

Team Learning

Team Learning is a powerful approach to differentiated instruction. Team Learning empowers students to help one another, and in doing so, to help themselves in a very fundamental way. Lev Vygotsky taught us the powerful idea that **the one who does the teaching is learning; the one talking is the one learning**. That's an easy way to understand the power of Team Learning. Vygotsky's ideas are NOT new:

- In about 35 AD, Seneca the Younger, the great Roman scholar and philosopher, wrote: "When we teach, we learn" (*Docendo Discimus*). He may have been influenced by the Greek philosopher, Socrates, whose questioning led to discussion, and those discussions led to a change in thinking—oral language brought new or improved ideas into people's heads.
- In 1795, a Scotsman, Andrew Bell, wrote a book describing a system of "mutual teaching" in which students teach one another.
- In 1815, the French introduced a similar idea they called "écoles mutuelles."
- In the 1950s, Dr. Donald D. Durrell and his colleagues at Boston University developed Pupil-Team Learning and published their year-long efficacy study performed in the schools in Dedham, Massachusetts, proving student success in the use of pupil-teams.
- Since 1986, Dr. Robert A. Slavin, at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, has extolled the virtues of cooperative learning. See: *Cooperative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (Allyn & Bacon, 1990).
- In 1988, Professors Roger T. and David W. Johnson opened their Center for Cooperative Learning at the University of Minnesota, and published "Cooperative Learning: Two Heads Learn Better Than One."

Team Learning often works best when two students are chosen by the teacher to learn as a team. These student pairs are assigned the role of the Learner and Mentor, the Learner's job is to master a concept, a topic, or an assignment. Mastery to the level of fluency requires a Learner to solve problems and to understand the concepts with few errors. Once fluent in that topic or assignment, the teacher may assign that student the role of Mentor. Mentors assist Learners in mastering and becoming fluent in that topic or assignment. On most new assignments, students are Learners. Then, with mastery, and practice on the assignment, Learners will achieve fluency. At this stage, they know the materials well and become able to present it correctly – then they become ready herself or himself to be a Mentor.

The core idea is clear: The one talking is the one learning. Students collaborate and teach one another. Every student must do the work individually. There is no collaboration on doing the work or solving the problems. It's OK for a Learner to

ask questions, to ask a Mentor for help, but NOT OK for a Learner to ask the Mentor for the answer.

To implement student teams, do this:

- 1) Make up task cards, a Learner card and a Mentor card, for every student. Copy, cut and paste cards from these pages.
- 2) Explain to the class the fun and powerful idea that teaching someone else is an excellent way to learn something for oneself: When you are teaching, you are learning!
- 3) Explain Mastery and Fluency:
 - a. Solving problems or learning new material thoroughly is Mastery
 - b. Solving problems from start to finish, or doing the work, with few or no errors is Fluency.
- 4) Explain: “You start every new assignment as a Learner. Learners make errors. That’s good! Learning is all about correcting errors. That’s how we all learn! Think about when you first learned to ride a bike: you fell off a few times until you didn’t any more. It’s just like that in math, science, social studies, reading, writing, and language arts. Make mistakes. Practice. Get feedback. Get better at doing the work. Become fluent!”
- 5) Explain: “When you achieve fluency in an assignment or with a new idea or new concept, you will become a Mentor for that assignment. As a Mentor, you will work with a Learner.”
- 6) Explain: “Task Cards help us to learn our jobs as productive Learners and Mentors.
- 7) Hand out the Task Cards. Every student gets both a Learner card and a Mentor card.
- 8) Go over both cards. Model the process. Answer questions.
- 9) When students become fluent on an assignment, assign them to be Mentors.
- 10) Get started!

Teacher Task Card for Team Learning

I am a Team Learning teacher. These are my tasks:

- I make assignments that are consistent with each student's Zone of Proximal Development, assignments that each student may reasonably expect to master.
- I model the Team Learning process for my students.
- I make it clear that the goal is mastery on every topic, every assignment.
- I change assignments when needed to keep each student working successfully to mastery.
- I monitor student progress by watching each student's level of mastery and fluency.
- When a Learner has mastered a topic or an assignment but is not yet fluent, I may re-set the assignment, or suggest to the Learner that he or she re-do the assignment, or some part of the topic or assignment, to achieve both mastery and fluency.
- I award Mentor status to students when they demonstrate fluency on a topic or an assignment.
- I pair students in Mentor / Learner relationships on a particular topic or an assignment. This is not permanent relationship; it may last for only one topic or assignment.
- I require Learners and Mentors to work in teams and mutually self-correct the work. The Mentor asks the Learner to describe the corrections the Learner makes while revising work, to make it better.
- I reassign pairs as needed. Students alternate roles between Learner and Mentor.

Learner Task Card for Team Learning

I am a Team Learner. These are my tasks:

- I solve the problems or do the tasks in today's assignment.
- When I need help with a problem or a topic, I ask my Mentor partner. My Mentor won't tell me the answer or do my work. My Mentor will ask me to explain the problem or the topic. She or he will ask me questions that will help me to understand the material, so I can solve the problem for myself.
- I do the work myself.
- I explain the topic or the assignment to my Mentor. My Mentor will help me, but will not do my work for me. My Mentor won't tell me the answers.
- My most important job, as the Learner in our team, is for me to teach my Mentor the material, the topic, the assignment, or the problem.
- Teaching my Mentor is a great, fun way way to LEARN something for myself.

Mentor Task Card for Team Learning

To become a Mentor, these are my tasks:

- I learn the material, solve the problems, and do the work in this topic or assignment with very few errors.
- When I feel that I understand the topic or assignment, I show my good work to my teacher.
- My teacher gives me the job of Mentor on this topic or assignment so that I can help a Learner.

As a Mentor, these are my tasks:

- I LISTEN to my Learner partner. My Learner partner needs my help. These are tasks I can do to help my Learner:
 - Ask questions that help my Learner figure things out for himself/herself.
 - Make suggestions of what my Learner could try.
 - When my Learner doesn't 'get it,' I suggest that she or he go back to the material and go over it again and have my Learner explain it to me.
 - I don't provide answers or do my Learner's work for him or her. My Learner needs to find the answers and do the work for themselves.
 - Because **the one who does the talking learns the most**, I say to my Learner:
 - **TELL ME...** (about this topic, this assignment, this math, how to solve this problem, how to do the work required)
 - **EXPLAIN TO ME...** (how this Example, this topic, this idea works)
 - **SHOW ME...** (how to do the work or how to solve problems like these)
 - When I explain something to my Learner, I always ask them to re-play it right back to me. I say: "**Please teach me what I've just explained.**"
 - I want my Learner to TEACH ME the topic, the material, the assignment.
 - I will stay with my Learner and help my Learner until he or she gets it right and is able to do the work, the topic or assignment with few, if any, errors.
 - If my Learner wants to become a Mentor for this topic or this assignment, I will stay on the job as her or his Mentor until my Learner is fluent in the task or the topic, making few, if any, errors. My Learner should be able to explain the material or the topic, tell me correctly how to do the work, or solve these kinds of problems.