

Life in miniature

Small world play offers some special learning opportunities for children. Acting out narratives and ideas through the manipulation of small equipment (animals, dolls, Lego people etc) helps children to reflect on feelings and events in their lives in a safe way. Small world play is also rich in possibilities for learning about spaces and positions, with many opportunities for putting things inside structures, on top, next to and underneath.

Doll play is also carefully presented and structured. Each doll has clothes, bedding etc which fit and the children are encouraged to imagine the dolls as a real person and respect them as such: we discourage the naked doll face down in the water tray, and other forms of play which devalue the dolls and limit the imaginative richness of play.

Dolls, clothes and bedding all reflect a range of cultural practices. Children are encouraged to take dolls out, push them in prams and take them around with the same care and respect they would show a baby: if children simply want an object to put somewhere and zoom around, then an alternative is found.

Small world play as a context for development and learning in the EYFS

Small world play supports children's **personal, social and emotional development** by providing opportunities to enjoy familiar and new play equipment, with others or individually, developing confidence and autonomy, and sometimes involvement for long periods of time. Small world play provides a context for children to make connections with others, drawing them into their play. In play, children can explore and experiment with different emotions and play out aspects of their experiences.

Small world play also helps children's developing **communication, language and literacy** as they vocalise, make sounds, talk about what they are doing and collaborate with others. It is a good way to experiment with the language of possession and position. Children will sometimes develop narratives with others, having to listen to and take account of different ideas and negotiate. Small world play is sometimes set-up to extend book experiences (e.g. the props for the Very Hungry Caterpillar) or first-hand experiences (e.g. trains and blocks following a trip on the underground); this allows children to reflect on experience or a story, sequence actions and events, and reflect on experiences and feelings.

Children can develop their **problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy** by exploring sets of objects, holding things in their hands and grouping them together, experiencing things that are larger and smaller, using language like "more" and "a lot", and counting. Small world play provides problems to solve: sorting objects by their properties (e.g. putting all the farm animals in the farm) and finding out about adding and taking items away from sets, and finding the total number by counting. Children can also explore capacity and size e.g. dressing dolls, building train tracks, and position e.g. putting Lego people into a house.

Small world play is also a context for children to expand **their knowledge and understanding of the world**, exploring objects with all their senses, finding out about causes and effects (e.g. how pushing the train makes it move along the tracks) and exploring ideas about the world through play (e.g. a garage set, farm or train station).

Their **physical development** is supported with opportunities to develop large and small motor skills and hand-eye co-ordination during play.

Children's **creative development** is supported as they enjoy and respond to familiar playthings, making noises and movements, and start to pretend and in time develop stories, sometimes based on their own life experiences.

