Transcript: Grounds for Learning - Small world

Narrator: Children are universally drawn to creating their own miniature worlds using whatever materials and prompts come to hand. Why are these kinds of experiences so important for children? For some, it seems that these imaginary scenarios give them opportunities to re-live experiences and come to grips with whatever life is bringing their way. Perhaps another part of the answer is that when children create these miniature worlds, they are big people and are able to control and direct what goes on. Whatever the reason, this kind of play is hugely important in stimulating imagination and creativity which, in turn, are important foundations for developing other key areas like problem solving, literacy and science.

Irene McCafferty, Playground Supervisor: With the twigs and stuff, some of them come away with quite good wee things, you know, it first started off that they would be making faces, but now you’re seeing them trying to build wee dens and stuff, things like that.

Carolyn Paterson: I’ve had some of the kids that I work with, with a lot of language and understanding impairments and building things like, you know, aeroplanes and things out of the pieces of wood that were at the front and I think there’s one wee fella in primary one, I’m quite sure he’s going to be a drummer, he’s always got two sticks in his hands.

Narrator: Small world play is perhaps one of the simplest forms of outdoor play to provide in schools. Nature provides a rich range of props for this kind of play. Stones, leaves, twigs, seeds, cones, shells and long grass; many schools have bushes that are regularly pruned. Think about whether you could hang on to some of the prunings for a while to create props for the play. If these things don’t already exist naturally in your school then they can be easily collected, but long-term, it’s better to think about planting trees and shrubs that while provide a sustainable future supply.

Lindsay Lambert, Playground Supervisor: Little groups of children go off on their own and explore, maybe away in the back of the playground, start improvising, using what they’ve got, sticks and boulders and leaves and all sorts, they make up soups with sticks and leaves and that so it does bring the children together.

Anne Daniels, Playground Supervisor: I mean we do, we do give them some guidance but we find that they, their imagination is just, kind of, you know, keep it going, it never seems stale up here.

Carol Perkins, Playground Supervisor: They just love it, they just love using their imaginations to build all different things and you never know what’s going to appear next, it’s amazing what they can do.

Narrator: Man-made materials and small toys are also really valuable for small world play, buttons, chalk, animal and human figures, wool and fabric off-cuts are all useful materials. Most of these things can be collected free from parents and colleagues, or very cheaply from charity shops and jumble sales. It’s important to think about how you can keep the materials varied and fresh. Nature will help providing you with daisies in the summer, leaves in autumn and snow in winter. It’s also a good idea to vary the man-made materials that are available from time to time and to think about how you can keep your stocks replenished.