

Subject area: Reading (Literacy and Language Arts)

Grade Levels: (K-12)

Title of Instructional Method, Strategy, or Approach: Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS)

Description of PALS: PALS was developed by two special education instructors at Vanderbilt University to help teachers increase reading and math skills in diverse learners. Upon release, PALS was approved by the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel for inclusion in the National Diffusion Network on effective educational practices (www.peerassistedlearningstrategies.com). PALS has been adopted in the Metropolitan Nashville Davidson County Public Schools, as well as several school districts in Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Arizona, and Ohio.

Training workshops for the PALS method are held at Vanderbilt University, or on-site by an outreach coordinator, and consume only one day of training. PALS has been proven to be an effective, inexpensive method with minimal materials needed. Teacher manuals run at about \$35, and there are additional training videos that can be purchased for \$15. PALS has also been tested, and found to be an effective practice in both general education and special education classrooms. Three main components shape PALS: Partner Reading, Paragraph Shrinking, and Prediction Relay.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) conducted a study on the effectiveness of using PALS in early grades (Kindergarten and First) to teach phonological awareness, decoding, and word recognition. Originally PALS was introduced to be specifically for grades 2-6, but in the past 5 years, it has been extended to K-1 and high school students. The study consisted of 385 children, 37 of whom had a disability. The study concluded that many higher-level reading skills that are typically held for older students can and should be directed to younger children. The study also

showed that there was no big difference in treatment with student type (with or without a disability, low, average, or high intelligence) or school type (high poverty, middle class).

References:

1. Fuchs, D. Fuchs, L.S., Burish, P. (2000). Peer-assisted learning strategies: An evidence-based practice to promote reading achievement. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 15 (2), 85-91.
2. Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L.S. (2005). Peer-assisted learning strategies: Promoting word recognition, fluency, and reading comprehension in young children. *The Journal of Special Education* 39 (1), 34-44.
3. Promising Practices Network. (2005). *Programs That Work: Peer Assisted Learning Strategies*. Retrieved August 26, 2007 from <http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=143>.
4. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development. (2007). *Peer Assisted Learning Strategies: Strategies for Successful Learning*. Retrieved August 26, 2007 from www.peerassistedlearningstrategies.com.

Implementing PALS into the classroom: After being trained by a PALS facilitator, or after studying the PALS teacher handbook, a teacher simply needs to order the correct manuals, which come with the appropriate age-range study sheets for students. The manuals provide an effective way of giving directions to the students, in order to train them on the PALS methods. Using CBM to complement PALS, teachers identify which students need help, and also which students are most appropriate to tutor those who need help. The PALS reading procedure is implemented 3-4 times a week for students K-8th, and 5 times every two weeks for high school students. Different times are associated with PALS Math.

The PALS teacher pairs up a higher-achieving student with a lower-achieving student, and partners are rotated every 4 weeks. As noted by Fuchs and Fuchs (2000), PALS is capable of being used on all students, and has been found to be especially beneficial with students with learning disabilities. After the teacher forms pairs, each partner has a chance to be the player (reader), and then the coach who listens and provides feedback while his/her partner is reading. The higher-achieving student is always the reader first, modeling correct strategies for his/her partner. Lessons are divided up by skill-level and the amount of time they will take. Each lesson

comes with a script for the teacher to use if he/she wishes. The PALS method allows the classroom teacher to circulate during lessons and record observations while providing feedback.

Other considerations: PALS is intended to supplement, not completely replace current curricula. No special reading material needs to be purchased or considered other than what was already in the curriculum. Often times, Title 1 funds will cover the cost of implementing the program. According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) it is important to note that not all students respond to the PALS treatment. In their study of expanding the reading skills to Kindergarten and first graders, 10-20% of students did not respond to the strategies.

Additional Links:

<http://www.promisingpractices.net/program.asp?programid=143> (review of 14 studies on PALS)

<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/kennedy/pals/outreach.html#workshops> (information on upcoming workshops)

<http://www.whatworks.ed.gov/InterventionReportLinks.asp?iid=7&tid=10> (intervention reports on PALS)

<http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/pals/teachmat/ReadingVideos.html> Video of PALS reading in action.

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