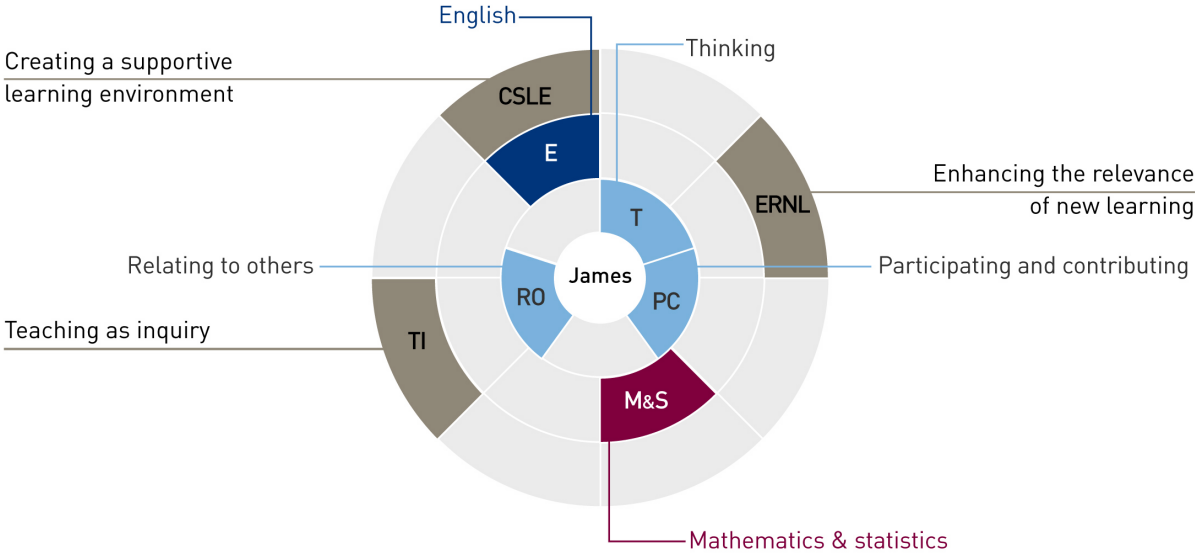


James learns and belongs

Links to the curriculum



Student background

Name	James
Age	10
Year	5
School	Primary

James attends his local rural primary school. He has autism and some difficulties in motor control, which affects tasks such as climbing stairs, holding a pencil, and using a spoon. James does not speak but he is beginning to use the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to initiate communication.

James is hypersensitive to noise and enjoys calm routines. The school receives ongoing and reviewable resourcing schemes (ORRS) funding, which includes specialist teacher support one day a week. The class teachers have full-time teacher aide support for James. Both his younger and older sister also attend the school.

Two learning stories

- 1. James is writing** March to May 2008
- 2. James joins in at mathematics** March to May 2008

These strings of learning stories show James as he develops an awareness of print, initiates social interactions, and shares activities with his peers.

James is writing

Student	James	Date	March to May 2008
Topic	English	Observer	Anne-Marie (specialist teacher)

James's achievement

James has recently developed an increased interest in making marks on paper, forming a variety of shapes, and is beginning to follow patterns accurately. Since the start of the year I have been tracing a "J" shape on his back while saying the letter. Recently, when I drew a "J" on his whiteboard, he moved my hand to his back so the shape could be traced there. Now he is beginning to form "J" shapes on his whiteboard while I trace them on his back. He is encouraged to make a "J" shape on all of his work. He also has a name stamp. He has been practising stamping his name underneath photos of himself.

The teacher aides and I verbally reinforce that the name he stamps on the paper represents him. Recently, when he has been stamping his work he has indicated to me to trace the letter "J" on his back. It appears he is linking the "J" on his back with the "J" on the name stamp and is aware that this group of letters relates to him. These stories also show peer interaction increasing as the staff who support James step back. James's interest in the people around him is new and exciting.



5 March 2008

James is making a variety of shapes on his whiteboard. I had been tracing "J" shapes on his back. It appears he is trying to recreate that shape.



5 March 2008

James has a piece of paper with his name outlined on it. He is carefully making marks inside the letter shapes. He is very motivated and focused on the task.



5 March 2008

James is using his name stamp to personalise his work. Every time he stamps his name, I say, "James." After a few examples, he stamps his work then waits for me to say his name before stamping again. He appears to link the stamped word with hearing his name.



16 April 2008

James and a classmate are working together on the whiteboard. Sometimes James leads as they make a pattern. Sometimes his classmate leads and James follows. There is no verbal exchange; however, they work cooperatively and effectively.



28 May 2008

While the class is working on group reading, James has been working at his desk. He picks up his whiteboard and approaches a group of girls on the mat. He smiles and laughs. He spends approximately five minutes sitting with the girls and making patterns on his whiteboard as they are writing. The girls encourage James telling him how well he is doing. James is focused and settled.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Individual education programme goal

The goals are for James to recognise that the word “James” relates to him and for him to continue a written pattern of dots, circles, zig-zags, wavy lines, and straight lines to develop fine motor skills to support writing.

Key competencies

Thinking, Relating to others

Providing a motivating programme within a secure routine appears to increase James’s independence. When staff step back and provide support only as needed, opportunities for peer relations are enhanced.

Teacher voice

I approached the class teacher and together we watched what James was doing on the whiteboard. She said, “He’s very settled. It’s great seeing him working with the others like that.”

Grandma’s voice

When Grandma came to collect James from school one day, I told her what he was doing in writing. She said, “He continues to surprise us. Who knows what he is capable of? Isn’t it wonderful?”

Learning areas

Level 1 English: Listening, Reading, and Viewing, Speaking, Writing, and Presenting: purposes and strategies

James is beginning to develop an awareness of the connection between oral, written, and visual language. He is hearing his name spoken when using the stamp “James” and seems to know this group of letters relates to him. He is also trying to recreate the letter “J” on his whiteboard.

Where to next?

I will make a set of stickers with "James" written on them, and assist James to stick labels on items that belong to him; for example, lunchbox, computer, whiteboard. I will aim to progress to discrimination, where James is offered two items, one that is familiar to and belongs to him, such as a cup, and one that is not his, such as a dictionary. I will offer James a name sticker and support him to select his item to label.

Future individual education programme goal

Another goal for James will be to independently write a "J" shape on his work.

James joins in at mathematics

Student	James	Date	March to May 2008
Topic	Mathematics and statistics	Observer	Anne-Marie (specialist teacher)

James's achievement

James is using and sorting mathematics material on the basis of colour and shape. He does this independently. What is most significant is that James takes his mathematics equipment and initiates interaction with other students. This connection and sharing is new and shows that James is learning to associate with his classmates. Until recently, James has shown little interest in, or awareness of, his peers.



5 March 2008

James is sorting mathematics equipment based on colour and shape. If an object is deliberately moved to an incorrect position, James laughs and returns it to the right place.



19 March 2008

James is watched by a classmate as he uses mathematics software on his touch-screen computer. A row of objects appear on the screen. One object clearly does not belong. James identifies the incorrect object by touch. He demonstrates perseverance and focus.



19 March 2008

During mathematics, the class is working in groups. James has been working on his own at his desk. He approaches a group, kneels, and makes eye contact. The children in the group respond with a "High five". James greets two members of the group then sits for a while with them, watching as they continue their work.



9 April 2008

The class is sitting on the mat listening to instructions about the mathematics task to follow. James had been working on his computer. He looks up and hurries to the mat joining his peers. He is becoming aware that he belongs to the class and is more likely to join in with group activities.



28 May 2008

James has been working with me learning to copy patterns on a pegboard. Other children in the class are working on mathematics tasks with a partner. James picks up the mathematics equipment he is using, goes to the mat, tips it out, and gives each boy a pegboard. The boys interact effectively and happily. I approach the class teacher and we observe the positive interaction.

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Individual education programme goal

The related goal is to sort objects into sets based on colour and/or shape and to engage with peers in this task.

Key competencies

Thinking, Participating and contributing

He is using this as an appropriate way to engage with peers. James is valued in his class and his interaction with others is celebrated as success and progress.

Teacher voice

I approached the class teacher to highlight James's successful social interactions. She said, "Didn't he just pick the right children to approach? They're having a lovely time. His parents will love this".

Peer voice

"James is real awesome at patterns". "He's fun to play with". These comments were made to me by other children after James had initiated interaction with them during mathematics.

Learning areas

Level 1 mathematics and statistics

James is using mathematics equipment effectively.

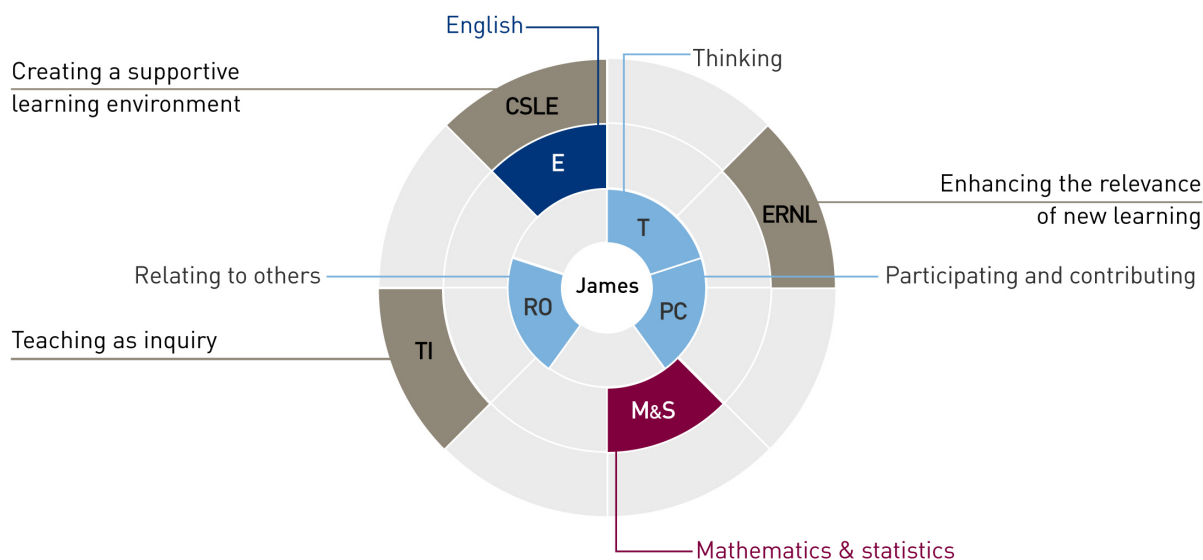
Where to next?

The next steps will be to consolidate existing patterning skills through sorting, but also to focus on structuring some of James's mathematics time to include relevant mathematics tasks with classmates.

Future individual education programme goal

A next individual education programme (IEP) goal for James will be to select a student from a photo board with whom he will work at mathematics time.

Reflection – what these stories exemplify



Key competencies

James is making connections that suggest an awakening sense of how print works. He is beginning to demonstrate an understanding that the letter "J" and the word "James" relate to him (thinking).

As James develops greater awareness of his environment, he is beginning to interact more with peers and to initiate these interactions. A programme, which has a high level of sensory input to reduce stress, and a range of motivating and interactive materials, supports James's social interaction (relating to others).

It appears James may be developing a sense of belonging; he happily enters the classroom each morning and is certainly becoming more actively involved in his class. He appears to be increasingly aware of the other students' learning activities and wishes to be with them doing similar things. On several occasions, James has elected to take his work and participate with other groups of his peers. Recently, this has even extended to his inviting others to work with him on his mathematics activity (participating and contributing).

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

James is an active learner who is increasingly choosing to take some control of the learning process and engage with peers in the classroom. He appears to be developing a greater sense of self in relation to others, which is leading to increased opportunities for James to become an active communicator (agency).

Reducing obvious adult support and James's developing curiosity both support his participation in writing and mathematics (breadth).

James's increasingly successful interactions now include partners, small groups, and the class, with various mediating resources, such as whiteboard and mathematics equipment (continuity and 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

This story demonstrates James beginning to connect with print. He appears to be beginning to understand that writing can convey a message.

Level 1 mathematics and statistics

James's learning is in the mathematics and statistics learning area, under the geometry and measurement, shape strand. James was sorting objects by their appearance.

Effective pedagogy

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

These stories provide useful insights into effective teaching that enhances James's learning.

It seems particularly relevant to reflect about the teaching process (teaching as inquiry) when considering James's success as he begins to make connections with print and engage more in social interaction. There is a need to provide meaningful programmes to meet achievable goals and to balance this by supporting and developing James's communication to allow maximum effective interaction within the class. It is important to view James as an active communicator who communicates through actions rather than words.

The fact that he imitates social interaction suggests he is interested in being with his peers. This provides teachers with an opportunity to explore ways of supporting effective communication, such as by using PECS. A supportive learning environment provides opportunities for James to develop positive social relationships with peers. Physical adaptations, such as a quiet space within a classroom culture where all learners are equally and actively valued, are important supports for James.

Part of my role in supporting this culture has been helping the school community understand what it might be like to walk in James's shoes. It is also important to ensure that when James develops a new skill, it can be used in more than one setting. We must make sure James has support to transfer what he learns across settings (enhancing the relevance of new learning).

Reflective questions for the reader

"How do you meet your students' curriculum goals in a way that also meets their need for social interaction and learning with peers?"

"How do you help your school community see your students as active and valued learners?"

"What is the best way to support classroom teachers to create an inclusive learning community of all students?"

"How can the specialist teacher best support classroom teachers to create a learning environment where all students are seen as successful achievers?"

Useful resources

Butterfield, N., Arthur, M., & Sigafoos, 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.

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.

Kluth, P. (2003). *"You're going to love this kid": teaching students with autism in the inclusive classroom*. Baltimore, Md.: P.H. Brookes Pub. Co.

Quill, K. A. (c2000). *Do-watch-listen-say: social and communication intervention for children with autism*. Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Pub.

Wagner, S. (c2002). *Inclusive programming for the middle school student with autism/Asperger's syndrome: topics and issues for consideration by teachers and parents*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons, Inc.