

# Activities-to-Go: Thematic, Editable, and Leveled Curriculum

## Executive Summary:

**Activities-to-Go** is a thematic, editable, and leveled curriculum that supports students with special needs. It is available in print or interactive formats through **Boardmaker 7**. The program targets life skills, learning, science, and social studies, a mix of topics that serves to enhance participation and build academic knowledge and vocabulary from Kindergarten through grade 12. Because it includes the Core First Communication Book (a companion to Snap Core First), this program is particularly supportive of students who use AAC.

## Activities-to-Go by the numbers:

- **Three levels** of different learning
- **Four** weekly units in each theme
- **Ten** monthly themes in each year
- **Forty+** activities in each leveled unit

The three leveled books within each unit target the same big idea so that all students can engage in rigorous and meaningful instruction, regardless of their ability to demonstrate what they know. Books and vocabulary routines are the instructional anchor of each unit. Teachers read and re-read these books multiple times across a week. Then, students explore a range of activities (including matching, sorting, writing, webs, hidden pictures, games, recipes, and crafts) that provide the kind of repetition with variety that leads to increased comprehension and retention of knowledge. Each leveled unit also comes with social, emotional, and behavioral support activities for both individual students and groups. Teacher Guides provide implementation support for big ideas and evidence-based strategies for supporting language, literacy, and comprehension growth. They also offer suggestions for enhancing instruction via an extended reading list. Last, there are suggestions for ways to enrich or differentiate instruction using Boardmaker 7 templates.

**Activities-to-Go** is the first pre-made curricular offering that is editable and aligns with College and Career Readiness Standards from K-12. You can use the activities in their current state or edit them before printing and delivering instruction. You can find the templates used to create this program in the template picker of **Boardmaker 7**. This collection of templates allows you to develop new activities or entirely new units that precisely match the learning needs of your students as well as the program needs of your school, clinic, or district. When delivered interactively, **Activities-to-Go** accommodates a range of access needs, including touch, scan, and eye gaze.

## Problem Statement:

There are many adapted curriculum products available today to support the needs of students in special education between kindergarten through twelfth grade. Despite decades of use, there is scant evidence to support their efficacy. These limitations include:

- **Lack of exposure to academic content:**

College and Career Readiness Standards mandate that all students engage meaningfully in school-based learning, yet they do not provide guidance or structure for including students with disabilities (Common Core, 2009). Failure to provide students with opportunities that allow them to build knowledge in science and social studies has considerable downstream effects. Without opportunities to explore, activate, and build their world knowledge, students struggle to develop the kind of mental scaffolding that lays the foundation for text comprehension and learning (Marzano, 2004).

- **Mastery-based approaches to instruction:**

Whereas mastery is critical in some learning domains (math, for example) it is detrimental to progress in literacy and language learning. When we teach students literacy skills in pre-determined, hierarchical ways, we ensure that they will struggle and ultimately stall at the earliest levels. This approach is inconsistent with best practices in ELA/language instruction, and it perpetuates belief systems about the perceived limits of students with significant disabilities. As beliefs about student potential diminish, so too does access to the meaningful curriculum (Joseph & Seery, 2004; Katims, 2000; Zascavage & Keefe, 2004).

- **Symbolized text:**

Evidence from the last six decades indicates that pairing symbols with connected text poses no real benefits to students with early or emergent literacy skills. Evidence suggests that this practice, while well-meaning, may slow or deter student progress. (Erickson, Hatch & Clendon, 2010).

- **False Claims about the nature of instruction:**

Many of today's adapted curricula make unsubstantiated claims about their efficacy and rigor. While many self-identify as reading programs, they fail to introduce students to the kinds of foundational experiences and interactions that literacy development requires (RTI, 2011).

- **Lack of accessibility:**

Learning requires that all students have varied opportunities to explore concepts, challenge assumptions, and manipulate the materials that support learning. Adapted curricula must provide customized access so that students can effectively engage with learning materials and demonstrate their knowledge. Since students with language impairments rely on conventional writing to communicate, they require opportunities to manipulate learning materials as well as access to the entire alphabet (Carnahan, 2012).

## Clinical Best Practice:

Research regarding comprehension instruction and knowledge acquisition has shifted from targeting working memory and toward engaging deeper cognitive-linguistic processes. Whereas the former approach is supportive of teaching students the content of a given book, the latter is consistent with the goal of comprehension instruction; to help students develop generalized ways to make meaning of texts. Research indicates that reading comprehension involves two concurrent behaviors: extracting meaning from text and then constructing it in personal terms (Adams, 1990). This process requires interaction between the reader, the text, and the activity (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Both processes must be activated and supported if students are to build and develop reading comprehension potential. Today's standards-based climate mandates that comprehension instruction is worthy of the same kind of focused, explicit attention that word recognition typically receives within the various contexts and classrooms where students with special needs learn (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). Thanks to College and Career Readiness Standards, instructional approaches must now integrate reading, writing, and communicating across all learning contexts. Further, these standards require that students have ample opportunities to develop, activate, and build background knowledge, engage in regular practice with grade-level texts, dedicate attention to vocabulary acquisition, and write from sources or texts (Common Core Standards, 2009). All students in K-12, including those with special needs, must have access to texts, literacy, and language instruction every day as a mechanism for leveraging the transactional and concurrent nature of literacy and language development; instruction and support cannot wait for decoding independence.

## Why it Works:

The following evidence-based practice led to the creation and instructional design of **Activities-to-Go**:

### ▪ Differentiated instruction:

Effectively differentiated learning paths offer students multiple ways to access and engage with materials, as well as varied opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and thinking. Additionally, differentiated instruction is optimally effective when teachers provide monitoring and ongoing formal and informal assessment so that students have diverse options to reflect and enhance learning (Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007).

### ▪ Predictable instructional routines:

**Activities-to-Go** supports parents and teachers in providing predictable instructional routines, as indicated in unit-based Teacher Guides. This approach benefits adults by helping them understand and implement lessons while giving real-time training in evidence-based practices. Predictable instruction benefits students by assisting them in focusing on the content within each lesson, rather than the tools that support learning (Troia & Graham, 2002).

### ■ Repetition with Variety:

**Activities-to-Go** provides holistic, integrated ELA instruction with layered opportunities to introduce repetition with variety. This consistent but varied exposure helps students make meaningful and lasting connections to the targeted concepts and vocabulary introduced in each unit. Furthermore, it takes students beyond demonstrating knowledge of isolated skills in isolated contexts and toward the ability to generalize knowledge across settings (Erickson, Clendon, Abraham, Roy & Van de Carr, 2005).

### ■ Activities that Target Speech/Language Growth:

Thematically linked and engaging activities that target common speech/language skills reflect evidence that language and literacy both develop in concurrent and transactional ways (Koppenhaver, Coleman, Kalman & Yoder, 1991).

### ■ Communication Supports:

**Activities-to-Go** includes the Core First Communication Book as a companion to this product. It supports students in learning to use core vocabulary, a bank of words that are easily applicable, alone or in combination, across partners and contexts. This feature supports students in acquiring and using a bank of words that are easily applicable alone or in combination, across partners and contexts (Erickson & Geist, 2016).

### ■ Tier 2 Vocabulary Instruction:

Each unit includes a multi-step vocabulary strategy that gives students varied opportunities to construct personal knowledge of highly useful vocabulary words (Zangari & Soto, 2009). The targeted words are those that frequently appear in texts yet may not be part of a learner's expressive vocabulary (Beck, Perfetti & McKeown, 1982). Students can continue to access new and increasingly sophisticated texts through instruction that emphasizes the relationship between words and provides opportunities to establish personal connections with them.

## Conclusion:

**Activities-to-Go** supports students at early learning levels as they activate and build world knowledge and develop increased comprehension abilities. When this program is delivered interactively, it provides access so that students with the most significant disabilities have essential experiences engaging with books and exploring activities that make new concepts and vocabulary stick. Its evidence-based instructional approach sets the stage for all students to understand and more fully participate in academic instruction. This program provides parents, teachers, and clinicians with a predictable framework for delivering high-quality, accessible instruction that is easy for adults to implement, engaging for students, and grounded in evidence-based learning practices.

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