful to dip into it as a reference point or use it when they need some information to assist with training, or a meeting with parents, or to get ideas. Use it in the way that feels most useful to you!

The manual is complemented by the Loose Parts Play Toolbox. The manual contains background theoretical and practical information for using loose parts. The toolbox contains many helpful resources such as posters, templates and checklists for you to adapt and apply.

Both resources address practical issues around loose parts such as where to find them, how to start, how to talk to parents and carers about them. The prepared tools are 'ready-to-go' - you can print them out and start using them.

Together, the manual and toolbox aim to make introducing loose parts play achievable, exciting and inclusive.

The toolbox tools are referenced at almost every step of the manual - so you can get started right away.



Look out for points to consider throughout the manual.

These are intended to give you starting points for reflection and discussion with colleagues, parents and carers and children.

1.3 Who is the manual for?

The manual is aimed at anyone who would like to introduce loose parts play in their setting. It has a particular focus on schools, nurseries, kindergartens and educational settings, but will also be suitable for youth clubs, holiday programmes and other spaces that wish to enhance children's access to play.

Introducing loose parts is a team endeavour. While children are at the centre of this, it is important that everyone surrounding the children builds their experience and understanding of play and their skills in supporting play.

With this in mind, you will find sections of the manual that are useful for:

- senior staff, inspectors, regulators and decision-makers, either for them directly or to be shared with them
- staff working directly with children and teenagers, including educators, pedagogues and teachers; staff supporting disabled children and teenagers and those with additional support needs; staff supervising school playgrounds; youth workers and playworkers
- parents, carers and families, and Parent Councils or other parent-led groups.

“We recognise the importance of play and that it's essential to the wellbeing, development and learning of our children and young people.”

Lesley Brown, Play Champion and Executive Director of Education and Children's Services, East Lothian Council, Scotland.

Photo credit: East Lothian Play Association



1.4 Playing through COVID-19

While developing this project, the COVID-19 pandemic was causing distress, school closures and unprecedented restrictions across Europe and the world. Many children experienced huge upheavals in their lives.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of play for all children and its role in helping children cope with anxiety, change and loss. Being at home for long periods of time and being physically separated from friends, families, routines and cherished places was a new situation for most of us.

Many organisations working with children found new ways to reach out to children and families. They encouraged and supported play, even from a distance, knowing that children need to play every day no matter what is happening in the world around them.

The loose parts play project partners were amongst those doing things to help children keep playing. This included creating new play resources, thinking about how teachers could reach out to families, using social media in different ways, sending play tips home and distributing play resources.

Some of these approaches have found their way into this manual. This is especially true of the sections on communicating about play which was strengthened by our experiences during various lockdowns.

Inevitably, the pandemic impacted on the project. The partners were not able to meet in person as planned but found creative ways to collaborate and learn from each other.

Most importantly, we were reminded of the fundamental importance of playing for children. We know that playing helps children stay physically and mentally well. It is an everyday part of a healthy and happy childhood and playing is just as important during a crisis. Playing helps children cope, feel better and maintain a sense that everything can be ok.

The International Play Association (IPA, 2020) wrote that during a crisis, playing is children's way to:

- stay emotionally healthy
- stay physically active
- relax and forget about worries
- make sense of any new experiences and changes in their world
- cope with feelings that are difficult or frightening.



Making time to play and have fun together is good for relationships and mental wellbeing. Playing can also protect children against some of the negative impacts of a crisis and support them through the process of coming to terms with what has happened. We recognise that recovering from this period of COVID-19 may take a long time.

Schools might feel they need to help children 'catch up' after school closures and might be under pressure to increase formal learning. However, we believe that children learn more effectively if they are happy and have been able to process their experiences. Time, space and permission to play helps.



1.5 Children's right to play – UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

All children have a right to play. It is a basic human right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Each right set out in the Convention is known as an 'article' and the right to play is set out in article 31.

Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. Member governments shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Two key documents help us to understand the right to play more fully. The first of these is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the second is the General Comment on article 31 which was issued by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2013.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

Children are born with fundamental freedoms, and the inherent rights of all human beings. Recognising the need for children to be extended particular care, the CRC sets out the rights belonging to every child without discrimination of any kind, and also acknowledges the importance of traditions and cultural values.

Since its adoption by the UN in 1989, the CRC has been ratified more quickly and by more governments than any other human rights treaty or convention in history. Ratification means that a State (government) has formally indicated its willingness to be bound by the Convention. Governments must report back to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the progress they have made in children's rights in their country.

UN General Comment on children's right to play

A General Comment is an official UN document. It gives guidance to governments on how they should implement articles from Conventions or how they should respond to thematic issues and explains in detail what is expected of them.

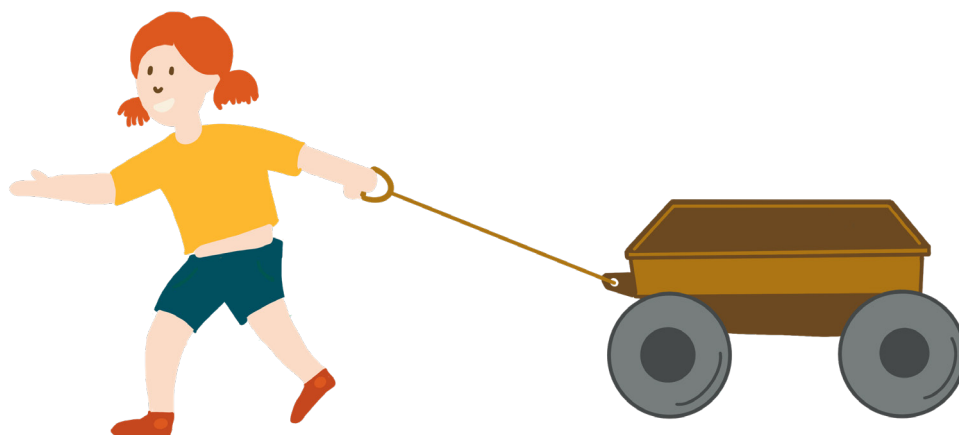
The Committee on the Rights of the Child published a 'General Comment' on article 31 in 2013. Its formal title is General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), often abbreviated to GC17. In outlining governments' responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights in article 31, the General Comment specifically states that schools have a major role to play, including through the provision of outdoor and indoor spaces that afford opportunities for all forms of playing and for all children, and that the structure of the school day should allow sufficient time and space for play.

Loose parts play supports children's rights in your school

Supporting play in schools and other settings is one of the ways we can help to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.

The right to play. Children need to play every day. Because schools are places children spend time on a regular basis, they provide extremely important opportunities for the crucial health and developmental experiences children have through play. This is especially important if children's opportunities for play are limited elsewhere by lack of safe space, limited free time or other barriers. Play is essential to children's health and wellbeing. Happy children engage better in school.

By allowing space, time and a positive environment for play you are respecting, protecting and fulfilling a fundamental right of children.



The right to education. The ‘education’ articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – articles 28 and 29 - establish that education must be “directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to the fullest potential.” Loose parts play provides a rich seam of experiences for children aligning with this goal.

The right to be included. In GC17, the positive benefit of play to children’s educational development is emphasised. It highlights that **inclusive education and inclusive play are mutually reinforcing** and should be facilitated every day throughout early childhood education and care (preschool) as well as primary and secondary school” (2013: 9).

Loose parts play story

A large storage crate has been turned on its side, creating a cubby hole. Children bring over a ladder and climb on top. They go up and down, often pausing at the top to look across the playground. New children arrive. “Climb it, climb it, climb it,” children chant.

Once on top, a child shouts, “Now get off so you can watch TV. Don’t you want to watch TV?” He shouts at some other children, “Hey guys, who wants to watch TV?”

Four children squeeze into the cubby hole. Someone shouts, “There’s a spider in here,” and they all run out. The chant of “climb it, climb it, climb it” starts again

Story and photographs from Windygoul Primary School, Scotland/ East Lothian Play Association



Imagine a conversation you are having with someone who is doubtful about the importance of play. What would your key points be in explaining play in schools from a children’s rights perspective?

Article 31 is important to Children and Young People

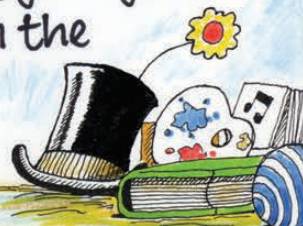


● We must have space and time for play, recreation and relaxing

● Playing helps us stay safe healthy and happy



● Governments MUST find ways to get rid of the things that get in the way of time for play



● We must have opportunities to explore and understand our own culture

● We should be involved in cultural and artistic activities and be able to go to places like museums, festivals, theatres, concerts and libraries

● Governments must make sure that none of us are left out



● If Governments take all of this seriously, our lives will be happier and healthier

iipa

Promoting the Childs right to play



More information on children's rights

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
OHCHR | Convention on the Rights of the Child
- General Comment no. 17 on article 31
Treaty bodies Download (ohchr.org)
- EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee
The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee | European Commission (europa.eu)
- ELPA Right to Play
page Right to play | East Lothian Play Association (elpa.org.uk)
- UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools
The Rights Respecting Schools Award | UNICEF UK

2. Loose parts play

– key points and shared understanding



Photo credit: Majthényi Adolf Primary School, Slovakia

The purpose of section two is to offer information and ideas to underpin your loose parts play project.

This section can help you develop a shared understanding with colleagues and the wider community of the school, from which to build your project. It covers what we mean by play, loose parts and the play-work approach with examples of loose parts and their use in schools. The section concludes by touching on space and its role in loose parts play.

2.1 What is play?

The definition of play used in this manual

Play can be easier to describe than to define! When we watch children play, we might see children running, jumping, being active and boisterous. On other occasions, we might see the same children contemplative and quietly engrossed in an activity. They might play alone, in a group or flit between activities. When we watch children play, we can only guess at their intentions and what they are experiencing.



Our own childhood experiences of playing often colour our view of play when we encounter it as adults. There can also be powerful influences within schools and other institutions on how play is valued. For example, high value may be placed on play which demonstrates co-operation or creates some kind of product that adults can look at and admire. Less value might be accorded to other types of play, such as experimentation that produces no obvious outcome or play that appears silly, frivolous or too rough. (See section 4.4 for more on play types.) However, it is the multi-faceted nature of play, when it is led and shaped by children as they play, which brings enormous value.

“Play is not frivolous: it enhances brain structure and function and promotes executive function (i.e., the process of learning, rather than the content), which allow us to pursue goals and ignore distractions.”

American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018

This manual uses the definition of play set out by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2013). (See section 2.6)

- Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves.
- It takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise.
- Play is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end.
- Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood.
- The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play.

“play (...) is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development.”

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013: 6



How does this definition compare with how you usually describe play? Do the play experiences in your school or setting reflect the definition of play? In what ways? Would changes in routines, environments or attitudes to play bring the opportunities offered closer to the definition?

2.2 What are loose parts?

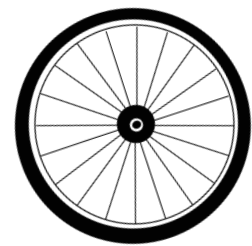
Loose parts are objects and materials that children can manipulate, move and combine when they play. They are often scrap, natural or recycled materials making them low-cost, easily available, ever-changing, inclusive and friendly to the environment. Loose parts can be used in any number of ways, they don't have a predetermined use, and it doesn't

matter if they are destroyed during play. They can be small like twigs and corks or large like tyres, wooden pallets and tarpaulins.

It is not the object itself that makes it a loose part. It is not a loose part just because it happens to be scrap, recycled, natural.

An object or material comes into the category of loose parts if it is available to be used freely, set loose from its original purpose. Children can play with it, manipulate it, move it and combine it with other objects or materials as they choose.

Introducing loose parts enhances children's experience of playing and greatly improves the environment for play. The wide-ranging benefits of playing are essential to children's health and well-being and a right of every child.



“Seeing the problem solving and children working together is fantastic.”

Deputy head teacher, Campie Primary School, Scotland

Loose parts are important in this context because they:

- support children's self-directed play
- stimulate new ideas and directions within play
- widen children's play repertoire
- reflect and enable inclusive approaches
- offer flexibility, versatility and novelty.



Figure 1

2.3 What is the playwork approach?

Playwork has its origins in Europe, when during and after World War II, children were observed playing in the rubble of bombed out areas, climbing in the debris, building dens and making play things out of found materials. The adventure playground movement in the UK is seen as the foundation for today's playwork ethos.

Across settings which use a playwork approach, there is a strong reference to the ethos, which is contained within eight guiding statements called the Playwork Principles.⁴ These principles establish the professional and ethical framework for playwork and are introduced in section 4. Schools introducing loose parts and striving to be play-friendly will benefit from understanding the playwork approach.

The theory and practice of professional playwork recognises that children's play should be 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.' Playwork is the work of

creating and maintaining spaces for children to play and is a skilled profession that facilitates, enriches and enhances children's play.

Playwork is also the support given by adults in an unobtrusive way to support children's play. Playworkers assist a child if needed but strive to be as inconspicuous as possible to allow the children to self-direct their play. a skilled playworker can enrich the child's play experience both in terms of the design and resourcing of the physical environment and the attitudes and culture within the setting.

Playworkers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. They understand the need for children to encounter and create uncertainty, risk and challenge as part of their play. Playworkers neither direct nor organise play, and use fine judgement on when, how or if to intervene in children's play.

2.4 Loose parts in schools and other settings

Loose parts can be introduced to support play before, during and after school. It can take place in the playground, classrooms, corridors and halls, and in the wider community, as well as at home and local spaces.

In many cases, loose parts are already there – think of sand, boxes and skipping ropes in the school playground; stones, twigs and daisies in the park; saucepans, pillows and old newspapers at home. We simply need to recognise their potential and ensure we are supportive of children using them for play. Sometimes this requires a change of attitude amongst adults, or a change of rules and ways of working.

In schools and other educational settings, loose parts have a valuable role in allowing a creative learning environment to flourish. Playing with loose parts can support all areas of curricula from numeracy and literacy to arts, ethics and citizenship. It does this through child-led play rather than adult-led

direction, so it is not an activity with pre-determined outcomes. This manual emphasises a playwork approach to supporting play in schools, bringing playfulness into the whole environment through an appreciation of the value of the process of playing.

In loose parts play it is not the object itself - whether a cardboard box, a peg or an old tyre - that makes it a loose part. It is a loose part because it can be used freely, in the way the child chooses.

The same kinds of scrap and recycled materials can be used for lessons with pre-planned steps and outcomes. But in that case, they are no longer loose parts, and it is no longer loose parts play.

In loose parts play, children are not directed to a purpose set out by adults nor asked to follow a set of instructions.



“Playing in the junkyard means imagination and a second life for these objects.”

GratoSfera is a good place to play with your friends.”

There are lots of ideas for buildings.”

Children, GratoSfera

2.5 Examples of loose parts

A list of possible loose parts is endless. The theory of loose parts (see section 2.7) may prompt you to think more deeply about loose parts in the environment.

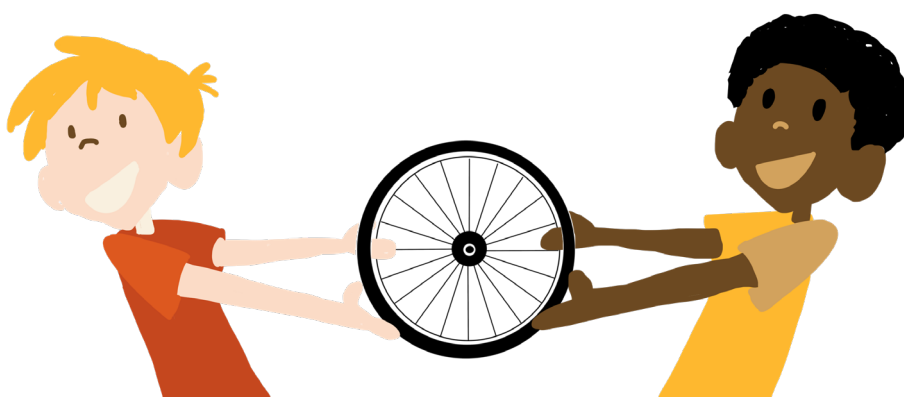
Most projects introducing loose parts play must think about how to collect loose parts and explain to people what is needed so they can help source or donate them. (See section 5.3)

In a practical sense, the kinds of things that tend to make up loose parts provision include:

- scrap materials such as old tyres and off-cuts of guttering or plumbing
- random found and donated objects such as old computer keyboards, suitcases, hard hats from construction sites, pots and pans from home
- different types of fabric such as dress-making cloth, and light gauzy fabric or heavier
- materials such as nets, rugs, blankets, tarpaulins
- building materials such as wooden planks

You might also want to consider the range and abundance of loose parts, for example:

- scale, size and weight - things that require effort and team work to move as well as things that are easier to manipulate.
- bigger children, bigger loose parts - often older children enjoy bigger things to play with though this isn't a hard and fast rule.
- more loose parts bring more flexibility and creativity - you will need plenty of loose parts.
- destruction and loss of loose parts – this is ok and a natural part of the play process. Your plan should include removing items that become hazardous and regularly replenishing your supply. (See sections 5.3 and 5.5)
- tools and mechanisms - magnifying glasses, pulleys, levers and tools such as, hammers and saws support the use of loose parts.



You can't really collect naturally occurring and disappearing phenomena like water, ice, snow, shadows, cobwebs, dappled light and rainbows, or smells, gravity and magnetism – but you can be aware of them! You can create environments (even in very small or unlikely spaces) in which some of them are more likely to occur or be noticed. For example, uneven ground collects rainwater, insects flourish in the weeds, frost sparkles on blades of uncut grass.

Loose parts aren't prescriptive; they offer limitless possibilities. There isn't a right and wrong way to use them, for example, a stick

may become a fishing rod, a spoon to stir 'porridge', a measuring stick, a sword, a doll or it could remain as a stick.

You can throw it, float it, snap it, ping it, bend it, hide it, burn it, tie it to something else, split it, catapult it or throw it away!

Natural environments such as mature woodland or beaches provide boundless loose parts with more play possibilities than many artificial play spaces such as a tarmac school playground or a tidy urban park. However, these spaces can be enriched by the supply of plentiful loose parts.

“It's fun to play with things my dad used to have.”

Child, GratoSfera



Photo credits: East Lothian Play Association

2.6 Play space and its role in loose parts

Children play from the youngest age and while playing are in contact with the space around them. Children's sense of self develops (the difference between me and not-me) from being in touch with their environment.

At birth, a child does not yet have this me and not-me feeling. Connecting to the external space (and the people in it) is an important source for developing body-awareness, self-subjectivity, physical and social self-agency. The "internal space" develops, which contains the feelings, attitudes, thoughts of the person (the child, but also later the adult). External space – both physical and social space – has a direct impact on our internal space, our feelings. We can feel moody on a rainy day or hurt if someone is "closed" to

us. Language used to describe spatial terms is also often used to describe our feelings and connections. For example, open, closed, over shadowed or distant.

Internal space also influences the external. During play the external space fills up with the subjective meanings the child brings to it. This space is the transitional space, which the psychologist Winnicott (2005) also calls "potential space". This space is partly in physical and social space, and partly in the fantasy of the child. Cloth becomes a king's collar; another child becomes a dragon. Everything can happen, can be experienced, without consequences in the "real" external world – this is a space for trial, error and development.





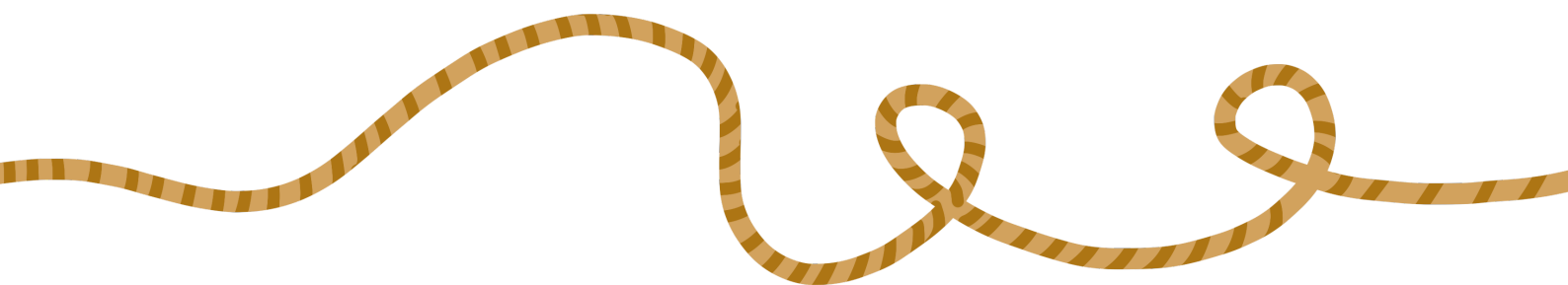
Affordance theory and loose parts

You may find the theory of ‘affordances’ useful when thinking about the relationship of play space and loose parts play. When children play in a space or play with an object, they experience it in a unique way. Rather than its intended purpose, they may view it in terms of its ‘affordances’. American psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) suggests that environments and objects within them have values and meanings that are unique to the person perceiving them.

The affordances of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a brick wall may mark a clear bound-

dary between a pavement and a garden but for many children it offers something to sit on, walk along, balance on, hide behind or jump off.

Outside, the interplay between children and loose parts, landscape, elements and seasons creates an ever-changing, growing, evolving play space, especially in natural environments that are loved and cared for. Furthermore, children experience a sense of freedom, space and autonomy that connects them to the land in an intimate way. (See also section 3.6)



Michael Follett (2017) founder of Outdoor Play and Learning, describes four important factors for developing the external space for play: social spaces, journey, affordances and change. We might think about these as:

- **social spaces:** there should be temporary and permanent closed or semi-closed spaces, where children can hide, talk, socialise.
- **journey:** external space should provide opportunity for play experience as a kind of journey, children are wayfarers, travellers. Journeying can be with the body (like climbing, balancing, leaning) and moving in space as well as a journey taken through the imagination.
- **affordances:** as many children have restricted opportunities to interact with a range of materials and natural elements, this should somehow be compensated by providing for diversity of environmental, sensory and textural experiences such as wood, plants, metal, rock, surfaces, textures, cultural references, objects - always finding something new, something surprising.
- **change:** loose parts, moveable materials and objects, which can be turned into anything the child imagines, are excellent catalysts of this potential space. The less the external meaning is fixed into an object (as in many commercial toys), the more opportunity it has to be turned into something with a different meaning

“ Accessible and inclusive environments and facilities must be made available to children with disabilities to enable them to enjoy their rights under article 31.”

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013

Some guiding questions for inclusive environments⁵

Finally in this section, when making changes to the physical environment of the playground or playspace, think about ways to make it as inclusive as possible for all children including disabled children and those with additional support needs of any kind.

- **How much freedom does the play space offer to all children?** You could think about freedom: to move, to be yourself, from judgement, to choose.
- **How much variety is there in the environment?** You could think about whether there is: open space, shelter, small spaces, different levels of height and challenge.
- **Does the space enable social experiences to all children?** You could think about opportunities to: play alongside other children, to access equipment and features of the space using a wheelchair, feel safe and secure, be with other children, be alone.
- **Does the space offer independence and access?** You could think about: suitable equipment for older children with additional support needs, access to equipment and features of the space in a wheelchair, paths and surfaces, accessible seating and tables.
- **What does the sensory environment offer?** Do sensory qualities include: things that spin, things you can touch, contrasting light and colour, natural materials in play areas e.g. sand, planting, long grasses, the elements – water, fire, wind, earth?

⁵ Derived from Casey, T. & Harbottle, H. (2018) Free to play: a guide to creating accessible and inclusive public play spaces. Edinburgh: Inspiring Scotland.

2.7 Nicholson's theory of loose parts

So far, this section has described how loose parts create richer environments for children. Children use them as raw materials to follow their interests, going where their curiosity, whims and imagination take them.

The term 'loose parts' is not new – it came into widespread use after the publication of Simon Nicholson's article **The Theory of Loose Parts: How NOT to Cheat Children** (1971). Although Nicholson is credited with coining the term, he says that the idea is not original but comes from the "discovery" method of learning.

Nicholson proposed that there was no evidence to suggest that some of us are born creative and inventive and some of us not. Instead, he recognised children's need to make and build things, play with fluids, water, fire or living objects, and **"all the things that satisfy one's curiosity and give us the pleasure that results from discovery and invention."**

Nicholson described loose parts as 'variables' and provided examples such as materials and shapes; smells and other physical phenomena, such as electricity, magnetism and gravity; media such as gases and fluids, sounds, music, motion; chemical interactions, cooking and fire; and other humans, and animals, plants, words, concepts and ideas. With all these things all children love to play, experiment, discover and invent and have fun.





“All these things have one thing in common, which is variables or ‘loose parts’. The theory of loose parts says, quite simply the following:

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.”

(Nicholson, S. 1971:30-34)

This classic quote from Nicholson has provided inspiration to many of us who hope to provide satisfying and creative environments for children’s play. And with that a challenge – are the environments we offer children full of the possibility of inventiveness, creativity and discovery?

Nicholson described what he observed in children’s behaviour and dispositions in ways that are profound but also readily applicable to the environments we provide for children.

In his writing, Nicholson extended the theory of loose parts into the realms of community interaction and involvement, planning and design, curriculum development and environmental education. (These are touched on in sections 3 and 6.6)



What might be revealed if you use Nicholson’s proposition to assess the environment you offer? Can you identify variables – how many and what kind? How do they support or hinder possibilities for inventiveness, creativity and discovery.

Loose parts play stories

The mop

The cleaning lady put the mop in the schoolyard to dry and the girls came and, since they saw it as loose parts, took it and cleaned the little mud kitchen corner with it. It was so cute and funny!



Story and photograph from Základná škola Adolfa Majthényiho s vyučovacím jazykom maďarským - Majthényi Adolf Alapiskola, Slovakia



Story and photographs from Szkoła Podstawowa nr 5 im., Poland

Limitless imaginations

One day, we decided to throw away the old castle that stood in our Hall because its structure was no longer stable and the castle kept falling over.

To give it a second life, we took it outside to the GratoSfera space (loose parts play space).

In an instant, it transformed from a heavy stone castle into a light, gliding rocket. For this, the boys took headphones with a microphone so they could connect with the 'airbase'.

As they 'flew above the ground', they saw a boy who was sitting on a wooden reel, fishing with a rod made from a broom handle.

They asked him:

- Henry, what are you doing?
- I am fishing for myself.

Henry wants to be a farmer when he grows up. His games allude to his contact with nature and what he wants to be in the future.

The rocket flew on and as they flew closer, they saw a stage, on which a performance entitled "Carrot" was taking place. A boy standing on the stage held a long cardboard tube, which symbolised a carrot, and he instructed the children standing around how to peel the carrot properly. Nearby, a kitchen was built where the carrots went for lunch.

3. Loose parts play in the life of the school



Photo credit: GratoSfera

In section three we consider loose parts play in the life of the school – what are the benefits of loose parts play and is it valued? Section three considers these questions by looking at the importance of the pleasure and enjoyment playing brings to children. It draws out a range of other benefits to the child’s health, wellbeing, development and learning, with a section on intrinsic, instrumental and institutional value.

Section three concludes by asking you to think about when and how play is supported at school and how you can share the message of play with families and the community of the schools.

3.1 The value of play in the life of the school

“Play is voluntary and often has no extrinsic goals; it is fun and often spontaneous. Children are often seen actively engaged in and passionately engrossed in play; this builds executive functioning skills and contributes to school readiness.”

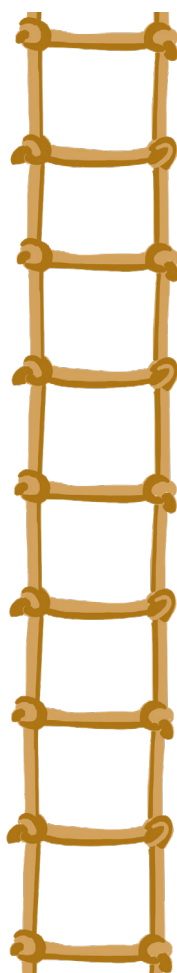
(American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018)

Introduction of loose parts play can add to the range of meaningful learning experiences happening through a variety of inclusive opportunities and environments in a school.

You might find it helpful to think about the ways that loose parts play interacts with requirements of the education system you work in.

For example, loose parts play can:

- foster a creative learning environment that encourages new ideas, exploration and experimentation (see section 3.4)
- provide opportunities for adults to observe and understand children’s own interests, abilities and strengths (see section 4.5)
- act as a release from demands on children allowing them to relax and enjoy themselves free of pressure (see section 3.2)
- nurture relationships and empathy when children and adults enjoy spending time playing together on a more equal basis (see section 3.2)
- contribute to safe places for children to develop relationships with peers, build friendships, cope and learn how to navigate arguments and falling out with friends (see section 3.2)
- provide opportunities for adults to show appreciation, interest and respect for children’s own ideas, ways of being and doing (see section 4)
- provide all children opportunities to express and explore their own personality, talents and interests (see section 1.5).





One way to think about these ideas is to use the ‘value triangle’ as a starting. The three points of the triangle are the intrinsic, institutional and instrumental value of play.

- Intrinsic value of play is 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 physically active; 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; 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.

The value triangle

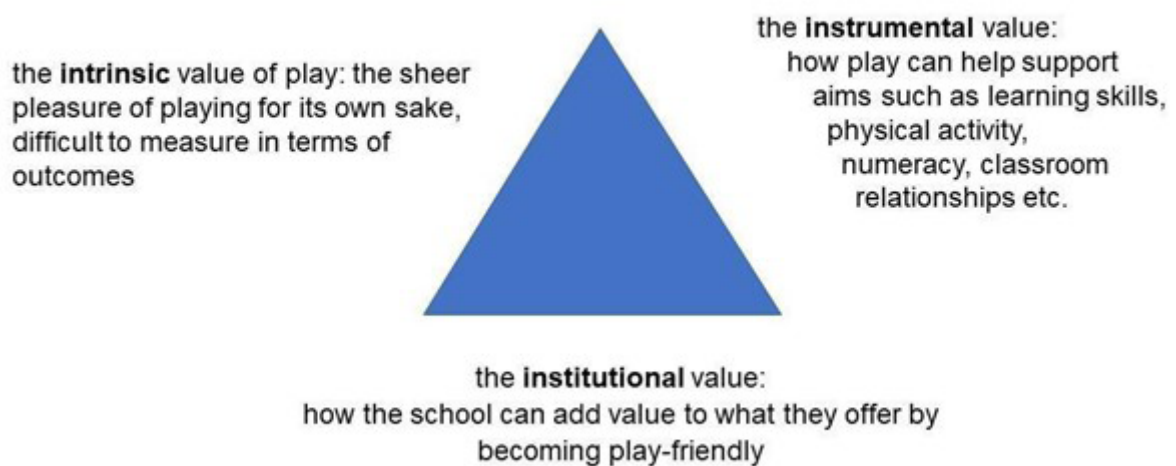


Figure 3

The value triangle described in the Play-friendly Schools Handbook (2019), developed from: Holden (2006)



In what ways does loose parts play support the goals of your setting? If you examine the benefits of play that drive your work, where would you locate them on the value triangle? What does this suggest to you?

3.2 The benefits of unstructured play with loose parts

“Another benefit of the free play was we were in the fresh air a lot, which went well even in the cold winter. It was good not only for the children, but for us teachers too. After playtime it was easier to teach them. I experienced that the children concentrated more during the lessons after the playtime where they had an opportunity to run and play a lot.” Veronika Gergely, Coordinator of Playworkers, Majthényi Adolf Primary School, Dvorany nad Žitavou, Slovakia

The guide to the Quality Criteria for a Play-friendly School (Russell, 2019: 5) discusses the positive correlations between play and a number of skills and dispositions in children, summarised as:

- cognitive skills (for example, paying attention, concentrating, constructing knowledge, making sense, communicating ideas, creativity, imagination, flexibility, divergent thinking, problem solving)
- dispositions and mood states (for example, curiosity and an openness to learning, enthusiasm, persistence, interdependence, resilience and self-efficacy)
- social skills (for example, relationships with peers and adults, emotional regulation, reciprocity, emotional well-being) and motor skills (for example, fine and gross motor skills, proprioception, co-ordination, spatial awareness, confidence, physical health and well-being).



It goes on to suggest:

- children's playground games contribute significantly to the development of **peer relations and networks, linguistic skills, adaptive skills, physical skills** and more
- school play times offer the opportunity for children to engage in **physical activity** (especially if outside space is available), countering excessive inactivity and obesity
- children's ability to **concentrate** improves after play times, implying that removing breaks in order to focus on academic work may be counterproductive, particularly for children who have difficulty concentrating and therefore may be disruptive.

” ***When children interact with loose parts, they enter a world of ‘what if’ that promotes the type of thinking that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. Loose parts enhance children’s ability to think imaginatively and see solutions, and they bring a sense of adventure and excitement to children’s play.***”

Daly and Beloglovsky, 2015

Most of the time loose parts play takes place outdoors bringing the positive impact of open space, fresh air and natural sounds. Many observations illustrate that loose parts play supports children to encounter (and indeed generate) varying degrees of risk and challenge, to stretch themselves and tackle challenges they meet. This is useful experience which builds capacity to assess risk and make decisions. Risk taking can be thrilling, bringing with it a sense of achievement that is equally beneficial in terms of feeling good, mental health, dealing with the unexpected, stress response systems.

The development of play spaces which make use of landscape, planting and other natural features to create rich play environments, draws on and also provides evidence about the benefits of playing outdoors with naturally occurring loose parts.

These include:

- improvements in young children's physical coordination (Fjørtoft and Sageie, 2000)
- children feeling better able to focus enhancement of cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000)
- time in nature aids psychological well-being in children (Wells and Evans, 2003)
- children more likely to visit greenspaces as adults (Ward Thompson, Aspinall and Montarzino, 2008)
- children and young people more likely to develop pro-environmental behaviours and attitudes as adults (Chawla and Cushing, 2007).

Some environmental, social, ethical and financial benefits of loose parts include:

- most loose parts are free of charge
- re-using unwanted home, trade and business scrap slows down its journey to landfill
- adults and children can develop awareness and understanding of environmentally sensitive approaches to natural loose parts
- unexpected and unusual donations stimulate play in new and exciting ways
- loose parts tend to be free from gender, social and cognitive bias
- loose parts play supports the realisation of children's rights in relation to play, participation, education and health
- loose parts can reflect the local community and culture for example a harbour town might acquire an old boat, fishing nets, buoys, seaweed, shells and lobster creels.

See section 4.5 for more on loose parts play and the environment

"In the GratoSfera children who often have difficulties in the classroom community open up. They are more willing to enter into and build relationships."

(Teacher participating in GratoSfera)

"Being here forces independent planning, choosing activities in line with children's interests."

(eacher participating in GratoSfera)



Create a 'mind map' starting with loose parts play at the centre and identify all the benefits you can think of in various categories. You could do this yourself for personal reflection or with colleagues, parents or children. You might find it interesting to share different perspectives. For example, do adults perceive the benefits of loose parts in the same way as the children?



3.3 Loose parts play at playtime, in the playground and other outdoor space

Loose parts play can happen anywhere in the whole environment and really at any time in which conditions allow – that is, when children feel they have time and space and are supported or allowed to play (and sometimes when they are not!)

However, most loose parts play projects focus on playing outside in the playground or school grounds and usually at designated playtimes and lunchtimes, when the children's time is their own.

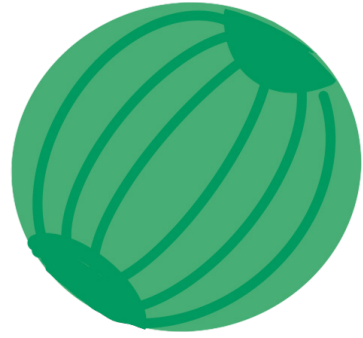
“Play time is children's time - and we adults get out of the way.”

Karolina Żmich, Kindergarten no. 3 in Gdańsk
- participating in GratoSfera

Creating conditions that support play requires paying attention to the culture and atmosphere of the space as well as physical features. przestrzeni, jak również na cechy fizyczne.



Figure 4



Supporting a children's rights approach through play

General Comment 17 on article 31 (see section 1.5) states that governments need to ensure children have sufficient time and space for playing. It highlights a particular role for schools. School environments have a major role in fulfilling children's article 31 rights, including ensuring:

- physical environments for play, sports, games and drama during and around school hours
- active promotion of equal opportunities to play for boys and girls
- playgrounds, play landscapes and equipment are safe and properly and regularly inspected
- equipment and spaces are designed to enable all children, including disabled children, to participate equally
- play areas afford opportunities for all forms of play
- location and design of play areas offer adequate protection and children are involved in their design and development
- adequate time during the school day for play and rest
- a curriculum which includes cultural and artistic activities
- a pedagogy which offers active, playful and participatory activities and learning (2013: 21).

The Play-friendly Schools Criteria guidance suggests schools look closely at the use of time, space and staffing to make best use of what is available to support conditions for play. A truly play-friendly school will have both indoor and outdoor space available for playing; if there

is no outdoor space, schools will have to be as inventive as possible with indoor space. The guide suggests ensuring plenty of loose parts in a varied environment to create the best conditions for play.



The quality indicators are useful. Perhaps you could use them to prompt discussion with colleagues? And what do the children think when you ask them about this?

- Do you make as much outdoor space as possible available for playing in all weathers?
- Does the physical environment support a wide range of forms of play, including risk taking?
- Is the physical space as diverse as possible, with different heights, materials, objects, features, slopes, etc.?
- Can children build and adapt spaces for playing, resting, refuge, observing and socialising?
- Can children be physically active in a variety of ways?
- Are a wide range of plentiful fixed and replenishable resources (loose parts) available for playing in variable ways?



Photo credits: GratoSfera



Majthényi Adolf Primary School, Slovakia

3.4 Loose parts play and a creative learning environment

A “pedagogy which offers active, playful and participatory activities and learning” is recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (as mentioned in 1.5). Loose parts play is a helpful bridge to a creative learning environment.

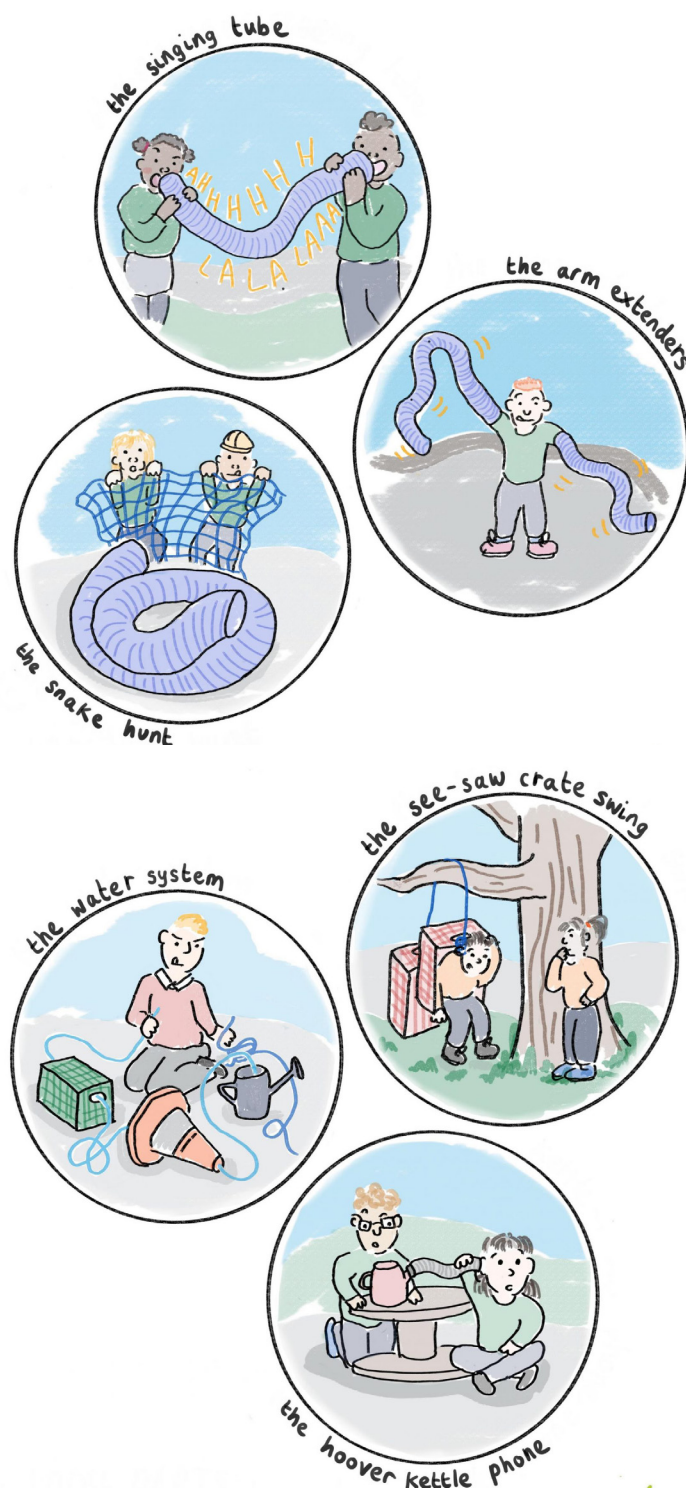
Loose parts play often brings the word creativity to mind – when we watch children at play, we might observe children conjuring up the spirit of an artist, dancer, musician or inventor.

You might like to think more about the ways in which loose parts play can add to an atmosphere of creativity. How does it go beyond playtime to imbue the whole setting with a sense of the excitement of experimentation and discovery?

Rather than enclosing creativity in individual activities, creativity thrives within environments which support it by offering materials, other people and sparks to the imagination. Like play it needs time, space and permission.

Creative Scotland (2013) described creativity as:

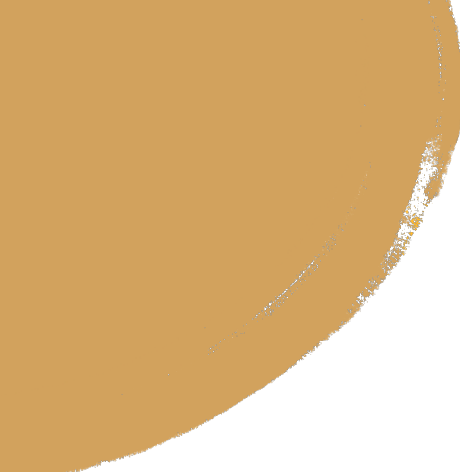
“the capacity to generate ideas that have value to the individual, to look at familiar things with a fresh eye, to examine problems with an open mind, make connections, learn from mistakes and use the imagination to explore new possibilities. Ultimately creativity is the ability to make the world anew, to shape the future and enrich the here and now.”



Invent
the LOOSE PARTS playground


Max Alexander
east lothian
play association
SCOTTISH REGISTERED CHARITY SC030069

Innovate and Invent from ELPA's 'The Loose Parts Playground' series.



The attitude of adults is crucial to give children permission to experiment with loose parts, at their own pace and to use them in their own way. Giving children time and space to play in the ways they choose, for sustained periods of time, demonstrates respect for play as an important occupation of children. “Uncertainty” is a positive attribute as it opens new possibilities. Learning in this way may be retrospective, learning from what has been done or what has happened.

Adults who spend time regularly with children, and reflect on their practice, will be in a better position to judge what they can bring to a creative environment. You’ll need a few different approaches at your disposal.

These might include:

- showing interest, appreciation and curiosity
- maintaining a spirit of exploration and experimentation
- being comfortable with uncertain outcomes
- keeping a distance and not interrupting the flow
- using body language to show you are available if needed
- being ready to offer help or resources if asked
- exploring your own creativity
- being open to children’s suggestions and guidance
- having the capacity to be delighted and ‘enchanted’ by children’s different ideas and ways of doing things.

(See also section 4 on the role of adults.)



Collaboration, discussion and exchange of ideas can be important aspects of creative environments. Equally important are solitary endeavours, time to reflect, sift ideas, remember, reflect and turn ideas over. Sleep and rest are times when the unconscious mind does its work.



Playing with junk makes me think of creativity.”

Child, GratoSfera

Resources

- different spaces and materials with a free flow between them
- encounters with people and ideas.

Adults

- who have a positive view of children
- who observe, reflect and respond.

Children

- who have lots of choices
- who feel relaxed and valued.

A culture that values

- everyone's interests and input
- experimentation
- sharing, discussion and reflection.



3.5 Loose parts play and class time

To help build links with class topics, while respecting children's play, we can think about a flow between the classroom and loose parts play, between playing and more structured learning.

Loose parts play can provide an opportunity for you to observe children's learning in a freer environment led by their own interests. Perhaps you will see children applying or expanding what they have taken from more structured activities, challenging and testing ideas or incorporating themes into their play.

When we talk about loose parts play in class time, we are still referring to child-led play, that is freely chosen. When the same kinds of scrap and recycled materials are used for lessons with pre-planned steps and outcomes, they are no longer loose parts.

“An object or material comes into the category of loose parts if it is available to be used freely, set loose from its original purpose. Children can play with it, manipulate it, move it and combine it with other objects or materials as they choose.” (See section 2.2)

Here are a few practical suggestions linking loose parts play to class time.

Sketchbook and journal time

Loose parts play sparks lots of imaginative and creative ideas and can leave children in a relaxed and unpressured state of mind. Some teachers like to schedule drawing or writing activities after loose parts play. Ideas can come from their play without interrupting it. Teachers have observed children who otherwise struggle, very motivated to draw and write after free play.

Storytime

Try reading or sharing a story before loose parts play. This might be enough to prompt play to go in a new direction or you could add some related loose parts. (Keep them loose though – they don't need to be too literal!) Stories about adventures, journeys and playing work particularly well.

“We read a story called *The Journey* about a girl's drawings that become real. The story features a magical red door. We added chalk with loose parts so the door could be drawn on the ground. Another time, I made a doorway from loose parts. In one school, the doorway was rebuilt in several sessions by children and became a way to enter the play space. Often after reading *The Journey*, children combined drawing with loose parts going on journeys and other adventures.”

Susan Humble, East Lothian Play Association

Add to the range of resources available for children to choose in loose parts play

By adding additional resources, you provide the opportunity to extend children's play or link with classroom topics. These resources can be left at the side for children to choose. This is a simple way to provide new possibilities without directing children's play.

Resources can link with class topics. For example,

- rulers, measuring tapes and spirit levels are a natural invitation for children to measure and compare
- chalk, paper, cardboard, pens and clipboards invite children to make signs, write slogans, do interviews or write letters
- bouncy balls make play more active and unpredictable and offer the opportunity to make ball runs, catapults and other experiments that link to science, technology, engineering and maths topics.

Respond to children's ideas

If you observe an interest or theme during loose parts play you might find opportunities to explore it further in the classroom. Displaying photographs of play in the classroom, can help this develop. For example:

- a game involving thieves and police could lead to finding out about the topic of justice
- play involving made up words could evolve into nonsense poetry or learning to say “hello” in different languages
- construction play could lead to learning about different types of buildings.

Care should be taken so that children don't feel that their playtime is under a microscope. Children's play changes when they feel it is scrutinised and some play can be intensely private. The adult presence has an impact on play, so sensitivity is required.

Alternative to a gold star

Often children are given a sticker (or a gold star) as a reward for something an adult sees as important. Turn this around by providing blank stickers for children to draw or write their own achievements on - what they felt proud of during a loose parts play session.

This approach gives children the opportunity to share their views and build skills in reflecting on experiences. The responses may surprise you!

Talk with children about their experiences of play and how they feel when playing. Children's ideas will guide and improve your loose parts play project.



Making loose parts available in the classroom

Consider offering loose parts in the classroom as well as the playground. This doesn't need to be a large area or lots of resources. You could:

- provide a suitcase or baskets with a selection of loose parts
- create a small loose parts area such as a tent or den
- add new, intriguing or unusual objects from time to time
- provide loose parts in a shared area or corridor with oversight from a classroom.

Consider with the children how to manage loose parts in the classroom. Many children benefit from breaks from structured activities allowing them to return refreshed. Playing with loose parts can also be valuable thinking time for children allowing them to absorb information. a break can aid concentration, release the need to fidget and avoid overload. małe przerwy w zorganizowanych działaniach, aby bawić się gratami

For example, you might agree with the children:

- to allow small breaks from structured activities to play with loose parts
- to play quietly without distracting other people
- to provide everyone with a loose parts play break a few times in a day.



Photo credit: Geraldine Heaney/ East Lothian Play Association

3.6 Loose parts play

— a step for sustainability and circularity

Loose parts play is a dynamic process which reuses and recycles existing materials by channelling them to children's play in schools, nurseries and community settings. Loose parts play links environment and sustainability with children's play, learning, health and wellbeing.

In nature nothing really goes to waste. There is a circular process involving life, nourishment, growth; death, endings and decomposition are all part of a continuous cycle.

In our modern lives there is a lot of linearity through consumption of goods and products (sometimes described as “take, make, dispose”). For example, goods are packaged, and the packaging fills our landscapes, rivers and

oceans with increasing amount of litter. We rely on “end of pipe solutions” which try to clean contaminants from water or air at a late stage, rather than stopping contamination in the first place.

Circular systems and the circular economy are based on the way nature works, with the idea that we restructure the economy with a focus on positive societal and environmental benefits. a circular economy aims to keep products and materials in use for longer, while waste is put back into use.

Circular systems involve re-using, sharing, recycling - the link to the resources we tend to use for loose parts play is clear. Redirecting what might otherwise go to landfill, contributes to Zero Waste principles.

We can find ways in our schools and nurseries to:

- refuse what we don't need (unnecessary packaging, plastic straws etc.) and, if possible, stop it coming into our schools and nurseries
- re-use, repair, and recycle through loose parts play and other activities
- ‘rot’, that is, if possible, return items to nature through decomposition, allowing them to fit back to nature. (See figure 5)

We can see that using loose parts and scrap materials support a move towards Zero Waste: loose parts play reuses and also recycles materials, we may also be able to carry out some repairs during the process.

Loose parts play offers lots of opportunities to combine resources in new ways, planned and unplanned, and for unexpected things to happen. The qualities of the same resources can appear quite different in different weather or light, from a new angle or used with different intentions.

Children often combine loose parts with the environment. When the environment offers a variety of textures, ground materials, vistas, large and small spaces - when it has lots of affordances - the potential for creativity with loose parts multiplies. (See section 2.6)



figure 5

By redirecting items for loose parts play, we reduce waste, we reuse materials and we take steps to recycle. While eventually some loose parts still return to waste and need to be disposed of – so we cannot state that it is entirely within the circular economy – it prolongs the lifecycle of the materials.

Introducing and managing loose parts play provides an opportunity to talk about the environment, sustainability, zero waste and the circular economy. This is an important step towards awareness of issues around environment and sustainability amongst children and the wider school community. In the long term this fosters a more considered attitude towards nature.

How does your loose parts project increase environmental awareness?

- Gathering, sorting, cleaning and playing with loose parts extends the use of scrap, natural or recycled materials, diverts them from landfill and contributes to the circular economy.
- As well as contributing to zero waste principles, loose parts in the form of scrap, natural or recycled materials help to meet a growing demand for sustainable and accessible resources both in education and the community.
- Providing loose parts to schools, nurseries and community settings fulfils a need for rich outdoor play and learning opportunities through loose parts play.
- Children and young people's involvement in this system of re-use and repurposing fosters first-hand, practical knowledge and understanding of sustainability and environmental issues.

Loose parts play projects can also assist local authorities, companies and businesses to meet targets by contributing to their environment and social commitments. For example, these could be commitments:

- outlined in Climate Change Strategies and other green policies
- to tackle the climate emergency at a local level
- to become 'Net Zero' or 'Carbon Neutral'
- on corporate responsibility and community engagement.

“Even with established recycling programmes there is so much more that can be done and the Loose Parts Play project has often been the missing link. The ability to not only reuse, but repurpose waste into fun, play and support for community purpose is a fantastic outcome. East Lothian Loose Parts Play has been the instrumental link that has connected us with schools and charities who can benefit from our surplus resources that would otherwise go to waste. They have enabled us to donate over 350 items, saving 1769kg CO2 and diverted 389kg of our waste.”

Historic Environment Scotland

Minimising the environmental impact of your project

Children need a playspace where they can develop a sense of ownership, not only of their play, but of the landscape too. You will need to set time aside to consider common sense approaches to managing the environmental impact of the play sessions.

These could include:

- seeking advice from the janitor or caretaker about how to look after the outdoor space
- undertaking simple acts of environmental stewardship, for example, picking up litter, encouraging use of refillable bottles and containers for drinks and snacks
- modelling appropriate values, attitudes and actions towards caring for the environment where play is facilitated
- considering the environmental impact of resources introduced, for example, glitter and other synthetic small items are difficult to clean up; plastic, playdough and human food could cause harm to wildlife
- actively seeking to source loose parts with a sustainable approach
- learning about and adhering to the Outdoor Access Code when in natural or wild spaces
- learn about the Leave Less Trace Principles⁶ to minimise the environmental degradation of a site whilst ensuring children can freely play.



⁶ The 7 Principles - Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics (Int.org)



3.7 Sharing your loose parts play 'message'

The community of your school can help make your loose parts play project a success, especially if they share your passion for the importance and value of play. Communicating with the school community can help to manage practicalities, address concerns and spark enthusiasm for loose parts play. Start your plans to share the loose parts message by thinking about the different people in your community and how to reach them.

Some of the people to reach	Some of the ways to reach them
School staff	Internal school and local authority or municipal communications, in-service days
Children	Within school – in class, assembly, google classrooms, posters, noticeboards
Parents, carers and families	School newsletter, parents' evenings
General public	Social media, local press and media
Potential donors and supporters	Targeted letters and leaflets.
Other schools	
Wider play and education communities.	

Some suggestions to help share the message

Children are your communication superheroes!

Once familiar with the idea of loose parts play, the children could lead a school assembly, create posters and leaflets, write to local businesses and create social media content. Their stories and drawings can be highly effective communication tools

Parents, carers and families are key partners

You can be fairly sure they will hear about the project from their children. A communications plan can help to address questions or concerns, encourage families to get involved with things like fundraising, playground maintenance and collecting loose parts.

All school staff need to know about and understand the project.

Make sure there are ways to keep all of the school staff including caretakers and janitors involved and informed. Consider forming a loose parts play group including teachers, playground supervisors, parents, children and any relevant organisations. This group can help to do things like playground audits, research, fundraising, and can discuss concerns and solutions.

Local businesses can keep you supplied with loose parts.

Spread the word to local businesses that you need loose parts. Families may have useful local knowledge and be able to help make contacts. Offer a personal approach and be clear about the items you are looking for.

Play sessions in action.

Seeing loose parts play in action is very persuasive. You could offer opportunities when parents are in and around the school for example, parents' consultation evenings or an open afternoon. You could also invite supporters, donors and other school staff – just make sure that you and the children are comfortable with the project first and it's running smoothly. Be aware of not overwhelming children's play with an adult presence.

(See relevant sections of the manual and toolbox for details related to the content of communications).

Pictures tell stories

Don't forget that photographs, drawings and video clips can really help to tell the story of your loose parts play journey. Use them creatively to link loose parts play to school values, curriculum, and health and wellbeing.

You should follow appropriate policies to ensure children's privacy is protected and make sure they, as well as their parents/carers, have provided suitable permission.



Photo credit: Geraldine Heaney/ East Lothian Play Association

Sharing the loose parts play message – case study

Windygoul Primary School and East Lothian Play Association, Scotland

Windygoul Primary School and ELPA created a communications plan together for introducing loose parts play in the school. They recognised levels of awareness of the benefits of loose parts play varied amongst the whole school community. Amongst staff, some people had more experience than others in putting loose parts play into practice. Creating a communications matrix was part of the planning process.

Communications matrix – which methods will reach which target audience?

Children's participation possible in all methods People to share the message with	Internal school and Council comms, in-service days	Within school in class, assembly, google classrooms.	Play sessions to join in Demo and taster sessions, 'stay & play'.	School newsletter A loose parts section or photos story to every newsletter.	Social media Scheduled posts. Create films, gifs and memes.	Local press and media Stories and visuals.	Targeted letters Requests for donation and support.
School staff		Staff learn from children					
Children		Includes opportunities led by children					
Parents and carers		Pupils take information home					
General public							
Potential donors and supporters			If appropriately managed				
Schools across East Lothian							
Wider play and education community							

Examples of media created and shared over several months to introduce the idea of loose parts play to the school community

Creative and problem solving

"We get to be creative and imaginative."
– Pupil, Campie Primary School

"Sometimes I just sit back and watch. I had high expectations of loose parts play and it has by far surpassed them. Seeing the problem solving and children working together is fantastic." – Deputy Head Teacher, Campie Primary School

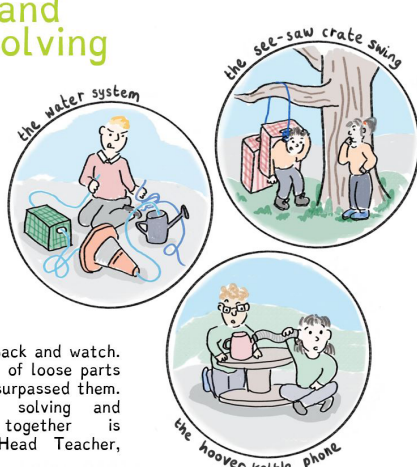


Illustration by Max Alexander @playradical1

Illustration by Max Alexander @playradical1

Focussed



"The loose parts play is popular in the playground. It gives people something to do to keep them busy so there is less fighting and people are less bored." – Pupil, Pinkie St Peters Primary School

"Many parents were very surprised by how long these items hold their children's attention."
First Step Community Project



Loose parts play encourages children to combine things in unusual ways and to use objects imaginatively. With loose parts and supportive adults, there are more opportunities for children to be creative.

www.elpa.org.uk
SC030069

When playing, children are following their own interests and doing something because they want to. When adults understand play, children are given the time to play and to find a focus without interruption.

www.elpa.org.uk
SC030069



Posters and social media posts were created to share the benefits of loose parts play



Windygoul Values
#Respectful, Positive, Responsible



Postcards and a social media series were created to link loose parts play to school values

Loose parts play stories: Naturally occurring inclusive play

Inside teachers create the environment. Outdoors, in the GratoSfera space, the children create the environment - which is more beneficial and natural. a child with autism creates a complex structure, a water pump, using loose parts. Other children see this, think it's interesting and join in. Indoors, co-operation or who works together is more set.



Photo credit: East Lothian Play Association

3.8 Toolbox resources

The Toolbox materials in this section are designed to:

- inspire teachers and parents to use scrap and recycled materials during the normal school day or at home.

Tool 14	Loose parts play at home - tips
Tool 17	Benefits of risk, adventure and challenge in play – poster
Tool 18	Loose parts play in the classroom – case study
Tool 20	Benefits of play in school- poster
Tool 22	The benefits of play – a child’s view - poster

4. Facilitating loose parts play



Photo credit: East Lothian Play Association

Section four provides an opportunity to learn more about the role of adults in facilitating loose parts play. It takes a playwork approach and supports you to think about how you will apply that in your project. Section four invites you to consider what adults can do to support a welcoming and inclusive environment so that all children are able to play.

4.1 The role of adults

“Free play with loose parts is something new in Polish schools. It is a completely new approach to using time and space at school. It also involves handing over control to the children, and we as adults then only have to be careful observers so as not to contaminate the play. And this is what is most difficult - to be able to let go of the need to control what is happening and not impose your vision. It is then worth trusting the children and thinking about the greater benefits to their development that come from our limited intervention and presence.”

Kamil Maciaszek, Founder of GratoSfera Project

Understanding adults have a crucial role in the successful introduction of loose parts play. Sensitive support to children at play can enhance children's experience, without undue interference.

The Playwork Principles are a professional and ethical framework providing guidance to adults supporting and facilitating children's play. They define the playwork approach which has been the basis of successive European projects (see section 1.1) and provide a shared understanding of what playworkers do. Adults in schools and nurseries may not have come across the playwork approach before but the principles can help introduce the key ideas.

“Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.”

Playwork Principles

The Playwork Principles guide the role of adults in supporting play with attention to:

- All children and young people need to play
- The focus is to support and facilitate children's own process of playing
- Children's play process is given priority
- Adults can support children in the creation of a space in which they can play
- Up-to-date knowledge of the play process underpins reflective practice
- Adults have an impact on the play space
- Children and young people's play has an impact on adults
- The style of intervention should enable children and young people to extend their play
- Risks and developmental benefits should be balanced. (See section 6.5)

Find the Playwork Principles and an overview here:

<http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>

Adult intervention⁷

Supporting play is often a challenge for adults. a key approach to supporting children's self-organised play is known as a 'low intervention-high response' way of working.

As much as possible, children should be able to engage with each other and the space in a spontaneous manner. This can create some tensions for practice in any context, but perhaps particularly in school settings. Here are some things you may want to consider:

- How far can children do as they please?
- What about risk, conflicts, getting dirty, harm to themselves, others or school property?
- Are there play types that make adults anxious or offended?
- What if children want to play with the adults?

Sturrock and Else (1998) describe four different levels of interventions that are aimed at supporting play rather than terminating or changing it:

- **Play maintenance:** the adult plays a watchful, protective role here, preventing unwanted interruption by others. At its best, the playing child or children will not even be aware of this level of intervention.
- **Simple involvement:** when the adult acts as a resource for play.
- **Medial involvement:** when the adult is cued (directly or indirectly) by the child to come into the play.
- **Complex involvement:** this is when the adult is involved in the children's play for a more extended period and without their involvement the play would break down.



Refer back to the definition of play frequently (see section 2.1). Doing so enhances reflective practice. If you need to figure out the appropriate thing to do in a given situation, referring back to the definition helps to keep the response play focussed.

4.2 Facilitating play - skills to put into practice⁸

On this page, you will find prompts to help you consider your own or team responses to children's play.

Wait to be invited to play.

Are you sensitive and careful not to take over? Do you organise play activities only when children want you to?

Enable play to occur uninterrupted.

How do you protect children's space and time for play? Do you think carefully before you interrupt the flow of play?

Enable children to explore their own values.

Do you support play in a way that recognises that children explore and understand values through playing and sometimes make mistakes?

Leave children to develop skills at their own pace.

Do you support play in a way that recognises play is a way children develop their own skills, abilities and judgement? Are you conscious of allowing children to play at their own pace and to learn through trial and error?

Leave the content and intent of play to the children.

Do you avoid directing and shaping the content of children's play?

Let children decide why they play.

Do you respect that play is behaviour without goals or rewards? It is a process. Do you steer clear of offering prizes or rewards for play?

Enable children to decide what is appropriate behaviour, within safe limits.

Do you enable children to explore and develop boundaries? Have you discussed safe limits, what these are and how you judge? Do you steer clear of complex rules in favour of shared understanding and simple guidelines?

Only organise when children want support.

Do you avoid organising children's play? Are you ready to help invent something to do or find resources when children need you to?

Thinking about our responses to children's play

- **Stop** yourself before you respond to, or stop, children's play
- **Look and listen** to what is happening. What are children doing?
- **Think** - are children managing any risks? What might be the impact of adult involvement on children's play?
- **Act** - now you can respond in a thoughtful way, rather than by reflex.
- **Reflect** - was your action the correct one? What have you learned?



4.3 Understanding play cues

Understanding and recognising play cues is another important skill that supports practice, especially inclusive practice. Adults can gain a better understanding of children's play by looking out for play cues and responding appropriately. The concept of the 'play cycle' containing 'play cues' and returns within a 'play frame' was developed by UK play thinkers Gordon Sturrock and Perry Else.

A **play cue** can be verbal, a gesture or an action and invites others to join the play. a **response** to a play cue creates a **play frame**.

Children generally respond to each other's play cues naturally. Some children might have difficulty recognising cues or responding to them in the way other children do. This can result in difficulties such as being left out of play or repeated upset because they have misread cues. For adults, understanding and recognising play cues is a skill that helps us respond appropriately to children's play.

A **play cue** is a hint or an invitation to someone to join in and play. Children communicate these invitations to play in different ways, sometimes verbally but often through gestures, posture or expressions. For example:

- tap on shoulder and run away laughing
- make a funny face at someone
- wink
- throw a ball to someone
- move closer to someone with things to play with
- allocate roles, for example "you can be the dragon"
- make space in a group for someone to join.

The **return** is a positive and equally playful response to a recognised cue, which can also act as a further cue – an indication to take the play further.



The **frame** can be:

- physical – a place or space, which could be as small as a cardboard box or as large as a playing field and which might be visibly indicated by mats, stones, rope, tyres, clothes, a hedge or fence, or a structure, platform, den, room or corridor.
- narrative – a new or a favourite storyline, a song or a piece of music, or a set of agreed rules. Any of these can give the reason for playing and hold the play together.
- emotional – when play is exploring a feeling such as fear, grief or triumph, so the props, the action, the place and the story can keep changing because it's the experience of the feeling that holds it all together.



Carry out some observations at playtime specifically looking for play cues. What do you notice? How have adults read play clues? Have they helped or got in the way?

4.4 Understanding play types

“It's a magical place in the school. I give the helm to the children there. My role comes to the background. The child is the initiator.”

Teacher participating in GratoSfera

Play types can simply be described as the different behaviours we can see when children are playing. There have been numerous attempts to categorise different types of play.

Play theorist Bob Hughes (2006: 33) explains that “each play type is both distinctly and subtly different from the others”. It is useful to be able to recognise them since “engaging in each one is a necessary corollary for a child’s healthy development”.

Hughes identified sixteen main types as: communication, creative, deep, dramatic, socio-dramatic, exploratory, fantasy, imaginative, locomotor, mastery, object, recapitulative, role play, rough and tumble, social and symbolic.

Play types are rarely seen in isolation. When playing, children move between play types and combine them with great speed and complexity





If children appear not to be engaging with a wide range of play types, we might ask whether it is because they choose not to, something in the environment or attitude of adults is stopping them or perhaps something else is happening that it would be useful to try to understand.

We can experiment with ways of widening the play types available to children, through changes in the:

- environment
- available loose parts
- atmosphere
- time for play
- attitude of adults.

(See also section 2.6 on play space)

Two useful reference points if you would like to find out more about play types are:

- Hughes, B. (2006) Play Types – Speculations and Possibilities. London: The London Centre for Playwork Training and Education.
- Scott-McKie, L & Casey, T. (2017) Play types – bringing more play into the school day. Edinburgh: Play Scotland.



Allocate some time to observing children playing and practise recognising play types. This will help you understand the range of play available to children in your setting, which types of play that are particularly prominent, which are observed rarely.

4.5 Observation

Unobtrusive observation provides insights into children's play and is an essential skill to practise and develop.

Observing children at play helps to:

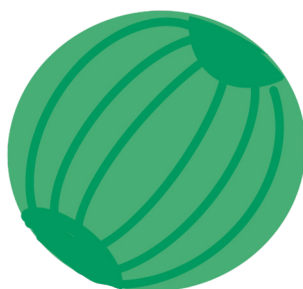
- build knowledge of children's strengths and preferences
- understand how the environment is working for children – does it support their play and provide the potential for a wide range of experiences?
- understand how children are using the loose parts
- look out for things like play types which can give a richer understanding of what is happening during children's play.

Some observation methods

- Noticing – for example, making mental notes
- Photographic – for example, taking pictures as and when things happen
- Timeline – for example, identifying a child or area and checking in every 10 mins
- Frameworks – for example, checklists or looking for characteristics
- Targeted/focussed – for example, looking at a specific area/child for a period of time
- Written – for example, a detailed 'story'.

Skilled practitioners observe all the time and one of the most important forms of observation is 'noticing'. Noticing is about paying attention to the subtleties of what children are doing and saying. This informal and on-going approach is part of tuning-in to and supporting children's play.

(See also section 7 – how are we doing?)



4.6 Keeping the momentum going

As with all activities, interests wax and wane. Sometimes there is a flurry of den-building over several weeks and this is replaced with another interest such as creating obstacle courses, and so on. Most children will happily initiate and generate ideas without any prompting.

However, items can be added to the core collection of loose parts to celebrate the seasons, cultural events or specific child-led interests. This can be a way involving children in gathering additional resources from home and the local community.

Here are some examples:

- Develop themed collections based on colours, light, smell, textures, sounds, water, mud, sand, constructions.
- Leave grassy areas unmown to grow dandelions, buttercups, daisies and other plants with high play value that can withstand being picked.
- Save up donations of things like tin foil, aluminium and foil 'space' blankets.
- Bring in some hay bales - these are fantastic for construction play and defining spaces. Be prepared for hay to end up scattered around. It can be gathered and used as mulch or compost in due course.
- Put a request out for real Christmas trees to be donated after the holidays so that they can be used for making dens or pretend forests.
- Keep the long plant stalks and other dead plant material after a winter garden clearance.
- Put a call out for leaves, pinecones or conkers in autumn.

A calendar of play dates

Outdoor Classroom Day – around 23rd May. Freedom to play outside the classroom. Get children outdoors to play and learn, on Outdoor Classroom Day and all year round!

World Play Day – 28th May. Toy Libraries worldwide invite you to celebrate play. World Play Day | ITLA (itla-toylibraries.org)

International Mud Day – 29th June. Invite parents to join in! Mud Day – World Forum Foundation

Universal Children's Day – 20th November. The UN and children's rights supporters around the world celebrate the anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. World Children's Day | United Nations

Loose parts play stories

The playhouse

There is a small shed, like a little house, in the garden for children to play in. The little shed was donated to the school after being used in the village Christmas scene. They do all kind of things in there, playing being a family, having it as a little store, etc. One day they were organising its cleaning and the children assigned roles among themselves: someone was getting the shovel and the broom, someone was arranging the objects in the shed, someone was brushing, etc.

They asked for a teacher's help only once because the shelf-system collapsed. The teacher climbed inside and saw the shelf system really was in pieces - its holder had fallen down from the hooks and the children couldn't put it back because it was too heavy. They did everything else by themselves, and this was a point where they rightfully realised that they needed help.



Staff perspectives changing through loose parts play

Before loose parts play was introduced, there were specific spaces where the children played specific things e.g. a group of boys always played football, while another group always used the slides. Now the space is used in a much more diverse way. This means that the old routines of paying attention to the children are not always appropriate – in a way we need to have a much wider perspective about the whole space.

Staff are positively surprised about tidying up after the play session – the children are very much involved in the process; they are proactively looking for things to put back in its place.

Staff look at the space through slightly different eyes now, looking at the affordances, and they also have more self-reflection on their own attitude.

For example, someone saw two boys trying to climb up the basketball hoop (which is not allowed). She was looking at them, wondering if she should intervene or not, while having a “discussion” with herself:

“I remember climbing when I was younger ... but it is not allowed ... I would also love to climb up actually ... but it might be dangerous,” and so on.



Story and photographs from Iskolánk tanulóiért Alapítvány, Hungary

4.7 Toolbox resources

The tools in this section are intended to:

- support teachers in organising play that benefits children
- to explore and consolidate information about the nature of play, in conjunction with the manual.

Tool 3 Role of adults in supporting play - poster

Tool 8 The play cycle - poster

Tool 23 Play observation sheet

5. Practical guidance to get started



Photo credit: GratoSfera

The purpose of section five is to offer practical tips and guidance to get your loose parts play project up and running. It begins with an overview of steps and suggests ways to acquire enough loose parts to ensure children can play freely.

This section considers issues around storage and suggests ideas for running your first few sessions to build confidence. Finally, section five goes into ways to maintain your project and keep momentum going.

5.1 Getting started

- general guidance and things to think about

- Consider the use of loose parts within your overall approach to play.
- Assess current provision. You can involve children and teenagers at each step in fun and interesting ways. (See section 5.2)
- Develop an action plan. Find ways for children to be fully involved at every step.
- Work out your approach to evaluation right from the start – it's helpful to have evidence showing the difference 'before' and 'after' the introduction of loose parts. (See section 7)
- Involve and educate staff, parents and carers about the use and benefits of loose parts. Online film clips, small study visits and presentations are all very useful. (See section 3.7. See Tools 17, 20 and 22 for posters to hang in school.)
- Access training to equip adults with knowledge, skills and confidence.
- Get your procedures in place for the sourcing, managing and using loose parts. You will review these as time goes on. (See sections 5.3 and 5.5. See Tool 7 which contain guidance on managing safety and handling loose parts.
- Work out where and how you will store your loose parts. (See section 5.4)
- Work on your risk-benefit assessment of loose parts play. These are likely to be adjusted as you and the children gain experience. (See section 6.5 and Tool 10 for a risk-benefit assessment template.)
- Gather your initial supply of loose parts and make a plan for how they will be replenished. (See section 5.3)
- Try some taster sessions, ideally with support from an experienced playworker or play organisation. See Tool 12 which contains guidance for running taster sessions.
- Facilitate play opportunities in line with the Playwork Principles. (See section 4)
- Plan, do, review.

It's natural for challenges to arise along the way when you are introducing something new. These may be practical issues, or practice or team challenges.

In the long term, working through issues as a team helps to embed loose parts play even more firmly in the school or setting's way of working. Problem-solving together with the children can improve understanding of the loose parts play approach.

5.2 Assessing your provision and involving children

In this section, we are looking at what you have and what you need on quite a practical level. Before introducing loose parts for play, and at intervals after introducing them, it's helpful to make this kind of assessment. Involving children in these types of activities helps to make the link with environmental awareness, sustainability and circularity.

Different users of the play space (adults, children) may have different perspectives of what's on offer. Children are well placed to gather as well as provide information, creating opportunities to develop their research skills. These kinds of activities are about the space and resources, and can be fun and engaging, but they aren't play.

What information would be useful to collect and understand?

- The play features and affordances of the physical environment
- Resources available for play
- What happens to resources – are they used, destroyed, recycled, composted?
- Any obstacles to play and underused space
- The routines and rules in the school or setting and how they impact on play
- The roles and expectations of children and adults in relation to play.

How can we involve children?

- Discuss why information is being collected and how it will be used
- Involve everyone in deciding what information should be collected and how
- Establish a sense of trust and respect for each other's opinions
- Use a variety of methods for collecting information that will appeal to children's varied strengths and interests, for example visual, creative, factual, data-driven, analytical methods
- Carry out activities in the spaces you are gathering information about. For example, interview the playground supervisor in the area he or she usually covers, create site plans outdoors in the play space.

How can information be captured?

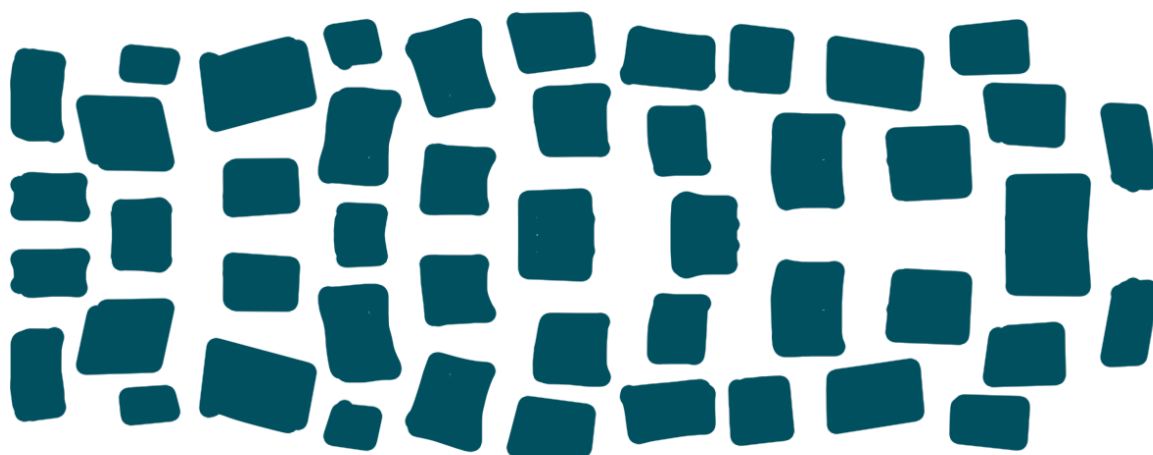
- Take photos or videos of features of the place space and use them to prompt discussion or make comparisons between what happens in different places.
- Draw a simple plan or map of the play space. Make plenty of photocopies then ask everyone to mark them up from their point of view. They could be asked to draw, write, scribble or use stickers to do this.
- Take time-lapse photos (or simple snapshots at regular intervals) of the same area over the course of a play session to see what really happens there.
- Make an inventory of play resources. You can do this with visual methods such as photos, lists and wall charts.
- Create a simple chart for monitoring things like first aid in the playground, playground incidents, absences from play time or other data that can be routinely collected. This should help you describe the impact of introducing loose parts and can be an interesting data handling challenge for children. If any of this data is already collected, make use of this.
- Organise for children to interview each other and adults. Preparing questions, asking them, listening and recording answers are great exercises in communication. Interviews can be recorded on paper, with audio or video.
- Check your playground rules, policies and procedures. Think about what they tell you about how play is perceived and valued.
- Review the expectations and job descriptions of people who are involved in supporting play in your setting. Do they reflect what is required to support play?
- Be brave! Find out what the children really think about how adults are supporting or hindering play through their actions.
- Re-visit each activity once loose parts play has got going so that you can gauge the impact.

How can we organise these activities?

- One class or group could take the lead in planning activities.
- The lead class or group could allocate activities to other children, classes, adults or groups to carry out.
- A number of classes or groups could each take one aspect of the assessment and report back.
- The same activities or focus could be given to children of different ages and stages to reveal different points of view and what they have in common.
- Some activities may be more appropriate for adults or staff such as reviewing policies but even these could usefully involve children.
- Some play organisations offer help to run or support assessment activities.
- Some organisations (play and others) can offer help in including the views of very young children or children and teenagers with additional support needs.

What do we do with what we find out?

- Gather the information together and look for themes, priorities, opportunities.
- Use it to answer questions such as: How could we make better use of the space we have? Are there areas valued by children that we hadn't realised before? Are there sufficient resources? Are we disposing of resources appropriately? Are there groups of children for whom we should be doing more to make sure they have fair opportunities to play outdoors? Do adults need to do things differently?

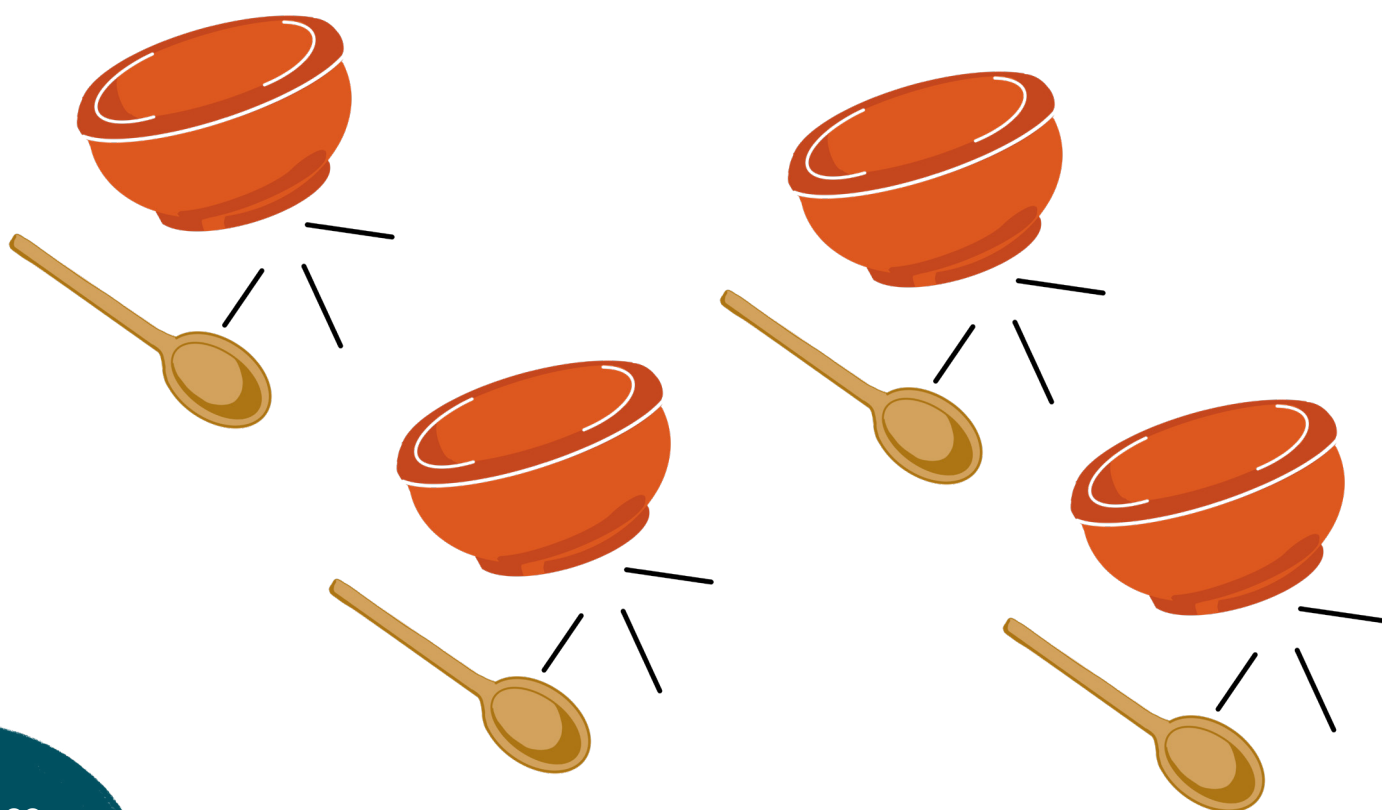


5.3 Acquiring plentiful loose parts

Most loose parts for play can be sourced free of charge. The main costs are the time taken to source and collect them, fuel costs if you have to pick them up, disposal and the cost of printing posters and letters. Using social media is a great way to reduce some of those costs.

As most loose parts are donated, they can add random, surprising qualities to play depending on what turns up.

Some people have a natural talent for acquiring loose parts! Once you start, spotting loose parts wherever you go can become a life-long habit. It's a great way for parents, carers and the community to be involved in your project.



How can we acquire loose parts?

(See also country specific guidance in Appendix 2.).

- Let people know the kinds of things you are looking for and see what comes. This is the easiest and often the single most successful way to acquire loose parts.
- Try social media posts, emails, posters and letters. (See the Tools 5 and 9.)
- If you have too much of one thing and not enough of another, let people know or exchange loose parts with another school.
- Visit local companies, building site offices, factories and shops to explain about loose parts play and how they could help. Take information and pictures so they understand the idea.
- Send a letter or email to follow up – try to address it to a named individual if possible.
- Ask – if you see some potential loose parts such as pipes or building off cuts, ask in person.
- Join a scrapstore (an organisation that sources and redirects scrap) if there is one in your area.
- Join up with other groups or settings to share and swap loose parts
- Visit charity shops, car boot sales and jumble sales for unusual items.
- Add reminders to newsletters, social media and websites.
- Find out which parents work or have hobbies likely to produce a good supply of loose parts – builders, plumbers, farmers, designers etc. Ask them to look out for things that could be donated. (See Tool 9 for a sample letter.)
- Set up an area where children and staff can deposit donated loose parts from home so that they can be checked and prepared for play.
- Make friends with your local builders, countryside rangers and tree surgeons.

Make sure people know you are looking for loose parts and supplies are likely to come!

How many loose parts do we need?

The number of loose parts should be proportionate to the size of the play area and the number of children. They should be plentiful so that children do not have to compete for resources. As a very rough guide, multiply the number of children by at least four or five to work out how many items of loose parts you might need. You will soon get a sense of popular items to replenish frequently and, on a day-to-day basis, the types of loose parts that are in demand from the children.

See Tool 1 We're collecting!

We're collecting!

A note about tyres

Old tyres have fantastic value on play spaces both as loose resources and for making semi-permanent structures. Commercial companies usually need to pay to dispose of old tyres so are generally happy to give them away. (Check for the rules in your country). However, they can present particular hazards to be aware of:

- Tyres present a fire hazard and should be stored safely away from buildings in line with any local fire guidance that may exist
- Some tyres have steel bracing; they should be checked for protruding wires and not used if they have any
- Tyres fixed in place should have holes drilled for drainage
- Loose tyres can also hold stagnant water and insects so need to be emptied
- Tyres fixed together to create structures must not create trap points which present a hazard to children
- If using tyres as swings, pay extra care to the condition of the tyre and check regularly.

5.4 Storage and location of storage

How to store loose parts is an early consideration for organising your project. Suitable storage depends on location, climate, and size of the project so could be a shed or shipping container, an open-sided shelter, or simply an area in a porch or reception area.

Storage can be improvised such as a wheelie bin, a trolley or cart, or even just a rucksack containing essentials. In some locations and for certain items minimal storage is required and many items can be left outside.

Storage considerations

- Discuss which storage options are suitable for the location and scale of your project.
- Make sure the children will be able to access the storage as independently as possible.
- Make sure the doors are wide enough - double doors on the longest side of a large container work well.
- Consider how to lay out the inside of the storage for ease of access. Try open boxes or bays against the sides to allow materials to be sorted easily.
- Create child-friendly signage to show what is stored where.
- Consider accessibility – this can be enhanced by ramps, hard surfaces such as tarmac or paving immediately outside the storage and a canopied front for additional shelter.
- Think about whether wood or metal storage is appropriate to your setting.
- Think aesthetics too, for example, planting around it or a mural designed and painted by children.

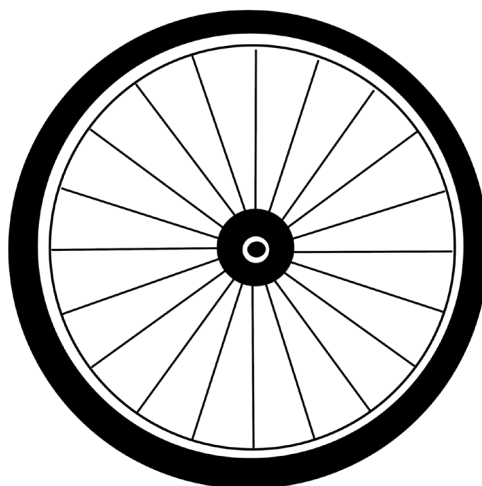
The location of the storage

An early discussion with those responsible for the maintenance or management of your outdoor space will help to decide on the appropriate space to site your storage.

- Can the storage be sited in or near the area where the loose parts will be used?
- Would several small storage areas work better than one large one?
- Would it make tidying up easier if the storage were located on the route the children use coming and going from the play space?
- Have you kept access clear for emergency vehicles?
- Are there any manholes, drains, water hydrants or other services to avoid?
- Have you checked the location of underground pipes and services?
- Are any permissions required before building or installing storage?
- Will the storage inadvertently create easy access to a roof or a boundary wall?

What can be left outside?

Natural play materials such as sand, stones, bark chip, twigs and vegetation are generally best left out as part of the play environment. In many locations, other general supplies of loose parts are unlikely to be tampered with or stolen and so can be left out. As the team on the site, you and your colleagues will be best placed to decide.



Some options to consider if you are deciding whether to leave the loose parts outside.

You should consider things like insurance and local context to decide on the right approach for your setting. This list provides some options to consider: Zachowaj niską tolerancję wobec

- Take a low-key tolerant approach to children playing with loose parts out of hours, providing no damage is done.
- Put up some signs letting children or teenagers (or even adults!) know you are aware they are playing with the loose parts out of hours and that you are happy with that, as long as nothing is damaged.
- Think whether storage might become the likely target of vandalism (especially if locked, people might think there is something valuable inside).
- Consider if some loose parts can simply be left out at little risk of harm or theft.
- Ask friendly neighbours, passers-by or local dog walkers to keep an eye on the play space informally and alert you or the police if they see any problems.
- Consider if problems are seasonal, for example, is there more chance of things being set alight at certain times of year? Are more teenagers hanging around on long summer evenings? If so, you might need temporary or seasonal solutions.
- Use your local knowledge to make a judgement.

Problem solving

It can be disheartening if your project suffers from vandalism and there is no answer that fits every situation.

- Sometimes you simply have to persevere until problems settle
- Schools or groups which have strong relationships in the community tend to experience fewer problems
- Friendly communication is often the key
- Involving children, teenagers, neighbours and community members in activities at your school or setting can often help, for example, gardening, maintenance or collecting loose parts for you
- Youth services and local safety partnerships may also help in engaging with young people.

See Tool 7 for tips on lifting and moving items safely.
See section 5.6 for more on routines.

5.5 Checking loose parts before, during and after playing

Loose parts need to be safe enough for children to use. Set up a system to check all new items, regardless of where or how they were sourced. Common sense will be your best guide. See Tool 7.1.

Involving children in maintaining loose parts supplies.

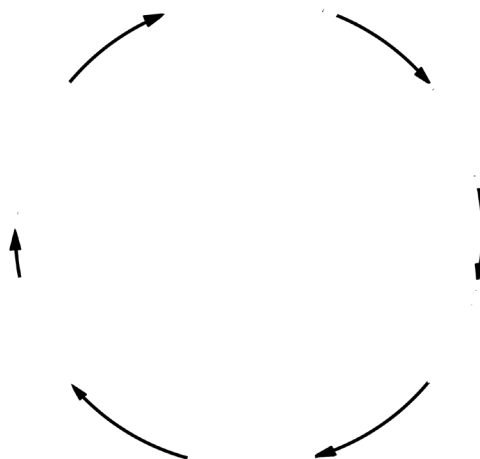
Some of the tasks involved in maintaining loose parts can be fun opportunities for children. They can learn to identify items that need action taken, undertake maintenance tasks (such as those in the steps above) and be involved in record keeping.

Involving children in maintenance of loose parts

- encourages a sense of ownership and responsibility
- gives a different way to be involved in the project
- provides opportunities to practise real-life skills.

Certain aspects of loose parts play require specific maintenance measures, for example, sand pits require sand to be swept up and to be raked over regularly. Items used in mud play will need to be hosed down from time to time.

The key is to be systematic. Work out what needs to be done, and who is responsible and ensure your system keeps going.



Step one

Check for potential hazards including:

- loose bits which may come off, creating choking hazards or splinters and sharp edges sharp items
- likelihood of splintering or shattering, especially under pressure or temperature changes flammable materials
- bacterial infection through damp, wet storage or stagnant water
- items that are likely to cause fingers, head or body to become trapped or crushed
- chemicals – batteries, leaky components, etc. (Remove from play immediately.)

Step two

If you find hazards that can be fixed immediately, take appropriate action such as:

- sand down sharp edges or splintery wood
- remove protrusions such as wire, staples or nails
- check pockets and lining of second-hand clothing and accessories
- remove or secure loose bits
- wash and clean resources.

Step three

MAKE AVAILABLE FOR PLAY

Step four

If you find hazards that can be fixed, but not immediately, take appropriate action such as:

- ensure the item is not accessible to children
- identify a specific place or container where broken or worn items can be stored
- use a sticker system to mark items requiring repair
- keep a record of items for repair and tick when the item has been returned to play.

Once repaired or fixed, go to **step three - MAKE AVAILABLE FOR PLAY**

Step five

If you find an item that is beyond repair or the hazards can't be fixed, REMOVE FROM PLAY by taking appropriate action such as:

- remove the item promptly
- add plant material to compost heaps or composting systems.
- contact your local authority waste disposal or recycling centre for advice
- put broken or worn items into a specific place for removal.

5.6 Setting up loose parts play routines

The routines here are offered as practical suggestions that can be adapted to help implement your project.

Creating a loose parts play zone or zones

It can sometimes be helpful to identify an area within the grounds or playspace for loose parts play. This can be helpful especially when first trying out loose parts and starting to understand how children play with them. Setting up and tidying up can be quicker if storage is located in the zone.

Creating a protected area can also help children to really immerse themselves in play without competing for space or being displaced by other interests, such as football.

If you choose to create a loose parts play zone, think about its location, whether the sun reaches it, and the affordances in the environment.

Try not to be too rigid – it's natural for loose parts to travel throughout a space that children play in.



Mixed age play

Loose parts play lends itself to all ages playing together with children accessing the loose parts when they wish to, rather than being restricted by a rota or divided by age. Children are naturally drawn to playing with children who are older or younger than they are. There are many developmental, learning and social benefits to mixed age play.

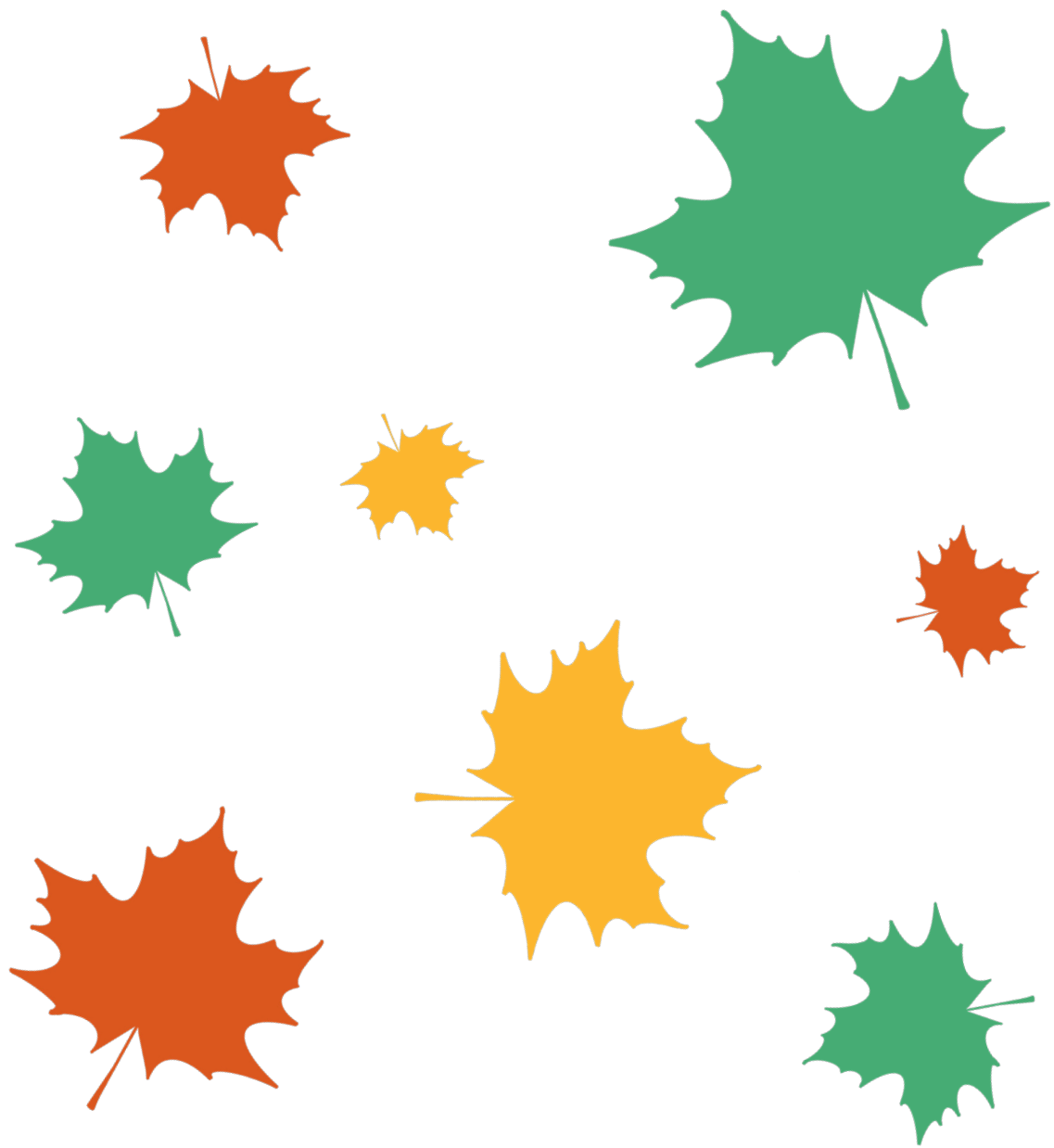
- Children gain motivation and new ideas from each other even when not playing directly together.
- Children have the chance to play in ways they wouldn't be able to with only children their own age.
- Children help each other because they can – maybe they need someone taller, stronger, thinner etc.
- Older children get the opportunity to show care and kindness to younger children.

“Age mixing fosters creativity in older children... age-mixed play is generally less competitive and more creative—in short, more fully playful—than is same-age play. When children of widely different ages play a game together, the focus shifts from winning to having fun. There is no pride to be gained by the older, larger, more-skilled child in beating the much younger one, and the younger one has no expectation of beating the older one.”

Gray, P. 2011

“Removing segregated age play has meant much more socialising between older and younger children. Accidents have reduced.”

Support for Learning Assistant, Scotland



Playing out in all weathers

Playing outside can be encouraged all year round. This allows children to further experiment and use the elements to their advantage. Think ahead about clothing, footwear and the management of wet gear. If your setting does not have outdoor shelters, then consider opening a room indoors or creating shelters with tarpaulins or tents so there is a choice available for children.

Agreements about use of the loose parts

Children should be fully involved in setting up agreements and expectations about playing with and managing the loose parts. Complex or hard-and-fast rules may not help you as much as simple, understandable prompts to make managing loose parts easy.

Tidying up and gathering in

In most settings, gathering loose parts back in is part of the process that enables loose parts play to happen on an ongoing basis. It's an ideal activity for children to get involved in and make decisions about.

Often, settings agree that there will be a signal such as ringing a bell to let children know they need to wind up what they are doing and to start to tidy up.

There are advantages to leaving loose parts out between play sessions so that children can return to things they have played with earlier. Children often gain inspiration from the other children's half-made or abandoned creations and use them as a jumping off point for their play. There is also an argument that children benefit more from the immersion in play and tidying up is less important than the play benefits.

Think about the practicalities and what's reasonable in your setting.

Tidying up tips

- Trolleys, barrows and carts can make gathering loose parts up more fun and less labour intensive for adults and children
- Large loose parts can be quicker to tidy away than lots of small ones
- Little loose parts like cones and shells can easily get scattered outside – they'll need less gathering if they are incorporated into the outdoor environment, for example, a cone pit in a raised bed
- On wet days, quick-dry materials such as nets and organza can be easier to manage than heavy cotton-based materials
- Sorting loose parts into types as you tidy up can be fun and time saving. For example, you can ask one group to fill a trolley with pipes and another to fill a cart with wooden things.

See Tool 21 and Tool 21a for tidy up tips
See Tool 12 for taster sessions guidance

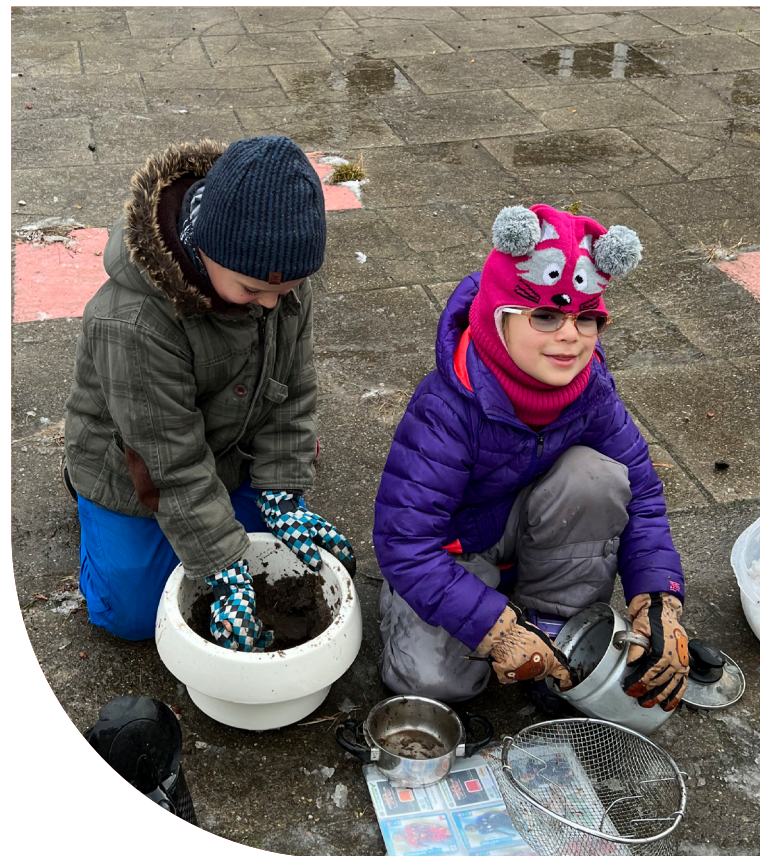
Loose parts play stories

Winter's arrival in the loose parts play space

A winter's morning, the children are quietly playing in the GratoSfera space. Some are 'surfing' using the floor panels, some are playing house and cooking. Suddenly, the weather changes and it starts to snow.

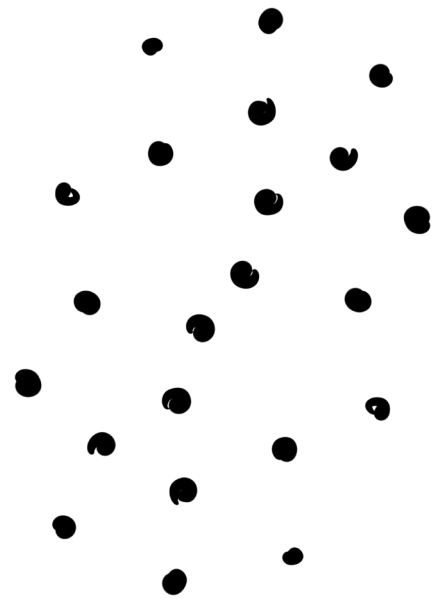
In fear of getting the loose parts material wet, I suggest the children return to the classroom. The children protest and communicate that since it is snowing, they will be preparing Christmas dinner. The surfers have swapped to snowboarding!

We remained outside. It was a pleasure to watch the children continue to play and enjoy the falling snow, catching snowflakes, and observing the variety of their shapes. And through the school windows, the other children watched us with longing and envious eyes as we enjoyed winter's arrival.



Story and photographs from Szkoła Podstawowa nr 5 im., Poland

A play dialogue



Andrew: Girls, shall we play?

Maria: What do you want to play?

Emilia: What's your idea?

Andrew: Let's play exotic office.

Maria: Play what?

Emilia: I know, we need tyres, blankets, umbrellas.

Viktoria: Great idea, I'll bring bottles, a table and I have a packet of crisps.

Andrew: And I'll bring laptops, tablets and phones.

Viktoria: What are we going to do in our office?

Andrew: Viktoria Don't you know? Place orders on the internet.

Viktoria: What orders?

Emilia: Viktoria We need to order Cokes, crisps, chocolate, bananas, strawberries, candy bars, pineapples.

Viktoria: Aha I see, we will make healthy shakes for our customers.

Maria: Oh dear, we still need a blender.

Emilia: Yes, we will be the best exotic office.

Andrew: But chocolate, crisps and chocolate bars are not suitable for cocktails.

Viktoria: Oh Andrew, the snacks are for us.

Emilia: Hihi, you're so cute Andrew.

Andrew: That's right.

Andrew: We have to arrange the office. We'll make armchairs out of tyres and put on blankets, the table will be in front.

Emilia: What about umbrellas?

Andrew: We'll hold them in our hands.

Viktoria: Mixer and products on the table, I'll make cocktails.

Andrew: Good idea Viktoria.

Emilia: Now we'll think of something.

Andrew: Yes, we are the best.

Viktoria: Great fun!

During the sunny day, the children inspired each other to play together. They came up with their own name "exotic office". One by one they brought the necessary things to create the office: 3 tyres, 4 blankets, 3 umbrellas, 2 bottles, a suitcase that served as a table, a laptop, a mobile phone, a tablet, a blender, a packet of crisps, they used coloured blocks for fruit; they used their own chocolate paper and candy bars. The playtime lasted 60 minutes. At the end of the game, the children put the props into the container in the designated places.

Story and photograph from Szkoła Podstawowa nr 5 im., Poland



5.7 Toolbox resources

The tools in this section will allow you to initiate the core activities of introducing play into schools.

The main objectives are:

- to build awareness and knowledge about play among teachers, parents, potential suppliers and donors
- to initiate contact and build relationships with parents and potential suppliers and donors
- To prepare teachers and children for possible risks and challenge in play (more on risk management below).

Tool 1	We're collecting! - poster
Tool 5	Sample letter to sponsors/donors
Tool 7	Handling loose parts safely
Tool 9	Introducing loose parts play – sample letter
Tool 12	Taster play sessions – workshop plan
Tool 17	Benefits of risk, adventure and challenge in play – poster
Tool 20	Benefits of play in schools – poster
Tool 21	Tidy up – poster
Tool 21a	Tidy up - tips
Tool 22	Benefits of play, a child's view - poster
Tool 24	FAQ Brochure

6. Plans, policies and procedures



Photo credit: East Lothian Play Association

Section six aims to equip you with information and guidance on developing some of the plans, policies and procedures that can help your project run smoothly. It offers examples that can be adapted. Section six concludes by signposting towards evaluating and evidencing your project so that you can share more about what you have learned and what has been achieved.

6.1 Developing a play statement

Developing a play statement can help to:

- make a clear statement about the school's commitment to children's right to play and the benefits of play
- give context to introducing loose parts
- allow the voices of children to be heard
- create a shared understanding of play
- help new staff and families to understand your approach to play
- make your case to potential supporters.

Often the process of developing a statement or policies is valuable, helping to identify shared ideas, concerns and priorities. It's an opportunity to consider the place play really has in the life of the school community and to find a shared way of expressing that.

Think about what you need and how you will use it. Do you simply want to be able to say play is really important in your setting and why that is? Do you want to establish a broad vision for play, priorities and principles? In that case, you may need a working document that creates momentum and gives you something to measure progress against.



Steps in developing a play statement

Do some basic groundwork

- Have a look at the wording of article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (See section 2.6)
- Have a look at other statements and policies to see what you like about them
- Find out if your local authority or municipality has a play policy – if so, it might help you to reference it and echo some of the same wording
- Is there a national play strategy – again, it might help you to reference it and echo some of the same wording.

Find out about play from different points of view

- Consult with children, parents, staff, community members etc.
- Think about who will do this finding out – could the children do it?

Use existing information

- Re-visit any play assessment activities – what has been the impact of the changes made? What improvements have happened?
- Link to the self-evaluation approaches used by your school or organisation.

Think about the important things you want to be able to say

- All children have a right to play
- Outdoor play and loose parts play are valued
- Risk and challenge are valued and managed through your process of risk-benefit assessment. (See section 6.5)



Bring it together

- Think about the overall framework and subheadings to make sure they link logically together
- You could run a workshop to involve people in thinking and discussing what's important
- You might choose to have one lead person, or a small group, to edit a draft

Possible headings

- What is play?
- Why support children's play?
- What do children say about playing?
- Your vision for play, aims, and principles
- Balancing risk and benefits in play
- Your priorities and main steps you plan to take
- Important reference points.

Consider how you will present your statement

- Child-friendly documents and formats are often really popular with everyone.
- You might like to present it from the point of view of the children using their words
- You could have a main document plus summaries or headlines
- Make sure people know it exists by presenting it at meetings and events and using it as a tool
- Consider different formats for different purposes, for example, postcards, website, posters, social media posts and videos.



Play-friendly Schools Quality Criterion Two: the school has a written statement on how it supports play⁹

The Play-friendly Schools guidance (p20) points out that the process of developing a written statement is valuable. The whole school community should be involved in its development and in reviewing the statement periodically. The statement acts as guidance for children, staff and families within the school community, and as a statement of principle and commitment to share externally.

You may find the following indicators useful reference points for your statement. More guidance is available in the Quality Criteria booklet.

- We have a written statement that includes our understanding of the nature and value of play, showing an appreciation of the importance of self-organised play.
- We have involved the whole school community in the development and review of this statement.
- The statement shows how the school is committed to supporting children's play and creating sufficient time, space and permission.
- The statement shows how we will make spaces and times for play accessible to all children (girls and boys, disabled children, children with different backgrounds, families, cultures, etc.) and in all weathers.
- The statement clearly outlines the school's approach to risk-taking and how we balance risk and benefit.
- The statement shows how we will develop our knowledge of play and how to support it, through recruitment, training and professional development programmes for staff and parents.
- The statement identifies the people responsible for strategic and operations management in improving opportunities for children to play at school.

⁹ Play-Friendly Schools (playfriendlyschoools.eu)

6.2 Opracowanie planu działania

Introducing loose parts play can be a significant undertaking in an organisation such as a school so an action plan is a necessary tool. Involve children as much as possible in action planning.

Here are some possible elements of an action plan. Plans evolve so you don't need to have every point decided from the start.

- What is the intended outcome? Have a clear vision. Refer back to your assessment activities. (See section 4)
- What needs to be done, by whom and by when? Think about specific actions, broken down into achievable tasks.
 - Where will the loose parts be stored?
 - Where will the loose parts be used?
 - Are any modifications to the space required?
 - How will loose parts be acquired?
 - How will you check incoming loose parts in a systematic way?
 - How will you maintain the loose parts – what routines need to be put in place?
 - How will the loose parts play sessions be introduced?
 - How will you put risk-benefit assessments in place and who will keep them up to date?
 - Who will monitor and refine the loose parts play sessions and how will it be done?
 - When will the original play space assessment be re-visited and how will you evaluate the impact?
 - How will you keep loose parts play going?
- Who will facilitate loose parts play taster sessions and how will they be trained and supported?
- Who will facilitate loose parts play on an ongoing basis and how will they be trained and supported?
- What challenges may need to be overcome and what strategies will be used to address them?
- How will you communicate a rounded picture of what's happening? (Challenges, actions, success stories, learning etc.)
- How will everyone who needs to be involved have an opportunity to have their say?
- Do you need to link the action plan to wider improvements within your school or to current local or national initiatives?
- What will you need to do to ensure this provision becomes embedded into the life of the school?

Action plan format

You could use a simple format such as this to record and update actions. Paper copies in a ring binder or electronic excel sheet would work well. Whatever format you use, make sure it is available to everyone involved and regularly updated.

Actions	By when (achievable date)	Complete?	Notes/further steps
1. Where will the loose parts be stored?			
<i>Example of an action: Mrs. D's class to compare storage units in other local schools and find out the pros and cons</i>			
<i>Example of an action: report back to loose parts committee with recommendation and cost</i>			
2. Where will the loose parts be used?			

And so on...

6.3 Risk-benefit assessment for loose parts play



Playing outside with loose parts all-year round in almost all weathers provides children with experiences which cannot be replicated inside. Alongside this comes the opportunity to enjoy challenging experiences and develop a range of skills.

Risk-benefit assessment is an approach to risk management which considers these benefits alongside the risks. It is about taking a balanced and proportionate approach to the risk assessment process.

In the UK, it's an approach supported by the Health and Safety Executive in their high-le-

vel statement, *Children's Play and Leisure: Promoting a Balanced Approach*¹⁰ and also in Scotland by the Care Inspectorate's position statement *Positive approach to risk in play* (2016)¹¹.

The International School Grounds Alliance (ISGA) produced a *Declaration on Risk in Play and Learning* (2017)¹². The Declaration highlights how risk-taking is essential for children's well-being. While promoting risk-taking on school grounds may raise questions of liability for schools and concerns for parents, it points out that risk is essential for the development of healthy young people.

¹⁰ Health and Safety Executive *childs-play-statement*

¹¹ Care Inspectorate *Positive Approach to Risk in Play*

¹² *Risk in Play and Learning* — ISGA (internationalschoolgrounds.org)

Risk-benefit assessment – a definition



Risk-benefit assessment means that the play provider weighs, with equal consideration, the duty to protect children from avoidable serious harm and the duty to provide them with stimulating, adventurous play opportunities to let children take risks when they play without putting them in undue danger of serious harm

Ball, D. et al, 2013

A typical risk-benefit assessment covers points such as:

- benefits of the activity or experience
- risks
- local factors, precedents and comparisons, to take into account
- decisions made
- actions and how the ongoing management of the risk will be dealt with.

Written risk-benefit assessments help to clarify the thought processes before arriving at a decision. Decisions might include:

- increase the possibility of risk and challenge
- do nothing or monitor the situation
- mitigate or manage the risk
- remove the risk.

Things to take into account when making a decision:

- the unique context of each setting
- the differing physical, social and cognitive abilities of children and young people
- how well you know the children
- prevailing weather conditions
- the physical environment.

While written risk-benefit assessments can be done in advance for predictable activities, environments or use of equipment, however, much risk assessment is done dynamically as play happens.

Dynamic risk assessment

In dynamic risk assessment you use your professional judgement to decide, at the time something is happening, if any intervention is necessary.

At any one time there will be many things happening in a play space. Adults are likely to be observing unobtrusively and ready to intervene if required. Making the decision to intervene and how to 'pitch' that intervention is a considerable skill.

If a child is likely to come to serious harm, then a rapid response is necessary. For most other occasions, a steadier approach is required. Knowing children well, their usual abilities and dispositions helps to make considered judgements.

Some options to draw on

- Stop, look and listen, think, act, reflect (See section 6.)
- Continue to observe from a distance
- Observe more closely, quietly letting the children know you are there – this can change behaviour in itself
- Step in with a question such as "I wonder what might happen if..."
- Introduce a new possibility "If we tried using this, what do think might happen?"
- Give a more direct message "I'm concerned that..." or "It's time to stop."

Some tips for developing confidence in dynamic risk-benefit assessment

- Reflect on your personal experience – someone who loves extreme sports may have a different attitude to risk to someone who is scared of heights. Reflect on how you can make objective decisions despite your own dispositions.
- Discuss real situations and decisions in staff meetings – what range of options were available to the adult? What influenced the decision they made?
- Use reflective questions to examine situations – did my interventions increase opportunities for children to play? Did my intervention support children to manage risks for themselves? Should I have intervened when I didn't?
- Remember that children are also assessing risk as they play in the same way we risk assess unconsciously as we drive a car, walk down a busy street or play a sport.

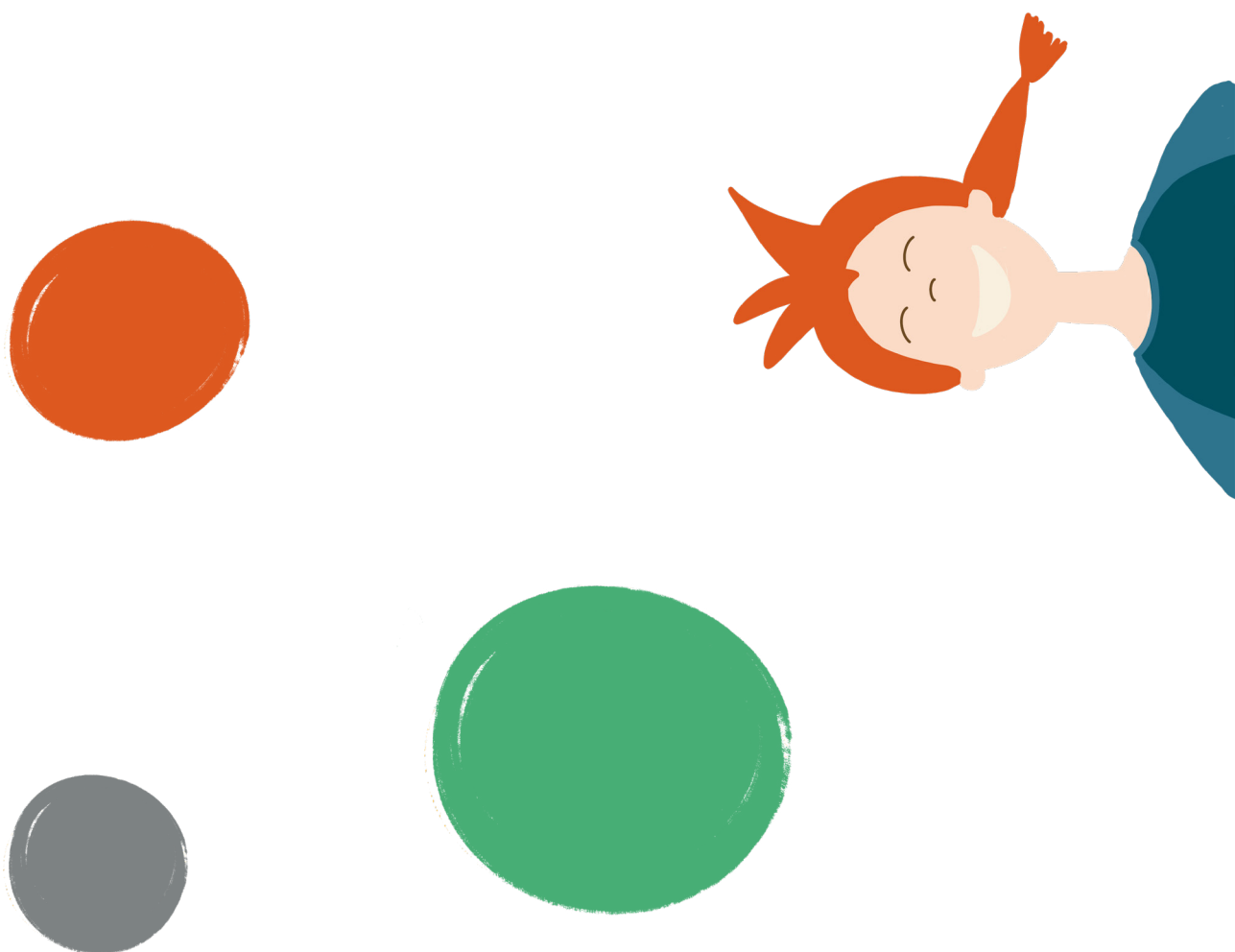
Children and risk assessment

Children can be involved in risk-benefit assessment but how they are involved matters. It should be appropriate to the level of understanding and interest of the child so that it is meaningful to them.

Risk-benefit assessment can be participative. As well as getting different points of view, it will ensure greater support and understanding from the whole community.

It should be a positive approach that uses common sense, appropriate language and is pitched at an appropriate level. For example, the phrase “What do we need to remember when playing with...” is a useful opener that avoids overtly focusing on the risks.

When children raise a concern, adults can ask for their advice about managing this concern thus promoting the value of children being capable of problem solving, taking responsibility for themselves and looking out for others.



Keep things up to date

Keep the written risk-benefit assessments up to date. Encourage everyone to help keep them fresh, especially if a minor accident or near miss occurs. They need to be living, working documents that accurately reflect procedures and practice. Think about where they need to be displayed or stored to ensure this happens.

If your school or setting is run or managed by a local authority or larger organisation, then you will have to follow their risk assessment procedures. They may not include reference to the benefits. In this situation, attach the benefits as a separate sheet or add an extra column to the standard risk assessment forms you use. This can be done in several ways:

- stating the general benefits of outdoor play
- stating the specific benefits of using loose parts
- stating the specific benefit in relation to the specific risk, for example the benefits of children playing when it is wet or icy outside.



Ensure all staff are aware of the risk-benefit assessment and procedures for checking and tidying loose parts. Engaging with health and safety issues through a risk-benefit approach can focus staff on the benefits of risky play"

Knight, 2011:113

Tool 10

Risk-benefit assessment - sample

Tool 17

Benefits of risk, adventure and challenge in play – poster



Can you think of an example of play involving risk and challenge which has provoked different responses from adults in your school or setting? What are the consequences for children's play depending on which response was made?

6.4 Monitoring and evaluating your loose parts play project

Monitoring and evaluating the impact of loose parts ensures the effectiveness of your efforts by showing things like what is working, what's making a difference, where there are gaps and what needs to be improved.

Monitoring and evaluation can help you to share what you are doing with various stakeholders and provide evidence for funding applications.

You may seek to monitor whether introducing loose parts play has made a difference to:

- the children's experiences and wellbeing
- achievements and attainment of individuals or groups.

You may wish to monitor whether:

- all the children feel loose parts play is available to them
- all children access loose parts play on a frequent and regular basis
- children have sufficient opportunities for play and time outside.

You need to review and ensure systems are in place to keep the loose parts provision fresh and interesting. You may wish to review whether there are:

- sufficient amounts and diversity of loose parts
- opportunities for children to engage with 'variables' in the way that Simon Nicholson described them (see section 2.7)
- your approach supports children to play in all weathers, seasons, and with loose parts in the environment.

Children read the social and physical landscape of a place. You might want to consider whether:

- children have sufficient freedom and autonomy over where, when and how they can play with loose parts
- the physical environment is tended and cared for
- you have strategies to manage environmental impact
- your practice helps to develop an ethic of care and stewardship.

What to do with the information you gather?

It is helpful to present the evidence you have gathered in ways that are useable, useful and persuasive to all stakeholders, including the school community, parents and carers, those who donate loose parts, the municipality or managing body for the school.

- Statistics gathered can be presented visually, helping the audience see the quantitative differences
- Photo journeys can capture the state of play, before and after the introduction of loose parts. This is also useful for school grounds improvements
- Explanatory notes help people know what they are looking at
- Evidence gathered from research articles helps stakeholders understand the reasons behind the need for loose parts play and its benefits. Your evidence is likely to substantiate the research
- Quotes from a range of people capturing what they say about your loose parts play provision should include the voices of children and staff
- Storybooks and videos can capture the children telling the story of what happened from their perspective, and the benefits
- Formal reports may be most useful and expected for some audiences.



Children can be actively involved, if they choose, in capturing information about your loose parts play provision. What do you think the possible impact will be on children's play if they are also involved in monitoring and evaluating? Are there pros and cons to consider?



What's the most powerful thing you have ever heard a child or adult say about their experiences of playing?

Loose parts play stories

Loose parts in the classroom

We've had small loose parts play in the classroom all year. We've got bottle tops, bits of string and ribbon, bits of wood and bamboo. When we stopped it for a couple of weeks because of library visits, the children asked for it to be back. I think that it has helped them with the outdoor play and everybody seems to be involved. We have three boys who regularly lie on a blanket. We decided not to say anything or to stop them and they have just started to take things into the blanket.



Story and photograph from Windygoul Primary School, Scotland/East Lothian Play Association

Adventures with tyres in the playground

The school got lots of old car tyres for the playground. Tyres are among the favourite and most used loose parts. The children from different classes and different ages playing together, have lots of ideas about how to use the tyres including playing sports, building towers and making houses. They figure out how they can use the equipment, how big the tower can be. The children, not the teachers, decide how they play.

One of their favourite games with the tyres is to have one child stand in the middle of a tyre on the ground. Then the others put more tyres one by one onto the first one (while the child remains inside). The tower is built as high as they can, around two meters high. When the tower is ready, the child in the middle tries to climb out from the inside. The tower is of course very wobbly, so the other kids are trying to keep it together, holding it from all sides. If the child can climb out without the tower falling down, everyone is cheering.



Story and photographs from Iskolánk tanulóiért Alapítvány, Hungary

6.5 Toolbox resources

The tools in this section can help you to:

- take care of the formal aspects of organising play in school
- create a common school policy on how to support play that involves the whole school community
- plan the safety and risk management aspects.

Tool 4	Consent form - sample
Tool 6	Developing a play policy – poster
Tool 10	Risk-benefit assessment – sample

7. How are we doing – ongoing evaluation and reflection



Photo credit: Majthényi Adolf Primary School, Slovakia

In section seven, we delve deeper into our loose parts play evaluation and reflection. Beginning with an introduction to Professional Enquiry, we move through suggestions for documenting children's play. Critical cartography is a method rich in potential for understanding the **how** rather than the **what** and **why** of children's play. As well as integral to the research process of this loose parts play project, critical cartography can become part of the ongoing development and documentation of the space.

7.1 Professional enquiry – why and how

As we introduce a play-based approach in our schools and nurseries, we continually explore the reasons this approach is beneficial and what we are learning about it as practitioners. We may be testing ideas and ways of working that are new to us.

We can do this through a process of Professional Enquiry. This is a 'finding out' or an investigation with a rationale and approach that can be explained or defended (Menter et al., 2011).

This type of enquiry “should lead to deep transformative learning which significantly informs and influences professionals' understandings, practice and subsequent impact.” (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2021)

An essential part of the process is to consider how we will critically engage with the approach to develop our own knowledge and understanding, whilst keeping children at the centre. Doing this helps ensure sustainable change.

“Quality teaching is developed through cycles of inquiry and action designed to increase the impact of teaching on the engagement and success of students.”

Robinson, V. 2011



Illustration adapted from General Teaching Council of Scotland

Professional enquiry can help us to:

- engage with research
- develop and individualise our own learning
- collaborate with and learn from others
- ensure that our pedagogical approaches have a positive impact on children's experiences.

Deciding on an approach

"Professional expertise is not just about having the evidence or being aware of it. It's also about knowing how to judge the evidence and knowing what to do with it." (*Hargreaves, A. & Fullan, M., 2012*)

- What is my focus and why?
- What research will help inform my thinking?
- What questions will guide my enquiry?
- What is my plan of action?
- How will I measure changes or impact?
- What is my data telling me?
- What is my informed action going to be?

Using data to underpin Professional Enquiry enables us to consider and refine our research questions.

To carry out your enquiry there are a number of models and methods to draw on including those described in this manual. The General Teaching Council of Scotland also shared examples of spiral inquiry, lesson study and action research methods¹³.

Collaboration with children

The Convention on the Rights of the Child promotes the rights of children and young people to have a say in things that affect their lives. Collaborating with children from the beginning enables practitioners to meaningfully add to their data and individualise their approach. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as observing behaviours and engagement, gathering views, beliefs and expectations and exploring evidence of learning together with the children.

Playing with loose parts enables children to explore and experiment, learn through trial and error, encounter challenges and attempt to solve problems. Similarly, and all while keeping children at the centre, Professional Enquiry enables:

- collaboration and research
- exploration and improvement
- a celebration of best and next practice.

¹³ The 'How' of Practitioner Enquiry | General Teaching Council for Scotland (gtcs.org.uk)

7.2 Documenting children's play

Documenting children's play can help to:

- raise understanding of play
- support professional enquiry
- aid communication with families to illustrate children's experiences
- share what is happening in your school, nursery or setting.

(See section 3.7 Sharing your loose parts play 'message')

Documenting children's play can also form part of your practice and relationship with children.

Documenting children's play can help:

- make children's interests and processes visible
- children to feel listened to
- remind us of what happened as a tool for reflection
- prompt discussion and reinterpretation.

Methods of documenting children's play

Using a range of methods and involving different people, helps to present a more complete picture of children's play. Think about who is involved and whose experiences are being explored across a range of methods, such as:

- observations, reflections
- interviews, questionnaires
- illustrations
- maps
- tours
- photographs
- videos.



Photo credit: East Lothian Play Association

Photographing children's play

Photography is a simple way to document play. Before taking any photographs or videos, ensure permissions are in place and that you follow any rules in the setting. If possible, allow children to take photos too. Here are a few tips for photographing children's play:

- Be patient – first observe, take your time and take photographs when it is meaningful
- Be purposeful - have a reason for taking the photograph and focus on that
- Consider perspective – it is often best to photograph children down at their level however, changing the camera angle may also offer an interesting perspective
- Capture movement – blurred photos can be effective to show movement and action
- Capture expression - capturing emotions may be more effective than writing about them and enable discussion with the children
- Tell stories - you may not need people in your photos. Take photos of things the children are interested in or invite children to take the photographs.

Presenting your documentation

You may collect a large amount of material. Allow time to review, reflect and organise all this material. Presenting documentation is a starting point to engage children, families and colleagues in discussions. Be open to surprises and new perspectives that may emerge in this process.

Consider the different reasons you are documenting children's play and how this will be reflected in the presentation. a simple display that is updated regularly or shared on social media may be sufficient.



In your setting, what is the relationship between documentation, planning and assessment? Who is involved in documenting children's play? How can you ensure children's views are gathered and presented?



7.3 Critical cartography - a brief overview

This section is intended as a short introduction to critical cartography and is drawn from *Rules for re-enchanting our relationship with play* (Russell, W. 2020).

Critical cartography is an approach to documenting how play happens in a space

Critical cartography pays attention to the conditions that support the emergence of play (rather than focusing on the benefits of play for individual children). The process considers the culture and atmosphere of a space as well as people, objects and physical features.

Critical cartography concerns itself with the “entanglements”, movement, rhythms and atmosphere in a playspace. It looks at the how rather than the what and why.

By using drawings, maps, photographs and stories to gather multiple perspectives and experiences, critical cartography questions habits, assumptions and routines. If we try to understand how moments of play emerge, or are constrained, we can better support children’s right to play. In this way, critical cartography can become a dimension of reflective practice for your team.

The process also really lends itself to children’s participation, creating maps, taking photographs, sharing stories, engaging with adults. Listening to children’s views and ensuring they feel listened to is an important part of creating an inclusive, welcoming play space for everyone.

In using critical cartography, you might want to think about who can be involved at various stages – teachers, the head teacher, principal, playground supervisors, caretakers, families, visiting specialists, for example. Different accounts will be generated, creating a collective wisdom. These multiple accounts can then be examined and scrutinised to see what more can be done in response.

Critical cartography: methods of interconnecting documentation

- **Maps** – ask several members of the team to create maps of the space from memory. When you come together, share and compare the maps - you're not looking for accuracy but for what they reveal. What elements have been missed by some or forgotten? What has more importance for some? What seems to resonate? The maps can be joined together to create a large joint map. Keep this to populate with other forms of documentation and take photographs of it.
- **Significant spaces** - take pictures of areas of the playspace that have meaning (positive or negative or a mixture). You could position the photographs on the map and talk about why they were chosen. What are the stories connected to these places? These conversations might give rise to suggestions for changing the space to see what might happen.
- **Stories** - stories bring the map to life. They can be written or drawn on post-it notes and positioned on the map. Present small, everyday moments of playfulness in detail, without interpretation. Take photographs of the story-filled map.
- **Lines** – lines bring about a focus on movement. Take a printed version of the map or a piece of paper into the play space and create lines following the movements of a child, adult or an object. Pay attention to the movement, flows, forces and rhythms within the space. Make the lines as detailed as possible – every meander, every detour, every stopping point. You can add notes. These lines help to bring the static map to life, showing how different elements of the space are connected.



Critical cartography isn't a series of steps - you can choose to move between methods and add variations, such as focussing on different senses. For example, if you close your eyes to pay attention to children mixing 'potions' with water and rose petals, your impressions of the stories and intentions may differ from watching.

Have fun and be creative with the documentation and presentation. You could create comic strips, animations, or use digital technologies, depending on the skills in your team.

Critical cartography brings our attention to how the space works, everyday moments of playfulness and how these emerge. It works with the mundane rather than the exceptional. Giving our full attention to these moments and considering all the conditions around them, can reveal what is often overlooked or forgotten.

With frequent pressure to define play and explain the benefits of play, we can perhaps lose sight of its playful essence. Critical cartography helps us to respond to and develop spaces with a renewed sense of joy in children's play.

The mapping documentation introduced here helps with this. It offers an account of conditions for play and how children can find time and space for playing.



What methods can you use to capture everyday playfulness. How can you involve children throughout the process? How can you present and share these moments of everyday playfulness with colleagues and families?

Stories of loose parts play

A question of who and what influences freedom to play

I'm watching two children sliding down a muddy slope. The grass is worn in a narrow strip where children frequently play. It is very muddy. Two other children tug my arm saying, "They're not allowed to do that. They got into trouble by their teacher at break."

They immediately run off to talk to the two children. After some discussion, the two who had been sliding in the mud find a plank of wood. It looks heavy and carrying it between them, they struggle to get up the muddy hill. They go a longer way round and put the plank at the top, across where they had sliding. Lots of children gather round looking at it and discussing. After a while, one child runs over and tells me, "That will stop people sliding down."



Story and photograph from Windygoul Primary School, Scotland/ East Lothian Play Association

Mapping changes in the play space

So many changes have been made on the school yard - a kitchen corner for children with new kinds of loose parts, ropes stretched between the trees, new trees and bushes planted, cable drums placed out, a new sandpit created and the bug monitor made by children. The school uses the whole school yard now the works are finished.

Some of the changes were made by teachers together with parents and students. Most of the teachers in the school like loose parts play; they like to spend time in the school yard, they like the space, they have pleasant memories and stories related to the space and loose parts play.

Here we see a base the children made from tyres which they defend from teachers.



Story and photograph from Základná škola Adolfa Majthényiho s vyučovacím jazykom maďarským - Majthényi Adolf Alapiskola, Slovakia



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Glossary

Adventure playgrounds: Adventure playgrounds (or junk playgrounds) are spaces dedicated to children's play which first began in Denmark in the 1940s. Children use loose parts—fabric, ropes, old tyres, timber, tools – to create their own play environments and are able to make fires, dig, build – and demolish – dens and other structures. Skilled adults, known as playworkers, provide support when needed.

Affordance: The affordances of an object or space are all the things it has the potential to do or be. For example, a brick wall may mark a clear boundary between a pavement and a garden but for many children it offers something to sit on, walk along, balance on, hide behind or jump off.

Creativity: the capacity to generate ideas that have value to the individual, to look at familiar things with a fresh eye, to examine problems with an open mind, make connections, learn from mistakes and use the imagination to explore new possibilities. Ultimately creativity is the ability to make the world anew, to shape the future and enrich the here and now. (Creative Scotland, 2013)

Loose parts: The theory of loose parts was proposed in the 1970's by architect Simon Nicholson, who believed that it is the loose parts in our environment that empower our creativity.

Loose parts are objects and materials that children can manipulate, move and combine when they play. They are often scrap, natural or recycled materials making them low-cost, easily available, ever-changing, inclusive and friendly to the environment. Loose parts can be used in any number of ways, they don't have a predetermined use, and it doesn't matter if they are destroyed during play. They can be small like twigs and corks or large like tyres, wooden pallets and tarpaulins.

An object or material comes into the category of loose parts if it is available to be used freely, set loose from its original purpose. Children can play with it, manipulate it, move it and combine it with other objects or materials as they choose.

Playwork: The theory and practice of playwork recognises that children's play should be 'freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated.' Playwork is the work of creating and maintaining spaces for children to play and is a skilled profession that facilitates, enriches and enhances children's play. It is guided by the Playwork Principles.

Play: Children's play is any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves. Play is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. It may take infinite forms, but the key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Play is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood and is an essential component of children's development. (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013)

Playworker: Playworkers enable children to extend their own play and protect and enhance the play space so that it is a rich play environment. Playworkers ensure that the play space is inclusive – supporting all children to make the most of the opportunities available in their own way. They understand the need for children to encounter and create uncertainty and challenge as part of their play. Playworkers neither direct nor organise play, they are trained to judge when or whether to intervene.

Play types: Play types can be described as the different behaviours we can see when children are playing and there have been numerous attempts to categorise different types of play. Play theorist Bob Hughes describes each play type (social play, rough and tumble play, deep play, role play etc.) as 'both distinctly and subtly different from the others.'

Risk-benefit assessment: Risk-benefit assessment means that the play provider weighs, with equal consideration, the duty to protect children from avoidable serious harm and the duty to provide them with stimulating, adventurous play opportunities to let children take risks when they play without putting them in undue danger of serious harm. (Ball, D. et al, 2013)

Scrapstore: a scrapstore is an organisation based on the principle of re-use. The basic operational principle of all scrapstore is the same, although their business models may differ significantly. Scrapstores operate by taking re-usable, safe, clean waste products ('scrap') and re-distributing them. Usually, these materials come from local industries and are donated.



National summaries of regulations applying to loose parts

Slovakia (Detailed information is also available in Slovak.)

School playgrounds and playgrounds in facilities for children and young people are regulated by legislations and standards, which also apply to all other public playgrounds in the country. This standard specifies requirements that protect the child from a hazard that is unlikely to be foreseeable when using the device as directed or as reasonably foreseeable. These regulations mainly apply to the permanent, formal elements of the playground, such as climbing frames, slides or swings. What other objects and toys can be on the playgrounds of schools and facilities is not precisely determined or regulated in this way. This is mostly the responsibility of the director of the facility, who can regulate this through the school policies and procedures. However, certain parts of playground safety standards may also apply to objects used in free play. In this section, we have given some examples of regulations of this nature. For example, certain tools, such as a hammer or a saw are usually not allowed in schools according to the school governance. However, the institution can decide to allow the use of these tools under appropriate supervision. The school governance also usually does not allow the use of open fire, however, it also may be allowed under appropriate supervision in outdoor areas.

The school policies and procedures are issued by the principal of the school or the facility after consultation with the municipal bodies and the pedagogical council. This may include a list of items used in children's free play, while the purpose of the use of these items as well as the conditions of their use are precisely determined. In addition, we recommend to also include in the school policies all the measures that the school has ordered to prevent accidents. We have listed a number of suggestions and recommendations on what the school policies should include in relation to loose parts play. We recommend that schools and school facilities discuss the use of loose parts and the related measures with the children's parents and request written consent for participation.

If items used for free play are damaged or are considered dangerous, they must be discarded immediately - stored out of reach of children in containers designed for this purpose. It is also important to properly separate and dispose these objects. Proper disposal of various items is regulated by law.

The use of storage facilities in schools and children's facilities is not generally regulated. It is the responsibility of the principal or the operator of the facility. The operators of most kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in Slovakia are local and regional self-governments, some schools are established by church or private founders. For the placement of containers and storage spaces on the premises of school facilities, principals need the consent of the operator of the facility.



Poland (Detailed information is also available in Polish.)

This section focuses on issues and topics related to the Polish adaptation of the loose parts project, such as the safety of children's play equipment and the storage and disposal of items.

General principles for GratoSfera (free play area)

In accordance with Health and Safety guidelines, the qualification of items for GRATOSFERA equipment should be made by a member of staff appointed by the Headteacher, who will properly assess the educational suitability of the item and its 'technical condition' for safe use during children's play. Loose parts must not pose a hazard to children and should be free of sharp, protruding, moving, loose parts that may cause injury to the child during play. It is imperative that glass objects, even in small quantities, are eliminated. All objects should be free from contamination with hazardous chemicals, grease, etc. Textile items must guarantee the health safety of children in terms of biological hazards: viruses, parasites, mites, insects, etc. The arrangement of objects in the container should follow the principle: heavy objects placed lowest and all objects stable.

Free play should take place at the designated time, under the direct supervision of the teacher, who should ensure the safety of the children.

The Department of Municipal Economy of the Municipal Office in Gdańsk points out that rubbish which is not suitable for further use should be disposed of properly and responsibly. Raw materials should be segregated and placed in an appropriate container at the waste collection point organised by the respective school. Unusual and hazardous waste such as furniture, trolleys, carpets, rugs, boards etc. which cannot be left in the rubbish bins must be taken by the school to the appropriate disposal site in accordance with the GRATOSFERA EQUIPMENT table.

Special attention should be paid to electrical and electronic items. Waste electrical and electronic equipment may contain substances or metals that are toxic and therefore should not be in the GRATOSFERA. If they do end up there, they must be complete, without any dismantled elements, and they must not pose a threat to users or the environment.

In the Gdansk Municipal Waste Management System schools constitute real estates where no residents reside, therefore they may deliver free of charge (within the fee for municipal waste management) to the PSZOK (selective collection point for municipal waste) only such waste as: paper, packaging glass, metals, plastics, multi-material packaging and green waste. Other waste can be delivered by schools to the Recycling Plant according to the valid price list or using commercial services offered by companies collecting such waste in the city of Gdansk.

Hungary (Detailed information is also available in Hungarian.)

In Hungary there are three main layers of health and safety regulation in schools. On the highest level, the National Public Education Act of 2011 declares that students have the right to learn in a healthy and safe environment, and for an adequate amount of free time and entertainment. Students also have the right to indicate to an adult if they notice a problem with any equipment they use in the school. However it is not specified in detail what “a healthy and safe environment” means other than a few basic details (such as adequate temperature). The second level that schools need to follow are the regulations indicated by their Regional Educational Authority, or if not specified on this level either, the school itself can create rules for their students and staff to follow in their local policy.

In case the use of loose parts is not mentioned at one of these levels it is within the authority of the Head Teacher to decide whether certain loose parts can be used for playtime or not. This was reiterated in the interviews we conducted with school leaders, and the most important factor they mentioned when considering the potential use of loose parts is whether there is a chance for it to cause harm to the students. It is important to note that the overall responsibility of monitoring children’s safety in the school ultimately lies with the supervising adult (in Hungarian schools, this is most often the teaching staff).

When deciding about the introduction of loose part play, school leaders must weigh the potential dangers and the benefits of the items. One school leader describe how they are minimising risks:

- checking wooden surfaces for splinters and nails
- banning toxic materials, ingredients, that can cause harm if it enters into the mouth (plants, paints, etc.)
- checking the size (if it is too small, it is a choke hazard; if it is too big and heavy, it can be very dangerous (eg: old furniture, logs)
- banning glass items, or any other material that can break easily
- items in which children can not only hide, but can be enclosed, are not advisable
- sharp objects, metal objects with which children can cause harm easily and quickly is not allowed. Saws and tent pegs are in this category.

Other school leaders have different judgements on certain items. For example, another Head Teacher wouldn't ban large objects because of their weight, nor items that children can hide in.

Going through the list of loose parts items, we can conclude that most items can be used without problem, some should be used only with close supervision (such as fire). Individual judgement is needed whether it can be used with supervision or is not acceptable at all). Finally, adults must regularly check the items for damage and when a previously used item becomes waste, they must consider its disposal.

Scotland

In Scotland, the Care Inspectorate is supportive of adventurous play experiences:

“The Care Inspectorate supports taking a positive approach to risk in order to achieve the best outcomes for children... For example, we encourage services to use risk assessment to support children to enjoy potentially hazardous activities such as woodwork using real tools, exploring nature and playing in the mud and rain. We do not expect written risk assessments to be carried out for daily play activities.” (The Care Inspectorate, 2016:18)

Though the Care Inspectorate does not expect written risk assessments for daily play activities, you do have a responsibility to carry out risk-benefit assessments for your loose parts play provision.

The risk-benefit assessment will include your plans to ensure loose parts are checked prior to use and your system for ongoing assessment. Items do get broken as children play with them and some materials may perish, rust or rot. The risks or hazards associated with some items may change according to weather conditions, for example becoming unsuitable in wet weather, windy or very hot conditions. All checks should be documented and supported by clear policies within your setting.

All staff should be aware of the risk-benefit assessment and procedures for checking and tidying loose parts. Engaging with health and safety issues through a risk-benefit approach can also help focus staff on the benefits of risky play (Knight, 2011:113).

Best practise and a rights-based approach, suggest children should be able to participate fully in activities (Knight, 2011:13). Children should be invited to share their experiences to inform planning and reviewing your loose parts play provision. Involving children throughout the process helps loose parts play run more smoothly.

There are no specific regulations relating to loose parts in the UK nor a list of permitted loose parts. As resources used for loose parts play are generally not toys, the Toy Safety Standard BS EN 71 does not apply.

Often common sense and context will be required to assess the suitability of an item for children’s play. However, there are some materials that you should take extra care around and, in some cases, avoid using. See the English language version of the Loose Parts Play Manual for fuller information.

Useful sources for further information:

- Care Inspectorate, Positive Approach to Risk in Play www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/guidance/9-professional/2961-positive-approach-to-risk-in-play Accessed 22 November 2022
- Health and Safety Executive, Children's Play and Leisure: promoting a balanced approach www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/chlds-play-statement.htm Last accessed 22 November 2022
- Knight, S. (2011) Risk and Adventure in Early Years Outdoor Play. London: SAGE.
- Play Scotland, Managing Risk webpage www.playscotland.org/learn/health-safety/managing-risk-play-provision Accessed 22 November 2022
- Potter, D. (1997) Risk and Safety in Play. Oxon: Taylor & Francis.

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