ARTICLE

TEACHERS' SMALL GROUP PRACTICES NEED REVISITING

WHAT DID THEY DO?

Researchers conducted an observational study to examine the extent to which teacher perceptions of students' behavioral skills and academic skills influence how much small group time is provided in grades 1-3. The study involved over 1000 students from 102 diverse general education classrooms within a culturally and ethnically varied school district. During core reading instruction,10 students were randomly chosen in each classroom, and their activities were recorded via video across three 120-minute lessons within one academic year–Fall, Winter, and Spring. Additionally, the 102 participating teachers were given questionnaires regarding their perceptions of the academic and behavioral skills of the selected students. Through analysis of video-recorded observations, the study aimed to investigate the duration of time students engage in small group reading instruction (both code-focused and meaning focused) considering teachers' perceptions of students.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

In first grade, instructional time ranged from 0 to 61.50 minutes per student for code-focused small group instruction and 0-113.17 minutes for meaning-focused small group instruction. For third grade, instructional time ranged from 0-18.82 minutes per student for code-focused small group instruction and 0-77.95 minutes per student for meaning focused small group instruction. Teachers' years of overall teaching experience did not significantly predict instructional time in either sample, however, the number of years teaching at their current grade level did significantly predict instructional time in the first grade. The more years of experience teachers had teaching in first grade, the more likely their students were to spend a greater amount of time in code based instruction regardless of teachers' perception of students' academic competence or problem behaviors. For third grade, there was no significant teacher level predictors.

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN FOR TEACHERS?

Teachers are not adjusting small-group instruction for students perceived to have lower academic competence or those who are actually performing at lower levels. Consequently, students with lower literacy achievement are not receiving appropriate instructional support. Specifically, the results from the first-grade sample show significant interactions between perceptions of academic competence and problem behaviors in predicting both code-focused and meaning-focused small-group reading instruction. Students with higher levels of both academic competence and problem behaviors received the most time in small-group instruction. However, this pattern of interactions was not observed in the third-grade sample.These findings underscore the importance of providing teachers with additional training and support to improve their ability to make instructional decisions based on consistent progress monitoring.