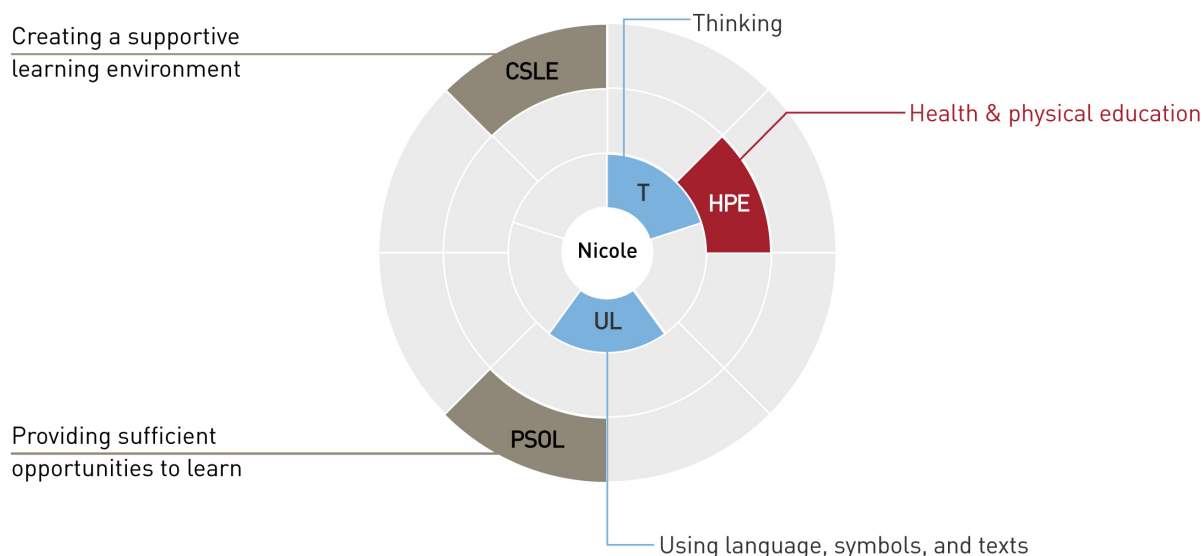


# Nicole takes charge

## Links to the curriculum



## Student background

<b>Name</b>	Nicole
<b>Age</b>	18
<b>Year</b>	
<b>School</b>	Secondary

Nicole enjoys socialising with others. Nicole is in a class with seven other students, two teachers, and three support staff at a special school. Nicole communicates with others in a variety of ways, including some special hand gestures.

Sometimes Nicole will repeat certain phrases, particularly when she attempts to interact with others in her class. She will call out to them and say, "How are you?" several times. She will use "enough" to signal that she wants to finish something, such as a meal or an activity. To support her communication, Nicole sometimes uses a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) as a visual prompt. These visuals are particularly helpful to communicate her news between home and school. They are also used to assist her in decision-making.

## Seven learning stories

- 1. Lunchtime and friendship** 28 February 2008
- 2. Hand massage** 10 March 2008
- 3. I will put it in the bin** 3 April 2008
- 4. More hand massage** 13 April 2008
- 5. Choice!** 23 May 2008
- 6. Talking for music!** 27 June 2008
- 7. Yes, please!** 22 July 2008

This string of learning stories shows Nicole taking charge and making decisions about what she wants and communicating these decisions effectively to others. She is also initiating some behaviours and demonstrating greater independence.

While this is obviously linked to the English curriculum, we have chosen to focus particularly on health because we have an expectation that Nicole will grow in independence and responsibility; making choices will help Nicole to work towards this.

## Lunchtime

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	28 February 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Lunchtime and friendship	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

At lunchtime today, we went out on to the playground and students were asked if they wanted to take a ball out with them – no-one did. Once we were out on the playground, Nicole said, "Play ball!" So, Liz (teacher aide) took her back to class to fetch a ball. On her way back to the playground, Nicole noticed her friend from another class standing by the gate for Room 2. Nicole stopped and moved to the gate, leaving Liz to carry on walking.

Nicole appeared to be working out who she wanted to spend some time with – and it seemed a difficult choice!

Nicole spent some time with her friend before walking towards the rest of her class. Halfway between her friend and the class, Nicole stopped, looked and then turned around and walked back to her friend. Decision made. Her friend was equally happy to see Nicole as she wanted someone to join her insect catching.

I was surprised that Nicole made the decision to remain with her friend as usually she would choose to remain with her classmates. This was a first!

## Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Nicole showed us how important people can be to her in the decision she made today. Her physical movement between the two choices shows that she was thinking about the choice at hand.

The length of time taken by Nicole to acknowledge that she wanted a ball tells us that she requires time to process some information.

## Key competencies

### Participating and contributing

- I am interested in my friends.

### Thinking

- I can make choices.

### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can tell you what I think/need/feel.
- I can show you what I think/need/feel.

## Learning areas

### Level 1 health and physical education: Relationships with Other People: relationships

- Explore and share ideas about relationships with other people.

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, [and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people].

## Where to next?

### Celebrate and consolidate

This was the perfect opportunity for Nicole to see her friend at lunchtime. It was interesting to watch Nicole making the decision – we will give her the time she needs to be able to make decisions on future occasions. We will also try to provide time when spontaneous opportunities arise for Nicole to make a decision based on engagement and interest. As Nicole took a long time to make a decision over the ball – now when we know we are going out to the playground, we will give her the opportunity to make a decision earlier so that she has sufficient time to make the decision prior to leaving the classroom.

## Hand massage

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	10 March 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Hand therapy	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

Today, I gave Nicole the choice of hand massage or play ball.

I chose these options because I know Nicole enjoys both of these and we had an opportunity for a brief period of downtime. I put out two PECS cards, "hand massage" and "play ball". I asked Nicole what she wanted to do, Nicole handed me the PECS card for massage and so that is what we did!

## Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Nicole expressed her choice, by making a selection between the two PECS cards. I offered the PECS cards to assist her decision-making because sometimes Nicole can take time to answer verbally and we only had a short period of time available.

## Key competencies

### Thinking

- I can make choices.

### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can show you what I think/need/feel.

## Learning areas

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, [and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people].

## Where to next?

### Celebrate and consolidate

Celebrate that Nicole made a choice to show us what she wanted to do. Continue to offer Nicole opportunities to make choice using PCS or other means, e.g. by physically moving herself.

## I will put it in the bin!

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	3 April 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Afternoon tea	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

As a treat at the end of the day, we had a small afternoon tea, which included some banana cake. Every student had a piece of cake, including Nicole. Nicole took a bite and first said, "Yummy," and then, "Enough!"

"Fine," I replied, "if you don't want any more, I'll put it in the bin."

Although she is able to put rubbish in the bin, Nicole would usually wait for someone else to tidy up for her. On this occasion, Nicole stood up, picked up the piece of cake and put it in the bin! You have clearly had enough, Nicole.

## Analysis – what learning is happening here?

This is the first time I have seen Nicole behave in this way at school. Nicole asserted strongly that she did not want any more cake – she did this verbally and then backed it up by putting Nicole's uneaten piece of cake in the bin.

## Key competencies

### Thinking

- I can figure it out.

### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can listen to others.

## Learning areas

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, [and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people].

## Where to next?

### Celebrate and consolidate

Good job Nicole – keep showing us or telling us what you want. We will continue to be aware of opportunities for you to initiate interaction and make choices for yourself without adult support; for example, choosing an activity for lunchtime, or who you would like to sit next to.

## More hand massage

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	13 April 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Hand massage	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

After music this morning we had five minutes available so I offered Nicole some hand massage. I said to Nicole, "If you want a hand massage, take off your gloves." I was not sure if Nicole could, or would, take off her gloves independently. I gave the instruction and then walked away momentarily. I hoped Nicole would try to remove her own glove. I walked into the side-room to fetch the hand cream. When I returned, to my surprise and delight, Nicole had nearly taken off her first glove, but the Velcro had caught on her jumper. I helped Nicole and then she tried to take off the other glove.

Nicole offered both hands to me for a massage and enjoyed her hand massage, before saying, "Enough"!

### Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Nicole responded to my offer of a hand massage – making me aware of her interest by trying to remove her glove as directed. Nicole enjoys hand massage and while she did not verbalise an acknowledgement, she showed her interest by taking her gloves off.

### Key competencies

#### Thinking

- I can make choices.

#### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can show you what I think/need/feel.
- I can listen to others.

### Learning areas

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, [and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people].

### Where to next?

#### Celebrate and consolidate

We will continue to offer opportunities for Nicole to respond to choices. We need to make sure that her environment at school provides her with opportunities to make her own choices without adult support. Adult celebration is important, but Nicole will be motivated to make choices where the environment provides her with highly motivating opportunities to do so.

## Choice!

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	23 May 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Lunchtime	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

After lunch, Nicole stood by the lunch table. Other members of the class had already decided what they were going to do and had moved to different areas of the class. I asked Nicole, "What are you going to do?" In response Nicole moved to the other side of the room, picked up a chair, and sat down next to Ben and Liz (teacher aide), who were listening to a story on the laptop.

In response to my question, Nicole made her own choices from a range of activities available to her.

## Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Nicole responded to a verbal question by physically moving herself to where she wanted to be.

## Key competencies

### Thinking

- I can make choices.

### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can show you what I think/need/feel.

## Learning areas

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, [and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people].

## Where to next?

### Celebrate and consolidate

Nicole demonstrated that she can make a decision when she is asked a question. We will continue to give her plenty of opportunities to make decisions, whether by offering a choice using PECS or by other means, such as choosing activities for lunchtime or physiotherapy.

## Talking for music!

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	27 June 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Music	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

Because I was on classroom release, I was working on my laptop in the side room. Nicole had been to the toilet and came back into class. She saw me and walked over to the side room, and said, "Hello Sara". I replied and asked how she was – after a few moments she replied, "Fine thanks". Then she continued to stand in the doorway looking at me. I asked what she wanted, waited for a few moments, and then repeated the question. Nicole answered, "Music please".

Great talking Nicole – work first with Lizzie and then you can listen to a song!

### Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Nicole saw me and initiated and engaged in an interaction with me. She responded to my questions and made her wants known, initially by remaining in the doorway, and then by making a request.

### Key competencies

#### Thinking

- I can use what I already know.
- I can make choices.

#### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can tell you what I think/need/feel.
- I can show you what I think/need/feel.
- I can answer questions.

### Learning areas

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

- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people.

### Where to next?

#### Celebrate and consolidate

Nicole never fails to greet me when she sees me, but today her continued presence suggested that she wanted to go beyond greetings. As it turned out, she wanted music and she told me that – just wonderful! We will try to promote further opportunities for you, Nicole, to extend the conversation.

## Yes, please!

<b>Student</b>	Nicole	<b>Date</b>	22 July 2008
<b>Topic</b>	Lunchtime	<b>Observer</b>	Sara (teacher)

Usually at lunchtime Nicole requests a drink, but today she had not asked for one.

I said to Nicole, "Would you like a drink, Nicole?"

"Yes, please!" replied Nicole.

"Okay Nicole – here's your drink!" and I passed her the drink bottle.

## Analysis – what learning is happening here?

This is the first time that Nicole has responded to my question with a direct reply. Usually, Nicole would reply by repeating the word "drink". Furthermore, she extended the answer to include "please" – well done Nicole! Nicole is very motivated at lunchtime which, I believe, is why she made a direct verbal reply when I discerned her need for a drink.

## Key competencies

### Thinking

- I can make choices.

### Using language, symbols, and texts

- I can answer questions.

## Learning areas

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

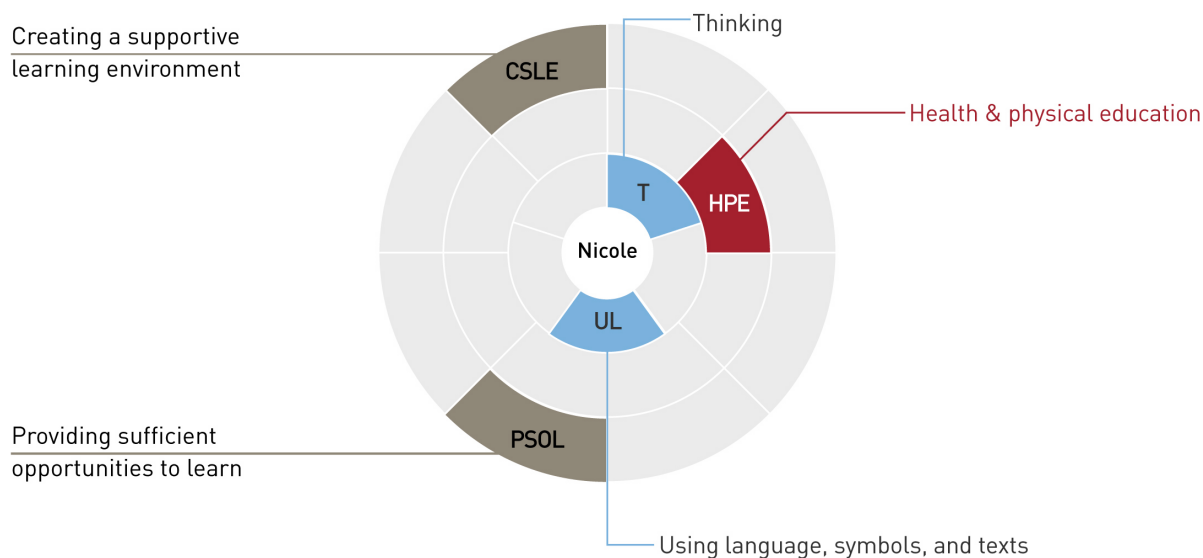
- Express their own ideas, needs, wants, and feelings clearly and listen to those of other people.

## Where to next?

### Scaffold, celebrate and consolidate

Nicole will be given lots of opportunities to practise giving a direct reply. Modelling by staff and other students will be used where necessary. Visual supports will be available to assist Nicole in making a choice if needed. One opportunity could be after baking, when Nicole could be asked if she would like a piece of the cake we have baked.

## Reflection – what these stories exemplify



### Key competencies

Nicole demonstrated the key competencies of thinking and using language, symbols, and texts. Her thinking was visible in the decisions she made. She communicated or made us aware of her decisions using PECS, telling us what she wanted, and gesturing to indicate choice.

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

In this string of learning stories, we can see Nicole making a variety of decisions and making her peers and teachers aware of those decisions in different ways (agency). Nicole's learning within this string of learning stories takes place in the classroom and playground of our school (breadth) over a five-month period (continuity). Learning was observed within different contexts and by two different staff, as Nicole made decisions about what to eat and drink, spending time with friends, and having a hand massage (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 health and physical education

This learning was mainly situated within health education, as Nicole demonstrated that she could express her own ideas, needs, and wants.

### Effective pedagogy

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

The staff who worked with Nicole know her well. Chris has worked full time with Nicole for two years and Sara has worked part-time with Nicole over a number of years. There has been a strong focus on developing Nicole's communication at school. A number of approaches have been used, including PECS – visual cues.

All staff have had high expectations for Nicole in relation to communication and have worked hard to provide support for Nicole, particularly in the area of socialisation and community access. Nicole enjoys meeting people and the use of visuals has been established by Chris to help Nicole access the community; for example, on community outings. Nicole is learning to purchase a hot chocolate for herself, by handing over a PECS strip with instructions to the cafe staff (see image).



Image from Boardmaker, Mayer-Johnson.

A supportive learning environment has been established by acknowledging Nicole's attempts at communication and responding to them positively to maintain and increase her interactions. Nicole initiates conversations with staff and peers. She is being encouraged to extend these conversations beyond, "Hi, how are you?" and to reply when she is asked how she is. Sometimes prompts are required to remind Nicole that she needs to respond. Sufficient wait time must be given for her to make a response.

Another feature of Nicole's setting is the focus of all staff on supporting students to grow in independence and responsibility. Providing sufficient opportunities to practise such skills as decision-making are both a formal and informal part of the classroom programmes.

### Reflective questions for the reader

"How do I encourage my students to take the initiative?"

"How do I provide opportunities for choice-making in my classroom?"

"Which activities can be used to provide the best opportunities for choice and communication?"

### 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. (c2005). *Teaching communication skills to students with severe disabilities*. Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co.

Hodgdon, L.A. (1998) . *Visual Strategies for Improving Communication – Volume 1: Practical Supports for School and Home*. Troy, MI: QuirkRoberts Publishing.

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

Ministry of Education. (2008). *The English Language Learning Progressions: a resource for mainstream and ESOL teachers*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (to be published in 2009). *Oral language in years 1 to 3*. Wellington: Learning Media.