Theory of Mind and Pragmatics: Think about it!

Jack turns over his boiled egg and says “Look mommy, I didn’t eat it!” Chloe hides behind the sofa and her daddy starts the “Where’s Chloe gone” routine. Both of these scenarios show children who are developing key concepts in the Theory of Mind.

Learning Outcomes:

- Identify 5 key concepts that underpin TOM development
- Describe behaviours you would observe in a child that demonstrate understanding of ‘seeing is knowing’ and ‘false belief’
- Recognise how a child’s pragmatic language skill may be linked to TOM development
- Formulate 2 activities that promote TOM development in pre-school children

Why is TOM important?

- Allows us to predict and explain other people’s behaviour and emotions
- Allows us to be compassionate, to keep a secret or to tell a lie, to pretend to be someone else in play, to be sarcastic, to show and share & to understand accidental behaviour
- Allows us to understand inference in communication e.g. “it’s cold in here” (point to window left open)
- Many researchers have argued that lack of TOM is the fundamental impairment at the root of autism and can explain the social and communication deficits
- Research as shown TOM to be delayed in children with hearing loss regardless of communication mode although measuring TOM is controversial.

Why could TOM be delayed in children with hearing loss?

One suggestion is reduced distance hearing and the ability to ‘overhear’.

Overhearing gives access to other peoples thoughts and conversations ‘incidental learning’ Without a well developed theory of mind the world would be a scary unpredictable place, it helps us to empathise and to understand others. This is the basis of our emotional intelligence.

‘Children need the best possible access to distance hearing for incidental learning’
Dr Carol Flexer
1) Theory of Mind – The beginnings

a) Write a definition for each of these terms
b) Write down one example of a behaviour you could observe in a child that would indicate they had an ability to understand this.

- Object Permanence:

- Sense of self:

- Sense of others:

- Joint attention:

- Desires and Emotions:

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Seeing is knowing

Describe a social routine that you could observe in a child when they are developing their understanding that ‘seeing is knowing’

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False belief is:

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People can have false beliefs about other people’s belief; we call this 2nd order false belief

Bibliography


