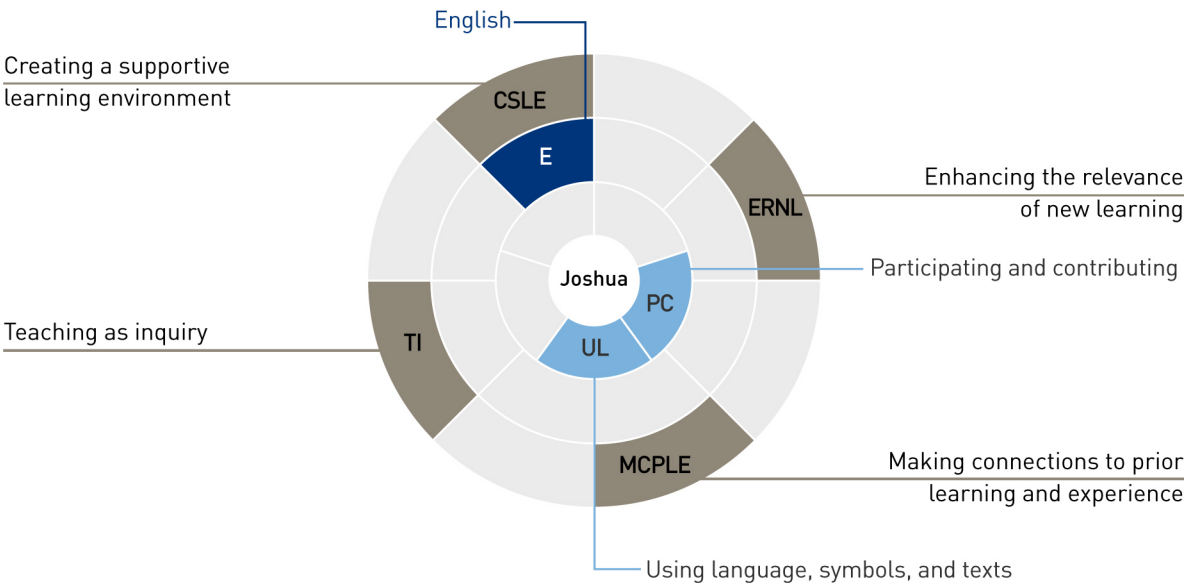


Joshua's communication journey

Links to the curriculum



Student background

Name	Joshua	Joshua loves Thomas the Tank Engine and music.
Age	5	Joshua is a student in a special education needs setting. He used to let people know what he wanted by pulling people to the object or activity.
School	Primary	

Now with the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) and music, Joshua's communication has taken off in leaps and bounds.

"Visuals" – picture cards used to assist students to understand class, home, and community environments, and for communication – are used in a variety of ways, such as daily schedules, behaviour supports, and choice boards.

PECS is a unique augmentative/alternative communication system that allows children and adults with autism and other communication deficits to initiate communication. PECS begins with teaching a student to exchange a picture of a desired item with an adult, who immediately honours the request. It then follows a sequence of phases where the system goes on to teach discrimination of symbols and then puts them together in simple "sentences". The student is also taught to comment on and answer direct questions.

One string of learning stories

This string of learning stories, recorded over six months (February to July 2008), shows Joshua responding to, and initiating communication, both in the school setting and at home (using language, symbols, and texts). This has enabled him to participate and contribute.

Communication

Student	Joshua	Date	February to July 2008
		Observer	Megan (teacher)

Intended learning

- For Joshua to be able to communicate effectively to a variety of people.

Joshua is new to our class this year. We had been told that he had not talked much and attempts to use PECS before coming to school had not been successful. We use PECS throughout our school day. It is a portable communication system that can be understood by anyone. We also use "visuals" throughout our school day and during all activities. We started with Joshua's interest in Thomas the Tank Engine but this was soon overtaken by his discovery of Snax biscuits!



7 February 2008

Joshua had only been at school for three days. While we were sitting waiting for the taxi, Joshua started singing and doing actions to a song we had sung that day. This was the first time he had shown a response to classroom learning. We taped him singing and sent a copy home. His parents were surprised and delighted.



11 February 2008

Joshua gave three independent exchanges at the PECS computer session today. The PECS computer session is a class group session involving the process of PECS and this is where the students ask for a specific song, using visuals. Joshua was able to follow the routines of the PECS computer session and participate in the activity.



12 February 2008

Joshua was sitting waiting when he started singing one of our songs "Open, shut them". We had not heard Joshua sing this song before.

15 February 2008

Joshua did 20 exchanges at PECS today. This was his second formal class session. He asked for his favourite Thomas trains. This was his first lesson on PECS. What a fantastic effort!

27 February 2008

Joshua had found our glitter pointer and went up to the days of the week. He pointed to each day while singing our day song. Joshua is now recognising visuals around our room.

28 February 2008

While I was having my morning tea of Snax crackers (on a wet inside day), Joshua came up and indicated he wanted one. I showed him the cracker visual in the folder (which was a new visual). He then went and exchanged it five times! Great!



2 April 2008

We had just finished singing "Five little ducks" when this little voice from Joshua started singing the song by himself! Another new song for your repertoire Joshua!

7 April 2008

Joshua's Dad and Mum wrote in the "home school" book that Joshua had been verbalising the letters of his name with intonation at home AND also singing one of our alphabet songs! It is great to see you sharing your learning at home!



8 April 2008

Joshua was able to do the, "Ten green bottles" song by himself. Joshua had to listen carefully to the song's instructions to take the green bottles off the wall at the right time. Wow!

Joshua also signed and said, "Not Monday, today is Tuesday". Joshua has shown us that he can use signing to assist in communicating with others.

15 April 2008

Joshua's Dad and Mum wrote in the "home school" book to say Joshua had sung and signed the days of the week at home. They were thrilled and very excited.

12 May 2008

After a home visit, Joshua's Dad visited school to participate in our PECS training with Joshua. Joshua exchanged his request with his Dad in this situation. Yay! You have not done that before! A very excited Dad!

19 May 2008

Joshua's Dad wrote in the "home school" book that they had had lots of success with the PECS folder. Joshua had used the "I want help" several times when prompted and also "I want computer". Yahoo! Dad said "This is cool and we are so excited!"

23 May 2008

Joshua's Dad wrote in the "home school" book; "Joshua is getting really good at using the PECS folder. He will ask for a drink or crackers and is also using the help card for things requiring our assistance. He has been verbalising "I want help". This is so much progress and very exciting."

1 July 2008

At the individual education programme (IEP) meeting, Joshua's parents expressed how pleased they are with Joshua. He is using PECS well at home and now needs to extend his range of visuals in his communication folder.

28 July 2008

We hid Joshua's crackers in different coloured eggs. Joshua got his folder and made the request "I want blue egg", which was the one with the cracker in it! Such a clever boy! Using attributes of colour in your requests now!

Analysis – what learning is happening here?

Key competencies

Using language, symbols, and texts

Joshua is learning a system where he can communicate his wants and anyone can understand it. He can make his needs met appropriately.

Joshua's learning is enhanced as he capitalises on the opportunities to communicate at school.

Joshua is also finding a way to verbalise — through music!

Joshua is learning how to communicate with others. His family is delighted because he can now use his visual communication system at home to let others know about his interests and needs.

Participating and contributing

Joshua is now asking for what he wants in appropriate ways.

Joshua is being an active class member; for example, joining in with counting songs.

Learning areas

Level 1 English: Speaking, Writing, and Presenting: purposes and audiences

Joshua demonstrates some awareness of purpose and audience.

Where to next?

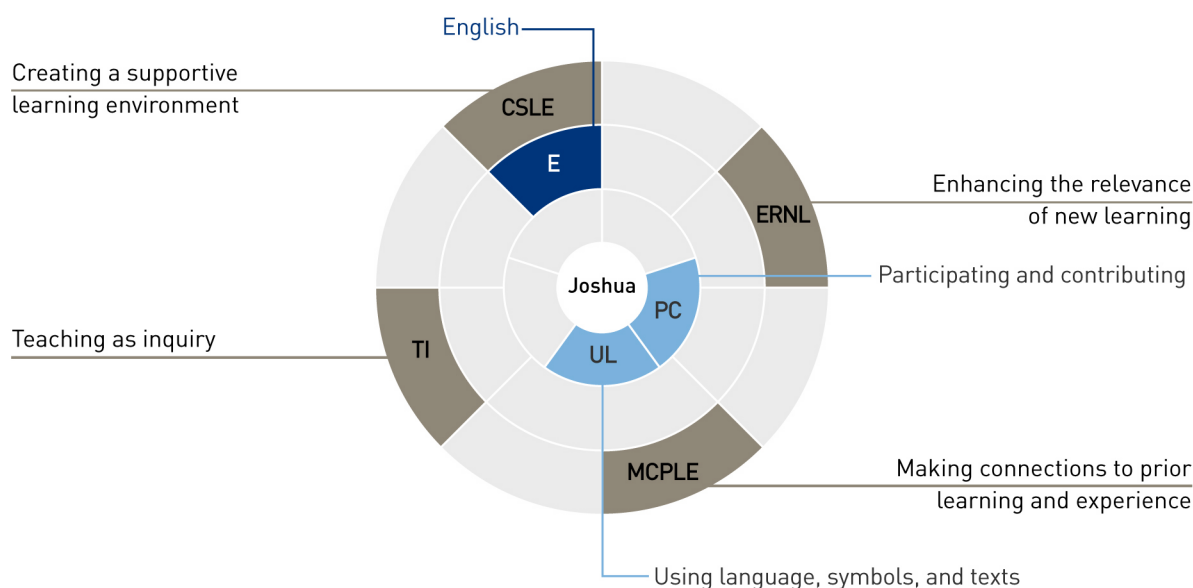
Celebrate and consolidate, Increase complexity

Joshua is working his way through the phases of PECS. While doing this, we need to ensure that he is generalising the skill in many environments and with a variety of people. We are also introducing it to home.

We need to ensure that many learning opportunities involve music or singing, as this allows Joshua to use words he otherwise may not attempt.

We need to continue to provide signing as a prompt with other forms of communication. It gives Joshua another way to learn and communicate.

Reflection – what these stories exemplify



Key competencies

Joshua is using PECS, singing, and sign language to communicate at school and at home (using language, symbols, and texts). His increased use of these is allowing him to participate confidently in all classroom activities (participating and contributing).

How might this string of stories strengthen Joshua's identity as a learner?

Joshua is using PECS independently to make requests (agency) both at school and at home (breadth). Joshua is using this form of communication increasingly over time; for example, on 15 February at school, and 23 May at home (continuity). Joshua is now using a variety of communication tools, including PECS, sign language, and singing with the teacher and his parents for different purposes (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

Joshua is using PECS to communicate his needs to significant adults in his life both at school and at home. Through song, Joshua is beginning to access and imitate features of language, such as rhyme and patterning.

Effective pedagogy

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

Routines, songs, and visual and verbal prompt supports are used by the teacher to support and encourage Joshua's learning. He is immersed in a PECS – and music-saturated environment, which has suited his style of learning (creating a supportive learning environment). The teacher is impressed with the speed with which Joshua took to PECS and this has opened up a whole world of communication for him. Joshua's teacher has become alert to the many opportunities in a school day for Joshua to use his communication system. Joshua recognised that PECS was a positive form of communication for him and he sought more opportunities to use it. It has now become a natural part of his day (enhancing the relevance of new learning). By recognising and using Joshua's interest in

Thomas the Tank Engine, the teacher has engaged Joshua in communication with PECS (making connections to prior learning and experience). The teacher found a way to make PECS work for Joshua using a reward that was significant to him; that is, Thomas the Tank Engine (teaching as inquiry).

Reflective questions for the reader

“Can people outside of the learning environment understand the communication system being used?”

“Is the communication system you are implementing portable?”

“What are the characteristics of a functional communication system for your student?”

Useful resources

Information on PECS resources from the Pyramid Educational Consultants of Australia website at www.pecsaustralia.com.