The Intentional Material—What’s inside the Bin?

The concept of "intentionality” in the context of loose parts and materials in early childhood education refers to the inherent qualities and characteristics of the materials themselves. It emphasizes the unique attributes, potentialities, and affordances that materials possess, which can stimulate children's creativity, imagination, and exploration. Understanding the internality of materials involves recognizing their intrinsic properties and how they can engage children in open-ended and meaningful play experiences.

Here are some aspects to consider when exploring the internality of the materials: provided in these bins

**1. Texture and Sensory Qualities:**

- Consider the tactile qualities of materials. How do they feel to the touch? Are they smooth, rough, soft, or hard? Materials with diverse textures can provide rich sensory experiences for children.

**2. Colour and Visual Appeal:**

- Examine the visual aspects of materials, including color, pattern, and shape. Bright and varied colors can attract children's attention, while different shapes and patterns can spark their visual exploration and creativity.

**3. Size and Scale:**

- Think about the size and scale of materials. How do varying sizes of materials contribute to children's exploration and manipulation? Different sizes can offer opportunities for problem-solving and fine motor skill development.

**4. Weight and Density:**

- Consider the weight and density of materials. How does the weight of a material affect how it can be used in play? Exploring materials with different weights provides children with a sense of physics and helps develop their understanding of cause and effect.

**5. Auditory Properties:**

- Some materials may have auditory qualities. For example, wooden blocks can create a sound when they fall or collide. How do these auditory properties contribute to the overall sensory experience of play?

**6. Transformative Potential:**

- Explore how materials can be transformed or repurposed by children in their play. The internality of materials includes understanding how they can be used in multiple ways, encouraging creativity and divergent thinking.

**7. Natural Elements:**

- Consider loose parts that incorporate natural elements such as stones, shells, or branches. How do these elements connect children to the natural world, and how do they contribute to a sense of authenticity and sustainability in the play environment?

**8. Symbolic and Representational Qualities:**

- Some materials may carry symbolic or representational qualities. For example, a small box might become a treasure chest or a wooden block could represent a building. How do materials invite children to assign meaning and engage in imaginative play?

**9. Durability and Longevity:**

- Reflect on the durability of materials. How long-lasting are they, and how does this impact their sustainability in the play environment? Durable materials can withstand repeated use, providing ongoing opportunities for play.

Understanding the intentionality of materials involves a deep appreciation for the unique qualities and potentialities that different materials bring to the learning environment. By recognizing and leveraging these characteristics, educators can create a rich and responsive space that invites children to explore, create, and learn through their interactions with diverse and meaningful materials.

**Group Work: Creating a Play Experience for Children**

How will you engage with investigating these materials?

What could lead you to use these materials as an invitation to play? What can the invite look like? Consider some points and discuss with your group.

What materials are you considering to use. How will they be organized?

What are we all learning?

What possible next steps can be considered of this play invitation?

**Setup the invitation and share with the whole group.**