

TOKEN ECONOMIES BOOST ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN SMALL GROUP READING

ARTICLE

Roberts, G. J., Mehmedovic, S., Cote, B., Wexler, J., & Strain, P. (2023). The impact of embedding behavioral supports into reading instruction for upper elementary students with reading difficulties and inattention. *The Elementary School Journal*, 123(3), 457-478.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

Roberts and colleagues investigated the impact of embedding behavioral supports into a small group reading lesson for 4th grade students with reading and behavioral difficulties. They worked with 2 schools of diverse populations and created two 5 student small reading groups. Students who qualified for the intervention were teacher-nominated and then verified with assessments on reading and behavior.

The intervention utilized the Voyager Passport reading program which is a 30 minute small group semi scripted reading lesson. The lessons were conducted by three graduate students hired by the researchers. The lessons used in the study focused on word study and reading connected text.

BEHAVIOR SUPPORTS

The behavior supports included the following for every small group intervention session:

1. Behavior rules and expectations reviewed and posted
2. Use of a timer (3 minute intervals)
3. Points awarded using a token economy
4. Point goals discussed
5. Game awarded at the end of every session for points scored

WHAT COULD THIS MEAN?

The results of this study suggest that implementing a structured and explicit behavior support can positively impact students' behavior and the success of small group instruction. Some students benefit strongly from repeated rules, procedures, goals, and rewards from earning those goals in a short term setting. Teachers can consider if student learning might be positively impacted by employing these strategies to increase student engagement and motivation. Structuring a small group lesson with a consistent schedule and expectations will give more time and thought to learning for both teachers and students.

WHAT DID THEY FIND?

The researchers found that for most students in the study, the intervention led to an increase in positive engagement and a decrease in disruptive behaviors. Of the 10 students in the study, only 1 did not show significant growth in engagement behaviors, so the researchers suggest that some students may be in need of additional, behavior specific support.

The researchers also note that although they gave students a reading pre- and post- assessment, they cannot conclude that this intervention increased reading skills growth. Their results demonstrate that all students improved from pre- to post- test, but they focus their results on the behavioral impact instead of the reading impact. They hypothesized that the intervention might increase reading scores due to the increase of student engagement in the lesson.

