

# Loose Parts: Re-imagining Outdoor Play Spaces from a Constructive Perspective

Candace Jaruszewicz, Ph.D., Mary White M.Ed., Jane Hart, M.A.T  
N. E. Miles Early Childhood Development Center  
College of Charleston

## 1. Introduction :

"In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it." Simon Nicholson, 1971 *Theory of Loose Parts*

"These objects (loose parts) invite conversation and interaction, and they encourage collaboration and cooperation." Daly & Beloglovsky, 2015 *Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children*



## 2. We wondered...

If loose parts would be an effective strategy for helping children to develop executive functioning skill?

## 3. So we reviewed the literature which revealed...

- Why executive functioning is important?
- How play promotes executive function?
- How loose parts might support the kind of play that would promote executive functioning?



### Sorting/Potting Bench

Divider, shells, plant material, seed pods, twigs/branches, corn cobs, pine cones, bark, etc.

### Mud Kitchen

## ...5. How did the children's play change

Children's play has gradually become highly integrated, with "parts" from different areas being used for elaborate and extended scenarios.

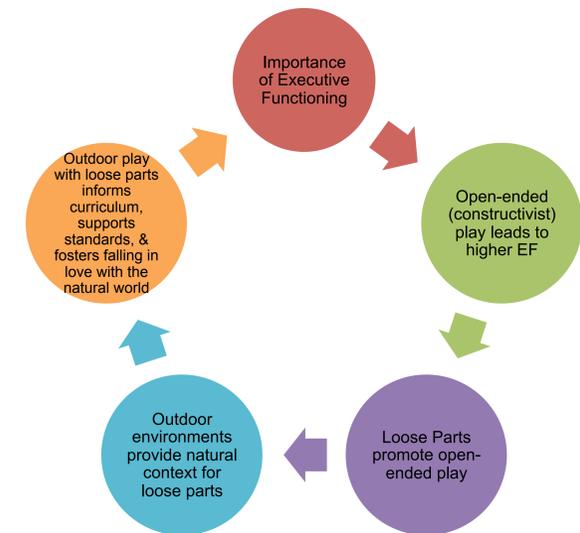


- Once play develops sufficiently, they won't choose to play in the "scripted" areas anymore (e.g. playhouses)
- Loose parts facilitate transition to "games with rules" stage
- Decomposition of natural materials has inspired a whole category of play - "science of the rotting log...."

### Fabric and Pillows

We experimented with sheer drapery fabric to make play areas but the children used them to make lots of things including tents, swings, and a kid-sized bird nest

### Additional Loose Parts



## Literature Review:

### Importance of Executive Functioning

:EF = "Air traffic control system" – ages 3-5 critical window ( Ctr. On Dev. Child, Harvard U.)

Research increasingly points to EF levels as important predictor of future academic & life success Bailey, 2007;

Blaire & Razza, 2007, Borella et al., 2010, Broidy et al., 2003, Denson et al., 2011 Duncan et al., 2007;

Gathercole et al., 2004; Morrision et al., 2010

Physical activity also proving to promote brain development: Tomporowski, Davis, Miller & Naglieri (2007);

Chomitz etal (2009); Prosser & Jiang (2008)

### Open-ended Play & Executive Functioning:

Pretend play a key to development of EF: Berk & Singer (2009); Berk, L. A., Mann, T. D., & Ogan, A. T. (2006). Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Lillard et al (2013); Welsh, Friedman, & Spieker (2008)

Kids with more free time & autonomy develop higher levels of EF & self-direction: Barker et.al, 2014 (University of Colorado)

Traditional psycho-metric testing (IQ) doesn't measure EF skills (Ardilla, Pineda & Rosselli, 2000; Blair et al., (in progress @ Penn State)

Free play promotes decision-making and problem-solving (Gray, 2013)

Curricula that promote scaffolding & include play promote higher levels of EF (e.g Tools of the Mind, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, etc.)