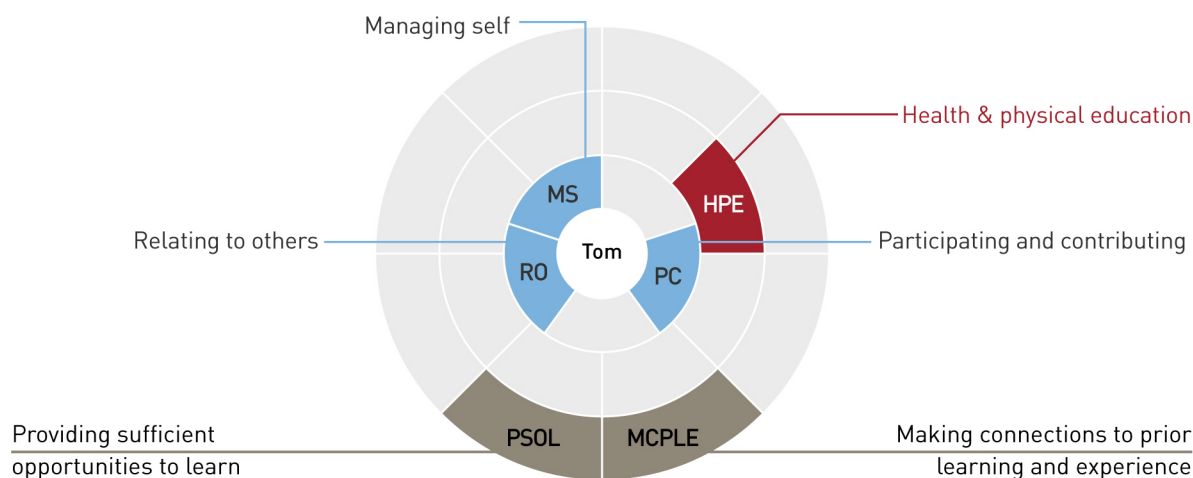


Tom gets “play”

Links to the curriculum



Student background

Name	Tom
Age	8
Year	4
School	Primary

Tom has the support of a teacher aide throughout his day as he works alongside his year 4 peers. Tom is not yet talking, although he is making some sounds. We have spent three-and-a-half years working on a play programme called Floor Time.

Essentially, we have been encouraging Tom to look, to take a turn, or to respond to any suggestion of play. Before 2008, Tom looked at play objects for brief periods only (less than 10 seconds). Although Tom usually engages in solitary or parallel play, he has recently begun to independently seek contact with other children. Another recent development has been Tom's increasing interest in some of the play equipment his peers use, such as balls and skipping ropes. Within these stories, we refer to Tom's use of a "Mighty Mo". This is a device that has pictures Tom can press and a spoken word conveys his need.

Seven learning stories

- 1. Tom joins in** 21 February 2008
- 2. "Kick the ball, Tom!"** 10 March 2008
- 3. Let's play!** 17 April 2008
- 4. Playing with the ropes** 18 April 2008
- 5. "Do you want to play Tom?"** 5 May 2008
- 6. Sliding and bouncing** 23 May 2008
- 7. Tom's train** 12 June 2008

This string of stories reflects Tom's increasing knowledge and skills in using play equipment over a five-month period. It also details Tom's ability to join in play with his peers with increasing confidence and independence during this time.

Tom joins in

Student	Tom	Date	21 February 2008
		Observers	Steffi (teacher aide) Annie (ORRS teacher)

Learning goal

- Tom will join in a play activity in the playground.

It was playtime. Tom was walking around the playground spinning a yoghurt container in his hand. A group of children were lined up against the wall. Another child was facing the line of children with a ball in her hand. Tom walked between the line of children and their peer, talking and spinning his container. He put his hands out as if to catch the ball. The child put the ball in Tom's hands. He smiled.



The other children yelled out, "Tom, Tom" and put up their hands to catch the ball from him. Tom placed the ball to his mouth repeatedly. He spun around. He threw the ball towards the children. He walked away. Steffi said, "That was so clever Tom. You had the ball. You were playing with the children". We are so proud of you, Tom, for joining in the game today. The children were pleased you decided to join in their game.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Participating and contributing

We were thrilled to see Tom put his hands out, which we interpret as him wanting the ball and maybe wanting to play with the children.

It was also wonderful to watch the reactions of the other children who treated Tom as any other peer who would throw the ball to them.

Learning areas

Level 1 health and physical education: Movement Concepts and Motor Skills

Tom was able to demonstrate an awareness of the use of a ball by putting his hands out.

Where to next?

We will

- continue modelling throwing and catching a ball
- provide Tom with opportunities to play with his peers
- continue the use of strategies, such as the Floor Time programme, to model reciprocity in play.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is teaching us that he can choose to play with others. He is showing us that he knows how to get the toys he wants.

"Kick the ball, Tom!"

Student	Tom	Date	10 March 2008
		Observer	Leanne (Tom's mother)

Learning goals

- Tom will kick a soccer ball towards a net.
- Tom will track the soccer ball as it moves.



Tom and his Dad were playing outside after school. Tom has been reluctant to kick the ball near the soccer net. Tom kicked the ball and his Dad moved the net towards where Tom had kicked the ball. Tom kicked the ball into the net. Dad made a big fuss when Tom got the ball in the net and Tom smiled.

Tom and Dad continued playing and Tom managed to dribble the ball (small taps and kicks) and track it as it went into the net.



Dad continued to bring the net closer to where Tom was kicking the ball. When the ball went to the side of the net Tom was able to direct the ball into the net using his feet. Every time that Tom got the ball in the net, his Dad yahoed and Tom smiled. We are so proud of you tracking the ball and finding the net, Tom.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

We were thrilled to see Tom using the ball appropriately in the context of getting a goal. In the past he just has not been interested in kicking a ball. He would run away or turn his back when we put a ball near him. This was the first time he was able to track the ball with his eyes and feet. What an achievement. We celebrated Tom being able to kick the ball over a distance of five metres.

Where to next?

As a family, we would like to get Tom to kick a ball back and forth with a partner or to use other things like the hoop and basketball (which we know he loves) to teach him to take part in a game with others.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is teaching us that he is ready to play with those toys his peers regularly use. He is showing us that he recognises the achievement of getting the ball into the net and that it is fun. He is also showing us that the numerous times we practise skills with him are worth the effort as we see the pleasure he gets from getting a goal!

Let's play!

Student	Tom	Date	17 April 2008
		Observers	Steffi (teacher aide) Annie (ORRS teacher)

Learning goals

- Tom will initiate play with a peer independently.
- Tom will participate in play with a peer.
- Tom will take a turn in a play activity.



Steffi and Annie (adults) and Tom, Becky, Lee, and Charlotte (children) were in the hall to play with one of Tom's favourite activities, being pulled by a rope on the scooter board. Becky, Lee, and Charlotte had been instructed not to pre-empt what they thought Tom might do, but to ask him what he wanted if he took their hand. We had the scooter board and the rope out. "Let's play with the scooter board and the rope", said Steffi.

Tom walked over to the rope and took it in his hand. He walked to Steffi. He reached out to give her the rope. She turned away. He repeated this three times. Steffi walked away. Tom walked over to Annie. He reached out to her with the rope. Annie turned her back on Tom.



He repeated his approach three times. Annie moved over towards Becky and stood behind her without speaking.

Tom walked over and reached out with the rope. Becky held her hands out and said, "What do you want Tom?" Tom gave her the rope. "Let's play, Tom," said Becky.

Tom sat on the scooter board and Becky pulled him. "Ready, set, go!" yelled Becky. She ran around the hall, pulling Tom. Lee and Charlotte yelled out, "Yay, Tom". Tom laughed and laughed.



When he let go of the rope Annie whispered to Lee to stand near Tom, but not to pick up the rope. Lee stood near Tom. Tom got off the scooter board and took the rope to Lee. Lee said, "Let's play, Tom". Lee pulled Tom on the scooter.

Tom laughed and laughed.



We repeated the same actions with Charlotte. Annie asked Becky, "If you were playing with another child and you had pulled them on the scooter board what would you do next?" Becky said, "It would be their turn to pull us".

The children were instructed to tell Tom it was his turn to pull them. Becky walked over to the scooter board Tom was sitting on and said, "It's my turn, Tom". Tom stood up, vocalising. Becky gave him one end of the rope and she sat on the scooter board.



Annie walked in between Tom and Becky to help pull on the rope with Tom. "Ready, set, go!" said Annie. Tom and Annie ran as Becky was pulled. Everyone was laughing. It was so much fun. When Becky dropped the rope, Lee said, "Tom, it's my turn".

Everyone laughed and clapped as they played. Charlotte had her turn. Steffi came back to join us. She said, "Tom, Charlotte, Lee, and Becky, you had so much fun. Great turn taking". The children packed up and as we walked back to class Lee said, "That was awesome, Tom".

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Today, Tom demonstrated how much he relies on adults as his first support. This has shown us that even with good intentions, we can be such a barrier to Tom accessing play opportunities with his peers. Our withdrawal from verbally and physically supporting Tom resulted in reciprocal play opportunities for Tom and his peers. This dependency on adults is also recognised as a barrier within Tom's home. He will walk past his sister to ask a parent for help. Tom's parents recognise the importance of him communicating with peers and we will work together to support this.

Key competencies

Relating to others

Tom initiated play and took turns with his peers in the hall with one of his favourite activities.

Where to next?

We will:

- provide daily opportunities for further modelling of appropriate responses to Tom's requests for the children at school
- provide play opportunities within a range of school and home environments and within structured (class) and unstructured (break/home) times
- model and teach the use of a variety of play equipment
- withdraw physical and verbal support in the playground through "fading".

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is showing us that we can use alternative ways of supporting him as he learns to play. He no longer needs us to initiate play, but he may need us to prompt his peers with ideas for promoting reciprocity and allowing him to take risks in his play. He is also showing us how his learning is more successful when we use objects (scooter board, rope) that he relates well to when teaching him new skills.

Playing with the ropes

Student	Tom	Date	18 April 2008
		Observers	Sue (teacher aide) Annie (ORRS teacher)

Learning goals

- Tom will initiate play with other children, without a teacher aide.
- Tom will participate in play with a peer.



It was lunchtime and the children were in the playground. Tom walked over and picked up a skipping rope from the ground. Charlotte (child) went to approach Tom to take the rope. I quietly asked her to wait, to stand, and not to initiate any contact with Tom. He walked over to Charlotte and put his hand out and gave her the end of the skipping rope. Charlotte said, "You wanna play with the ropes, Tom?"

Tom kept his arm outreached to Charlotte. She took one end of the rope and Tom had the other. Tom ran around with the rope as did Charlotte. "Let's go!" said Charlotte. They laughed as they ran around with the rope, spinning in circles. Emma ran over to join in and the three children laughed and ran together. After about two minutes, Tom let go of the rope and walked away. "That was fun, Tom," said Charlotte.



Tom approached peers to play with him on two more occasions during lunchtime with no teacher aide prompting. The children accepted Tom's approaches and ran around the playground with him. Wow, Tom! We are so proud of you inviting someone to play with you. We loved seeing you laughing and running with Charlotte and Emma.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Relating to others

It was fabulous to observe Tom generalising his new play skills from the structured environment of the play session in the hall to the unstructured setting of the playground.

Managing self

Tom is making choices about who he wants to play with and which equipment he wants to use. Tom demonstrated this new skill on three occasions without an adult prompting him.

Learning areas

Level 1 health and physical education: Relationships with Other People: interpersonal skills

Tom is able to show us when he wants to play and when he does not. He is participating in his play with enjoyment as are his peers.

Where to next?

We will celebrate this success with Tom's peers and support them to play with Tom, without having to take responsibility for him. We will provide opportunities for Tom to play with other students at school and with family members at home. We will model new games and uses for the play equipment Tom prefers to use. We will introduce the use of a card or Mighty Mo to tell the children that he wants to play or to indicate his choice of play equipment.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is teaching us that he does not always require us to prompt him to play. When he wants to join in with other children, he does not need us to organise it for him. He is showing us that he understands that when you offer a toy there is a reciprocal action. We can step back and enjoy watching Tom playing with his friends.

"Do you want to play Tom?"

Student	Tom	Date	5 May 2008
		Observer	Sue (teacher aide)

Learning goals

- Tom will respond to an invitation to play.
- Tom will use play equipment in an activity.

The children were in the playground. Tom was standing, watching the children playing. Teagan (child) got a skipping rope. She walked up to Tom and said, "Do you want to play Tom?" She reached out with the skipping rope in her hand and Tom took it. They ran around in a circle with the rope. They stopped. They looked at each other. Teagan said something to Tom that I could not hear. They turned to face the playground fence and ran parallel to each other with a stretched rope.

When they got to the end of the court they turned and ran the other way. They stopped and Teagan started wiggling the rope up and down and Tom joined in this wiggling. Teagan and Tom were laughing together. They continued wiggling the rope for approximately one minute. Tom dropped the rope and walked away. I think it's wonderful that you can play without me Tom. You are awesome!

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Participating and contributing

The children are no longer coming to us to ask if Tom wants to play. Instead, they are asking him if he wishes to play. Tom participated directly with a peer.

Learning areas

Level 1 health and physical education: Relationships with Other People: interpersonal skills

Tom was able to respond positively to a request from a peer to play.

Level 1 health and physical education: Movement Concepts and Motor Skills

Tom was able to use the rope to play within a variety of activities. Tom was able to imitate an action from his peer.

Where to next?

We will continue to provide play opportunities for Tom and his peers in both structured and unstructured environments. We will continue modelling the use of a "Can I play?" card and Mighty Mo for joining in play and selecting play equipment. We will also introduce the concept of finishing (the signing that Tom has used on other tasks) and signalling that Tom wishes to end his participation in the game.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is showing us that he wants social interaction. He is ready to accept invitations and understand that they have a purpose. Tom is starting to initiate play. He is also showing that he wishes to explore the uses of everyday play equipment and that imitation of peers has an effect on his learning. Way to go Tom!

Sliding and bouncing

Student	Tom	Date	23 May 2008
		Observer	Leanne (Tom's Mother)

Learning goal

- Tom will participate in a game, taking turns with his sister.



Tom and his sister Natalie were playing in their parents' bedroom. Tom was bouncing on the bed. Natalie put a mattress at the end of the bed and said, "Look, Tom". Natalie slid down the mattress three times. Tom watched her as he continued bouncing on the bed. Natalie said, "Tom's turn". Tom moved towards the mattress and got stuck.

Natalie grabbed Tom's legs and guided him to the mattress. She pushed him down the mattress for speed. Natalie said, "Good boy, Tom, good sliding". Tom and Natalie were laughing and giggling. They repeated having turns for approximately five minutes. Tom then wanted to look at the books on his Mum and Dad's bed.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Participating and contributing

Tom is able to participate in a game and try new things when Natalie provides a model of how to play. We think Tom is actually getting the whole idea of play.

Learning areas

Level health and physical education: Movement Concepts and Motor Skills

We think Tom is showing us that he is ready to use everyday equipment in a variety of play situations.

Where to next?

We would like to keep introducing different ways to play using everyday materials. We also see the importance of teaching Tom the "finished" sign to indicate he wishes to exit play.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom is teaching us that he is willing to take risks mentally and physically when we support him in new play situations. Natalie is a really powerful model, giggling and teasing Tom, and enjoying play with him.

Tom's train

Student	Tom	Date	12 June 2008
		Observer	Sue (teacher aide)

Learning goal

— Tom will participate in a play activity with a group of children.

A group of new entrant to year 5 children were playing in the playground at lunchtime. They had made a train by linking themselves together with hoops. They approached Tom with a hoop. They held the hoop out to Tom and one of the older children asked Tom, "Do you wanna play?" Tom took the hoop in his hands. The older children flipped the hoop over Tom's head, encircling his body and leaving his hands on the front of the hoop. The children said, "Tom, you can be the driver". Tom stood at the front of the train and the next child linked onto Tom's hoop.

All the children ran and walked, following Tom's lead, making noises as they played in the playground. Tom looked around at the children behind him, laughing. I suggested to one of the children that Tom might like the "Down at the Station" song. The children sang as they moved around. Tom was laughing and holding onto his hoop. He was very animated. The children played for three minutes. Tom stopped, put his hoop down on the ground and stepped out of the hoop. He walked away. One of the children picked up the hoop, walked over to Tom and asked, "Tom, do you want to play?" Tom flapped his arms and walked away.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Tom was able to join in a group activity spontaneously. He was able to participate in imaginary play, and to stay at this activity for three minutes. The exciting thing for me is that Tom demonstrated an awareness of being part of a group.

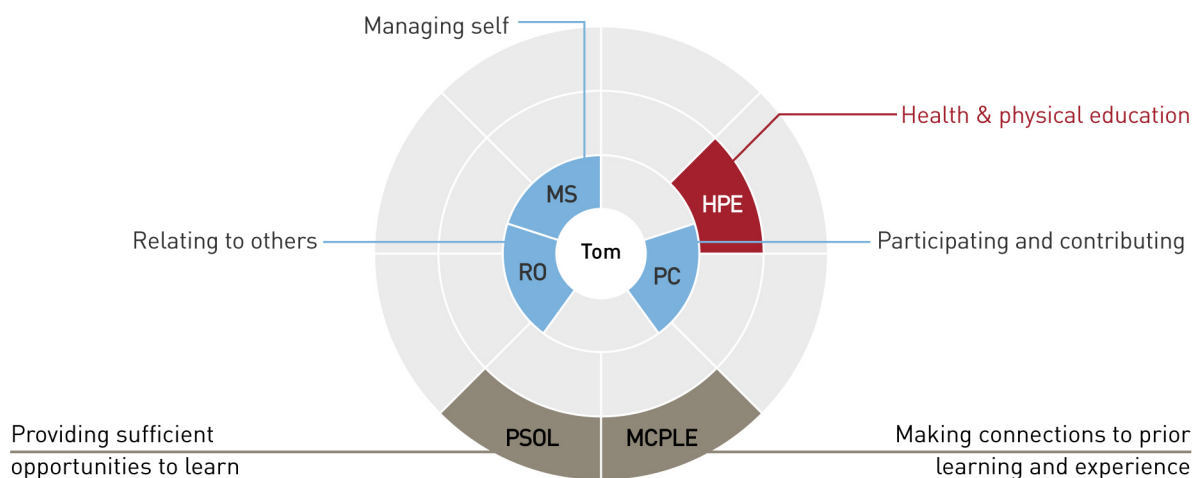
Where to next?

We need to continue reminding Tom to signal that he wishes to finish a game. We need to continue providing Tom with opportunities to join in play with his peers.

What has Tom taught the adults working/living with him?

Tom has taught us how effective we are at supporting him to play with others by withdrawing physically from him in the playground. He is showing us that play is not the hard work that it has been in the past. He loves joining in. The children have also learned how to play with Tom without mothering him.

Reflection – what these stories exemplify



Key competencies

These stories illustrate that Tom is learning to make choices for himself, including what he wishes to play with, whom he wishes to play with, and when he has had enough of playing (managing self). He has demonstrated a growing awareness of his ability to try new things (such as working in new areas) and new roles (the initiator/the recipient) in play. Tom shows that he is interested in others and enjoys playing with them. He is also interested in what is going on around him in play situations (relating to others; participating and contributing). Tom is finding play a pleasurable experience.

How might these stories strengthen Tom's identity as a learner?

Over the duration of this string, Tom's peers began to recognise him as a learner in a number of ways. In the last two stories in this string they approached Tom to play, without conferring with or relying on an adult to interpret for them or to give permission to play with Tom as has happened in the past. The children's expectations of Tom in play have changed. In the past they have flooded him with choice. Now they are prepared to wait for him to make a play choice (communicating). They are seeing him as a peer who can play, both as an initiator and a respondent.

Tom became more independent over time (agency) requiring less support from us. Tom began to teach others, including his peers, that he was ready to play with them and that he could copy them. His peers learned they could interact freely with Tom and no longer required constant prompting from adults.

Tom's learning is occurring in different environments at school and home – the hall, playground, house, and farm (breadth); with different people – peers, father, sister, teacher aides, teacher; and within different roles, either as initiator or respondent (depth). This string of stories illustrates a change in skills and competencies and their occurrence (continuity) within these different environments. Tom is able to show us that not only can he can transfer his new play skills across environments, but he is also able to transfer across resources, using both standard play materials, such as a ball and rope, and other objects, such as the mattress. Tom is able to demonstrate new knowledge of communicating his needs, playing with equipment, and experimenting with this equipment in new ways (depth). As his Mum Leanne says, "He's getting play".

For more information on the four dimensions of agency, breadth, continuity, and depth (ABCDs), refer to *Narrative assessment: a guide for teachers*.

Learning areas

Level 1 health and physical education

Tom is developing his knowledge of using a variety of play equipment within a range of play environments (movement concepts and motor skills). At the same time he is now identifying enjoyable physical activities (physical health and physical development). He is also expressing his needs and wants clearly (interpersonal skills). This is a tremendous change for us, as in the past Tom has not demonstrated any awareness or inclination to participate in reciprocal play requiring more than two turns on his part. The skipping rope and scooter board were chosen for teaching play within school as Tom seems to really enjoy these. At home he has been more responsive to the use of a ball, and future learning at school will continue to include a ball in play choices.

Effective pedagogy

What does this tell us about teaching and learning in this setting?

Tom has used a skipping rope and scooter board for a number of years. We have persisted in modelling the use of a ball in play during this time. Tom has participated in a Floor Time programme to model reciprocity in play within home and school environments. We encouraged his new learning by providing opportunities to use these skills and resources together (making connections to prior learning).

Although we do not always understand Tom's intentions, we use our knowledge of his prior learning to anticipate and encourage new learning for him; for example, if he puts his hands out, we will give him a toy. We have encouraged Tom's learning by providing both structured and unstructured play opportunities on a daily basis (providing sufficient opportunities to learn). This learning has been supported by Tom's family, who have promoted the same skills within a wide range of environments.

Opportunities to learn occur in social contexts and it has been an important consideration in this string of stories to teach Tom's peers appropriate ways to interact with him. We think this has resulted in more authentic play experiences for Tom and his peers. The most exciting thing for us adults was that we were no longer needed – that other students ignored us and walked past to play with Tom.

Reflective questions for the reader

"How do you get home involved with the learning at school?"

"How do you stand back and give students space to become involved with their learning environment?"

"What are the ways your students seek engagement with others?"

Useful resources

Butterfield, N., Arthur, M., & Sigafos, J. (c1995). *Partners in everyday communicative exchanges: a guide to promoting interaction involving people with severe intellectual disability*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.

Downing, J. E. (c1996). *Including students with severe and multiple disabilities in typical classrooms: practical strategies for teachers*. Baltimore: P.H. Brookes Pub.

McCormick, L., Loeb, D. F., & Schiefbusch, R. L. (c2003). *Supporting children with communication difficulties in inclusive settings: school-based language intervention*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Schroeder, A. (2008). *The friendship formula*. Cambridge: LDA.

Janney, R., & Snell, M. E. (c2006). *Social relationships and peer support* [Part of the set *Teachers' guides to inclusive practices*] (2nd ed.). Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.