

Tom Goes To School: An Interactive Board Game

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Research suggests that children often have an implicit understanding of Theory of Mind (ToM) before they are able to articulate it explicitly, so we created a board game that would provide educators the opportunity to observe children's understanding of ToM through play. The game *Tom Goes to School* allows children to engage in social interactions that focus on ToM acquisition and development. This game was designed for primary level students, and it can be implemented easily into any curriculum subject as it can be altered to cover a wide range of subject areas.

This game is played in teams, and the object of *Tom Goes to School* is to have the students take their game piece (Tom and his friends) from home to school. As the students journey through the board game they will engage in four different activities which focus on ToM acquisition.

The activity associated with the blue square is one in which the students will engage in kinaesthetic learning. The students are supposed to act out a suggested person, place or thing which is given to them on the blue cards. The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate to children that their others do not know what is going on in their mind, and therefore they must explain their thinking and communication so that others may understand.

The activity involved with the pink square is designed to have children expand their thinking and encourage new language skills. Children are provided with a topic and the point is to come up with ways to hint to their partner(s) what the topic is, without explicitly saying the topic. To make things even more challenging, there are four prompt words for each topic which are not allowed to be used while giving team members hints. This activity challenges children to come up with new words to help their partner(s) come to the correct response. This activity helps children expand their awareness and familiarity with new terminology which in turn introduces the idea that situations, thoughts, and feelings can be articulated in many different ways.

The activity with the yellow square works on expanding children's language skills. In this activity, children are provided with a category title and their partner(s) must come up with possible word items which would fit under that particular category (i.e. title: sports, categories: soccer, hockey, football, basketball, etc). This activity facilitates children's thinking about different words which represent one thought and to also develop schemas for various categories. This is important for ToM acquisition because it implicitly makes children appreciate that there can be more than one way to define or describe an object, idea, or thought. Children will hear their partner(s) guessing words which may be different to their ideas, and through this experience they may realize that others can have thoughts that are independent of their own.

The purple card activity is one which engages a different modality of children's thinking to help them understand and further develop their ToM. This activity has children engage in expressions of various ideas through the arts, particularly drawing. The child who is drawing is not able to use words to explain the picture described on the card. Therefore, they need to understand the importance of being detailed and open-minded in their drawings. This activity focuses on perception, and over time this activity may increase children's awareness that others may perceive an image differently than themselves.