

THE ROLE OF TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING PRIMARY LEARNERS

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Abstract: In the context of primary education (ages 5–12), the integration of team-building activities transcends mere recreation. It serves as a critical pedagogical tool for fostering Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), cognitive flexibility, and communicative competence. This article examines how structured collaborative tasks influence the developmental trajectory of primary learners and explores the neurological and social frameworks that support group-based classroom interventions.

Key words: team building, primary learners, teaching, activities.

Introduction

In educational terms, primary learners are children typically between the ages of 5 and 11 or 12 years old. They are in the first stage of formal compulsory education, often referred to as primary or elementary school¹. Primary education marks the transition from egocentric play to sociocentric collaboration. Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners reach higher cognitive levels when interacting with peers². Team-building activities defined here as structured tasks requiring collective problem-solving act as the bridge between individual capability and collaborative achievement. Vygotsky believed that learning was an active process rather than a natural or passive one. He said that children were engaged in their own learning and discovery but that their development happened in the context of social interaction, as opposed to independently or in isolation.

In recent years, schools have placed considerable emphasis on developing students' leadership skills. Personal attributes such as social competence, effective communication and resilience are some of the characteristics that a leader should possess. However, there is no doubt that team building is also one of the essential components of a successful leader.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of team-building activities in primary education is closely connected with Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky emphasized that children learn more effectively through interaction with peers and teachers within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)³. This idea supports the use of collaborative classroom activities to improve communication, social interaction, and cognitive development among primary learners. Another important contribution was made by Bruce W. Tuckman, who introduced the four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, and

¹ <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/about-us/education-new-zealand/our-education-system/primary-and-secondary-education>

² [https://www.gowriensw.com.au/thought-leadership/vygotsky-theory#:~:text=peer%20or%20mentor,-,Vygotsky's%20Zone%20of%20Proximal%20Development%20\(ZPD\),the%20guidance%20of%20a%20teacher.](https://www.gowriensw.com.au/thought-leadership/vygotsky-theory#:~:text=peer%20or%20mentor,-,Vygotsky's%20Zone%20of%20Proximal%20Development%20(ZPD),the%20guidance%20of%20a%20teacher.)

³ Vygotsky L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. – Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. – 159 p

performing⁴. His model explains how learners gradually develop cooperation and teamwork skills through group interaction. Researchers such as Bonebright further analyzed Tuckman's theory and confirmed its relevance in educational settings⁵. Dyer and Dyer describe team building as a structured process aimed at improving cooperation and overall group performance⁶. Their research highlights that effective teamwork activities increase learners' motivation, confidence, and participation in classroom tasks. Recent studies also show that collaborative activities help develop leadership, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence skills among young learners⁷.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative and descriptive research methodology to examine the role of team-building activities in teaching primary learners. The research was based on the analysis of scientific literature, pedagogical theories, and previous studies related to collaborative learning, social interaction, and child development. Comparative and analytical methods were used to evaluate the effectiveness of team-building activities in improving communication skills, cooperation, motivation, and classroom participation among young learners. In addition, the study applied theoretical analysis of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Tuckman's group development model to explain the educational significance of teamwork in primary education.

Results And Discussion

Team building is a process of diagnosing team performance and instituting processes to improve team performance⁸. Team building is a process that involves multi-step rather than a one-off event. It involves assessing how different members collaborate and communicate with each other, followed by implementing solutions based on that diagnosis. The ultimate goal of team building is not only to strengthen the relationship of team members, but more importantly, to improve the team performance.

Bruce W. Tuckman created a model in 1965 describing the stage of team building. The model presented 4 stages of team building, namely forming, storming, norming and performing⁹.

The forming stage, also known as the "testing and dependence" stage, starts when group members meet for the first time for a programme or project and come together to get to know each other¹⁰. In this stage, the group becomes oriented to the task, creates ground rules, and tests the boundaries for interpersonal and task behaviors. In other words, team members are trying to understand the purpose of the group, decide basic rules such as the meeting times and figure out how formal the group will be. The forming stage is also the stage in which group members establish relationships with the leader and other members. Members tend to look to the leader for direction and reassurance. To build relationships with each other,

⁴ Tuckman B. W. Developmental sequence in small groups // Psychological Bulletin. – 1965. – Vol. 63, № 6. – P. 384–399

⁵ Bonebright D. A. 40 years of storming: a historical review of Tuckman's model of small group development // Human Resource Development International. – 2010. – Vol. 13, № 1. – P. 111–120

⁶ Dyer W. G., Dyer J. H. Team Building: Proven Strategies for Improving Team Performance. – 5th ed. – San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013. – 272

⁷ Mohd Rick A. M., Wan Mohd W. N. H., Abd Rahman M. et al. Exploring Online Group Work Using Tuckman's Model // International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences. – 2022. – Vol. 12, № 11. – P. 1500–1512

⁸ Dyer, W. G., & Dyer, J. H. (2013). Team building: Proven strategies for improving team performance. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

⁹ Bonebright, D. A. (2010). 40 years of storming: a historical review of Tuckman's model of small group development. Human Resource Development International, 13(1), 111–120.

¹⁰ Zirar, A., Muhammad, N., Upadhyay, A., Kumar, A., & Garza-Reyes, J. A. (2025). Exploring lean team development from the Tuckman's model perspective. Production Planning & Control, 36(4), 442–463.

people in the group begin to introduce themselves and learn about others' personal backgrounds, trying to make a positive first impression. For informal groups, there may also be ice-breaking activities to allow the members to build trust and feel more open to one another¹¹.

As the team begins to work together, arguments may start to arise, which marks the start of the "storming" stage. As primary learners start to establish their roles and responsibilities, some members may be satisfied with their roles while others may not, which results in conflicts. For example, members with high workloads and responsibilities may feel overwhelmed and frustrated. Another explanation is that the members in the "storming" stage are aware of the team's direction and may express an unfavourable attitude towards the decision proposal. Knight argues that storming behaviors may occur throughout the team's lifetime rather than as a distinct stage¹². While it is true that disputes can occur at any stage of team building, "storming" is a stage where major disagreements occur as roles and team structure are being negotiated.

The "norming" stage begins when the group establishes cohesiveness and commitment to its tasks, finds new ways to work together, and sets norms for appropriate behaviors. The "norming" stage represents a successful resolution of the "storming" stage, where primary learners convert lessons learnt into clear norms and commitments. Furthermore, members tend to avoid conflicts to ensure harmony. To achieve this, they may be less likely to stick to their own point of view when being persuaded by others. Another characteristic of the "norming" stage is that the leadership evolves from one person being in control to a shared leadership¹³. As trust, cohesion and mutual respect start to develop within team members, they are more willing to participate in decision-making. Also, they are more open-minded in listening to and following decisions made by others. As a result, the leadership responsibilities are distributed among the team members instead of one person.

In the "performing" stage, the team becomes a "problem-solving instrument". The phrase "problem-solving instrument" points out that teams reaching this stage are very effective in solving problems because they have reached a level of maturity and primary learners can work together efficiently to tackle challenges. Since the subjective relationship between primary learners has already been established, members can now adopt and play roles that will enhance the task activities of the group¹⁴. Instead of sticking to assigned roles, members can take on a role where they can contribute the best, therefore enhancing the team performance. Although the "performing" stage is regarded as the last stage in the Tuckman's model, it does not necessarily mean that teams will always stay in this stage after reaching it. New challenges, change in team composition and unanticipated conflicts can bring the team back to the "storming" stage. Teams then have to solve all the conflicts and obstacles before moving forward again. This may result in a cycle involving the storming, norming and performing stages.

While often viewed as "soft skills", team-building directly impacts executive functions. When children engage in a group challenge, such as building a bridge out of limited materials, they must exercise:

¹¹ Zhang, W. (2024). The Effective Use of Musical Ice Breaking Activities. *Arts Studies and Criticism*, 5(2), 75.

¹² Knight, P. J. (2007). Acquisition Community Team Dynamics: The Tuckman Model vs. the DAU Model.

¹³ Mohd Rick, A. M., Wan Mohd, W. N. H., Abd Rahman, M., Sukiman, S. A., Mokhtar, R., & Katawazai, R. (2022). Exploring Online Group Work Using Tuckman's Model. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 12(11).

¹⁴ Tuckman, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63(6), 384-399.

- *Inhibition Control*: Waiting for a peer to finish a thought or action.
- *Working Memory*: Holding the group's goal in mind while executing a specific task.
- *Cognitive Flexibility*: Adjusting their plan when a teammate suggests a different approach.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) identifies relationship skills and social awareness as pillars of primary development. Team-building provides a low-stakes environment to practice these.

11. Empathy development: Primary learners begin to recognize that their peers have different perspectives and strengths.

12. Conflict resolution: Group tasks inevitably lead to friction, providing "teachable moments" for educators to guide students through negotiation rather than avoidance.

For primary learners, team-building is an intensive language laboratory. Unlike teacher-led instruction, peer-to-peer activities require students to use exploratory talk. They must explain, argue, and clarify their ideas to reach a common goal, which significantly accelerates vocabulary acquisition and syntactic complexity.

Conclusion

Recent studies highlight that the efficacy of these activities depends on *reflection*. Without a "debrief" session where the teacher helps students identify *why* their team succeeded or failed, the activity remains purely recreational rather than pedagogical. Team-building is not an interruption of the curriculum; it is a delivery vehicle for it. By integrating collaborative tasks, educators address the "whole child," ensuring that primary learners are not only academically proficient but also socially resilient and communicatively adept. As the modern workforce shifts toward collaborative models, these early interventions provide the foundational architecture for lifelong success.

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