

# **The Design of the English Language Arts**

## **Curriculum of Time to Know**

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## Introduction

The Time To Know language arts program introduces a unique vision to the study of language arts. It incorporates a constructivist, experiential approach with an interdisciplinary focus and provides an advanced technological environment that produces in a unique form of blended learning. It facilitates inquiry-based learning that is both differentiated and collaborative.

The Time To Know educational environment combines a broad spectrum of educational research, proven pedagogical practice and alignment with state standards. Its blended learning environment brings the best of technological advances to create a rich learning experience that combines media and print to stimulate and engage learners in the exploration of text and language. The program stimulates linguistic analysis and increased awareness of language and social issues. It provides a forum for investigation and research as well as a platform for presentation and assessment.

The rich variety of media and texts immerses the learners in an environment that offers differentiated stimuli that cater to many levels of interest and proficiency. Learners engage in creative literacy activities at their level and pace and expand their vocabulary understanding and use. The unique individualized approach combined with highly advanced educational technology encourages both personal engagement and collaborative associations.

The program empowers teachers to unleash their knowledge and pedagogical skills most creatively and provides them with tools for differentiated instruction and individualized learning. The technology enables real-time monitoring of students' performance and assessment of their developing knowledge and skills. The technology also provides teachers with tools to assess their students' progress, their growing conceptual understandings and their developing skills in language arts and reading. This monitoring technology enhances teachers' ability to modify and adapt their teaching and the learning environment and provides insights for planning future learning modules.

# **The English Language Arts Curriculum**

## ***The Structure of the Units***

The Time to Know comprehensive K-5 language arts curriculum combines a broad spectrum of educational research, best pedagogical practice and alignment with state standards. This curriculum uses the backward design approach (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) to define the desired outcomes which create the backbone of instruction.

Each unit is organized on a theme relevant to the child's world and is aligned to the grade level standards. The unit emphasizes reading and writing as well as listening, speaking, research skills and focused vocabulary development. Each unit contains a core curriculum that is complemented by differentiated modules.

The learning environment blends technology and traditional teaching in a rich learning experience. A writing forum helps stimulate linguistic analysis and increased awareness of language and social issues. The Time To Know Gallery and writing activities provide a forum for investigation and research and a platform for presentation of students' writing for peer review and discussion and teacher assessment.

## ***The Pedagogical Design***

In recent decades, the constructivist approach has emerged as a dominant paradigm in education to have a major intellectual impact on pedagogy. Initially, the constructivist approach was applied to the fields of mathematics and science but more recently these principles of cognition and learning have influenced the development of language arts curriculum as well. The emergence of this paradigm also coincided with a shift in pedagogy towards learner-centered approaches that focus on cognitive and social processes and scaffold learners' growth in knowledge and understanding.

Constructivist approaches are central to the pedagogy of emergent literacy, narrative development, reading and language arts. This conforms with the need to advance academic rigor in all areas and combines language-enhanced activities with content-rich academic preparation. This shift in language pedagogy has engaged curriculum developers and language educators in new patterns of interdisciplinary collaboration and has caused them to rethink the basic pedagogical practices. This approach combined with advanced educational technology and differentiated learning is at the heart of the Time To Know educational program.

The Time To Know approach is based on the notion that learning occurs through construction of new understanding through interaction with texts through reading, writing, multi-sensory linguistic exploration and experience. This approach embodies the theoretical principles of Piaget (1959, 1967, 1974) and Vygotsky (1974) to create opportunities for learners to engage in hands-on manipulation of raw data in quest of

gaining knowledge and new understanding. Time To Know is based on the premise that elementary school students need to be engaged in the learning process, in pursuit of diverse paths to concept acquisition. Scaffolding inherent in the program is central to the learning process.

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***Vignette: The Constructivist Approach***

*Mrs. Lebowitz is preparing to introduce a new two-week unit on inventions. She begins the lesson by presenting the class with a challenge. In small groups the students must examine parts of an invention, name the parts, and define what each is used for. The idea behind this lesson is for students to develop their own understanding in a social setting, by promoting inquire-based learning in the classroom environment.*

*Mrs. Lebowitz goes on to have a classroom discussion around the students' hypotheses. As the unit progresses Mrs. Lebowitz continues to promote discovery and understanding while also providing scaffolding, modeling, coaching and on-going feedback.*

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## ***Integrating the Technology***

The Time To Know educational program introduces a blended-learning environment that combines an advanced educational technology with teacher-supported learning. This blended environment includes multimedia to stimulate learners' inquiry and to provide options that include audio and video enhancements to learning modules. Clearly defined visual icons highlight the diverse aspects of the curriculum and facilitate teachers' and learners' interaction throughout the program. The blended environment opens new pathways for learning, teaching, and assessment that place the Time To Know educational program at the forefront in the learning and teaching of language arts and reading.

The blended environment empowers teachers professionally. It enables them to formulate attainable goals by selecting differentiated learning modules for each student. It provides the teacher with tools to evaluate each student's progress in real time, thereby helping the teacher to plan, modify, change and adapt the learning modules based on the progress of individuals and groups of learners.

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***Vignette: Blending Technology and Learning***

*Mrs. Lebowitz is preparing to teach a two-week unit comparing the Galveston hurricane of 1900 to Hurricane Ike in 2008. She begins the lesson by engaging the students with a quick animation the class views together. This animation leads to a whole class discussion where students*

*use higher-order think skills to make predications. This is followed by a kinesthetic activity where students act out the movement of a hurricane.*

*Mrs. Lebowitz strives to integrate technology with best practices in her classroom, catering to a wide range of learning styles and grouping strategies. Throughout the unit, she has students work individually and in small groups utilizing the unique features of the computer system. Sometimes students read stories using the Text Reader, which looks like a real book. Other times students use the Live Text component to interact with and manipulate the text. After reading, students reflect on what they have read and they write pieces that are shared with the class using the Gallery feature.*

*Mrs. Lebowitz likes the fact that she can control and monitor the entire class throughout the unit from her own laptop computer. While students are working, Mrs. Lebowitz sends individual students messages to help reinforce the key concepts of the day. In addition she uses the "Eyes on The Board" function to stop the class and explain the night's homework.*

*The blended learning environment allows Mrs. Lebowitz to integrate technology with her traditional teaching methods.*

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From the learner's perspective, the blended environment enables each learner to gain full access to all the learning modules and to select those that are aligned with his/her level of proficiency and interest thereby giving the learner a sense of success and accomplishment.

The Gallery provides learners with a platform for publishing their writing and presenting it for sharing, peer review, or teacher evaluation.

### ***The Use of Text***

The Time To Know language arts curriculum integrates language development with a discourse approach that focuses on the text. Learners interact with a variety of texts, experiencing meaningful literacy events that include in-depth reading and writing. Diversity of text genres (narration, expository, procedural, argumentative and persuasive texts, digital texts), provide an understanding of grammatical functions, cohesion elements (e.g. logical connectors, tense usage, reference patterns) and other textual features as they relate to genre.

The curriculum emphasizes vocabulary by focusing on key words that are related to the theme and by providing contextual support, analysis of collocations and clarification of special meanings. Learners analyze authors' position and readers' perspectives and in that they enhance their ability to interpret and evaluate while becoming better readers and writers. This leads to readers who make good use of strategies and metacognitive skills.

## ***Spiraling Standards***

The Time To Know language arts curriculum has been developed to conform to state standards. In order to reinforce skills and standards taught in and across grade levels, the standards are spiraled throughout the three-week units. By spiraling the standards, students are exposed to skills across a wide-range of genres and topics. This helps make the concepts concrete for the student and it allows concepts to be taught at higher levels of complexity. Carr and Harris provide a detailed discussion of the values of spiraling a curriculum (2001).

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### ***Vignette: Spiraling Standards***

*In a comparative genre study unit, entitled *Secrets of the Sun*, Mr. Jones' fourth grade students are writing an original poem that includes two types of figurative language, similes and metaphors. They have acquired the prerequisite skills to successfully complete this task during the course of four previous study units in the Time To Know curriculum.*

*Mr. Jones first introduced similes and metaphors in an earlier unit on *The Underground Railroad* in which students encountered figurative language in a narrative poem about escaping from slavery. In the *Immigration* unit, students are revisiting metaphors when they prepared for a debate about whether the United States is a melting pot or a mosaic.*

*Mr. Jones knows he will revisit figurative language in the next study unit as well when his students study the *Galveston Hurricane of 1900* and *Hurricane Ike*. His students will be required to identify similes and metaphors within a personal narrative. Mr. Jones feels confident that his students will be able to identify an author's use of similes and metaphors to produce imagery in a variety of genre and that they will be able to use figurative language in their writing.*

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## **Tools for Individualized Learning**

### ***Differentiating Instruction***

Awareness of individual students' ability to construct meaning from texts enables teachers to respond to their students' strengths and areas of need. Thus, they are able to provide appropriate support to maximize learning for each student. Computerized logging and feedback enhances the teacher's ability to develop appropriate learning experiences that are specifically designed for each student's cognitive skills and level of reading and writing.

Time To Know instruction includes differentiated texts that enhance learning and acquisition of literacy skills for diverse students. Integrated individualized assessment provides learners with a sense of accomplishment that motivates them to reach higher levels and greater success.

Three sets of principles underlie the approach to learning in the Time To Know educational program: a) building learner autonomy, b) taking the learner through a multifaceted learning cycle, and c) providing the learner with a positive learning experience.

Unique software provides allows for adjusted learning pace, inherent self evaluation, and enhances possibilities for self initiation of activities within learning cycles.

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***Vignette: Differentiation***

*As Ms. Jones prepares for tomorrow's reading lesson she examines the differentiation possibilities the Time To Know curriculum provides. This lesson includes leveled reading passage with differentiated comprehension questions as well as extension and enrichment activities.*

*Ms. Jones forms three groups of students based in the students' reading level. Each group receives a slightly different piece of text to read. These differentiated texts cover the same content so students are all reading and learning about the same topic, but they provide that text on a level for each group that ensures maximum comprehension. The passages are presented in the Text Reader that is scaffolds the students' learning by providing narration and highlighting features.*

*Finally, students choose from a variety of computer and non-computer enrichment activities after they have completed the reading lesson. The computer offers each student some choices of activities based on that student's academic level and personal interests.*

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The Time To Know learning environment presents individual positive learning experiences, success in task performance and opportunities to practice and rehearse in ways that promote a sense of accomplishment for each and every learner.

***Assessment***

Time To Know automatically tracks all student work and in so doing it provides many opportunities in each lesson for formative and summative assessments of student learning. Time To Know includes a complete end-of-unit assessment function as well.

Each unit includes a performance task in which students use their reading and writing skills to demonstrate mastery of a standard. For example, in a unit on note-taking skills students read about explorers. At the conclusion of the unit, students use multimedia tools to describe the kind of explorer they want to be and they write an expository paragraph explaining their choice.

A cognitive map tool is often the basis of a performance task. For instance, students create a character map of the protagonist in a story by drawing on their understanding of the concept of character traits.

At the conclusion of the three-week theme-based unit students take a summative assessment of the standards taught within that unit.

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***Vignette: Assessment***

*For three weeks Ms. Smith's fourth grade class has been studying the topic of Immigration and now that the unit is complete, Ms. Smith wants to assess her students according to the standards that were taught during the Immigration Unit. The students enter the room and get to work on the assessment she has assigned them.*

*Later, Ms. Smith reviews the results of the assessment. The multiple choice items have been automatically scored by the computer and she looks through the summary report to see which questions students answered incorrectly. She notices that many of these assess spelling plurals. Ms. Smith knows she will have to assign the plural spelling module to several students.*

*Finally, Ms. Smith scores the open-ended items, using a scoring rubric that is provided by the curriculum. For some students, she writes individual notes that will accompany her evaluation when students review their work. The next day, students see their scores, review their mistakes and read through the attached comments.*

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## Concluding Remarks

The Time To Know platform encourages teachers to use their expertise in the discipline and their pedagogical style in the most creative and efficient manner. It includes authoring tools that teachers can use to customize both the online and offline materials to match their teaching preferences and the capabilities of their students. The result is rich content that can be tailored to each local setting and that fits seamlessly into daily classroom practice.

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## **Appendix: An Empirical Evaluation**

To determine if the design and content of this curriculum has a substantial impact on the learning of students in English Language arts, Time To Know commissioned a controlled study of its use in schools in Tel Aviv, Israel, during the 2008-2009 school year. In the two treatment schools, teachers used the Time To Know curriculum with their students exclusively. Two other schools that matched the treatment schools on demographic and achievement factors provided comparison classrooms that did not use these materials.

Hebrew is the national language of Israel but all students also study English as part of their elementary class instruction. Student learning in both subjects are relevant to an understanding of ELA learning and the empirical study tested students in reading in both Hebrew and English. The treatment in this study consisted of using the Time To Know educational software platform and curriculum as the primary form of content delivery in Hebrew and English with all students in the participating classrooms in two schools.

Students in all four schools were given tests in Hebrew and English. Students took a pretest at the beginning of the school year in 2008 and a post-test at the end of the year in the spring 2009. The study analyzed the results from the treatment schools and the comparison schools on these measures. by calculating a gain score from the pretest and post-test score and then analyzing these statistically.

The study examined the gains of students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade who had used Time To Know for two years when compared with students who did not use technology. The study also examined the results from 4<sup>th</sup> grade students who had used Time To Know for only one year; these results and a more complete description of the study can be found in the document “Empirical Findings.” The table shows the results of this analysis for the students in the two-year treatment.

**Table**  
**Statistical Analysis of Gain Scores**  
**for Treatment and Comparison Groups in English and Hebrew**

**English**

	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Comparison Group</b>
n	79	114
Mean gain score	21.7	19.3
t-value	5.39	
significance	p < .000	

**Hebrew**

	<b>Treatment Group</b>	<b>Comparison Group</b>
n	84	119
Mean gain score	10.3	6.6
t-value	2,42	
significance	p = .02	

Students in the treatment group had significantly higher gains in their test scores over the course of the year than 5th grade students in the comparison schools in both Hebrew and English. These findings demonstrate that the Time To Know treatment can improve student learning in reading and writing, when other factors that influence learning are controlled.

## **Contact**

For more information on the research on the T2K product, contact us at:

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