Research shows that 10 % of students are capable of learning by reading from a textbook; in contrast, 90% are able to learn if they are actively teaching others.
(Glasser, 1990)

Learning Stations vs Learning/Interest Centers

Centers - a classroom area that contains a collection of activities or materials designed to teach, reinforce, or extend a particular skill or concept. Centers can be interest centers designed to motivate students' exploration of topics they are interested in or learning centers. Centers can be found in many shapes, sizes, and locations in a classroom. They contain materials and activities meant to reinforce or enrich content and skills being learned. They can also serve to reinforce concepts previously learned. Centers can be based on interest and serve to motivate students' exploration of new topics through choice. Centers allow students to work at their own pace. Teachers need to be sure that students can work independently, without disturbing classmates. Examples of centers may include: computer, writing, art, listening, reading, science, or math centers. Centers should be clearly organized (directions), focus on learning goals and essential questions, provide for learning preferences, and allow for keeping track of student work through the use of Learning Logs, Journals, or some type of end-product. Even students can create centers for other students! Learning Contracts work well with centers. (Centers are different from stations in that stations are part of a whole concept, topic, or theme being taught. Students rotate through the stations in steps as part of a unit of instruction. Centers, on the other hand, exist as separate entities devoted to providing alternative activities to students.)

Interest centers:
* focus on important learning goals
*use materials addressing a wide range of levels, profiles and interests
* activities that vary from simple to complex, concrete to abstract, structured to open ended
*provide clear directions and tasks
*includes instructions for what to do if needs help
*uses a record keeping system to monitor what students do and quality level
*includes a plan for ongoing assessment of growth in tasks

Learning centers:
*materials usually teacher constructed
*materials and tasks focus on mastery or extension of specific understandings or skills
*materials and tasks are more exploratory than other assignments
*differentiated content, process or product
*[instructional benefits](#)

Stations: are different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously. Stations work in concert with one another. Stations allow different students to work with different tasks. They invite flexible grouping because not all students need to go to all stations all the time or spend the same amount of time in each station. Using stations involves setting up different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously.

These stations invite flexible grouping because not all students need to go to all stations all the time.
*different spots in room - students work simultaneously
*teachers can ask students to move to particular parts of room
*conducive to flexible groupings
*not all students need to spend the same amt. of time at each station
*assignments of students can vary day to day based on who rotates there
*teacher can set up parameters but student can also choose.

The Basics:
Each learning center or station needs to be set up so that the students have all the materials and direction they need. This could include:
> • a sign or label for the center – *Math Center*; *Simple Machines: Lever*
> • clear directions, task cards, or a stated goal for the center project
> • all the materials needed in order to complete the activity

The current classroom lessons or themes will determine the type of learning centers you choose. There are several ways to organize learning centers or stations. It isn't necessary to organize all of them in the same way. It is often useful to adapt several different approaches to fit the needs of the students. Organizational approaches include:
> • By theme: Coral Reef, Simple Machines, Plants, etc.
> • By learning styles: auditory, tactile, visual, etc.
> • By subject or topic: math, spelling, language, science, social studies, and computer skills or cell reproduction, binomials, verbs, etc
> • For Stations, the organization of each would be interrelated. For instance, all of the stations would deal with fractions or conflict

Preparation:
Take time to present each center.
> • Explain the purpose of each center.
> • Show the materials the students will be using.
> • Go over the directions and task cards; show them where the directions will be posted.
> • Review any reporting system or checklists that should be completed.
> • Show where materials are stored between sessions (this could be folders, baskets, computer files...).
> • Schedule help for challenged students. Recruit students for help.

Take time to present the rules.
> • Present the behavior expectations for each center.
> • Demonstrate the expected behavior, and have students practice modeling the behavior.
> • Discuss the importance of respecting each team member's materials and ideas, and of listening to one another. Appoint group leaders and roles when necessary.

Setting up the classroom:
The way you set up learning centers in the classroom will depend on your class space and the method you use for learning centers. Center groups should generally not exceed five students. There are some basic set-ups that work well with any size class.

• Center areas can be placed around the room, including rug areas, reading nooks, and space outside the classroom. This is a good set-up if you will be teaching lessons and students will be using the centers at different times throughout the day.
• Centers can be organized in baskets or folders that are put on tables or groups of desks during a designated center time. Students are then assigned to each center and rotate as scheduled or organized by you.
• Center folders can be assigned to groups. Each group of students working together can carry their materials with them to designated areas in the room.
• Computer activities will depend on your access to computers.

Records and Assessments:

How you assess the students will naturally vary with your teaching methods and types of learning centers you choose. I have found that even young students can self-assess and keep track of their work with help. Here are some ideas:

• checklists: Provide checklists for students to self-check the activities completed.
- Turn in work for each center, one per student or one per group
• Goal Sheets/Portfolio Assessments
- How did I do today?
- What would I like to do tomorrow?
• Final Assessments: Generally, the completion of the learning center task is assessed on the basis of pre-established criteria. Students can:
- present their projects to the class
- turn in projects for teacher evaluation
- test
- self-evaluate
- have group/peer evaluations

Time for clean up:

• Allow plenty of time for orderly cleaning of each center. (about 5-10 minutes)
• Students should put the center materials back in place for the next group.
• Students should have a place to put their finished and unfinished work

Examples of centers
Science learning center
Science station
Sample task cards for science, internet task, fiction, newspaper studies, and social studies.