



How to: Manage Groups Large and Small: The Teacher-Student Learning Game

Description: The Teacher-Student Learning Game (Nelson, Benner, & Mooney, 2008) is a procedure for managing instruction that can work with large and small groups, as well as with individual students. While appropriate for typical students, the Game has also been found to be effective with those with emotional/behavioral disorders (EBDs). The Game offers incentives for appropriate behaviors, is not coercive, and prompts students to apply positive peer pressure within their groups to earn Game points and resulting incentives. The procedure is designed to be feasible for any teacher to use.

Preparation: To prepare for the Teacher-Student Learning Game, the instructor:

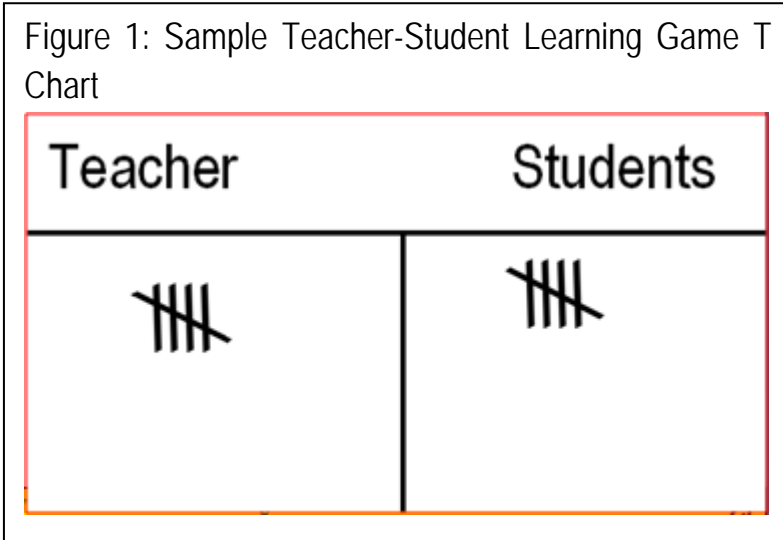
- **teaches behavioral expectations.** The teacher develops classroom rules for acceptable behavior. A short set of rules is developed for the most common learning situations (e.g., large-group instruction; small-group instruction; cooperative learning activities; independent seatwork). Each set of rules should be short (i.e., no more than 5 rules per situation); specific; stated whenever possible as positive behaviors to be displayed rather than as negative behaviors to be suppressed; and described in language easily understood by all students. Through modeling, guided practice, and regular feedback, the teacher verifies that students understand and are able to follow these rules.
- **selects reinforcers to support the Game.** The teacher chooses those reinforcers ('rewards') to be given to winners of the Teacher-Student Learning Game. The instructor will decide what reinforcers will best motivate the group. While praise is always recommended, the teacher may also elect to have each winner choose an item from a prize box; allow the winning group to select by vote a reward from a reinforcer menu; or assign points to a winning team to be redeemed at a future time for prizes or privileges.
- **creates a Game T-chart.** Using a flip-chart of small, erasable white-board, the teacher draws a T-chart, with the left column of the chart labeled 'Teacher' and the right column labeled 'Students'.
- **introduces students to the Game.** The teacher describes the procedures of the Game (provided below) to students.

Procedure: The Teacher-Student Learning Game can be used with groupings of any size, from one student to an entire class. To conduct the Game during a particular activity, the teacher:

1. **announces that the Game is in effect.** The teacher ensures that all students are paying attention and says, "*For this activity, we are going to be playing the Teacher-Student Learning Game.*" At the instant the Game begins, the instructor completes the first observation of the group's behavior and awards points to the 'Students' or 'Teachers'--as described in the next step.
2. **assigns points for appropriate and unacceptable behaviors.** While teaching, the instructor observes student behaviors. Periodically, when the teacher notes that most or all students in the group are behaving appropriately, the instructor awards 5 points to the group, recording those points in the 'Students' column of the T-chart as a 5-hashmark tally: The instructor also says, "*Students score five points for [insert description of positive behavior or rule being followed].*"



Whenever the instructor observes a rule violation, that instructor awards 5 points to the teacher, recording those points in the 'Teacher' column of the T-chart as a tally. The teacher also says, " *Teacher scores five points; some students did not show [insert description of positive behavior or rule **not** being followed]*. See Figure 1 for an example of a T-Chart.



In a typical Game session, the teacher is likely to make a total of 4 to 8 observations/point assignments. If the Game is effective, students will typically win in approximately 80 percent of sessions (Nelson, Benner, & Mooney, 2008).

3. **provides reinforcers or feedback.** If, at the end of the Game, the student team wins, the teacher praises their behaviors and supplies any earned reward. If the teacher wins, the instructor explains what student behaviors prevented their victory and discusses with them what goals they can set for improved behavior at the next Game session.

Tips for Use. The Teacher-Student Learning Game can be used intermittently as one method for instructional management. Typically, the instructor would use the Game more frequently in the first months of school and taper its use later in the year as student behaviors stabilize or improve. Teachers are encouraged, however, to use the Game at any time when a group is failing to follow classroom rules--perhaps even introducing the Game in the middle of a class period if needed.

Reference

Nelson, J. R., Benner, G. J. & Mooney, P. (2008). *Instructional practices for students with behavioral disorders*. New York: The Guilford Press.