

Loose Parts & Toddlers

Transcript for Episode 4 - ronniespreschool.com/from-my-perspective/loose-parts-and-toddlers

Welcome back to "From My Perspective: Taking Theory to Practice." This is the second video in the loose part series and we are going to talk all about "Loose Parts & Toddlers." Earlier I asked: "What holds you back? What would motivate you?" Thank you to those of you who provided great questions and today I'm going to answer them. I'll also provide other tips and ways to reflect on our practices to make us feel more confident in our roles as educators. Make sure to grab the "Reflective Workbook" in the show notes - this will support you in reflecting on your practice and creating a plan for staying motivated to continue your loose parts journey with toddlers.

Let's get started!

Common observations described by Educators are that toddlers throw, dump, and mouth the items. These actions are sometimes viewed as a hindrance or not purposeful play. I'm going to challenge that view.

We need to ask ourselves "What is purposeful play?" Are we looking at a child's play from their perspective or from ours? Do we see their play as learning and discovery or as destructive and annoying? Reflecting on our views and being honest with ourselves is key. Any changes we want to make won't happen if we have the wrong perspective.

How do we change that? When we look at the acts of throwing and dumping from a child's perspective the first thing I go to is Schemas.

In her book *Schemas: A Practical Handbook*, Laura England states that "a schema is often referred to as a pattern of play, that is used to describe the repetitive behaviours of young children." "They allow young children to construct knowledge and understanding of how the world works." Throwing and dumping would be examples of the "Trajectory Schema." Children are exploring vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. When we understand and see their throwing as purposeful we have a mindshift and can then plan for these patterns in behaviours.

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Two tips I would suggest for throwing and dumping are:

1)What can they throw and dump?

As I mentioned last week, having the right kind and number of variables from the theory of loose parts is key to using them in you programs and the children's play.

2)Where can they throw and dump?

Make a safe space or plan a provocation around their interest in throwing and dumping.

Check out the photos below for trajectory play ideas, as well as my pinterest board for ideas to support the children's play of throwing and dumping.

I want to share a personal story explaining my perspective and the mindshift I went through when it comes to viewing children's play as purposeful to them. While running my program, my little guy loved to crawl through a pile of loose parts (in particular a pile of glass stones and shells).

He would swish his body in them, spreading them all over the floor. Making a pretty big mess, at least from my original perspective.

When I began to learn about his needs and the connections with sensory processing I quickly changed my perspective and saw his play was purposeful for him because he needed the sensory stimulation that his body would get from it: the sounds from the items moving, the tactile input from feeling the items on his body, the visual input from engaging with colorful glass stones, proprioceptive input from crawling on the floor. He was happy as a clam swishing all around in it. Especially with toddlers, being open to changing our perspective on what purposeful play is allows us to grow as Educators, plan better and make a more engaging learning environment for everyone.

Staying motivated with bringing loose parts into your toddler program is a very real element. The best way I know how to do that is to share my story with loose parts and what motivated me to keep going.

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When I first started embracing loose parts I ran a mixed age program that had children from 12 months to 3 years. I was very excited but also unsure and nervous about the safety, cleanup, and storage. I started small and simple. The children and I took this journey together. At first I would only put out juice lids, rocks, shells and pom poms on the table. Then, as soon as they were done, I would clean it all up! Now that I look back I was completely micromanaging the situation and defeating the whole purpose of loose parts play and how children learn through play. I continued to do research by reading articles and blogs. I gained lots of inspiration from the "Loose Parts Play Group" on Facebook. When I decided to change out the plastic food in our home area, I replaced it with corks, glass stones, pom poms, and rocks (I no longer had infants at this time). I got my first glimpse of the magic of loose parts. The play went deeper with the kids asking questions, problem solving, showing independence, and complex social engagement. This motivated me to keep going and slowly our whole environment had loose parts mixed in with traditional open-ended resources.

Then I wanted to make sure I had a good grasp on the theory of loose parts and not just the physical materials. I have probably read the paper written by Simon Nicholson at least 5-6 times in the last year alone. Each time I read it a different key statement sticks with me and I reflect to see how it appears in my practice. Has my view on loose parts changed over the years, of course! Reflecting on my practice and being willing to take risks and question what I do is what made me more confident in my role, and this greatly benefited the children.

To answer your questions, Heather said she was held back by the mouthing of loose parts. I talk about how to overcome that in the previous episode of ensuring you have the right kind and number of variables that allow for that type of play. Teri asked how to clean and sanitize loose parts. When it comes to the variables that are metal, plastic, and glass/ceramics these can be easily sanitized and cleaned within your regulations.

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Fabrics can go in the washer - you can use a fabric bag to protect them if needed. As for packaging items, if they have been mouthed I would put them out for recycling and have a steady supply. As for wood items, depending on your regulations, use a natural sanitizer of vinegar and water and wipe it down with a cloth and the mix. For natural items, I see mouthing these items as apart of building their immune systems. For safety with size, supervision is needed, but I would just replace them every now and then. The other variables like motion, smell, plants, animals, words, ideas... No cleaning required! I would look at these variables more and see how they are explored in your programs.

That is it for this week's blog post on "Loose Parts & Toddlers." I hope I provided some food for thought and also some practical strategies. Make sure to grab your "Reflective Workbook" for this episode and share your reflections in the Facebook group. If you liked this video, please give it a like and share, and subscribe to get all the episodes.

You will find all the resources I talked about in the show notes below. I will see you next week for the third video in this series, "Loose Parts & Preschoolers." Thanks for watching!