

Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

Category: Language/Reading

Grade Level: Grade 2-6 (Extensions available for K, Grade 1 and High School)

1. What is the purpose of Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies?

PALS is an instructional strategy developed to enhance students' literacy development and beliefs about reading within a peer mediated framework.

2. With whom can it be used?

Originally developed for grades 2 through 6, PALS now has extensions available for Kindergarten, Grade 1 and High School. PALS can be used with children of various ages and varying reading abilities.

3. What is the format for using Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies?

Through structured activities, students work in tutor-tutee pairs. The activities require frequent verbal interaction and feedback between tutors and tutees, as well as reciprocity of tutoring roles.

➤ Elementary PALS:

1) Training Sessions

- classroom teacher conducts 6 to 10 scripted lessons, ranging from 30 to 60 minutes each
- training sessions involve brief teacher presentations, student recitation of information and application of principles, and teacher feedback

2) Pairing Sessions

- three 35 minute PALS sessions are conducted each week during

which time students work in tutor-tutee dyads

- pairs are composed of one higher-performing student and one lower-performing student
- tutor-tutee roles are reciprocal

3) Teams and Points

- PALS uses a motivational system in which each tutor-tutee pair is assigned to one of two class teams
- teams receive points for completing reading activities and demonstrating proper tutoring behavior
- every 4 weeks pairs and teams are recreated

Each PALS session is comprised of 3 activities:

1) partner reading

- designed to improve reading fluency and accuracy
- each student within a dyad reads aloud for 5 minutes, with the higher-performing student reading first and the lower-performing student rereading the passage
- tutor points out word-reading errors
- tutee retells the passage at end of activity

2) paragraph shrinking

- designed to develop comprehension through summarization and main idea identification

- students read orally and identify the main idea of each paragraph
- tutor guides idea identification through established questions
- tutee then summarizes main idea in 10 words or less

3) prediction relay

- designed to develop and automate students' abilities to formulate and (dis)confirm predictions
- tutee predicts story content, reads aloud, confirms or disconfirms hypothesis, and summarizes the main idea
- tutor corrects tutee's reading errors, judges whether prediction was reasonable and if not, asks for another prediction

➤ **High School PALS:**

The High School extension of PALS is similar to the elementary version in that it also uses the tutor-tutee dyadic relationship, the 3 PALS activities and the motivational team approach.

It varies in that:

- 1) the dyads are mixed up more frequently, often on a daily basis
- 2) the motivational system incorporates a more structured adult-oriented work theme and allows students to earn PALS dollars that can be used to purchase desirable donated items
- 3) reading material covers expository, rather than narrative, text and involves content that is more applicable to the students' lives

➤ **First Grade PALS**

First grade PALS also uses the tutor-tutee dyadic relationship and the motivational team approach. There are two versions of PALS for first grade: PALS-Only and PALS+Fluency. Both programs are similar in make up, with the exception that PALS+Fluency includes activities designed to enhance reading fluency.

Grade One PALS-Only and PALS+Fluency differ from the elementary and high school versions in that:

- 1) each PALS session is started with teacher instruction
- 2) the activities are more suited to the reading level of grade 1 students
 - 4 Sounds and Words activities
 - Partner Reading, similar to the advanced PALS activity, is introduced during the 4th week of PALS

➤ **Kindergarten PALS**

Kindergarten PALS also uses tutor-tutee dyadic relationships. Similar to Grade 1 PALS, the kindergarten version also uses different activities that are more suited to beginning readers.

- 1) focus is on phonological awareness, sound-letter correspondence, decoding and fluency
- 2) only two activities are used:
 - Sound Play (addressing rhyming, isolation of first sounds, ending sounds, etc.)
 - Sounds and Words (addresses decoding)

4. In what types of settings should Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies be used?

PALS may be used within the regular classroom with all students participating.

5. To what extent has research shown Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies to be useful?

Research has shown PALS to be an effective reading intervention program. Improvements in students' reading fluency and comprehension have been noted for learning disabled, low achieving and average achieving students. With regards to the PALS extensions, High School PALS has been shown to effectively promote literacy among seriously reading-delayed adolescents. Kindergarten PALS research has shown positive improvements in phonological awareness and significant increases in the children's reading competence overall. Research on the First Grade PALS extension is pending.

References:

1. Fuchs, L.S., Fuchs, D., Kazdan, S. (1999). Effects of peer-assisted learning strategies on high school students with serious reading problems. *Remedial and Special Education, 20*(5), 309-318.
2. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., Mathes, P.G., & Simmons, D.C. (1997). Peer-assisted learning strategies: Making classrooms more responsive to diversity. *American Educational Research Journal, 34*, 174-206.
3. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., Thompson, A., Svenson, E. et. al. (2001). Peer-assisted learning strategies in reading: Extensions for kindergarten, first grade, and high school.

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Resources:

1. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S., Mathes, P.G., & Simmons, D.C. (1996). *Peer-assisted learning strategies in reading: A manual*. Unpublished manuscript, Vanderbilt University at Nashville, TN.

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