



# Student Team Literature

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### *Content*

- literature analysis
- reading skills
- integrating the language arts
- instructional practices
- cooperative learning strategies
- higher-order thinking skills
- assessment strategies
- school-wide reform

The Student Team Literature program (STL) is a middle school language arts curriculum and instructional program designed for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students as a component of the Talent Development Middle School reform initiative. STL is designed to improve students' skills in reading, vocabulary, literary analysis, and student collaboration by using great books, higher-level questioning, working with other students, and a wide variety of instructional and curricular materials. The program avoids short anthology selections and literal comprehension questions. STL includes (1) curricular materials to assist students' study of great literature; (2) recommended instructional practices, peer assistance processes, and assessments; and (3) staff development, mentoring, and advising for teachers to support the curricular and instructional reforms.

Student Team Literature is an adaptation of previous cooperative learning programs in language arts that have been successful in raising student achievement in reading and writing. STL is an adaptation of Student Team Reading and incorporates instructional practices used in Student Team Writing; these programs were originally developed to address the specific instructional and developmental needs of middle grade students.

### *Context*

- urban middle school
- low-income, high-minority populations of students

## PROGRAM CONTEXT

The Student Team Literature program was implemented in 1995-96 in 21 classrooms in sixth through eighth grades at Central East Middle School in Philadelphia. Additional schools are now involved. Central East Middle School serves 1,000 students in fifth through eighth grades. Over 85 percent of the students are from low-income families. The student population at Central East Middle School includes a large percentage of second language learners and minority students.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



The comprehensive staff development program employs both the training and observation and assessment models of staff development. Training occurs both in the summer (2 days) and monthly throughout the year. The summer workshop provides a baseline of knowledge and skills in establishing peer learning structures within the classroom and in using interactive instructional strategies. Additionally, teachers in the STL program participate in monthly seminars to troubleshoot problems with instruction and to extend their knowledge and skills in the Student Team Literature's program instructional strategies and support materials. Teachers receive biweekly coaching following classroom observations by an expert instructional strategy specialist. Periodically, small groups of teachers convene to review the instructional materials. In March of the same school year, teachers also receive training in Student Team Writing, a related instructional model.

### *Process*

- training
- demonstrations
- modeling
- classroom-based coaching
- periodic review sessions

The staff development activities are provided by the Talent Development Middle School Program staff, local teacher leaders, and school and district-based experts in curriculum and instruction.

### **S**UMMARY OF RESULTS

Students in the Student Team Literature classrooms displayed significantly better reading comprehension after the first year of implementation (effect size .51) than did students in the comparison group. The increase in reading comprehension occurred across all levels of prior ability; students with the strongest prior reading skills benefited the most. Peer assistance was found to be more productive and frequent in STL classrooms than in the control classrooms.

### *Intended Audience*

- entire school
- entire department or team

## EVIDENCE OF INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



A matched control group, pre-test/post-test design was used to evaluate effects of Student Team Literature on students' end-of-the-year reading comprehension scale scores on the Stanford 9. Researchers used hierarchical linear models to estimate the differences between experimental classrooms (21) and control classrooms (25) in reading comprehension, while controlling for prior achievement and current grade level. Additional measures were used to estimate the difference in the effectiveness of peer assistance in increasing reading comprehension in experimental and control classrooms.

While the results for Student Team Literature are based on one school's use, earlier research on Student Team Reading (the first version of Student Team Literature) was extensive. It demonstrated significant improvement ( $p < .05$ ) in the California Achievement Test Total Reading for 1,223 urban sixth-grade students in six middle schools when compared to control classrooms where traditional reading instruction was provided using basal and isolated skill instruction. In addition, a second study of the Student Team Reading Program paired with the Student Team Writing Program in sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade classrooms with 3,986 students in the Baltimore City Schools, resulted in significant improvements (at least  $p < .05$ ) in reading comprehension, vocabulary, language mechanics, and language expression on the California Achievement Test when compared to match control schools. These results were obtained even when the control schools had significantly higher pre-test scores ( $p < .01$ ) in Total Reading and Total Language.



Student Team Literature is one part of the larger Talent Development Reform effort for middle schools, and it has produced results for students in this context. Previous versions of Student Team Literature have been used independently of whole school reform efforts and have demonstrated their impact on student learning. The structured, interactive approach to student analysis of literature engages students in responding to literature.

## SAMPLE SITES



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## DOCUMENTATION

Mac Iver, D., Plank, S. & Balfanz, R. (1997, August). *Working Together to Become Proficient Readers: Early Impact of the Talent Development Middle School's Student Team Literature Program, Report No. 15*. Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, Johns Hopkins University and Howard University.

