

# CASE STUDY

## CREATIVELY SPEAKING: A CASE STUDY INTO HOW LOOSE PARTS PLAY LED TO HAVING THE CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK



**MARION WALKER**  
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Marion Walker has been a childminder for 16 years. She works with her husband at Soar Childcare in Bishops Stortford. She loves creating bonds with families in her community and provides a caring, fun-filled setting within which children grow, learn and have new experiences. She continuously strives to improve her practice so that children get the best possible start to their early years.

**“ NOTHING GIVES CHILDREN A GREATER SENSE OF POWER THAN BEING IN CONTROL OF THE MATERIALS THEY'RE USING. ”**

**LISA DAILY**  
**AND MIRIAM**  
**BELOGLOVSKY**

I came across the above quote shortly after inspirational loose parts training with the East of England Reach Out Early Years Stronger Practice Hub. After the training, I immediately set my mind to thinking about a little girl in my setting who uses a range of ways to communicate and we wanted to support her development of language with adults. I knew loose parts supported learning covering many areas of learning and was great for motor skills and creativity, but this quote made me wonder if it was the perfect vehicle for helping Hannah find her voice.

### **IN THE BEGINNING:**

Hannah arrived at our childminding setting just after Covid ended. She was almost two years old so had spent the majority of her infancy in partial lockdown. We knew the family well as we had previously taught her older sister. Hannah's mum had told me that Hannah was quieter than her sister but full of personality. We started off meeting in coffee shops when lockdown was eased and you could go out in small groups. Hannah would happily interact and

smile and seemed content in my company with her mum by her side.

When allowed we started visits here at our setting and Hannah was hesitant at first but was soon exploring and playing. She would speak to her mum and respond to me with gestures if I spoke to her. On her first day without mum, Hannah came in hesitantly. We had put out her favourite toys and she sat and played and watched everyone. Before long she seemed well-settled and came in happy and smiling. She eagerly participated in activities and used gestures to make choices. She began to speak quietly to other children in the setting but even months after starting had yet to utter a word to either of the adults in the setting. She would happily curl up in our laps for a story or join us in a game, but she wouldn't speak or respond verbally to questions. She happily chatted to her parents at pick up and through conversations with her parents we found out that she even struggles to speak to her grandparents who look after her one day a week. It was felt that not speaking appeared to be her form of control over her world. Although Hannah seemed happy at our setting, six months in and she still was not speaking to any adults while here.

### **EXPLORING LOOSE PARTS:**

Hannah loved creative activities so we set up a trolley of loose parts including shells, bits of sea glass, bamboo, felt squares and other interesting items we found. Some were gifted by the stronger practice hub after our training. On our first day exploring loose parts, I introduced the trolley to Hannah and explained what was available to explore. I sat in the loose parts play area and started making my own structure with the objects. Hannah came over and started to explore. She chose what she wanted to do and this [play based learning](#) had a positive effect on her progress. She lined up patterned buttons and then added them to my tower. She took my felt pieces and laid them out on the floor like a rainbow. I chatted about what she was doing and she pointed to what she wanted.

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I always responded to her requests. I praised her creations and we took pictures to send home.

We left the loose parts out continuously and Hannah chose to play with them everyday. She had choice in what she played with, what she created and how she used the loose parts. There was no pressure to be correct or have a right answer. By the third session, Hannah started to speak to me. At first she used a very quiet voice and whispered, "Look at my family." She had used loose parts to create her mum, dad and sister.

In the weeks that followed, Hannah became more confident with her speech while playing with the loose parts. We supported Hannah by describing what we saw and what she was doing and extending her vocabulary by adding words to what she told us. This use of [narrative speech](#) introduced her to new vocabulary and modelled speaking during play. We always respected her choice to speak or to remain silent. Hannah thrived in this creative environment where she had control over the materials. No one was telling her how to use them or giving her instructions and she was free to explore, create and make changes. Her confidence to speak grew and she began describing her creations and making up little stories using the loose parts. She would use photos of her family and have them interact with the loose parts as well. She actively sought us out to engage us in her creations.



**TO FURTHER SUPPORT HANNAH WE HAVE ADDED LOOSE PARTS TO OTHER AREAS OF OUR SETTING: THE MUD KITCHEN, OUTSIDE ON THE PLAYGROUND, IN THE ROLE PLAY AREA...IN THE HOPES THAT WE CAN EXTEND HANNAH'S LANGUAGE AND CONFIDENCE FURTHER WITHIN THESE AREAS.**

**WE HAVE ALSO CREATED A LOOSE PARTS TRAVEL BAG SO HANNAH CAN TAKE LOOSE PARTS WITH HER WHEN SHE VISITS UNFAMILIAR PLACES AND PEOPLE.**

### HANNAH'S DEVELOPMENT WHILE PLAYING WITH LOOSE PARTS

- Hannah now speaks freely in the setting to both adults and children. At the age of two she uses a variety of words and up to six word sentences.
- Hannah has gained enough confidence to tell others what to do with great inflection and volume.
- Hannah brings maths into her loose parts play. She can often be seen counting pieces, sharing pieces out with others in the setting or chatting about whose creation is tallest so she was using the loose parts play to make [comparisons](#).
- Hannah calls her friends over to join her in her loose parts play. This allows for [collaborative play](#) helping her build strong relationships.
- Hannah's confidence to speak that began with loose parts play has spilled over into other areas of play and she now regularly speaks and joins in with conversations, stories and songs.
- Hannah imitates conversations with children and adults and is eager to share her creations. Loose parts play provided a sensory experience in which [social skills](#) could be taught and modelled.
- Hannah uses problem solving skills with her loose parts play. For example, she made a catapult last week and made changes when her pom poms wouldn't stay on the seesaw like structure.

### CONFIDENCE BEYOND LOOSE PARTS

Loose parts was the catalyst for Hannah's confidence but it has spilled over into other areas.

- Hannah has begun to take on characters in role play and uses language and sounds to become different characters such as a mother caring for her baby, or a pet cat that needs to go to the vet. Her participation in role play allows us to further expand her vocabulary and speech opportunities through modelling and [narrating](#).
- Hannah's vocabulary is growing as she joins in with story times and group songs. There is evidence to show that [music](#) can help with self regulation. She recently demanded her turn to tell a story while doing helicopter stories.

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### CONTINUED...

- Hannah's family recently went to a family function with lots of extended family and they stated that Hannah had really opened up and they had never seen her so chatty. We used photos from this event to encourage Hannah to tell us about her weekend and she happily told us what she did and who she was with using the photos from home.

**ALTHOUGH HANNAH NOW HAPPILY EXPLORES ALL AREAS OF OUR SETTING HER FAVOURITE IS STILL THE LOOSE PARTS PLAY AND SHE CHOOSES IT EVERYDAY.**

**LOOSE PARTS OFFERS FREEDOM OF CHOICE, A CHANCE TO BE CREATIVE AND A VOICE.**



### THE EVIDENCE

Loose parts play is a great part of [play based learning](#) which has been shown to improve early literacy and language development and early numeracy.

Loose parts play gives opportunities for children to [play collaboratively](#). This gives increased opportunities for children to learn from each other and develop relationship skills.

Loose parts gives opportunities for making [comparisons and connections](#) and teaching the language for these comparisons is a proven strategy for improving mathematical skills as shown by the Education Endowment Foundation.

Loose parts play gives boundless opportunities for [teaching and modelling](#) new vocabulary which has a positive impact on children's oral language.

Loose parts play gives practitioners opportunities to use [narrative speech](#) as children explore and play with the materials. This has been shown to support children's communication language development.

### REACHOUT STRONGER PRACTICE HUB OUR OFFER:

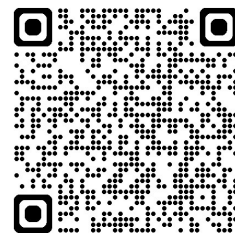
Stronger Practice Hubs are part of the DfE's Early Years education recovery support package. All support is FULLY funded and Free to access.

Each Early Years Stronger Practice Hub supports other early years settings regionally to improve outcomes for children in their local area across the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), but specifically focusing on areas of development that research shows have been most impacted by COVID-19: personal social and emotional development (PSED); communication and language, and early literacy and maths.

There are 18 Hubs - two in each of the government office regions in England.

Each Hub is led by a group-based (school-based, private, voluntary, or independent) early years provider and supports settings to adopt well-evidenced practice improvements.

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