## Evidence-Based Practice

### Token economy

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### Brief Summary

The Token Economy intervention is a system that pairs a student with an educational professional to set behavioral goals and provide reinforcements for a target behavior based upon the student’s interest. A token economy is most suited for students with mild behavior problems that are not severe in nature.

### Expanded Description

A Token Economy is an effective program for addressing the needs of students who display challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. This approach has been used for individual students as well as the whole class. Research suggests it has been effective for students with specific needs in classroom survival skills as well as decreasing inappropriate behaviors (Reitman, 2004).

Token Economies have traditionally been implemented in school environments at both elementary and the middle school levels for students with and without disabilities. Many problem behaviors have been addressed using token economies including: talking out, off-task behavior, and not participating in classroom activities or discussions. Students with more severe behavior needs are not recommended for this approach.

Token Economies not only appeal to teachers and specialist, but the student as well. Because this approach takes into consideration the interests of the child as well as the target behavior, the approach is easy to implement to the student (Lantz, McKenna, Prince, & Stralow, 2007). According to Mercer, Mercer, and Pullen (2011), this approach does take some planning time by the teacher by getting to know their students, it requires limited resources that can come at little or no cost and can be implemented as a whole class approach.

Token Economies aim to improve targeted behaviors for targeted student by providing a menu of reinforcers (e.g. tangible and non-tangible “tokens” to work towards) and by allowing the student to see the consequence of their behavior. Token Economies allow for the student to understand the target behavior that the professional is aiming to increase/decrease and inappropriate behaviors are not reinforced. The student can self-monitor their progress and enhances self-control.

### Essential Components/ “How to” Information

There are many ways a token economy can be made for the classroom. Many teachers will choose to make theirs differently and incorporate it into the classroom differently. One way that a teacher may know that they need to use a
token economy is when their students are bored with their “rewards” (Reitman, 2004).

Students might need other reinforcers in the classroom to stay motivated. Token economies can be made easily and at little cost. A teacher can take a piece of construction paper and put the days of the weeks on the paper. This can be computer made or by hand and laminated for durability. It helps if the students get to hold onto this reward system. If the student is always looking at their token economy they get to know where they are for the day or week and they know where they need to be at to get the “reward.”

The next step in making a token economy would be to cut out numbered circles and attach a piece of velcro on it. This velcro would also be placed on the days of the week or however your student/teacher decides would be appropriate for the token economy. When the student does a good behavior they get a token. The student would physically place the token on their sheet. If the student partakes in a negative behavior the student would have to physically take off a token. This helps with the student and knowing how many tokens that have received for the day. A token economy can be used many different ways. It is always important that the student and teacher agree what the positive and negative behavior looks like and what the reward will be. Token economies can be used for any behaviors but more specifically talking out, off task behaviors, and participation in the class. It is important to know that a token economy will not always work for every student and their needs.

### Implications for Practice

There are many pros to a token economy system. According to Mercer, Mercer, and Pullen (2012) students will avoid boredom with a token economy system because the reinforcements used can be a variety of tangible objects or special events. Students can choose from things that are in their interests. A token economy also helps students to appreciate the relationship between desired behavior and reinforcement. This allows them to understand that their behaviors have consequences and this understanding enhances the student’s self-control. The system is shown to be useful for students who normally do not respond to social reinforcements.

The cons within a token economy system include: the amount of thought, development, and required refinement. According to Mercer (2012), a token economy system requires a great amount of thought and development. The teacher must get to know his or her students before designing the token economy system. Students’ interest and positive/negative behaviors must be established before development of the system. Teachers should also be aware of refinements that will be needed throughout the system. The original development of the token economy system will form problems throughout the implementation process which will require changes to be made so flexibility is required.
Possible Adaptations/Modifications

The possible adaptations and modifications are endless within a token economy system. According to Mercer (2012), the desired behavior, token, and reinforcement can be altered to fit the student’s needs. A teacher can observe a student and decide on a target behavior that is desired over the negative behaviors the student is displaying. The way the target behavior is defined is also able to fit the student as needed. The token used and the type of reinforcement are also chosen to fit the students’ personalities and interests.

Foundational References


Additional Links/Sources


- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybIr6NCfA2U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybIr6NCfA2U)


- [http://www.behavioradvisor.com/Tokens.html](http://www.behavioradvisor.com/Tokens.html)

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