

Leading Loose Parts

A SELF-GUIDED PD COURSE FOR CALIFORNIA EARLY EDUCATORS



CHAPTER ONE

Before You Begin

Introducing a new practice across a whole program is a different job than trying it in one classroom. Your teachers will follow through on loose parts to the exact degree that you keep showing up for it — not with pressure, but with attention, warmth, and steady follow-up. This guide gives you a self-directed, month-by-month plan to do that across a full school year, on your own schedule.

How to use this guide

Each month has a focus and a short set of touchpoints organized into three phases: early-month preparation, mid-month observation and coaching, and an end-of-month team moment. Read the month at the start, work the touchpoints as you go, and stop at the Director's reflection to capture what you're seeing.



Pair this with the educator course at tryplayground.com/resources/looseparts

Your teachers can work through **Loose Parts Play: A Self-Guided PD Course for California Early Educators** while you run this leadership plan alongside them.

How this counts in California

Leading a year-long professional learning initiative supports professional growth for your Site Supervisor or Program Director permit — 105 clock-hours over each five-year renewal cycle. Use the log at the back to record your leadership time and add both to your California ECE Workforce Registry profile.

PHASE ZERO

Launch Prep

Setting the Stage

Before your first team conversation, get the physical environment ready so loose parts feel like an intentional program-wide shift, not just another memo.

01

Gather a sample tray of loose parts

Assemble a rich aesthetic display of stones, shells, buttons, fabric swatches, pine cones, and wood rounds to bring to your initial alignment talks.

02

Prepare and print the family donation letter

Customize the California-specific family request template to ask families for clean, safe recycling, natural components, and household loose parts.

03

Set up a shared Loose Parts Museum

Carve out a small display shelf or table in a common entrance area. This visual anchor sparks parental curiosity and centers the program's shared focus.

04

Decide on your kickoff modality

Plan how you will launch: a short interactive staff meeting, an evening shared reading circle, or by provisioning access to the California ECE Registry companion course.





August

LAUNCH & FOUNDATION — SETTING THE STAGE

Loose parts arrive best as an invitation, not an assignment. This month is about establishing a warm, pressure-free start and celebrating first efforts, however small or imperfect.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Introduce loose parts to your team — share the educator course or lead a short kickoff conversation.
- 2 Distribute the family donation letter for teachers to send home within the first week.
- 3 Ask each teacher for one simple commitment they'll try, and take brief note of any questions they raise.
- 4 Follow up privately and warmly with anyone who seemed hesitant or overwhelmed.
- 5 Two weeks in, visit each room and look for one loose parts invitation that's successfully set up.
- 6 Celebrate early efforts publicly at your next staff meeting — name specific things you actually saw.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Who on your team is expressing the most immediate enthusiasm, and who seems hesitant or doubtful? Write down one specific, supportive way you will check in with each of them this month.



September

BUILDING HABITS — INVITATIONS BECOME ROUTINE

The goal this month is consistency: loose parts move from a novel, one-time novelty to a predictable, beloved element of your program's daily learning rhythm. Your warm, specific praise is the catalyst.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Check in with each teacher individually in their space: 'Show me your loose parts layout. How is it flowing?'
- 2 Help troubleshoot classroom-specific challenges — such as dynamic storage, throwing, or cleanup routine habits.
- 3 Perform a structured 10-minute quiet observation in each room focused exclusively on how kids use loose parts.
- 4 Give warm, specific, and written positive feedback within 24 hours of each classroom visit.
- 5 Dedicate 10 minutes at the monthly staff meeting to: 'What is working? What is feeling difficult or chaotic?'
- 6 Publicly recognize teachers who are trying new aesthetic setups, even if they aren't fully resolved yet.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

What is the single most common classroom obstacle or material management issue popping up across multiple rooms? How can you address this as a systemic team solution rather than coaching teachers one-by-one?

3

October

DEEPENING PRACTICE — CONNECTING TO CURRICULUM

Loose parts stop being an add-on when they connect to what children are already investigating. This month introduces documentation, too, as a vital tool to map open-ended play back to educational frameworks and standards.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Meet with each teacher about how loose parts connect to current curriculum themes.
- 2 Suggest themed collections — fall nature items, color-sorted materials, or textured metals.
- 3 Introduce simple documentation: a photo and a brief note captured during play sessions.
- 4 Give each teacher a documentation template (including date, observation, child quote, and next steps).
- 5 Model documentation yourself during a classroom visit — sit with the kids and take active, focused notes.
- 6 Spend 10–15 minutes at the staff meeting sharing documented observations, and build a small hallway display.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Which teachers are thriving with documentation, and which need more support before the holidays? What's your plan for the ones who are struggling?

4

November

EXPANDING MATERIALS — COMMUNITY & NATURE

This month broadens the material base and moves loose parts outdoors, while making space for gratitude and intentional reflection as the first busy stretch of the school year draws to a close.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Assess each room's collection — do they have enough overall materials? Do they have enough variety?
- 2 Coordinate a school-wide loose parts drive with a community partner or local eco-minded business.
- 3 Encourage a nature walk with children specifically to collect pinecones, seeds, and outdoor loose parts.
- 4 Discuss adding outdoor loose parts play — mud kitchens, heavy stick building, or leaf collections.
- 5 At the staff meeting, ask what teachers are most grateful for in their practice and classroom this fall.
- 6 Write a personal note of appreciation to each teacher who took a creative risk with loose parts this term.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Point to specific growth you've observed in your educators since August. What has changed in your program's culture that you couldn't see day-to-day?



December

REFLECT & CELEBRATE — END OF FIRST SEMESTER

Close the semester by making the collective growth visible — to your team, your families, and yourself — and set the stage for a strong, highly aligned return in January.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Collect photo documentation from all rooms to compile for a semester-end visual review.
- 2 Ask each teacher to write 2–3 sentences on their biggest personal loose parts success story.
- 3 Dedicate a staff meeting to celebrating the semester with a collaborative slideshow or digital display.
- 4 Invite child success stories and share highlights with families (always ensuring proper permissions).
- 5 Ask each teacher to set one specific, achievable loose parts goal for the upcoming January launch.
- 6 Refresh, reorganize, and safely pack away or clean collections over the winter break period.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

How have classrooms physically and socially changed since August? Name the one story or child breakthrough that best captures this shift.



January

FRESH START – NEW INVITATIONS, NEW INTENTIONS

Re-energize the program's practice after the break and sharpen one specific, vital skill: the intentional, open-ended questioning that makes or breaks children's critical thinking during play.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Revisit each teacher's December goal and discuss any fresh adjustments for the new semester.
- 2 Walk each room together with the lead educator: 'What would you add or change this semester?'
- 3 Introduce at least one brand new material or innovative invitation type in each classroom.
- 4 Observe each teacher in action, focusing specifically on their open-ended questioning language.
- 5 Offer a practical mini-refresher on conversational prompts and questions at the monthly staff meeting.
- 6 Pair teachers for peer observations using a simple check-in protocol, followed by a brief reflection debrief.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Whose questioning skills have grown, and whose still leans too heavily toward directing? What is one supportive coaching move you can make for each?



February

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL FOCUS — LOOSE PARTS & CONNECTION

This month draws out how loose parts support complex social-emotional and language development, and bridges the gap between home and school by bringing families closer to the practice.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Ask teachers how they have seen loose parts support child-led sharing and social-emotional growth.
- 2 Discuss real classroom scenarios: negotiating over materials, turn-taking, and collaborative builds.
- 3 Encourage rich language expansion during play — narrating, labeling, and naming what children create.
- 4 Suggest pairing tactile loose parts with seasonal read-aloud storybooks in the library area.
- 5 Send families a customized photo update explaining the deep social-emotional learning behind this play.
- 6 Invite families to a Loose Parts Play Night or a morning drop-in session to experience the materials firsthand.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

How is loose parts play changing the social climate of your rooms? Where do you observe its impact during moments of conflict and cooperation?



March

OUTDOOR EXPANSION — NATURE-BASED LEARNING

As the weather turns, extend loose parts into your outdoor space — often the richest and most overlooked environment you have.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Walk your outdoor space with teachers: where could loose parts play live outside?
- 2 Identify a mud kitchen area, a stick-building space, a nature collection station.
- 3 Check the safety of natural materials for each age group.
- 4 Plan a school-wide outdoor loose parts day or nature walk.
- 5 Encourage children to collect their own loose parts — give each a bag.
- 6 Refresh classroom collections with spring materials.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

How is outdoor loose parts play different from indoor in your program? What surprised you when you watched it?



April

CHILD-LED INQUIRY — FOLLOWING CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS

This month shifts ownership to the children: invitations respond to their questions, and documentation deepens into evidence of thinking.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Ask teachers what children are most curious about right now.
- 2 Plan invitations that respond directly to children's interests and questions.
- 3 Discuss emergent curriculum — loose parts as a vehicle for child-led inquiry.
- 4 Have teachers collect 3–5 pieces of documentation this month.
- 5 Sit with each teacher for 20 minutes to review documentation together.
- 6 Plan a year-end family event and begin end-of-year portfolios.

► DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION

Where do you see genuine child-led inquiry taking hold? Which teacher is ready to be a peer mentor next year?



May / June

YEAR-END CELEBRATION & PLANNING AHEAD

Close the year by honoring the growth, capturing what you learned, and setting up next year so the culture you built doesn't reset.

This month's touchpoints

- 1 Hold individual end-of-year conversations about each teacher's loose parts journey.
- 2 Review the year's documentation — what changed? What growth is visible?
- 3 Identify 2–3 teachers ready to become peer mentors or model classrooms.
- 4 Dedicate 30 minutes of the final staff meeting to celebrating growth program-wide.
- 5 Share a year in photos and honor every teacher by name.
- 6 Plan next year's PD and write a letter to next year's teachers about the culture you're building.

► **DIRECTOR'S REFLECTION**

What will you do differently next year based on what you learned? What's the one thing worth protecting exactly as it is?

Leadership Professional Growth Log

Your time coaching teachers, observing classrooms, preparing team meetings, and reflecting on the rollout all count as professional growth and as documented staff development you provide. Use the log below to record it month by month. In California, review the completed log with your Professional Growth Advisor to confirm how it applies to your Site Supervisor or Program Director permit, and add the record to your California ECE Workforce Registry profile.

OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE

Completion Record

Keep this page for your professional growth file.

"This confirms that I led and completed the self-guided professional development initiative Leading Loose Parts: A California Director's Guide to Coaching Your Team All Year, including team coaching, classroom observation, and reflection across the school year."

NAME OF EDUCATOR

PROGRAM OR CENTER

CHILD DEVELOPMENT PERMIT LEVEL

TOTAL HOURS COMPLETED

DATE COMPLETED

EDUCATOR SIGNATURE