



Small World Play

Sorting and describing, using mathematical properties such as size and shape as well as position and distance
Counting and comparing numbers
Solving problems involving sharing



Children often enjoy playing in an imaginary small world environment, for example, the zoo, jungle, farm, with dinosaurs ...

Adults could provide various collections of small world play figures, junk materials and an area for the play to take place.

The Activity

Get out the appropriate play items, leaving them in their basket/box, alongside a suitable area for the play to take place. (Below we use the farm as an example.)

Encouraging mathematical thinking and reasoning:

Describing

Tell me about your farm/farm animals/pens . . .
Tell me about (for example) the cows and the pigs.

Recording

Shall we take a photograph of your farm?
Let's make a picture of your farm.

Reasoning

Why have you put . . . here?
What else could belong here? Why?
Why is (for example) the cow pen so much bigger than the sheep pen?

Opening out

[Name of child] wants to have a farm as well, could s/he share some of your animals?
Do you think the pens for the . . . could be any better, if so how?
I've just found these extra animals. Might there be space in your farm for them?
How will the farmer know if any of the animals are lost?

The Mathematical Journey

Same and different:

- grouping according to a rule e.g. animal type, size . . .
- developing language to compare and contrast e.g. bigger, taller . . .

Position and spatial properties:

- positional language e.g. next to, opposite, far, close, on top, underneath, inside, outside . . .

Number:

- counting and cardinality – progressing from knowing some number words, to saying one number for each object, then knowing the number of the whole group
- relative number size – comparing numbers
- sharing
- estimating

Development and Variation

Although we've used the farm as the focus for this activity, any small world play environment such as using dinosaurs, the zoo, the jungle, the sea-side ... would enable similar mathematical talk.

A visit to a farm or zoo can stimulate children's small world play back in your setting. Observing the different enclosures and space that each type of animal requires provides an opportunity for you to help children articulate ideas about size and possibly area.

Children's own collections of objects may also elicit similar mathematics. (See the NRIC EYFS activity "Collecting".)



Resources

You will already have lots of collections of small world environments in your setting. You might provide assortments which are:

- miniature objects, such as cars, small people or animals
- essentially junk modelling materials for the children to incorporate in their small world play.

A camera may be useful to take photos.

