

Research Base

New York TEAM Toolkits Teaching ELLs for Academic Language Mastery



Kits for Grades K–12



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Introduction

According to Halliday and Hansan (1985), work as cited by the Council for Great City Schools, *A Framework for Raising Expectations and Instructional Rigor for English Language Learners*, language is one of many systems of meaning-making used in a student's life. English language development is not learned in the absence of context. Rather, English language learners (ELLs) acquire the kind of language required for participation in various situations encountered throughout their school experiences. A functional approach to language development, with an emphasis on communication, helps to focus attention on language features as relevant to a particular instructional activity. In the very broad sense, the instructional focus of *TEAM Toolkits* is to help educators understand the language use in school and help to support ELLs in making meaning from newly acquired language.

English language learners have unique needs that must be met both instructionally and linguistically within the classrooms. The greatest challenge for educators is to provide sound English language development instruction based on language acquisition research principles so students will meet the requirements of grade-level content standards and language proficiency assessments. The challenge for publishers is to provide instructional materials based on research-based practices to ensure both educator and student academic success. Understanding academic language doesn't come easily for many English learners, but it is essential to success with new content learnings in the classroom. The complex and formal nature of academic English is often a hurdle for students trying to achieve English language proficiency.

The *TEAM Toolkits* provide educators a research-based strategic approach to supporting ELL students' success, through detailed scope and sequence programmatic overview documentation, instructional features and suggestions for implementation, clear lesson and language objectives, and targeted connections to state English Language Arts standards. The *TEAM* annotated teacher's editions and audio CDs provide educators with a variety of components in each lesson. These elements include: statement of lesson objectives; strategies for language differentiation, and audio script for each listening passage; time guidelines to assist educators with pacing; and tools to support authentic academic conversations. The systematic *TEAM* approach ensures that all students thrive in the classroom as they acquire rich, targeted academic language to engage in collaborative discussions, present independent ideas and thoughts, engage with complex grade-level texts, explain reasoning, construct arguments, and ultimately critique reasoning of their peers. The grade-level *TEAM* curricula provide students meaningful opportunities to both develop and practice receptive and productive language skills.

The *TEAM Toolkits* are based on principles defined in Second Language Acquisition research as discussed in the Center for Applied Linguistics, *Developing Academic Literacy and Language in the Content Areas*, the framework outlined by the Council of the Great City Schools, and the WIDA Standards Framework and Theoretical Foundations. The research base for the *TEAM Toolkits* includes the latest research from Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Literacy Panel on language-minority children, and American Educational Research Association.

This document summarizes development of research in English as a second language and highlights how *TEAM Toolkits* align with key research-best practices and principles.

English Language Development Strategies

Scaffolding, strategic contextual connections, modeling, and direct instruction are all English language development strategies that support English language learners as they both acquire English and learn English in the context of core academic subjects (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). English language learners who develop academic language alongside key concepts in core content areas like English language arts, science, social science, and mathematics will not only improve in their overall academic performance in these areas but also gain essential language skills. *TEAM Toolkits* employ numerous English language development strategies. Approaches used include scaffolding, strategic contextual connections, language differentiation within each lesson, opportunities for student language goal setting, and modeling. Direct instruction is also given to help students acquire English as a second language and master key curricular concepts across other core content classes.

TEAM Toolkits and English Language Development Strategies

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is an important strategy for English language development that supports growth in “listening, speaking, reading, and writing through the study of an academic subject” (Díaz-Rico & Weed, 2010). The *TEAM Toolkits* address academic topics across a variety of content areas providing exposure to rich language and interesting and engaging content, and providing strategic supports to help English language learners develop both academic language and literacy skills. Several scaffolds provided to the students are through strategic language and learning targets stated in each lesson, and embedded language differentiation based on a student’s English language proficiency level. The *TEAM* student book provides illustrations, front-loaded vocabulary, audio supports through listening components, and adaptive content that supplies opportunities for the students to work within each language domain: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Strategic Contextual Connections

The *TEAM Toolkits* provide ELL students engaging content and reading passages that expose students to cross-curricular content. Students are able to learn new academic language and vocabulary in a multitude of contexts through meaningful connections.

Modeling

The *TEAM Toolkits* provide strategic modeling by both the teacher and peers to engage students and to help create purpose for reading a text. The teacher read-aloud provides a model to build meta-cognitive comprehension strategies such as questioning during reading and making predictions. The *TEAM Toolkits* provide this same methodology of modeling through the teacher read-alouds and the gradual release process built into each unit of study. Students are invited to interact with the concepts and content by creating their own schema and connections.

Direct Instruction

Many of the activities built into the *TEAM* units of study are based on a direct instructional model in which the teacher provides the students the purpose and learning outcomes for each lesson. The *TEAM* teacher’s edition provides meaningful opportunities for teachers to clarify incorrect answers, confirm correct responses, and support a student’s individual learning and language goals.

First Language to Support English Language Development

Many languages share common sounds. Educators can use sounds and concepts from a student's first language, their L1, to build phonological awareness and oral language skills in English. A teacher's background knowledge about a student's first language can positively influence the language and literacy development in English by using specific tools to scaffold instruction.

TEAM Toolkits & First Language to Support English Language Development

Common Elements and Translanguaging for Communication

Not all classroom teachers speak a second language, and often educators can't accommodate the many first languages spoken in the classroom. The scaffolded support structures embedded in the *TEAM* instructional materials provide educators instructional suggestions to support students in making strategic connections between their first language and English. An English language learner's evolving language proficiency is captured by the notion of interlanguage. Learners build on their prior knowledge and schema as they acquire more complex understanding of language which is refined over time (Fitzgerald & Noblit, 2000).

Low-Stress Practice

Learning a second language is difficult. The *TEAM Toolkits* provide resources to educators to create a positive atmosphere for language instruction and meaningful individualized feedback. Students gain oral vocabulary and language simultaneously with meaningful cross-curricular passages. Students can listen to peer models reading and having conversations as a model for their own oral language development. The embedded scaffolds throughout the student book encourage students to work with peers to check for understanding, provide clarification, and support one another in their language development.

Listening and Speaking Skill Development

Listening and speaking are essential components of English language development (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). Oral language skills or oracy are important to support an ELL's social and emotional growth through both social interaction and classroom participation. As students are able to produce the sounds of a language, or phonological process, their reading acquisition and comprehension is enhanced (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). The *TEAM Toolkits* help to contextualize and model English to support students in developing both listening and speaking skills.

TEAM Toolkits & Listening and Speaking Skill Development

Modeling Language in Context

The *TEAM* instructional materials provide students with rich opportunities for learning oral vocabulary and phrases. All new unit content is presented with audio support through CD connections to the text, written text, and visual content including photos and illustrations. Students are given an opportunity to explore new academic language and vocabulary with meaningful connections to the text and supports in their student book.

Academic terminology is explained and demonstrated in multiple contexts throughout a unit. Many academic terms have independent meanings that are content specific. These tiered vocabulary words are reiterated throughout a unit of study, and students are provided meaningful opportunities to explore these terms beyond the original example. Additionally, students are exposed to conversational phrases and are able to develop meaningful in-school language skills by listening to and following instructions, answering and creating questions, and processing a variety of other types of auditory information.

Feedback is another language support model found throughout the *TEAM* instructional materials. Students are encouraged through each unit of study to practice new phrases and new questioning techniques with peers. Within the turn and talk experience, educators can provide individualized support and modeling to students in an effort to create authentic conversations in the classroom.

Producing and Practicing Language

Research indicates that English language learners need both “receptive and expressive language skills” (Saunders & Goldenberg, 2010). Proficient English language students must be able to listen to spoken language and then produce it themselves. With the *TEAM* instructional materials and resources, students are provided numerous opportunities throughout a lesson to both produce, practice, and develop individualized language goals to evaluate their own accuracy, pacing, and expression as they acquire English.

Academic Vocabulary Development

Marzano's (2010) research on academic vocabulary development indicates vocabulary knowledge as a significant indicator of a student's academic success. Students with limited vocabulary, including English language learners, are likely to have difficulty with core academic areas. Simply providing a list of words to memorize is not enough to help students acquire new content-specific academic vocabulary. For students learning English, "using real and virtual experiences and visuals to introduce vocabulary" is critical (Cunningham, 2009, p. 86). Students will increase their overall academic success as they learn the core content language in a rich and contextualized learning environment. The *TEAM Toolkits* teach academic vocabulary words in meaningful and engaging ways through a variety of contexts to ensure students can use the newly acquired vocabulary throughout their academic day.

TEAM Toolkits & Academic Vocabulary Development

Building Academic Vocabulary for Academic Success

The *TEAM* instructional materials provide students opportunities to learn basic words as well as academic vocabulary as defined by Marzano (2010). In each unit, the student is exposed to a variety of tiered vocabulary that helps the student not only successfully navigate the classroom environment but provides meaningful exposure to vocabulary used within a core content area and as seen on standardized assessments. In order to prepare students for new content-specific vocabulary, the *TEAM* instructional resources expose students to strategies for identifying word parts and identifying multiple-meaning words.

Contextualized Academic Vocabulary Development with Meaningful Repetition

Research indicates that English language learners master vocabulary more quickly when provided helpful and meaningful connections and context for the new language. Within the *TEAM Toolkits* scope and sequence, vocabulary is not taught in isolation. Students are introduced to the new vocabulary while simultaneously negotiating a core-content focused text. Students are encouraged not only to create their own definitions based on their exposure to the new academic language, but to apply this language in a variety of different contexts. The meaningful repetition throughout the student book helps students acquire content vocabulary more quickly.

Creating a Language-Rich Learning Environment

For English learners and unskilled readers, poor comprehension can be at least partially a result of limited vocabulary (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). To ensure English language learners improve their overall comprehension of rich content-specific text, the *TEAM* instructional materials provide structures for educators to create language-rich learning environments to support academic English vocabulary acquisition. Throughout each unit's lessons, students are encouraged to interact with new vocabulary through engaging visual supports and teacher-directed classroom discussions.

Differentiated Instruction for ELLs

Differentiated instruction is a proactive approach to teaching English language learners in which the curriculum is adapted to the individual linguistic needs of the student's language proficiency. Ideally, classroom instruction takes students' individual readiness into consideration when considering curriculum, academic vocabulary development, and texts.

TEAM Toolkits & Differentiated Instruction for ELLs

Individualized Instruction

The *TEAM* instructional materials provide educators the opportunity to differentiate instructional materials to best align to a student's English language proficiency level. Students receive materials that are simplified or more advanced dependent upon a student's individual needs within the unit of study. Educators are provided scaffolding suggestions within the context of each unit to further support struggling students. Within the *TEAM* student books there are additional visual supports, illustrations, and supportive text features to ensure student success with rich grade-level content. The student book guides students through activities using all four language domains.

Progress Monitoring

Teachers can use the student books in the *TEAM Toolkits* as a means to document and evaluate their student's progress and to aid in further differentiating instruction. Evaluation of student work helps provide teachers with resources by which to make effective decisions about how to continue to supplement the students' English language development. Additionally, the appraisal of student work offers ways to continue to challenge students at the appropriate level.

Effective Literacy Instruction for ELLs

A panel of researchers, including Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Russell Gersten, and Timothy Shanahan authored the 2007 guide entitled, *Effective Literacy and English Language Instruction for English Learners in Elementary Grades*. The guide identifies five core recommendations to support English language learners in acquiring language and literacy skills. Provided below is a brief summary of how the *TEAM Toolkits* meet the specific recommendations as outlined in the support guide.

TEAM Toolkits & Effective Literacy Instruction for ELLs

Recommendation 1: Screen for Reading Problems and Monitor Individual Student Progress

The *TEAM* instructional materials provide educators the opportunity to identify reading challenges and structure in-class lessons to support students within the context of each unit. The student books provide educators with resources to monitor student progress throughout the *TEAM* curriculum.

Recommendation 2: Provide Intensive Small-Group Reading Interventions

The *TEAM Toolkits* provide pacing and instructional support for direct instruction to supply individualized reading interventions that address the five core elements of developing reading skills in English: phonological awareness, word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The *TEAM* teacher's edition provides a variety of pre/post assessments to monitor student performance, graphic organizational tools, vocabulary assessments, and blackline masters for student journal responses.

Recommendation 3: Provide Extensive and Varied Vocabulary Instruction

The *TEAM Toolkits* teach a multitude of cross-curricular academic vocabulary within each lesson and unit. In addition to cross-curricular academic vocabulary development, students continue to work with word-family patterns and sight words. Vocabulary is reinforced through contextualized exposure, context-rich sentences, writing prompts, and discussions. Students demonstrate vocabulary mastery through a series of assessment activities found within the teacher's edition.

Recommendation 4: Develop Academic English

The *TEAM Toolkits* help students acquire academic English through explicit instruction embedded in each lesson and unit of study. Students are exposed to the new language through a listen and discussion time, followed by a reading passage and in-class discussion. Finally, learners are provided opportunities for additional practice through a supported writing activity. Within each unit of study, the *TEAM* student books provide illustrations, visual representations, and information about parts of speech for the newly acquired academic English. After multiple exposures and practice, students demonstrate mastery of the new academic English through vocabulary assessments with cloze sentences.

Recommendation 5: Schedule Regular Peer-Assisted Learning Opportunities

The *TEAM Toolkits* provide educators the support and structures to shelter English language development in the classroom through modeling. Peer modeling and meaningful feedback opportunities are designed to enable students to develop both language and literacy skills. Within each *TEAM* unit of study, students are encouraged to develop and verbalize their own learning goals as related to the language development skill addressed in the lesson. This meaningful ownership of the student's English language development encourages students to reflect on both their strengths and identify areas of need.

Supporting ELLs Reading Comprehension

Effective literacy instruction involves explicitly teaching comprehension skills, strategies, and concepts (Denton, 2011). In order for students to be successful readers, they must master the following skills in English: associating sounds with letters, blending letter sounds, and identifying and using root words and affixes. Additionally, successful readers in English have both metacognitive and metalinguistic skills to help comprehend the text and to decode in meaningful ways. Additionally, English language learners require a great deal of scaffolding to build background knowledge in order to comprehend a text. English language learners must be introduced to concepts that are central to reading fiction and informational text in English. The *TEAM Toolkits* explicitly teach reading comprehension skills and strategies to help students become successful readers in English.

TEAM Toolkits & Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction for ELLs

Reading Comprehension Skills

The *TEAM* instructional materials integrate English language development instruction with literacy instruction. Effective reading instruction must address the five essential components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. These five areas are a foundational element of all *TEAM* instructional materials. Reading skills and language development are part of each unit study and each lesson's interactive activities. For example, English language learners acquire background knowledge through interactive read-alouds. Students are exposed to strategic word-solving strategies by practicing both with a peer and through classroom discussions.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

The *TEAM Toolkits* employ direct instruction methods to teach reading comprehension strategies. This involves a variety of depth-of-knowledge questions addressing skills such as making inferences, identifying the main idea and supporting details, and creating graphic organizational maps to better understand a text. After learning a new reading comprehension strategy, students are provided opportunities to practice this skill set through guided reading and independent reading passages found in their student books.

Building Background Knowledge and Cross-Curricular Connections

Denton (2011) identifies that students "need background knowledge related to reading and to the topics they are reading about" (*Teach the Essentials*). The *TEAM Toolkits* teach concepts necessary for English language learners to build background knowledge by pairing readings throughout a unit of study. The passages within a unit share vocabulary and key concepts so that students are able to apply meaning from one text to the next. Students are building cross-curricular concepts and vocabulary that can be applied to further units of study throughout their academic day.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring helps educators identify how well new content concepts have been learned and to individualize a student's learning and language path. The *TEAM* student books help educators monitor student performance and provide individualized support when needed.

Scaffolding English Language Development Strategies to Support ELLs

English language learners are required to master a number of academic tasks while simultaneously negotiating language in order to be successful in the classroom. Scaffolding is an essential component of interventions provided to English language learners as they learn new and complex content-specific tasks. As students begin to master a task, “the assistance or support is decreased gradually in order to shift the responsibility for learning from the teacher to the student” (Larkin, 2002). The *TEAM Toolkits* provide both language and literacy instructional materials that employ language development scaffolds to support English language learners as they assimilate new concepts.

TEAM Toolkits & Providing Scaffolding for English Language Learners

Student Learning and Language Goal Setting

The *TEAM* instructional materials encourage students to set learning goals with each lesson. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own progress and needs as they develop English language proficiency.

Differentiated Instruction and Instructive Feedback

Not all English language learners require the same instruction or same English support scaffolds. The *TEAM* instructional materials provide educators with options for individualization dependent upon English language proficiency level. All students are provided engaging language and literacy activities but will receive more individualized instruction as indicated by performance in the student book. Students who struggle to master a specific concept can receive more instruction and practice, whereas those who have mastered a concept can move on to more involved skills. Additionally, English language learners identified as struggling readers will receive additional teacher-scaffolded supports with the text.

Independent Learning Opportunities

Larkin (2002) recommends that students receive less scaffolded support when they are capable of working independently on a task. The *TEAM* instructional support materials provide educators with a flexible curriculum and opportunities to differentiate a lesson to best meet individual student needs. The student books provide English language learners experiences to work independently with new skills and concepts. The goal setting and scaffolded supports ensure that students work towards independence.

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Zone of Proximal English Language Development

Vygotsky (1978) developed the zone of proximal development (ZPD) concept, defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86). The ZPD is the difference between what an English language learner can do with language support and what the learner can do without support. The *TEAM Toolkits* provide a language and literacy curriculum that aligns individualized language development instruction tailored to the student’s ZPD.

TEAM Toolkits & Zone of Proximal English Language Development

Pre and Post Assessments

Vygotsky believed that providing a child with learnings within his or her ZPD was the best way to advance individual learning. The *TEAM* instructional materials provide English language learners with activities and lessons within his or her ZPD by providing instructional material tailored to the student’s individual English language proficiency level.

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