

Title of Training: The Power of Loose Parts for Social and Emotional Development

Board Present: Jennifer Bowman – President, Rebecca Dunahoo – President Elect, Emma Tempest – Secretary, Anna Cannon – Washington Count Member-at-Large

Participants in attendance: 15

The meeting was called to order at 6.30pm by Jennifer Bowman. Jennifer welcomed the participants to the NWAECA meeting.

Business:

1. **Winner of our 'Tip Share' for last month was Terri McGuire** – you all have another chance to win in April, visit our [Facebook](#) group or email nwaeca@gmail.com when the Tip Share post goes live!
2. **Prize drawings** for attending 3 meetings – if you attended our meeting last month you still have a chance to win by attending today and in May!
3. **Program Shout Out!** Do you know an early childhood program you would like to nominate that needs an extra show of appreciation? Share your messages via our [Google form](#) or submit a photo/video [here](#).
4. **Arkansas Children's Week April 10-16: *Make Amazing Things Happen*** - we are "Making Amazing Things Happen" with MATH! This self-paced, 3-hour online training for educators of all ages focuses on ways that adults recognize and support children's mathematical thinking. Register [here](#). Email your questions to Marcy White at MWhite@AState.edu

Speaker: Emma Tempest

Emma started her presentation by sharing a definition of loose parts, as proposed by Simon Nicholson who founded the theory of Loose Parts back in 1971. You can read his original article [here](#). Loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

Common categories of loose parts include:

- nature based (e.g. leaves, sticks and rocks)
- wood reuse (e.g. chair legs, clothespins, frames)
- plastic (e.g. bottle tops, party cups, pipes)
- metal (e.g. tin foil, washers, muffin tins)
- ceramic/glass (e.g. gems, flower pots, prisms)
- fabric (e.g. ribbons, chiffon, string)
- packaging (e.g. tape rolls, bubble wrap, cardboard)

Loose parts are often defined as being open-ended – there are no pre-set rules, no specific problem or goal is in mind, the process is focused on more than the product and

there is no wrong way to engage with them. The thing that some people don't know about loose parts is that Simon Nicholson theorized that, "In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discover, are directly proportional **to the number and kind of variables** in it." When it comes to variable loose parts, early childhood educators need to consider the following when children are playing:

- the weather – e.g. the wind can add a different use of objects outside
- other children – when children share ideas and thoughts with each other, that can change how the parts are used
- chemical interactions – e.g. when children are cooking
- adults – when the educators in the room allow children more freedom to explore, the parts can become looser as creativity is given more room to grow
- sounds – adding music to loose parts play can inspire different ideas
- words and concepts – when educators introduce new vocabulary, it can allow children to discover new concepts
- physical phenomena – e.g. magnetism, gravity, fluids, smells

Emma shared that rather than thinking something is or is not a loose part, to instead imagine a sliding scale. On the 'tight' end of the scale are items that you can perceive to be closed-ended (they might have set rules or guidelines, specific outcomes may be expected when you use them, it may be more product-orientated or have defined right or wrong ways to use it) and then at the other end of the scale the items are 'loose' and perceived as more open-ended. The thing that makes something looser or tighter is usually a child! A child's imagination can run wild if the other variables in the environment support it – including you, the early childhood educator! Any object can become a loose part – just add a child! Emma challenged the participants to consider how 'loose' they are when it comes to their classroom and how they could perhaps nudge themselves towards the 'looser' end of the scale.

When it comes to social and emotional development, Emma considered the [Arkansas CDELS](#) when sharing information on how to use loose parts. She suggested several different ways educators could set out loose parts to meet these standards. Here are some examples:

Sense of identity - children can create self-portraits and notice similarities and differences amongst their peers, using mirrors to look closely at their features. They could also use loose parts to role play family stories and create family portraits – this could be a great family engagement activity!

Expression & regulation of their own emotions - loose parts can be used as self-regulation tools e.g. smooth stones, squishy/stretchy materials akin to stress balls, to create

representations of their feelings (e.g. collecting all the red bottle tops to represent anger or moving gems into the shape of a face to represent a happy smile)

Trusting relationships & attachments to adults - bonds can form when adults trust and empower children to use loose parts safely (big and small!), when children have an idea to use a loose part in an inventive way and the adults do not immediately dismiss the idea. Having space to openly discuss safety and hazards of loose parts creates a sense of "I am seen, I am heard, I am loved."

Emma shared that when children are playing, educators can ask themselves three questions as they observe:

1. **What are the children doing?** Find the verbs in their play – throwing, connecting, building, combining, designing etc
2. **How are the children interacting with the materials?** Look for their social interactions and make a note of which materials create opportunities for children to play together, for them to play alone, and what children find easy/difficult to use.
3. **Why are the children using those parts?** What do you think they are thinking and how do you know this? Why are these parts important in their play story? You can find clues in children's words, facial expressions, and gestures. Are they staring intently with wonder? Are they showing curiosity? Are they frustrated? Are they negotiating with their friends?

Emma finished her presentation by inviting everyone to get stuck in themselves when it comes to loose parts! She invited them to imagine that they are a child and there are no rules of engagement, no right or wrong way to interact. What loose parts are you drawn to? Which ones do you not find interesting? Take some time to play yourself and just enjoy the process – don't focus on creating a product at the end of your time. Get playful and get loose!

If you want to get in touch with Emma, her email is emma@makeyourownrainbows.com

We invite you to share your thoughts about loose parts over in our [Facebook group](#)! We would love to hear what your children are currently interested in when it comes to loose parts play and social emotional development and maybe you can inspire some other people!

Meeting was adjourned by Jennifer Bowman

Next Meeting: Tuesday 11th May 6.30-7.30pm

Topic: Loose Parts Responsive Circle & Celebration Meeting!

Minutes shared by Emma Tempest