
Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding research on the benefits of teaching assistants in classrooms. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

Question: *What are the research results on the benefit of teacher assistants in elementary classrooms?*

Search Process

Key words and search strings used in the search: *teaching assistants AND elementary classrooms; paraeducators AND classrooms AND roles; reading intervention AND teaching assistants OR paraprofessionals*

Search databases and websites:

1. ERIC: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>
2. JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch>
3. Google Scholar: www.google.com/scholar
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources: <http://ies.ed.gov>
5. What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

Sample Citations Retrieved: *(NOTE: Abstracts and executive summaries are copied directly from the reports when possible to ensure accuracy):*

Blatchford, P., Bassett, P., Brown, P., & Webster, R. (2009). The Effect of Support Staff on Pupil Engagement and Individual Attention. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(5), 661-686. doi: 10.1080/01411920902878917

Abstract/Summary: Despite an unprecedented increase in classroom-based support staff, there are confusing messages about their appropriate deployment and a lack of systematic evidence on their impact. This article addresses the deployment and impact on pupil engagement and individual attention of support staff, commonly known as teaching assistants (TAs), in terms of: (1) a comparison between TAs and teachers; (2) differences between pupils with and without special educational needs (SEN); and (3) differences between primary and secondary schools.

Systematic observations of pupil behaviour in 49 primary and secondary schools showed that support staff presence resulted in increased individualisation of attention and overall teaching, easier classroom control, and that pupils showed more engagement and a more active role in interaction with adults. This supports teachers' positive view of support staff, but their presence also meant pupils' contact with teachers declined and at secondary level there was less individual and active interactions between teachers and pupils. (Contains 17 tables.)

Fricke, S., Bowyer-Crane, C., Haley, A.J., Hulme, C. & Snowling, M.J. (2013). Efficacy of Language Intervention in the Early Years. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54(3), 280-290. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.12010

Abstract/Summary: Background: Oral language skills in the preschool and early school years are critical to educational success and provide the foundations for the later development of reading comprehension. Methods: In a randomized controlled trial, 180 children from 15 UK nursery schools ("n" = 12 from each setting; M[subscript age] = 4;0) were randomly allocated to receive a 30-week oral language intervention or to a waiting control group. Children in the intervention group received 30 weeks of oral language intervention, beginning in nursery (preschool), in three group sessions per week, continuing with daily sessions on transition to Reception class (pre-Year 1). The intervention was delivered by nursery staff and teaching assistants trained and supported by the research team. Following screening, children were assessed preintervention, following completion of the intervention and after a 6-month delay. Results: Children in the intervention group showed significantly better performance on measures of oral language and spoken narrative skills than children in the waiting control group immediately after the 30 week intervention and after a 6 month delay. Gains in word-level literacy skills were weaker, though clear improvements were observed on measures of phonological awareness. Importantly, improvements in oral language skills generalized to a standardized measure of reading comprehension at maintenance test. Conclusions: Early intervention for children with oral language difficulties is effective and can successfully support the skills, which underpin reading comprehension. (Contains 5 figures and 2 tables.)

Fried, L., Konza, D. & Mulcahy, P. (2012). Paraprofessionals Implementing a Research-Based Reading Intervention. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 17(1), 35-54. doi: 10.1080/19404158.2012.674052

Abstract/Summary: In many schools in Australia students often begin their primary years with limited preparation for reading. "All hands on deck" are required to ensure the best possible student success rate for learning to read. In this project, Education Assistants, often under-utilised in schools, were used to implement a reading intervention to struggling readers in years one to three. Education Assistants were trained to withdraw students in small groups and engage

students in an explicit, systematic early reading program. The intervention was implemented in a cognitively and emotionally supportive manner and the Education Assistants were trained using autonomy support, collaboration and reflection. Results showed encouraging growth in reading skills for all student age groups compared to the rest of the class. The Education Assistants responded well to the initial and ongoing training processes, refining their teaching skills and the intervention over the period. (Contains 11 figures and 5 tables.)

Hauerwas, L.B. & Goessling, D.P.(2008). Who Are the Interventionists? Guidelines for Paraeducators in RTI. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus*, 4(3), Article 4.

Abstract/Summary: As a Response to Intervention approach begins to be utilized in our schools, there is growing confusion regarding the role of teacher assistants/paraeducators in this problem solving approach. In this article, the authors share survey and interview data from their experiences working with Rhode Island teacher assistants--both in leading teacher assistant training on RTI and in researching implementation of RTI in RI elementary schools. Both challenges and guidelines for the use of teacher assistants in a RTI model are presented. Recommendations for the effective use of teacher assistants in general education and special education classrooms include: teacher assistants as members of school-wide intervention teams; a greater focus on the use of teacher assistants during the assessment process; better professional development; and increased common planning time for enhanced communication about student learning. (Contains 4 figures.)

Houssart, J. (2012). Teaching Assistants' Roles in Daily Mathematics Lessons. *Educational Research*, 54(4), 391-403. doi: 10.1080/00131881.2012.734724

Abstract/Summary: Background: The increasing numbers of teaching assistants (TAs) and their widening role in English primary classrooms is part of wider international developments. Several large quantitative studies have been influential in shaping debate, but little qualitative research exists on TAs and the content of their activity in the key area of mathematics. Purpose: The article addresses the question: How do TAs in primary schools perceive their role in daily mathematics lessons? Sample: Twenty-four TAs employed in English primary schools participated in the study. Their experience ranged from 2 to 20 years. Two were men; the rest were women. Design and methods: Interviews were undertaken in the spring and summer of 2011, transcribed and coded using Glaser and Strauss' recommended method (B. Glaser and A. Strauss, 1967, "The discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research"; Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing Company). A typology of TA activity was created and used together with other cross-cutting factors to ascertain what TAs did in general and, specifically, in mathematics teaching. Results: The results show that previous pictures generated from large-scale quantitative studies of TAs working with children seen as having the greatest difficulty in mathematics are

essentially (though not universally) correct. However, they may be internally differentiated to a greater extent than previously envisaged. Conclusion: The range of TA activities in mathematics classrooms is considerably wider than previously thought; professional development for TAs and teachers needs to take account of this.

Jones, C.R., Ratcliff, N.J., Sheehan, H., & Hunt, G.H. (2012). An Analysis of Teachers' and Paraeducators' Roles and Responsibilities with Implications for Professional Development. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 40(1), 19-24. doi: 10.1007/s10643-011-0487-4

Abstract/Summary: There is a lack of documented evidence related to the relationships existing between paraeducators and teachers working in early childhood classrooms. Based on a 2-year project with three phases of data collection, the authors explore the duties of paraeducators and their working relationships with the teachers with whom they team. Based on findings from the data collected, the authors make specific recommendations for targeted professional development that is designed to improve collaboration and skill sets for paraprofessionals within early childhood learning environments. The position taken is one that supports collaborative teamwork designed to maximize the learning of young children.

Maggin, D.M., Fallon, L.M., Sanetti, L.M., & Ruberto, L.M. (2012). Training Paraeducators to Implement a Group Contingency Protocol: Direct and Collateral Effects. *Behavioral Disorders*, 38(1), 18-37.

Abstract/Summary: The present study investigated the effects of an intensive training protocol on levels of paraeducator fidelity to a group contingency intervention used to manage the classroom behavior of students with EBD. A multiple baseline design across classrooms was used to determine whether the training was associated with initial and sustained increases in treatment fidelity. Data were also collected on the effects of paraeducator use of the group contingency program on rates of paraeducator, teacher, and student behavior. Results indicated that the training package was associated with immediate increases in paraeducator fidelity, which were subsequently sustained following the removal of systematic performance feedback on paraeducator adherence to the protocol. The implementation of the group contingency program by paraeducators also led to increases in the rates of interactions between paraeducators and students, increases in the rates of teacher instruction, and decreases in the rates of aggressive behavior by students. Findings of the study are discussed within the context of developing effective training methods for paraeducators working alongside students with EBD. (Contains 3 tables and 1 figure.)

O'Keeffe, B.V., Slocum, T.A., & Magnusson, R. (2013). The Effects of a Fluency Training Package on Paraprofessionals' Presentation of a Reading Intervention. *Journal of Special Education*, 47(1), 14-27. doi: 10.1177/0022466911404072

Abstract/Summary: Paraprofessionals are widely employed in response to intervention (RTI) settings to provide instruction to students at-risk for reading disabilities. However, little research has addressed effective and efficient ways to train these paraprofessionals to deliver instruction with high fidelity. In addition, given the limited time and finances available in most districts, training needs to be as efficient as possible. This study assessed the effects of a 5-hour fluency training package on the presentation rates, praise rates, and error correction accuracy of five paraprofessionals providing supplemental reading instruction within an RTI system using a multiple baseline design across participants. Students' reading accuracy and percentage of intervals with on-task behavior were evaluated. Paraprofessionals generally increased their presentation rates, praise rates, and error correction accuracy. Students' behaviors were affected less. (Contains 1 table and 4 figures.)

Phillips, Beth M. (2014). Promotion of Syntactical Development and Oral Comprehension: Development and Initial Evaluation of a Small-Group Intervention. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 30(1), 63-77. doi: 10.1177/0265659013487742

Abstract/Summary: This article reports on the development and preliminary implementation trials of a modular small-group intervention targeting syntax and vocabulary for children at high risk for reading comprehension difficulties in grades prekindergarten through first. The intervention, delivered by trained paraprofessionals, included 12 weeks of 20-minute lessons that included hands-on activities promoting receptive and expressive acquisition of grade-specific targeted syntax and semantic features such as prepositions, passive sentence structure, and adverbial clauses. Children ("n" = 354) ranging in age from 4-101 months were screened for inclusion on several standardized language measures and those included in the intervention (64-68 per grade, scoring below the 30th percentile on several measures) were assessed on two proximal measures of intervention-linked syntax and listening-comprehension. Results from the repeated implementation trials in each grade indicate that the intervention shows substantial promise as a method of supporting syntax growth and ultimately improving comprehension skills in young children.

Radford, J., Blatchford, P., & Webster, R. (2011). Opening Up and Closing Down: How Teachers and TAs Manage Turn-Taking, Topic and Repair in Mathematics Lessons. *Learning and Instruction*, 21(5), 625-635. doi: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2011.01.004

Abstract/Summary: Support for children with special educational needs in inclusive classrooms is increasingly provided by teaching assistants (TAs). They often have a direct pedagogical role, taking responsibility for instruction in mathematics. The quality of TAs' oral skills is crucial for learning but has rarely been researched. Using conversation analysis, this study compares teacher and TA talk in terms of turn allocation, topic generation and repair. From 130 recordings, transcripts of mathematics teaching in four lessons were analysed in depth. We found that teachers "open up" students whilst TAs "close down" the talk. Teachers, with whole classes, adopt inclusive teaching strategies to ensure oral participation whereas TAs, working with individuals, emphasise task completion. Teachers use open strategies for topic generation whilst TAs ask closed questions. Teachers withhold correction with prompts and hints whilst TAs supply answers. The findings are interpreted with reference to the TA role and implications for management and training. (Contains 2 tables.)

Ratcliff, N.J., Jones, C.R., Vaden, S.R., Sheehan, H., & Hunt, G.H. (2011). Paraprofessionals in Early Childhood Classrooms: An Examination of Duties and Expectations. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development*, 31(2), 163-179.

Abstract/Summary: Millions of dollars are expended, in the USA and elsewhere, to provide paraprofessionals or "teaching assistants" for regular early childhood classrooms. However, little consistent information exists related to best practice in the use of paraprofessionals in these early childhood settings. This article describes a study employing the use of 159 teacher and 161 paraprofessional surveys and classroom observations in 23 randomly selected kindergarten and four-year-old classrooms. Paraprofessionals delivered large amounts of group instruction and frequently managed student behavior. Furthermore, it was found that a lack of understanding of specific duties and expectations related to the roles of paraprofessionals was characteristic of both teachers and the paraprofessionals themselves. (Contains 5 tables.)

Rubie-Davies, C.M., Blatchford, P., Webster, R., Koutsoubou, M., & Bassett, P. (2010). Enhancing Learning? A Comparison of Teacher and Teaching Assistant Interactions with Pupils. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 21(4), 429-449. doi: 10.1080/09243453.2010.512800

Abstract/Summary: In many countries, teaching assistants are working in schools in increasing numbers. While they formerly supported teachers by completing low-level administrative tasks, they are increasingly playing a pedagogical role and working directly with pupils, particularly those with special educational needs. However, little is known about the quality of the support that teaching assistants provide to these pupils. This paper systematically examines differences in the types and quality of interactions teaching assistants have with pupils compared with the interactions of teachers in the same classrooms. Differences were found, particularly in relation

to the development of pupil thinking, and examples of the differential interactions are provided in the paper. Recommendations are made related to the need to examine existing models of teaching effectiveness to take account of the role of teaching assistants in classrooms and the role of teachers managing teaching assistants. (Contains 1 table and 1 note.)

Sosinsky, L.S. & Gilliam, W.S. (2011). Assistant Teachers in Prekindergarten Programs: What Roles Do Lead Teachers Feel Assistants Play in Classroom Management and Teaching? *Early Education and Development*, 22(4), 676-706. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2010.497432

Abstract/Summary: Assistant teachers are a ubiquitous yet virtually overlooked part of the early education workforce. Assistant teacher education level and its relationship to various classroom characteristics and the roles lead teachers feel assistants play in classroom management and teaching were examined in a nationally representative sample of 3,191 state-funded prekindergarten classes. Research Findings: Most classrooms had at least 1 paid assistant teacher, and classrooms with multiple assistants were more likely to be in Head Start. Lead teachers in public schools were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher, to be paired with an assistant with a high school degree, and to report fewer release hours for planning (alone or shared with assistants) than teachers in Head Start. Hierarchical multiple regression indicated that assistant teachers were rated as most useful to teaching duties when the classroom was in a Head Start setting, when the discrepancy between the lead and assistant teachers' education was smaller, and when there were more shared release hours for planning. Practice and Policy: Implications focus on future prekindergarten teacher workforce needs, the need for more shared planning time and guidance in its use, and the need for more attention to and support for the training and roles of assistant teachers. (Contains 6 tables.)

Vadasy, P.F. & Sanders, E.A. (2009). Supplemental Fluency Intervention and Determinants of Reading Outcomes. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 13(5), 383-425. doi: 10.1080/10888430903162894

Abstract/Summary: This study replicates research on the efficacy of a repeated reading intervention with word-level instruction for students in Grades 2 and 3 with low to moderate fluency skills, examines differences between treatment implementers, and tests unique contributions of treatment-related variables on outcomes. Students from 13 schools were randomly assigned to dyads; dyads were randomly assigned to treatment or control conditions. Schools were matched into treatment implementer groups (teachers or paraeducators) at study onset. Tutoring occurred during school hours for 15 weeks ($M = 25.5$ hr). Multilevel model results showed treatment students ($n = 98$) gained more than controls ($n = 104$) on measures of letter-sound knowledge ($d = 0.41$), fluency ($d = 0.37-0.38$), and comprehension ($d = 0.30-0.31$); students tutored by teachers gained more than their paraeducator-tutored peers on word reading

and fluency. Finally, dyads tutored with greater fidelity gained more in word reading and fluency; dyads that read more complex words in their texts gained less on letter-sounds, fluency, and comprehension. (Contains 9 tables.)

Referrals

Organizations:

- Florida Center for Reading Research: <http://www.fcrr.org>

Federally Funded Resources:

- Institute of Education Sciences (IES), public search engine available at: <http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/>
- What Works Clearinghouse: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>

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