Breaks are Better: Guide to Improving Off-Task Behavior and Task Completion for Students who Engage in Escape-Maintained Behavior

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Students who engage in problem behavior often struggle to meet expectations and achieve academically due to their problem behavior hindering their ability to learn. These students need interventions and supports to meet the high expectations demanded by the state curriculum (Algozzine et al., 2001; Lane, Barton-Artwood, Nelson, & Wehby, 2008). Students with problem behavior show the lowest levels of school satisfaction of any other group (Murray & Greenburg, 2001) and have a higher than average drop-out rate (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Marder, 1992). As problem behavior impedes students’ learning, grades decrease and behavior referrals increase resulting in students missing valuable instruction time (Barrett & McKenna, 2004; Colvin & Fernandez, 2000; Sugai, 2002).

Educators often need guidance when selecting the most effective interventions for students who engage in problem behavior. However, teachers often struggle to choose effective interventions to support students who engage in problem behavior due to the many responsibilities teachers have and the needs of other students (Bettini, Kimerling, Park, & Murphy, 2015). Teachers sometimes lack the knowledge needed to implement interventions for problem behavior effectively (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In addition, implementing interventions is labor intensive and challenging (Evans & Lunt, 2002; Heflin & Bullock, 1999). Students whose problem behavior is not responsive to general education classroom management techniques and basic corrective strategies often require individualized interventions that directly address the purpose or “function” of the student’s problem behavior. Researchers emphasize the importance of defining the function of the
problem behavior before choosing an intervention for a student. When the teacher considers the function of the behavior before implementing an intervention, the intervention is more likely to be effective for the student (Karsh, Repp, Dahlquist, & Munk, 1995; Trussel, Lewis, & Stichter, 2008; Turton, Umbreit, Liaupsin, & Bartley, 2007).

**Negative Impacts of Problem Behavior**

Students who engage in problem behavior struggle to focus and therefore are unable to stay engaged in classroom activities, causing them to fall behind in academic areas. Teachers often struggle to instruct students with behavior problems because they must simultaneously teach student’s areas of struggle and manage their behavior (Bettini et al., 2014). To effectively manage student’s academic and behavioral needs, teachers must be knowledgeable in multiple content areas, academic and behavior interventions, and classroom management skills. With the multitude of responsibilities teachers possess, they often do not have adequate time to instruct students. Bettini et al. (2014) found that teachers often spend less than 40% of the school day instructing students due to problem behavior and the other responsibilities they hold. As demands increase, teachers may become overwhelmed and unable to complete all their tasks (Myers, 2004). As teachers become overwhelmed, students with behavior problems risk academic failure due to inadequate instruction time.

In order to reduce the frequency of problem behavior, students need to learn how to stay engaged (Hudely, Daoud, Polanco, Wright-Castro, & Hershberg, 2003; Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2008). Problem behavior coupled with poor academic skills leads students to stay unengaged and unable to focus during academic tasks putting them at a greater risk for academic failure (Dotterer & Low, 2011; Downer, Rimm-Kaufman, & Pianta, 2007; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011). Problem behavior also puts students at risk for being placed in alternative settings such as
self-contained classrooms, self-contained schools, or residential settings. Landrum, Katsiyannis, and Archwamety (2004) found that only 27% of students who have behavior problems or a behavior diagnoses are placed in general education placements even though Reid, Gonzalex, Nordness, Trout, and Epstein (2004) found that students perform significantly lower in self-contained classrooms than students placed in general education classrooms.

Besides the academic side of teaching, students with behavior problems often lack positive relationships with teachers due to being the population teachers often dislike working with the most (Baker, 2005). Most students want positive-supportive relationships with their teachers who can relate and provide support (Capern & Hammond, 2014; Cefai & Cooper, 2010, Dods, 2013) but some students are unable to meet the high demands of the classroom due to being unable to regulate their behavior and emotions (Simonsen et al., 2008). Students with behavior problems often need a supportive relationship in order to be motivated to learn and stay engaged in the classroom. However, teachers’ perceptions often define a student’s school career (Podell & Tournaki, 2007). Therefore, students need interventions and strategies to better prepare them for the high behavior demands of their teachers in order to build a supportive student-teacher relationship. Due to students’ behavior disrupting teacher’s instructional time, students who engage in problem behavior may be unable to succeed in the general education classroom without a supportive student-teacher relationship.

**Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)**

Due to legislation, teachers are required to meet all students’ academic and behavior needs in the school system today (Campbell & Anderson, 2008). PBIS is a 3-tiered model based on the public health model to provide adequate services and instruction to all students through evidence-based instruction and date-based decision-making (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Each tier
represents a different percent of the school population whose needs must be met. If PBIS is successfully implemented into a school, Tier 1 includes 80-90% of the school population, Tier II represents 5-15% of the school population, Tier III represents 1-5% of the population. As students move through the levels, the level of support increases to support the individual needs of each student (Simonsen et al., 2008). This model also helps the school assess which students respond to Tier I instruction, which students need additional support from Tier II and Tier III services, and which students need individualized instruction.

Tier I provides evidence-based instruction for all students regardless of placement. All students follow a school-wide behavior management plan and all students receive high-quality instruction (pbis.org). This provides a bridge between all classrooms and school environments so student expectations are consistent. However some students need additional support. If Tier I instruction does not fit the behavioral needs of a student, assessments should be taken to ensure the underlying skill deficit did not form after lack of adequate instruction. In order to identify students who need to move to Tier II instruction through an assessment, the school should define how to identify a low performer and this definition on normative data (Crawford, 2014). Tier II involves targeted-group instruction for students who need additional support in specific areas, such as behavior. This group instruction is individualized to the student’s need and is not a “one-size-fits-all” approach (Simonsen et al., 2008). Tier II provides interventions to help students who engage in problem behavior manage their emotions and behaviors. Often students with behavior problems have high IQ’s but are unable to manage their behavior, forcing them into restricted settings. Through PBIS, more students who engage in problem behavior can continue their education in the general education classroom with a group intervention individualized to the student’s need.
Tier II Interventions

Researchers have conducted extensive amounts of research on Tier II behavior interventions in order to help teachers and students manage behavior. Teachers need access to multiple interventions, because interventions are not “one-size-fits-all” (Simonsen et al., 2008). Four extensively researched behavior interventions include; (1) First Step to Success (Walker, Seeley, Small, Severson, Graham, & Feil, 2009), (2) Check and Connect (Maynard, Kjellstrand, & Thompson, 2014), (3) Check, Connect, and Expect (Cheney, Lynass, Flower, Waugh, Iwaszuk, Mielenz & Hawken, 2010), and (4) Check-In/Check-out (Campbell & Anderson, 2011). Each of these interventions promotes student-coach relationships through the use of positive reinforcement, rewards, and adult attention. These adults build a strong relationship by connecting with the student’s interest and needs, providing a mentor, and providing them with an advocate. The success of the intervention relies on the ability of the coach to individualize the intervention to the student’s needs and through teaching students how to appropriately respond and act in different environments.

First Step to Success is an early intervention program to prevent students who are at-risk of developing behavior problems in kindergarten through third grade. Coaches teach students social skills through a social-ecological conceptual model in the student’s classroom and at home (First Step to Success Intervention Report, 2012). Through this program the student earns points, if the daily goal is met the student picks and activity for the whole class to do at the end of the day. The student learns replacement behaviors, teaching the student how to act appropriately in different situations. The Check and Connect intervention (Maynard, Kjellstrand, & Thompson, 2014) works to engage students in academic content areas by continually monitoring student’s progress, giving positive feedback, providing individualized attention for
social support, and stressing the importance of continuing their education. Check, Connect, and Expect (Cheney et al., 2010), incorporates a goal setting component where students learn to self-monitor their behavior.

First Step to Success, Check and Connect, Check, Connect, and Expect, and Check-In/Check-Out are effective for students due to the individualized plans that teach students how to act appropriately in school settings, whether it is by teaching replacement behaviors (First Step to Success), providing feedback on academic and social progress and performance (Check and Connect), or by teaching students to self-monitor and create daily and long-term goals (Check, Connect, and Expect). The fourth intervention previously introduced, Check-In/Check-Out (CICO; Campbell & Anderson, 2011) incorporates many of the previously stated components, but also gives the student some responsibility. The student must check-in and check-out with their teacher’s throughout the day to receive feedback on their behavior. They also receive points for daily or weekly prizes. Students learn 3-5 clear expectations through examples and nonexamples so they know what is expected of them. All of these interventions show evidence in working for students who engage in problem behavior or who are at-risk for developing problem behavior. However, many of these interventions show the highest effectiveness for students who engage in attention-maintained behavior problems (Cheney et al., 2009; Crone, Hawken & Horner, 2010) leaving behind students who engage in problem behavior to avoid work.

**Escape-Maintained Problem Behavior**

Alberto and Troutman (2006) defined four functions to problem behavior; attention, access, escape, and sensory stimulation. Often times, teachers use negative reinforcement when disciplining students who misbehave or do not finish their work through time-out procedures.
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(Downing, Keating, & Bennet, 2005; Lavay, French, & Henderson, 2006). Teachers, in turn, may unintentionally reinforce problem behavior by allowing students to avoid working (Siedentop & Tannehill, 2000). When students engage in escape-maintained problem behavior to avoid working, time-out procedures reinforce their desire to not work leading to an increase in problem behavior. It is important for teachers to reinforce positive behavior by maintaining classroom rules and routines (Lavey et al., 2006), having clear expectations (Cothran, Kulinja, & Garrahy, 2003; Markos & Boyce, 1999), and using breaks only as rewards for appropriate behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2006). Through using breaks as a reward, students will learn when it is appropriate to take a break from working.

Off-Task Behavior

In order to be successful in school settings, it is important for students to meet grade level requirements, and stay on-task. Jolivette et al. (2001) found that when teachers gave students choice-making opportunities off-task behavior decreased as task completion increased allowing the teacher to spend more time on instructional activities. When students learn to make appropriate decisions, motivation and self-esteem increase, which can in turn decrease off-task behavior. Fearrington, McCallum, Steve, and Skinner (2011) found that when teachers gave students positive feedback their self-esteem increased and task completion increased. Researchers also found when teachers reward students for completing assignments, students’ motivation increased (McGinnis, Friman, & Carlyon, 1999).

Breaks are Better (BrB)

Boyd and Anderson’s (2013) Breaks are Better (BrB) Tier II intervention is a modified version of Check-In/Check-Out (CICO). As with CICO, at the beginning of the day, students check in with the facilitator and receive their daily progress report (DPR). The facilitator
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reviews expectations and helps the student gather materials needed for classes. The student gives the teacher their DPR at the beginning of class and receives a teacher rating on a Likert scale based on their ability to meet their set expectations at the end of class. However, BrB incorporates a break system for participants. Students may choose to take a pre-determined number of brief breaks from academic tasks throughout the school day. During these brief breaks students may engage in a pre-determined activity (i.e. reading a book, coloring, playing quietly on the computer). At the end of the day the student meets with the facilitator, the facilitator tallies the points, gives feedback, and the student may receive positive feedback or a reward. The intervention is individualized to each student through the number of breaks, pre-determined break activity, and expectations based on the function of the problem behavior. Facilitators create clear expectations (Cothran et al., 2003; Markos and Boyce, 1999) and consistent routines and rules (Lavay et al., 2006). Through consistency and breaks teachers reinforce student’s positive behavior.

BrB helps students who engage in escape-maintained problem behavior by allowing them to choose to escape from their tasks in an appropriate way. Allowing choice-making opportunities helps students learn to manage their behavior and learn how to take an appropriate break (Jolivette et al., 2001). Although students escape from work, students learn to take breaks only when needed and teachers learn to reinforce only positive behavior (Downing et al., 2005; Lavay et al., 2006). As students learn to take appropriate breaks, on-task behavior increases so students can earn their rewarded breaks. As teachers reward positive behavior students who engage in problem behavior learn to manage behavior through appropriately taking breaks.
Purpose of this Study

Problem behavior affects everyone in the classroom, including the teacher, all students, and the student who engages in problem behavior. Although, research focuses on interventions for students who engage in problem behavior, teachers need to choose interventions based on the function of student’s behavior. As curriculum demands and expectations increase, teachers demand more from their students. As independent work time increases, some students engage in increased levels of problem behavior (Hayling, Cok, Gresham, State, & Kern, 2007) due to students being unable to choose an appropriate replacement behavior.

The BrB intervention includes choice-making opportunities (i.e. when to take breaks), positive feedback at the end of each predetermined session, and a rewards system (when needed). These components allow students to self-regulate their behavior and use replacement behaviors (e.g. student takes a break instead of engaging in problem behavior) while learning grade level material in the general education classroom. Students who engage in escape-maintained problem behavior need interventions to help them remain in the classroom to meet grade level requirements and learn social skills. With the increasing demand of students reaching proficiency on standardized test, teachers need effective Tier II interventions.

This research study seeks to extend the work of Boyd and Anderson (2013) on the BrB Tier II intervention and the efficacy of the intervention for decreasing problem behavior. This study seeks to answer the following research question: Is there a functional relationship between the BrB intervention and decreased time off-task and increased task completion during independent work time for students who engage in escape-maintained behavior?
Method

Participants

The researcher conducted the study with 4 male participants all from Hispanic backgrounds who were undiagnosed and did not receive any special education services at the time of the study. Participants were chosen due to meeting the following criteria; (1) undiagnosed with a disability defined under IDEA, (2) spend all of the school day in the general education classroom, (3) were not participating in another Tier II intervention, (3) engaged in escape maintained behavior, (4) and were in the 3rd grade or higher. Following, principal and teacher recommendations four participants were chosen from two schools. After assent and parent permission forms were signed, the researcher ensured all participants engaged in escape-maintained behavior through teacher interviews and short observations before data were collected. Both participants from school 1 were in the fifth grade and both participants from school 2 were in the fourth grade. The two 4th grade students were in the process of being referred for special education services but no diagnostic evaluations or services were provided at the time of the study.

Setting

The study took place in two Fort Worth Independent School District elementary schools that contained preschool-5th grade students. Neither school was self-contained, meaning students switched classes and teachers for each subject. School 2 included a bilingual program in which half of the school week was taught in English and half of the school week was taught in Spanish. Since BrB is a Tier II Intervention, students spent most of their time in their general education classroom. School 1’s classroom consisted of four long tables where 6-7 students sat at and one kidney table at the front of the classroom for small group work. Both teachers wrote learning
objectives in the front of the classroom and the teacher reviewed the objectives with the students at the start of class. The classroom in school 2 consisted of groups of 4 desks with 2-3 students at each cluster. The teacher’s desk was at the front of the classroom. All data were collected during math and English Language Arts time periods due to lack of independent work during Social Studies and Science periods. This ensured the student and teachers used the intervention throughout the school day and that the intervention was not subject specific. The times were chosen after interviewing teachers and noting when independent work time was conducted and when the students engaged in high levels of off-task behavior.

School 1 had a universal set of 5 different rules and expectations for students to follow throughout the 5th grade. School 2 did not have explicit rules; therefore participants at school 2 adopted the same rules and expectations as school 1. Researchers decided to keep the same rules to ensure consistency. All participants were placed in the front of the classroom with students who have high levels of on-task behavior. Placing students with students who engage in high levels of on-task behaviors helps students stay on task.

Materials

The materials used in this study were timers, folders, point cards, and break cards. Each participant had a folder labeled with his or her name. In this folder were the new and used point cards. The used point cards were collected at the end of the week to collect data and add up the points. The folders were placed on top of a purple box, which included pencils, erasers, pencil grips, and timers. On the box were a list in English and Spanish of what was included in the box and a numbered list of how to use the intervention for the student (Appendix A). Students were allowed to borrow any materials they needed throughout the day. The point cards varied slightly depending on the school (Appendix B). All point cards had the same 5 expectations (1) come to
class with a pencil and your completed homework, (2) keep hands feet, and objects to yourself, (3) follow directions the FIRST time, (4) stay on task during work times, and (5) use kind words. The number of check-in periods depended on the number of times students changed classes, therefore, school 1 had 5 check-in periods and school 2 had 3 check-in periods. Under the point boxes were how the points were distributed, bonus points for checking-in and out, and taking breaks appropriately. Break cards consisted of the steps for students to take a break. This card had 5 steps for the students to follow; (1) thumbs up, (2) wait for my teacher to say yes or no, (3) If my teacher says I can take a break, start my timer (2 minutes), (4) take my break quietly, and (5) go back to work when the timer goes off (Appendix C).

**Dependent Variables**

Researchers collected data on mean duration and task completion using a paper-and-pencil data collection form. An iPhone timer was used to time the duration of students’ off-task behavior. All data were collected during independent work time, defined as when a student works in an area on reading, writing, completing math problems, or working on a project without assistance from other students. However, the student asked for teacher assistance. Observation sessions lasted 15 minutes and were conducted 7-9 times per week. The study lasted for 8 weeks in total. Follow-up data were collected two weeks after the last data point of each participant to ensure maintenance of the intervention. Each student was observed every day but sessions were conducted during different class periods if conducted on the same day.

The dependent variables in this study included; problems behavior, time off-task, task completion, points earned, and break request. Problem behavior was defined as a period of time when students were engaging in other activities not related to assigned instructional tasks, out of seat, or talking out due to work avoidance. Time off-task was defined by when student’s eyes
were not oriented to their assignment or when they were engaging in problem behavior. The number of completed problems defines task completion. The researcher took the number of problems completed divided by the total number of problems multiplied by 100. Break requests were defined by the number of times students requested a break throughout the day through holding a thumbs up on their desk, whether the request were accepted or denied. Points earned is defined by the number of points students earned on their point card each day. Nine random days were selected to graph points earned for each participant.

Researchers collected data using a timer to collect time off-task. Time started 3 seconds after the student began off-task behavior and ended when the student’s eyes were oriented back on their assignment or project, their pencil was in writing position, they were counting on their fingers, or were listening to a teacher prompt. The timer did not run if they were waiting for teacher assistance and their hand was raised, if they were asking for a break with their thumb up on the desk, or the student was reading a resource on the wall. Independent work included activities such as center work, math worksheets/computer programs, reading assignments, or independent reading.

After all data points were collected, the researcher sent out a social validity survey, via email, to the four teachers. The researcher wanted to assess the students and teachers view of the intervention and whether or not they wanted to continue the intervention. Researchers assessed the surveys to see if teachers and students noticed a change in off-task behavior and task completion after BrB was implemented.

**Design and Procedure**

The researcher conducted the study using a nonconcurrent multiple baseline design across students to evaluate the extent to which there was a functional relationship between the
BrB intervention and decreasing student’s off-task behavior (Kennedy, 2005). Through a nonconcurrent multiple baseline design the researcher was able to conduct research across different subjects and different times of the days. In this study the researcher conducted observations during ELA independent work time, which consisted of Worldy Wise, *We the People* packets, independent reading assignments, and grammar worksheets. The other half of the sessions the students were observed during math independent work time in which students worked in workbooks, worksheets created by the teacher, STAAR work packets, and an independent online math program. The multiple baseline design incorporates a safety net for the researcher to ensure the intervention causes the change in behavior and not extraneous factors. By having different lengths in baseline, and starting each participant with the intervention on different days, the researcher analyzes whether or not a functional relationship occurred between the dependent variables and the intervention. For each student, baseline continued until a stable pattern of high off-task behavior occurs. After the stable baseline occurred, the researcher individually taught each participant the intervention. The researcher collected data on a Duration Recording sheet, using unidentifiable labels for each participant to ensure confidentiality (Appendix D).

**Student Observation**

The researcher conducted an interview with the principal and 2 teachers at each school to identify: (a) student problem behavior, b) the perceived function (i.e. purpose) of the behavior, and c) the average amount of time that students were off-task during independent work time. After the participants were chosen, the researcher observed the students to ensure teachers and principals correctly identified the students. Through the interviews and observations the researcher chose to observe all participants during ELA and mathematics
Baseline

Baseline started after all assent and parent permission forms were collected and signed from the students and parents. To prevent the language barrier between the parents and forms, teachers met one-on-one with the parents to review the forms or called the parents to explain what was going home. During baseline, the researcher-collected data on the amount of time during the 15-minute intervals the student’s engaged in off-task behavior during independent work time. This also included the amount of time before the participant notified the teacher they were finished with an assignment (e.g. their hand was not raised, they did not walk up to the teacher, and they were disrupting other students). Each participant’s baseline varied in length to ensure extraneous factors did not prevent or change the behavior. The researcher choose to use 3, 5, 7, and 9 baselines for the students as long as they exhibited consistent off-task behavior and did not show a decreasing trend before starting the intervention. Two days between teaching each participant the intervention also prevented extraneous factors from changing the student’s behavior.

Trainings in BrB

The researcher trained the teachers three weeks before starting the intervention and reviewed the intervention two days prior to starting the intervention with the students. The research used PowerPoint to present the intervention and gave a printed copy of the slides. Teachers were given the opportunity to ask clarification questions and practice Check-In/Check-Out times with the researcher. This training took between 30-45 minutes. The student was trained two days prior to starting sessions so the researcher could help the teachers and students learn the different parts of the intervention. Student trainings also took between 30-45 minutes. This also built in fidelity to ensure all parts were learned and being used effectively. The
intervention was taught through an explicit lesson plan to the students and the teachers were given a PowerPoint to remember how to use the intervention. The explicit lesson plan was a modified version of the Breaks is Better Manual by Justin Boyd and Cynthia Anderson (2013).

Through the training, the teacher learned how the break and point system work. The researcher gives explicit examples and nonexamples and explains every part of the intervention. Teachers were told they were allowed to accept and deny breaks but were encouraged to give as many breaks as possible. When the teacher denied a break they were instructed to give the students a reason and when to ask again. Teachers were taught the signs for a help and break request.

In addition, each participant met with the researcher prior to starting the intervention, after all baseline data points were collected. The students were told they could take breaks during class periods to help them stay on-task and complete their work more often. Their students were then taught how and when breaks were acceptable. Through examples and nonexamples the researcher and participant decided on appropriate times to take breaks. Then they were taught the signs for a break and help request (e.g. thumbs up for break, hand raised for help). Participants were able to choose what they did for their two-minute breaks with approval from both their teachers and researcher. Options included, doodling, laying their head down, reading, working on other work, or walking up and down the hallway quietly for two minutes.

Parents had the option to meet with the researcher to learn about the intervention, however no parents desired to meet with the researcher. Parents were able to email and meet with the researcher at any time throughout the study. All parents and participants were informed they were allowed to withdrawal from the study at any point without explanation.
**BrB (Intervention)**

This intervention follows the methods Justin Boyd and Cynthia Anderson (2013) created with a few changes. At the beginning of the day participants gathered their timer, point card, break card, and other materials from a purple box in the back of the BrB teacher’s classroom. After they gathered their materials they met with their teacher for 2-3 brief minutes. During this morning check-in time the teacher and student discussed the rules and expectations, when and how to take an appropriate break, and ended with a positive note for the student. The meetings were held during morning work time, when students were catching up on work, working on individual goals, or studying math facts, to ensure students did not feel singled out and so they could be included in morning routines.

The check-in times throughout the day depended on when the students switched classes. At school 1 students had 5 check-in periods and at school 2 the students only had 3 check-in periods. The point system consists of a 3 point-scale (0-2) for each rule for the teacher to rate the student at the check-in periods. The point cards included the number of check-in periods and the time the students were supposed to check-in with their teacher. These check-in periods were also brief and lasted 30 seconds to 2 minutes depending on what needed to be discussed. During this time the teacher included either a positive comment if the student met expectations or a neutral comment (e.g. let’s try and work on expectation 2 more, or I wish we behaved better today, etc.) to the student when expectations were not met. This was also a time students could ask questions or discuss concerns with their teachers. These ending comments and areas for questions allow a positive teacher-student relationship to form.

At the end of each day the participants checked-out with the same teacher they checked-in with in the morning. This was a time when the teacher and participant added up all the points,
bonus points were given for remembering all check-in times, taking appropriate breaks, and for the afternoon check-out. This period was right before school was released so no student had to stay after school and hold up the carpool lines. For this intervention, rewards were received on Fridays. If the participant reached their goal (e.g. school 1: 250 points, school 2: 150 points) they earned a small prize (e.g. candy, chips, pencils) of their choosing, if the students earned their super goal (e.g. school 1: 300, school 2: 200) they earned a bigger prize (e.g. computer time at the end of the day, pizza for lunch, etc.). Rewards encouraged students to reach their goal of staying on-task and completing their tasks.

**Interobserver Agreement and Procedural Fidelity**

**Interobserver Agreement (IOA).** Two independent observers collected data on each participant’s behavior during independent work time for a minimum of 20% of baseline and treatment sessions. To calculate IOA the researcher used Mean Duration Per-Occurrence. The researcher first calculated the percent time off-task of each session. To calculate Mean Duration Per-Occurrence the researcher sums the total number of seconds of off-task behavior and divides the smaller times by the larger time, and multiplies the total by 100 (Kennedy, 2006). This allowed researchers to see when observers agreed and disagreed, how often, and to what extent.

**Procedural Fidelity.** To ensure procedural fidelity researchers observed check-in and check-out times for each teacher at least once a week using a checklist (Appendix E) to ensure the participant and teacher used the intervention correctly. The teacher also filled out the BrB checklist once a week during intervention implementation (Appendix E). The researcher checked to make sure the teacher (1) prepared the student for the day by discussing rules, expectations, and explaining the break routine, (2) gave points, positive feedback, and breaks during the day, (3) and calculated the points, (4) discussed the day as a whole, and (5) gave
positive feedback at the afternoon check-out time. Without these components the intervention would have low fidelity and would not be generalizable. Researchers provided participating teachers with opportunities to ask questions throughout the intervention to ensure the intervention worked and was implemented effectively.

**Social Validity.** The researcher measured social validity through a survey for both teachers and participants at the end of the study (Appendix F). The researcher wanted to know if students found the intervention acceptable and helpful, liked the break system, and if they wanted to continue the use of the intervention when the study was completed. The students completed a written or an oral survey with the researcher or teacher. The same questions were asked for both versions of the surveys. Students were asked to rate each question on a 0-5 Likert-type scale. Teachers were given a survey with a 10-point Likert scale with space under each question to leave comments. The teacher survey included questions regarding the usefulness of the intervention, if the intervention decreased problem behavior and time-off task, if they liked the intervention, and other concerns or comments. Teachers were encouraged to leave additional comment.

**Results**

Figure 1 represents the data for decreasing off-task behavior for the four participants in this research study. Baseline, treatment, and follow-up data were collected using an IPhone or iPad stopwatch to collect the amount of time student’s engaged in off-task behavior during independent seat work time in Math and ELA class periods. When students engaged in off-task behavior they often engaged in the following problem behavior; talking-out, distracting other students, breaks materials, or exchanging inappropriate comments with peers and teachers. This data were not graphed separately but will be discussed later. Researchers collected total time
off-task during 15-minute intervals. Researchers used the point cards to collect data on the number of breaks and points students received a day.

The researchers calculated the mean and range on percentage of off-task behavior and task completion, for each student, during baseline and intervention. During treatment, the researcher collected frequency data on the number of breaks and points earned throughout the day on separate graphs. Overall the mean time off-task during baseline was 73.82% and the range was 61.81%-79.83%. The mean for task completion during baseline was 17.78% and the range was 6%-29.38%. During the intervention the mean off-task behavior decreased to 13.54% with a range of 12.38%-14.48% and the task completion increased to a mean of 92% with a range of 89%-95%. Once the intervention had started the average number of breaks for School 2 was 3.28 and for School 1 was 3.45. The number of points earned during the intervention had an average of 39 for School 2 and 64.17 for School 1. The results for each student are addressed below:

George (school 2)

During baseline, George engaged in off-task behavior at an average of 78.83% of the 15-minute intervals (Figure 1) and completed on average 21.20% of tasks in the allotted time (Figure 2). George would play with materials, distract other students by talking or messing with their materials, and ask to leave class to get a drink, go to the restroom, or to walk around. George is currently in the referral process for special education services but no services have been provided. After the intervention George decreased his time off-task to 13.17% and completing 90% of tasks in the allotted time. George decreased his time-off task by average of 65.13%. George was able to finish tasks and desired to finish his tasks in an appropriate amount of time. A random selection of 9 days was taken to collect break and point data for George.
From these days, George was taking an average of 2.44 breaks a day (Figure 6) and an average of 72.01% of the possible points that could be earned (Figure 4). Follow-up data were taken two weeks after the researcher collected the last session.

*Oliver* (school 2)

During baseline, Oliver struggled to pay attention and stay focused during independent work time due to being unable to focus and remember all the tasks that were assigned. Oliver was on average off-task 79.56% of the time during baseline (Figure 1) and finishing on average 14.52% of assignments (Figure 2). After the intervention was implemented Oliver’s mean off-task decreased by 65.08% to 14.48% time off-task. He was also completing on average 95% of tasks in the allotted time. A random selection of 9 days was taken to collect break and point data for Oliver. From these days, Oliver took an average of 4.11 breaks a day (Figure 6) and an average of 78.00% of the possible points that could be earned (Figure 4).

*Derek* (school 1)

During baseline, Derek was often times defiant and refused to work on assignments. He would verbally tell teachers he would not finish, never bring finished homework or papers signed, and had little parent involvement in his education. He told his teacher he was waiting to turn 18 so he could go to jail and eat good food. Therefore, Derek did not have a positive relationship in his life during school. During baseline David was off-task on average 75.06% (Figure 1) and completed on average 6% of his’ tasks (Figure 2). After the intervention, Derek began to turn in assignments, bring back signed forms, and complete assignments during class in an appropriate amount of time. On average during the intervention, Derek was off-task 14.13% of the time and completed 93% of assignments. He did not take breaks often so he had an
average of .78 (Figure 5) breaks a day but an average of 75.00% of the possible points that could be earned (Figure 3).

Cody (school 1)

Cody had trouble-staying on-task due to him not understanding assignments and sitting next to distracting students. During baseline, Cody’s average time off-task was 61.81% (Figure 1) and completed 29.38% of assigned tasks (Figure 2). After the intervention was implemented, he began to take a lot of breaks averaging 6.11 breaks a day (Figure 5) and an average of 78.18% of the possible points that could be earned (Figure 3). This lead to his average time-off task decreasing 49.44% to 12.38% of the time and he was able to complete 89% of his tasks in an appropriate time.

All participants decreased their time-off task after the BrB intervention was implemented and students were able to take breaks. During follow-up students off-task behavior stayed low with all points under 10% and task completion staying above 90%. Anecdotally, students also were able to build a positive relationship with their teachers through the check-in periods, student's behavior was positively reinforced which led to student’s self-esteem raising and their motivation increasing. Although students did not completely reach 0% off-task for multiple sessions in a row, it is unlikely students will always be on-task.

Discussion

The current study examined the functional relationship between the BrB intervention on decreasing off-task behavior and increasing task completion during independent work time in Math and ELA. The resulting data shows a decrease in off-task behavior and increase in task completion following the implementation of the BrB intervention for all participants. At the discretion of the teacher, students engaged in predetermined activities, instead of engaging in
problem behavior that was disruptive to other students and learning activities (McGinnes, Friman, & Carlyon, 1999). As students were given the option to take a break they desired to stay on-task in order to earn their breaks (Jolivette, et al., 2001). Break requests and points earned varied on each day depending on the need for a break to stay engaged and the behavior of the student. Teaching students how to appropriate take breaks shows evidence in the ability for choice-making to decrease off-task behavior (Jolivette, et al., 2001). When students are given a choice and given appropriate choices with explicit expectations, students learn how and when to take an appropriate break. Supportive student-teacher relationships build due to the decrease in off-task behavior leading to a decrease in punishment and decrease time receiving negative feedback (Fearrington et al., 2001).

Although the study did not measure problem behavior directly teachers noted in their social validity surveys that they noticed students engaging in appropriate behavior during independent work time. They reported that they began to see students self-assess and realize when they needed a break to regroup and give their brain a rest. Overall, the results show evidence in the ability of the BrB intervention to decrease time off-task and increase task completion.

Social Validity

Social validity was assessed through surveys given to the participants and teachers at the end of the intervention. Teacher surveys have a 10-point Likert scale and student surveys had a 5-point Likert scale. Teachers were given an opportunity to write additional comments under each question to allow the research to collect more data. Students were verbally given the survey in order for the teacher to probe the student’s interest in the study. In the teacher surveys, teacher noted how easy it was to implement the intervention once they understood how to use it.
They also liked how they did not have to change the structure of their day to incorporate the intervention effectively. They noticed students completing assignments and tasks in an appropriate amount of time. If students did not finish work in the allotted time they noticed students working on unfinished assignments after they completed the tasks at hand. The teachers noted that none of them had used a true behavior intervention but they had tried different things to motivate students such as rewards, being positive towards the student, and trying to allow students to work in groups. As a last note, researchers found that they had a more positive view towards the student as they began to become on-task and complete assignments. Teachers began to build a positive student-teacher relationship as the students became compliant and active participants in the classroom.

All students noted their desire to take breaks during independent work time to let their head rest and take a break. They reported that they liked being able to take a quick nap, getting out of their seat and walking down the hallway, or playing on the computer. They noticed they were able to focus on their tasks, participate in discussions, and complete their assignments. They also noticed that they began to like school and their teacher. They liked how they were going to the office less and felt that they were not being singled out as often as before. Overall, all students wanted to continue the intervention except one. However, the one student who did not want to continue improved the most and took more breaks than the other students.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include when teachers allow breaks, small sample size, time constraints, participants attending different schools, multiple teachers implementing the intervention, and lack of data collected when researcher was not presented. Sometimes students were denied breaks due to them already being off-task. When the students were
denied a break, often times off-task behavior would spike and problem behavior would occur. The teacher would tell the student to ask again in a set amount of time, but often the student would not ask again until the next class. Also, with such a small sample size, the researcher will be unable to generalize the findings of the study to a larger population even though the results show strong evidence to support the use of intervention. Also, with a limited time to complete the study, it is unknown if the students would continue to use the BrB intervention to appropriately take breaks and stay on task during independent work time.

Since students attended different schools, researchers were unable to keep every variable constant. For example, students’ schedules resulted in some students having frequent long breaks between classes (i.e. lunch, recess, specials) whereas one school had all breaks blocked together. Also, schools have different expectations, standards, values, and work systems. Since this is a teacher-based intervention, researchers lack the responsibility for ensuring all parts were implemented effectively at all times. When the researcher was present, the intervention was implemented correctly, however, data were not collected when the researcher was not present. The research must take into account, the inability to collect strong data when researchers on not present.

**Future Research**

To expand the research in this article, future researchers should research the effect the intervention has on student’s grades and academic achievement, if it works for students in self-contained classrooms, and look at what parts of the intervention are essential. Teachers need interventions that help students manage their own behavior and increase their time-on task. With the increased focus on standardized achievement tests, grades
become the priority. Teachers cannot help students improve their grades until students’ behavior is managed and students are academically engaged. The BrB intervention could potentially increase grades for students due to them focusing more during independent work time. When students are more focused they participate, finish work, and have more opportunities to learn the material. Although students may need additional interventions in specific subject areas, further research is needed to determine if the intervention BrB results in higher levels of academic achievement.

Boyd and Anderson created this intervention for students in Tier II who are in general education classrooms for the majority of their education time. However, researchers should try this behavior intervention in a self-contained behavior class. All students need breaks, but not always at the same time. Giving the choice of breaks, allows students to learn when breaks are needed and how to take an appropriate break. Students in self-contained classes may need more breaks than other students to control their emotions and behaviors. This intervention may help students with EBD when they get frustrated with difficult or time-consuming assignments. Many students need help focusing, and all teachers need effective behavior plans for students.

Researchers could also investigate the essential parts of the intervention and parts to include into the intervention that increase positive behavior. Researchers could add in teacher engagement and praise between check-in times, add in a beginning meeting with just the teacher and student to figure out what might help the student before the intervention is introduced, like in the Collaboration and Proactive Solution Model (Greene, 2014), or figure out how many check-in times are needed. Each of these parts could be individualized for every student, however future research would help consolidate the
findings and identify the best versions of the intervention for teachers and specific students.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research study supports the idea that when students are given choices during work time motivation and task completion increases as a result (McGinnis, Friman, & Carlyon, 1999). As students built a supportive teacher-student relationship and earned rewards for positive behavior motivation increased and students desired to accomplish daily task (Fearrington, McCallum, Steve, & Skinner, 2001) and rewards helped students. This intervention helped the participants in this study learn how to take appropriate breaks and when it was acceptable to take a break through a teacher-driven intervention. This study supports that there is a functional relationship between the intervention and decreasing off-task behavior and increasing task completion. As researchers continue research on this intervention with different kids and research the essential components, eventually this intervention could be generalized across a specific population such as students who engage in escape-maintained behavior problems. As teachers and researchers begin to see the importance of defining the function of the behavior and choosing and intervention based on the needs of the students, interventions will easily be chosen and students will become independent learners. Overall, the BrB intervention is specifically designed for students who engage in escape-maintained problem behavior, but could work for other students as well.
References


doi:10.1007/s10964-011-9647-5


Figure 1: Participants Percent Off-Task Behavior During Independent Work Time

George

Oliver

Derek

Cody

Session Number
Figure 2: Percent Task Completion

**George**

Baseline | Intervention | Follow-Up

**Oliver**

Baseline | Intervention | Follow-Up

**Derek**

Baseline | Intervention | Follow-Up

**Cody**

Baseline | Intervention | Follow-Up

Percent Task Completion

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21
Figure 3: Percentage of Points Participants Earned for School 1

Figure 4: Percentage of Points Participants Earned for School 2 (Max: 52)
Figure 5: Breaks Participants Took for School 1 (Max: 15)

Figure 6: Breaks Participants Took for School 2 (Max: 9)
Appendix A
Labels on Intervention Boxes

Instructions on the purple box for students to follow

What is in the box? | ¿Qué hay en la caja?
---|---
~Point Card | ~tarjeta de puntos
~Pencils | ~lapieces
~Erasers | ~borradores
~Pencil Grips | ~apretones de lapiz
~Timers | ~temporizadores

What do I do
1. Grab point card y el temporizador (put your name on it)
2. Check in with Mr. Diaz
3. Follow rules on point card
4. Remember you can take 3 – 2 min breaks!!! (thumbs to ask)
5. After each class give your teacher your point card to receive points
6. Check-out with Mr. Diaz, put point card in folder, put materials in box

Que debo hacer?
1. Coge una tarjeta de puntos y el temporizador (ponga su nombre en el)
2. Comprobar con el Sr. Diaz
3. Seguir las reglas de tarjeta de puntos
4. Recuerde que puede tomar 3-2 minutos dedescanso (un diez para preguntar)
5. Después de cada clase darle a su maestro de su tarjeta de puntos para darle puntos
6. Salida con el Sr. Díaz, puso punto de tarjeta en su carpeta, poner todos los materiales prestados en el cuadro
### Appendix B

#### Point Cards

**School 1 Point Card**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st – 755-830</td>
<td>Come to Class with a pencil and your completed homework</td>
<td>Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself</td>
<td>Follow directions the FIRST time.</td>
<td>Stay on tsk during all work times</td>
<td>Use kind words</td>
<td>Breaks taken the right way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd – 830-10</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd 10-1130</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th – 1130-1230</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th – 2-245</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POINTS**

2 Met Expectations (Great Job)
1 Met Some Expectations (Good Work)
0 Met few or no Expectations (room for Improvement)

**Check-In Points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attends Check-In</th>
<th>1 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was Prepared</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check-Out Points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attended Check-Out</th>
<th>1 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Completed Ratings</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bonus Points** (breaks taken appropriately)

_____

**Today's Goal** __ Today's Total ___ Goal Met? Yes No

---

**School 2 Point Card**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st – 1030-12</td>
<td>Come to Class with a pencil and your completed homework</td>
<td>Keep hands, feet, and objects to yourself</td>
<td>Follow directions the FIRST time.</td>
<td>Stay on tsk during all work times</td>
<td>Use kind words</td>
<td>Breaks taken the right way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd – 1230-2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd – 1030-12</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>0 1 2</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>B B B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POINTS**

2 Met Expectations (Great Job)
1 Met Some Expectations (Good Work)
0 Met few or no Expectations (room for Improvement)

**Check-In Points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attends Check-In</th>
<th>1 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was Prepared</td>
<td>1 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check-Out Points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attended Check-Out</th>
<th>1 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Completed Ratings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bonus Points</strong> (breaks taken appropriately)</td>
<td>___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Today's Goal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Today's Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How I take a break!

1. THUMBS UP

2. Wait for my teacher to say yes or no

3. If my teacher says I can take a break, start my timer (2 minutes)
   a. If my teacher says no I go back to work and ask again later

4. Take my break quietly

5. Go back to work when the timer goes off
Appendix D
Duration Data Recording Sheet

Student Name ____________________  Grade Level ____________________
Class __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Start Time</th>
<th>End Time</th>
<th>Total Min.</th>
<th>Time Off-Task</th>
<th>% Time Off-Task</th>
<th>% Assignment Complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix E
Fidelity Check List

### For Researchers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Num.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Circle One (comments if necessary)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Morning Check-In: Did the teacher give the student their point card, talk about expectations and appropriate breaks, and give the student a compliment for the day?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Did the teacher help the student when the student requested?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Did the teacher allow the student to take breaks?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>If the teacher rejected a break request, did the teacher give a reason and tell them to check back in X amount of time?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Check-In: Were points given?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Check In: Did the student receive appropriate feedback?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Check Out: Were all points added up including extra points?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Check-Out: Was a reward given if the student earned one?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### For Teachers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Num.</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Circle One (Comments if you want)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Morning Check-In: Did I receive the home-not back, give a new point card, talk about expectations and appropriate breaks, and give them positive feedback to start the day?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Did I help the student when they requested help?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Did I give the student breaks when they requested?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Did I give the student a reason and a time to ask again if a break request was rejected?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Check-In: Did I give points immediately?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Check-In: Did I give appropriate feedback?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Check-Out: Did I add up all the points including the extra points?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Check-Out: Did I give the student a reward if they earned it?</td>
<td>Y  N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Social Validity Questionnaire

For Participants
1. Did you find the Breaks are Better intervention helpful?
2. Did the intervention help you complete more math assignments and get your math problems correct?
3. Would you like to continue this support in your classroom after the study is over?

For Teachers
1. Did you see a difference in your students’ behavior throughout the intervention?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Comments/Examples

2. Have your students ever used a support/intervention in your classroom before?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Comments/Examples

3. Did you notice a difference in your student’s math assignments during the study?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Comments/Examples

4. Do you have any extra thoughts about this intervention?
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
   Comments/Examples