

# Teacher-Researcher Collaboration in Animal-assisted Education: Co-designing a Reading to Dogs Intervention

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## Background & Aims

Reading to Dogs (RTD) is a form of Animal-assisted Education (AAE) thought to benefit pupil wellbeing and reading outcomes, yet current practice lacks a curricular and pedagogical framework or complementary educational activities.

**Aim:** This project involved teacher researcher collaboration to co-design a new and innovative RTD intervention designed to extend and sustain the benefits of RTD.

## Methods

### Participants

3 primary school teachers and an AAE researcher

### Procedure

A **three-phase framework** was devised for participants to collaborate online synchronously and asynchronously. This included:

**Phase one: Initial preparation** (including compilation of a research brief for teachers).

**Phase two: Recruitment and online platform creation.**

**Phase three: Intervention co-design** (including 4 hours for synchronous meetings, and 6 hours to contribute asynchronously to a shared online folder).

A framework evaluation questionnaire was completed by teachers on co-design completion.

## Results

- The three-phase framework facilitated a productive and meaningful collaborative process.
- A RTD intervention informed by research and practice was initiated.
- Teachers were very positive about the framework, reflecting that it provided effective facilitation of the co-design, and observing that working with teachers from other authorities offered an enjoyable, valuable and motivating learning opportunity.
- Facility to contribute synchronously and asynchronously was positively evaluated, allowing contributions to be made at convenient times, and enabling sharing of diverse experience and ideas from a broad geographical area.

### Reading to Dogs (RTD)

RTD is defined as a child reading to a fully assessed and registered dog select for this purpose and accompanied by a handler. The rationale behind it is that the dog may be a non-judgemental listener, conferring unconditional positive regard on the child.

## Discussion & Implications for Education

This framework facilitates researcher/teacher collaboration, and intervention co-design. By synthesising theoretical/empirical insights with pedagogical practice and expertise, interventions are more likely to be acceptable to the education community and feasible for classroom practice. This framework could be drawn upon by researchers and practitioners across a range of disciplines within and beyond AAE, who plan to collaborate/co-design a broad range of interventions.

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### Academic paper

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