

MODULE 4 • LESSON PLANNER

Loose Parts *Lesson Planner*

Creating spaces of possibility, creativity, and inquiry. A practical, teacher-facing planner: one implementation plan for setting up a loose parts area, followed by three ready-to-use lessons across Early Years, Middle Primary and Upper Primary.

AGE RANGE	FORMAT	FOCUS
Early Years to Upper Primary	Implementation plan + 3 lessons	Open-ended materials

HOW TO USE THIS PLANNER

Begin with the implementation plan to set up one loose parts area. Then choose the lesson that matches your phase. Each lesson stands alone and can be used immediately, while carrying the same philosophy: start small, present with care, document the thinking, and let the environment invite creativity.

THE KEY MESSAGE

Loose parts are not simply natural materials. They are open-ended materials with multiple possibilities. They invite children to move from being consumers of learning to creators of learning.

"Children do not become creative because we teach creativity. They become creative because we provide environments that invite it."

— Module 4: Loose Parts

CHILDREN BECOME CREATIVE WHEN WE INVITE

possibility, experimentation, inquiry and brave thinking, and trust them with materials that have no single right answer.

SECTION 1 • IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Setting up a loose parts area

A calm, purposeful area that invites children to create, not consume

- 1 **Choose one area.** Select one shelf, table, basket area, light table, outdoor corner or creative zone. Start small and improve one section at a time.
- 2 **Gather open-ended materials.** Collect materials that can be used in many ways: sticks, stones, shells, wood slices, pinecones, fabric, buttons, corks, bamboo, wire, cardboard tubes, mirrors, magnets, recycled materials, wooden figures, and digital or technical parts for older learners.
- 3 **Remove single-purpose materials.** Notice which resources lead children towards one expected outcome; keep those that invite children to imagine, combine, transform, redesign and invent.
- 4 **Sort and present with care.** Organise by type, texture, size, possibility or invitation, using baskets, trays, glass jars, wooden crates or labelled containers. Keep the area calm, clear, beautiful and accessible.
- 5 **Create invitations.** Add small prompts or challenge cards without over-directing the learning (see the open questions alongside).
- 6 **Include the light table.** Use it for exploration, pattern, transparency, reflection, shadow, symmetry, storytelling and construction. Encourage children to test, move, layer, build and redesign.
- 7 **Teach collective responsibility.** Add "Return me to my spot" photographs and "Work in progress, please do not tidy" signs, and teach children to care for the area and return materials thoughtfully.
- 8 **Document the learning.** Photograph the process, not only the final product; capture student voice and add short notes about the thinking behind the construction.
- 9 **Reflect and refine.** Observe how children use the materials, notice which invite deeper thinking, and add, remove or reorganise based on how children interact with the space.

OPEN QUESTIONS TO OFFER

- What could this become?
- What are you trying to understand?
- What happens if...?
- Can you tell the story of your creation?
- What problem could you solve?

TEACHER REFLECTION

- What possibilities did the materials invite?
- What did children do that surprised you?
- What thinking did you notice?
- What will you add, remove or change next?

SECTION 2 • LESSON 1 • EARLY YEARS

Free Exploration with Loose Parts

Free exploration, sensory investigation, storytelling, symbolic thinking, construction and light-table play

LEARNING INTENTION

Children explore open-ended materials using their senses, imagination, movement and early symbolic thinking.

- 1 Invitation.** Present the loose parts area beautifully. Invite children to explore without showing an example to copy: "What do you notice? What could this become?"
- 2 Exploration.** Allow children to touch, move, group, stack, sort, line up, combine and transform materials. Encourage the light table for transparent, reflective or shadow-based materials.
- 3 Teacher role.** Observe closely and avoid taking over. Ask: What are you making? Tell me about this. What happened when you moved that? What else could you try?
- 4 Documentation.** Photograph children's hands, arrangements, patterns and constructions, and capture the exact child voice where possible.
- 5 Reflection.** Invite children to share what they made or discovered, using drawing, gesture, home language or simple words.
- 6 Tidy-up routine.** Use the "Return me to my spot" photograph, model careful returning, and keep unfinished work if the child wants to continue later.

MATERIALS

Loose parts baskets; natural materials (sticks, stones, shells, pinecones, wood slices, leaves, bark, cork, fabric, bamboo); transparent materials for the light table; mirrors; small baskets and trays; a light table; clipboards or simple documentation sheets; a "Work in progress" sign; a "Return me to my spot" photograph.

OBSERVE FOR

Curiosity; sensory exploration; symbolic thinking; language development; collaboration; persistence; early pattern-making; and the ability to care for shared materials.

SECTION 3 · LESSON 2 · MIDDLE PRIMARY

How Does Playtime Make Us Feel?

Using loose parts to represent emotions, social experiences and playtime reflections

LEARNING INTENTION

Students use loose parts to create a visual representation of how playtime on the playground makes them feel.

- 1 **Connection.** Begin with a short discussion: How can playtime make us feel? When do we feel included, or alone? What helps us feel safe? What helps us repair friendships?
- 2 **Invitation.** Invite students to create a loose-parts representation of how playtime makes them feel. It need not look realistic; it can show a feeling, a moment, a friendship, a problem or a hope.
- 3 **Creation.** Students choose materials and build their representation, thinking about shape, colour, space, distance, balance and symbolism.
- 4 **Teacher prompts.** What feeling are you showing? Why did you choose these materials? What does this part represent? Is there anything you want to change? What would make this playtime feel better?
- 5 **Student voice.** Students write or dictate a short explanation: "My creation shows..."; "Playtime makes me feel... because..."; "One thing that helps me is..."
- 6 **Reflection circle.** Students may share if they feel comfortable. Keep sharing optional and respectful, emphasising listening, empathy and community.
- 7 **Documentation.** Photograph each creation and add the student's explanation beside it. Consider a class display titled "How playtime feels".

MATERIALS

Wooden circles; sticks; stones; shells; fabric; corks; buttons; coloured loose parts; small wooden figures; emotion cards; mirrors; trays; paper and pencils for written reflection; a camera or tablet for documentation.

OBSERVE FOR

Emotional literacy; symbolic representation; empathy; communication; student voice; the ability to connect materials to meaning; respectful listening; and self-regulation.

SECTION 4 · LESSON 3 · UPPER PRIMARY

Explore, Create and Be Brave

Loose parts through digital literacy, technology, innovation and creative problem-solving

LEARNING INTENTION

Students explore diverse, random sections of a computer and other technology items as loose parts, using them to investigate, design, prototype and ask questions.

SAFETY NOTE

Only use technology parts that have been made safe for classroom use. Remove batteries, sharp edges, glass, and anything electrical, hazardous or unsafe.

- 1 **Provocation.** Place technology loose parts on trays and invite students to observe before touching: What do you notice? What do you recognise? What do you wonder? What might this part have done?
- 2 **Explore.** Students handle and examine the parts safely, sorting, grouping, comparing, sketching, labelling and discussing possible functions.
- 3 **Create.** Students use the parts to build a prototype, model, invention or speculative design that may be practical, imaginative, futuristic or symbolic.
- 4 **Be brave.** Encourage creative risks; there is no single correct answer. The goal is to test ideas, ask better questions and think like designers.
- 5 **Teacher prompts.** What problem could this solve? What system might this belong to? What did this part make you wonder? How could you redesign this? What would you need to learn next? What evidence supports your idea?
- 6 **Documentation.** Students photograph their prototype and write a short design explanation: "We used these parts because..."; "Our design solves..."; "We still wonder..."; "Our next step would be..."
- 7 **Share.** Students present to a small group, giving feedback with: I notice...; I wonder...; What if...?

MATERIALS

Safe, disassembled computer parts; keyboards; circuit boards; wires; old mouse parts; screws; gears; small electronic components; recycled technology; cardboard; tape; connectors; labels; sketching paper; safety guidelines; magnifying glasses if available.

DIGITAL LITERACY & ETHICS

Discuss how technology is designed by people and how design decisions affect users, communities, sustainability and access. Ask: Who benefits from this technology? What happens when technology becomes waste? How can we design more responsibly?

OBSERVE FOR

Inquiry; systems thinking; digital literacy; ethical and design thinking; collaboration; creativity; problem-solving; resilience; and the ability to explain choices and next steps.

IN CLOSING

The thinking behind the construction

The loose parts are only half the story; the learning lives in the thinking

REMEMBER

The loose parts themselves are only half the story. The learning lives in the thinking behind the construction. When children manipulate, test, revise, represent and redesign, they are not simply making something. They are building understanding.

"Not learners waiting for answers, but thinkers capable of asking better questions."

— Module 4: Loose Parts

FINAL TEACHER REFLECTION

- What did the children create?
- What did they ask?
- What will you offer next?
- What did the children understand?
- What surprised you?