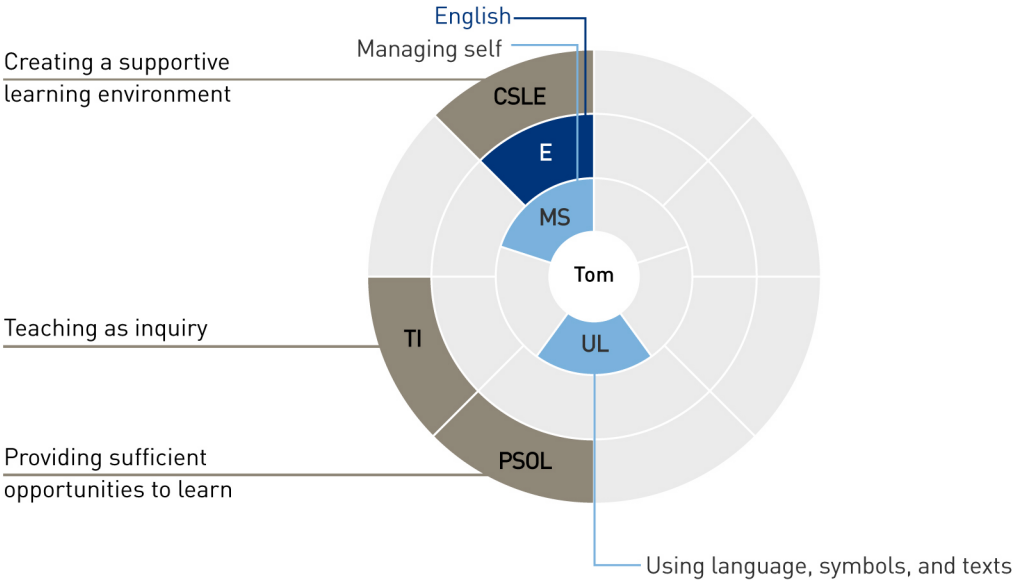


Tom can write!

Links to the curriculum



Student background

Name	Tom
Age	8
Year	4
School	Primary

Tom is fully supported throughout his day by two teacher aides as he works alongside, and with, his year 4 peers. Tom is described as non-verbal, which means that although he does communicate verbally with us, we do not always understand the sounds he makes.

We do, however, understand when he is angry, happy, or upset by the tone of his voice or the physical gestures and actions he uses; for example, dropping to the ground, crying, and so on. Tom’s family and various education staff have spent the past five years modelling and writing Tom’s name as we have encouraged him to recognise, read, and write it. During the past few months, Tom has demonstrated an awareness of writing his name and, for the first time, during this string, we have seen him complete the correct letter strokes to be able to do this.

Tom has complex sensory needs, which can change quickly. At times he can tolerate various materials and sounds, yet within minutes these can be unbearable for him. It is important for us to recognise this and to change teaching materials so that a task will be reinforcing for him. A further concern is recognising the difficulty for Tom to complete the physical act of writing. He uses big pens so that he can grip them using the grasp he has mastered. In the past, he has required weight on his wrists as he writes because of his low muscle tone and lack of body awareness.

Four learning stories

- 1. I can write** 17 April 2008
- 2. I can write independently** 19 June 2008
- 3. Writing is fun** 23 July 2008
- 4. I can sit and write** 1 August 2008

This string of stories reflects Tom's increasing confidence in writing his own name and a parallel increase in the amount of time he can sit at his desk to complete such tasks.

I can write

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

Learning goal

- Tom will write his name.

Tom's classmates were sitting at their desks. Everyone was writing. Steffi placed a sheet of paper on Tom's desk. She had already placed the individual cards "T", "o", "m" on the desk as a model for Tom to copy. Steffi instructed Tom to start writing, repeating the instruction, "T, o, m spells Tom". Steffi placed her flat hand on Tom's wrist so that he would have some weight bearing on this area.



Tom made a "T", an "o" and an "m".

Steffi called out to Annie who came over to look at Tom's writing.

We were so happy. We were saying, "Great writing Tom". Tom smiled and laughed. The students at Tom's desk were excited, saying, "Look at Tom's writing". Annie said, "Write your name, Tom". She took Tom's hand and placed it at the top of the sheet of paper.

Like Steffi, she placed her flat hand on Tom's wrist to encourage awareness of his muscles being used. Tom made a downward stroke, a cross stroke, a circle, and an "m".

Tom wrote his name. Everyone was so excited. Tom went with Steffi to get an award from the principal. Tom's writing went on the wall in our classroom "Learning Journeys" display, alongside everyone else's work.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Managing self

We are so proud of you, Tom, for persevering to learn to write.

Learning areas

Level 1 English: Speaking, Writing, and Presenting

After five years of having his name modelled to him and being encouraged to write it, Tom has shown us that he is ready to do this.

Where to next?

We want to provide as many opportunities as possible for Tom to write his name. As we know that Tom has a complex range of sensory needs, we will provide practise with different surfaces and writing tools. We will encourage Tom to sign his name on his work, in cards, to name his gear, and for the myriad of other things we sign our names for.

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

Tom has taught us that it is worth us persevering with tasks and that with lots of practise he can achieve the goals we work on. We have interpreted Tom's smile and laughter as his acknowledgement that he has succeeded at writing.

I can write independently

Student	Tom	Date	19 June 2008
		Observer	Sue (teacher aide)

Learning goal

– Tom will write his name independently.

Tom was sitting at his desk with the Magna Doodle. After a period of time where I let him play and explore the surfaces of the Magna Doodle, I told Tom that it was time to get on with our work.



I handed him the Magna Doodle pen and he played around making some squiggles and rubbing them out. I handed him some shapes and he loved making lines on the Magna Doodle with these. I said, "Come on Tom. How about we write your name?" I talked about the letter shapes and had the cards for each letter next to the Magna Doodle. Tom picked up his pen and he wrote his name without any physical prompt from me.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Managing self, Using language, symbols, and texts

We have all worked together for so long and you have shown us that you are ready to write.

Learning areas

Level 1 English: Speaking, Writing, and Presenting

We are so excited to celebrate your first independent writing of your name, Tom.

Where to next?

We will continue giving you opportunities to write your name and any other letters you wish to try. We will support you by continuing to provide these opportunities using a range of materials and surfaces. We will continue working on letter legibility and using the computer to write your name.

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

Once again Tom has surprised us with his perseverance and his achievement of writing his name without physical prompting. He has shown us that it is worth persevering with our teaching goals, as he constantly surprises us by suddenly completing a task we have been working on for long periods of time.

Writing is fun

Student	Tom	Date	23 July 2008
		Observer	Kim (teacher aide)

Learning goal

- Tom will complete a writing activity independently.

Tom and I were in the hall. I placed four literacy activities around the hall at knee height (two picture-matching activities, a whiteboard for writing, a sketching board for writing). Tom was familiar with this set up as we had started working in this way a fortnight earlier. Tom was sitting on his scooter board. I had a skipping rope and I gave one end to Tom. I said, "Let's go, Tom". I pulled Tom along on his scooter board. I stopped at the whiteboard activity. Tom made a sound that I interpreted as displeasure. I said, "We're going to stop and do some writing, Tom". I picked up the whiteboard pen and took the lid off. I gave the pen to Tom who was sitting on his scooter board. The whiteboard was directly in front of him at eye level. I said, "Tom, can you write your name?" I placed my palm under Tom's wrist and said, "T". Tom moved his hand to the whiteboard and attempted a letter "T". I prompted "o" and "m". I continued to support Tom's hand as he wrote. When Tom had finished I said, "Great writing, Tom. "T-o-m" is Tom. Let's scoot". Tom put his hand out for the skipping rope and we scooted to the next activity.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Managing self, Using language, symbols, and texts

We have paired a favourite activity (the scooter board) with a less desired activity (writing) to encourage Tom to practise the skill of writing his name. It is fabulous to watch you writing your name with a minimum of fuss, Tom.

Where to next?

We will continue to provide you with opportunities to practise writing your name. We will try and think of lots of fun ways for you to do this. We will continue working on letter legibility.

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

Tom has shown us that when we pair favourite activities with learning we can achieve so much together. Our knowledge of Tom is central to the strategies we use to motivate him and encourage new learning.

I can sit and write

Student	Tom	Date	1 August 2008
		Observer	Annie (ORRS teacher)

Learning goal

- Tom will work for at least five minutes on a writing task.

Tom was sitting at his desk. I placed a piece of A3 paper with the word "Tom" on it on Tom's desk. I said, "Tom, we are going to write your name". Tom looked away. I said, "We are going to use playdough to write today". One of the students at Tom's desk asked, "Why are you using playdough to write?" I said "Tom might find it easier to write his name if he can feel how it is written".



The other students at Tom's group said, "Cool" and "Yeah". "He finds it hard to write his name," I said. "We'll help him then." I got out the playdough and rolled a piece in front of Tom. I asked, "Can you help me roll the playdough, Tom?" Tom put his hand down on the desk, but did not look down. I interpreted his hand down as a choice that he wanted to roll the playdough.



I placed my hand over Tom's as we rolled and made the letters for Tom's name. Tom's peers were fascinated to watch us writing. I placed Tom's hand on top of the T and said, "T." I repeated this for "o" and "m". The children joined in, "T-o-m - TOM". Tom smiled. He looked away. He picked up a toy to play with. I said, "Good working, Tom. Nine minutes of writing is hard work".

Tom's peers made comments like, "Good writing, Tom" and "Cool playdough". They returned to their work.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Managing self

Great focus Tom. You showed us you are able to sit at your desk for nine minutes at a writing task.

Learning areas

Level 1 English: Speaking, Writing, and Presenting

Although it was hard work, you were able to help me write your name. You were able to feel the shape of your name as we read the letters.

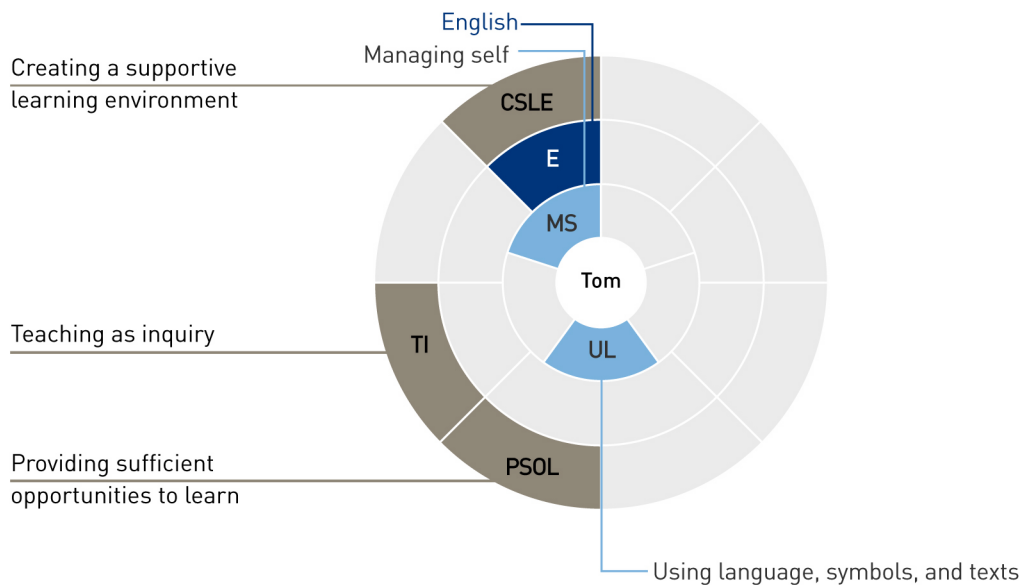
Where to next?

We will continue to show you many ways to write your name. We will help you to recognise the shapes of the letters and to write them so we can read them.

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

Tom is teaching us that there are times when he can work at his desk and attempt such tasks as writing his name. He is showing us that he is ready to work on tasks that require a longer period of concentration and that can build on previous knowledge.

Reflection – what these stories exemplify



Key competencies

These stories illustrate that Tom is learning to use language, symbols, and texts to make meaning of the letters "T-o-m". Tom has demonstrated a growing awareness of his ability to try new things, such as writing his name, and to extend the amount of time he can stay at these new tasks (managing self). We recognise the importance of supporting Tom as he stays at a task for longer periods of time if we wish him to expand his literacy efforts.

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. They have attended school with Tom since the age of five years, and for the first time have seen examples of Tom writing his own name and having this work published alongside theirs on the wall. When their language learning goals were discussed and introduced, Tom's peers were able to identify his learning goal as writing his name independently.

Over the period of the learning story string, Tom was able to move from writing his name with some physical support to attempting his writing independently (agency). He was able to experiment with a range of writing resources and a variety of people (depth).

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 English

The learning is situated within the Speaking, Writing, and Presenting strand of English. Tom is learning to use a personal content word (his name) to create meaning. We have celebrated any attempts at independence in this task, while recognising that continuing practise using a variety of materials will assist in legibility.

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

Tom has been supported to attempt writing his name over many years in both home and school environments (creating a supportive learning environment). Regular communication and sharing ownership for Tom's learning has resulted in many joint activities to stimulate learning consistently between home and school; for example, using rice, playdough, chalks, pipe cleaners, name cards with photos, and so on. This learning community has been vital in establishing a background to support Tom's recent learning.

Central to this learning environment have been the daily opportunities for Tom to practise the skills needed to recognise and write his name. Multiple opportunities are provided within a variety of environments within Tom's day. These opportunities are provided in both structured formats, as in the fourth learning story, and unstructured formats, such as linking a writing task to a preferred activity, like a game format (providing sufficient opportunities to learn). Our knowledge of Tom is central to the strategies we use to motivate him and encourage new learning (teaching as inquiry).

Reflective questions for the reader

"How can I make sure I am communicating with, and involving everyone important in my student's life, in their learning?"

"Am I providing a variety of opportunities and environments to support my student's learning?"

"Am I using all the sensory resources available to me in the learning environment?"

Useful resources

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

Janney, R., & Snell, M. E. (c2004). *Modifying schoolwork (2nd ed.)*. Baltimore: P.H. Brookes Pub.

Ministry of Education. (2003). *Effective literacy practice in years 1 to 4*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (2007). *Literacy learning progressions: meeting the reading and writing demands of the curriculum: a professional tool for teachers: draft for consultation*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Mitchell, D. (2008). *What really works in special and inclusive education: using evidence-based teaching strategies*. Abingdon [England]: Routledge.