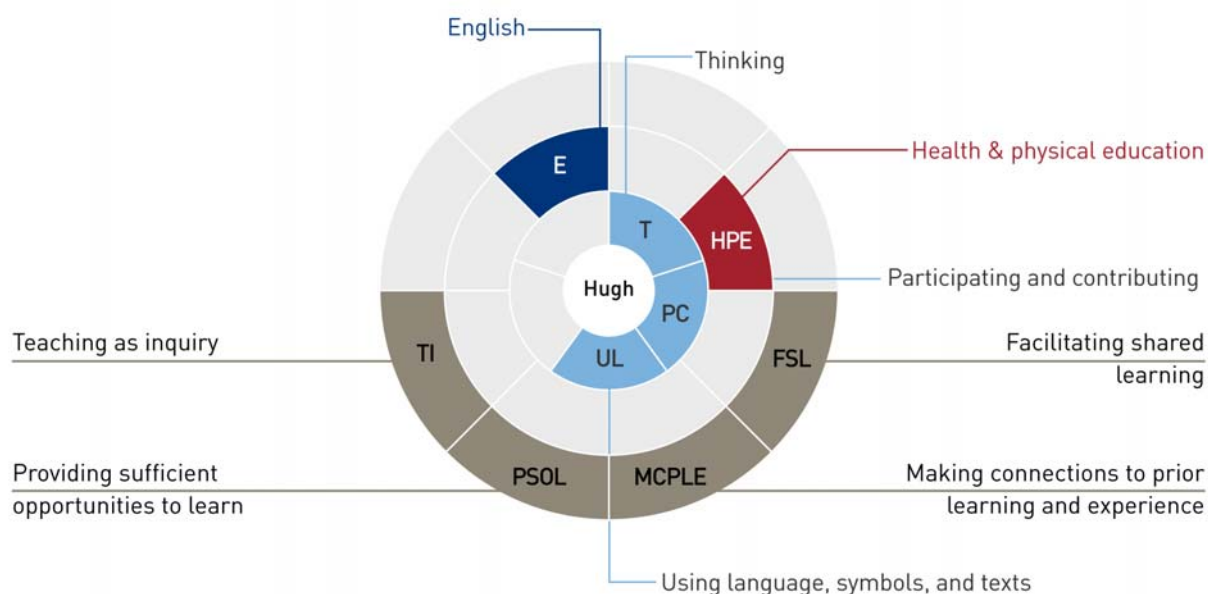


# Sign language helps Hugh

## Links to the curriculum



## Student background

**Name** Hugh

**School** Intermediate

Hugh was confident and enthusiastic about coming to intermediate school, but the transition did not turn out to be as smooth as we had hoped.

While he tried to communicate with teachers, teacher aides and his classmates by gesture and speech, we could not readily understand him. We needed to find an effective shared communication system.

We had noticed that Hugh was signing some words, which he had been taught as a young boy. Hugh's speech language therapist reviewed all interventions to date, including a computer software program and a phonics programme, and suggested it might be appropriate for Makaton sign language (Makaton) to be introduced for communication.

How exciting it was, within a few months, to see not only some improvement in clarity of speech, but also Hugh developing recognition of written words we identified as essential in his individual education programme (IEP).

Hugh's transition to secondary school includes a plan for his teachers and teacher aides to learn Makaton.

## Three learning stories

- 1. Hugh begins Makaton classes** March and August 2007
- 2. Hugh helps teach his classmates!** April and July 2008
- 3. Hugh communicates a near miss** 24 July 2008

This string of learning stories shows Hugh communicating successfully using Makaton. This has contributed to Hugh feeling more confident and able to share and partake in school life. It has also been a vehicle for revealing other hidden strengths.

## Hugh begins Makaton classes

<b>Student</b>	Hugh	<b>Date</b>	March and August 2007
		<b>Observer</b>	Shelley (teacher aide)

Hugh was excited that so many people he knew were coming to his school and were going to learn a new language with him in the staffroom. They included Hugh's parents, scout leaders, youth leader, family friends, class teacher, teacher aides, ongoing and reviewable resourcing schemes (ORRS) teacher and children who Hugh knew well. He enjoyed having his teachers and teacher aides learning with him.

Rhiannon (speech language therapist), made the learning fun, and we would all have turns copying her. We were all given homework. Hugh laughed when he saw that some of us were getting the signs wrong. We discovered Hugh could learn the signs quickly and help his teachers!



### 7 March 2007

Here Hugh is learning the sign for cow.  
Hugh lived on a farm in Australia.



### 3 August 2007

In this photo Hugh is signing the word for teddy bear modelled by Rhiannon.  
He is enjoying taking his turn around the circle, with Shelley, a teacher aide, a family friend, and a classmate.

## Where to next?

After Hugh learned signs for high interest words, we focused on whole phrases and sentences. Hugh learned to sign and say words he would need for his everyday communication.

## Hugh helps teach his classmates!

**Student** Hugh

**Date** April and July 2008

**Observer** Shelley (teacher aide)

Shelley and Sharon (teacher aides), were both motivated to learn Makaton as they understood what a difference it would make to communicating with Hugh. They were also keen for the whole class to learn basic Makaton communication. They asked to have class lesson time each week to teach what we adults had all been learning. Guess who was keen to be the teacher?!



### 7 April 2008

Shelley and Hugh demonstrate to the class what they want them to practise next.



In this photo, during the same class, Hugh helps Shelley and Sharon, his teacher aides, show the class how to sign the letters of the alphabet.



### 28 July 2008

Hugh keeps a careful eye on his classmates as they practise the sign Shelley is demonstrating.

Signing became the basis for Hugh's learning and everyday communication. What a difference this made! Signing helped Hugh get his message across. It became so much easier for him to interact with his classmates and teachers.

## Where to next?

Hugh would help Shelley and Sharon model the words and phrases and then help his classmates in small groups to practise their signs.

## Hugh communicates a near miss

**Student** Hugh

**Date** 24 July 2008

**Observer** Shelley (teacher aide)

One morning Hugh arrived at school late and appeared very agitated. He could not be persuaded to go to class. Something had happened that he needed to talk about. Shelley and Sharon could see no visible signs of injury, and his bike did not appear to be damaged.

By Hugh's use of his sign language, as well as his emphatic use of the words "yes" and "no", and his teacher aides' drawing pictures on the whiteboard, the conclusion was reached that he had almost been hit by a car coming out of a driveway.

Thank goodness we had all been learning Makaton!



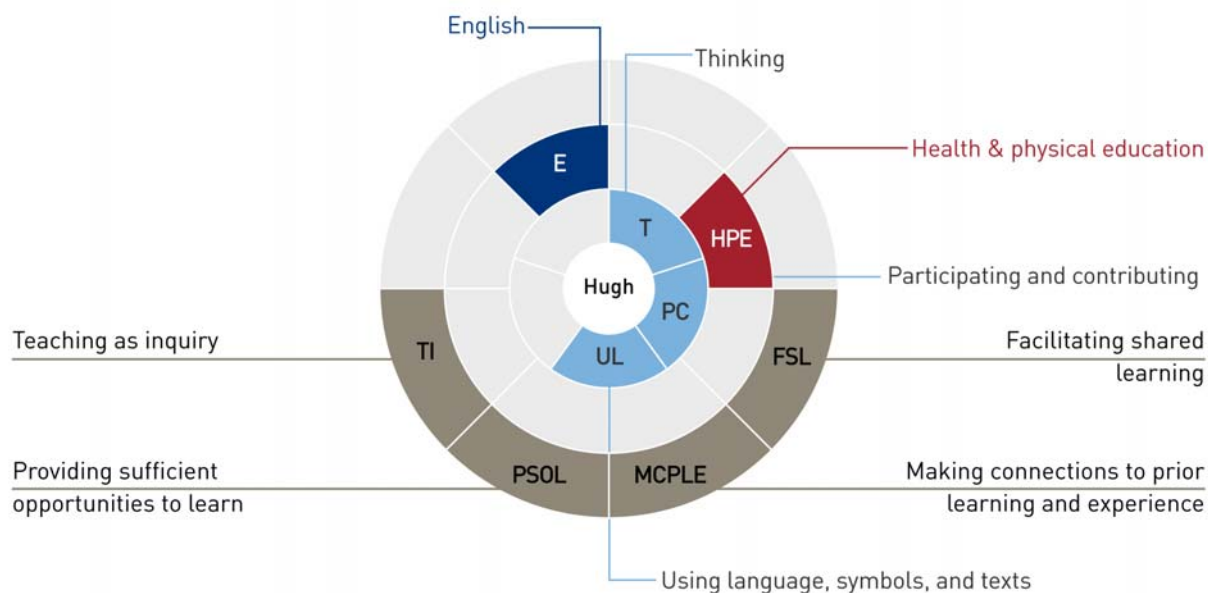
Shelley and Sharon were sympathetic and told Hugh that they understood what a fright he must have had. They explained they would ring his parents to tell them how upset he had been upon arrival at school. Hugh calmed down enough to continue at school for the day!

Hugh continues to ride to school happily each day on his bike.

## Where to next?

We can use Makaton, speech, and drawing pictures (in any combination) to enable Hugh to describe more complex events and ideas.

## Reflection — what these stories exemplify



### Key competencies

#### Using language, symbols, and texts, thinking, participating and contributing

This string demonstrates several of the key competencies in action for Hugh. Firstly, by using language, symbols, and texts via Makaton, Hugh's world was opened up for him: he was able to be understood and to get his message across. This allowed Hugh to participate more fully in his classes and in everyday interactions with others. Hugh practised this new skill as he taught his peers and thus deepened his own learning. Hugh felt really proud of his achievements, as he could learn the signs as fast as his peers and remember them better than some of his teachers (thinking).

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

Hugh showed motivation and perseverance in using Makaton to communicate and teach others (agency). Hugh's learning occurred in the classroom, in the staffroom and in the learning centre (breadth). The stories span a year and Makaton will be ongoing (continuity). The secondary school Hugh will be attending next year is planning to build on the Makaton learning for Hugh and the staff.

This learning occurred with his home class and key people who work with Hugh at school and outside (depth). Hugh's family is learning Makaton too.

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 string reflects learning in the Speaking, Writing, and Presenting strand of English, where Hugh expects his communications to be understood, responded to, and appreciated by his classmates and teachers.

#### Level 1 health and physical education

In the Relationships with Other People: interpersonal skills strand Hugh is expressing his own ideas, wants, and feelings with increasing clarity.

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

The staff persevered with finding a shared communication system for Hugh, his teachers, teacher aides, classmates and people in his life. When Makaton was introduced, the staff set realistic goals and kept raising the bar for Hugh as he achieved them. Some of the staff were surprised by the rate he could learn and his memory retention, which had not been recognised at school before (teaching as inquiry).

Makaton was used by Hugh in a variety of places as more and more people in his life learned the signs (providing sufficient opportunities for learning).

Hugh seemed to relate to signing and this made sense to us as we knew that Hugh had been introduced to Makaton when he was much younger (making connections to prior learning).

Staff who work with Hugh value learning from and with each other so providing the opportunity for Hugh's community to learn Makaton was a logical step and this proved very successful (facilitating shared learning).

### **Reflective questions for the reader**

"Are you aware of the variety of communication strategies and systems for students like Hugh?"

"What difference might an effective communication strategy make for any of your students? Could this reveal hidden strengths?"

"How do you fully utilise your teacher aide time in your learning community and provide professional development opportunities?"

### **Useful resources**

*Makaton vocabulary development project:* Weblink:  
<http://www.makaton.org.nz/resources.htm>

Ministry of Education. (2002). *Kia tūtangata ai: supporting learning: an introductory resource for teacher-aides/kaiāwhina supporting teachers of students with special education needs.*