

Token economy: a strategy for positive behavior management

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Introduction and objectives of the illustrative practice

Appropriate behavior does not automatically happen but must be practiced and learned. A token economy is a strategy for teaching positive behavior and consists of three basic elements: the selection and definition of behavior, the attribution of tokens when students demonstrate the desired behavior and the exchange of tokens for attractive rewards. Research indicated that a token economy lead to a more favourable learning climate, leaving more time for teacher instruction and active learning time for the students. Therefore, the objective of this study was to implement a token economy and investigate the aforementioned effects.

Description of the illustrative practice and data collection

Prior to implementation of the token economy high frequencies of two disruptive behaviors were observed: getting dressed and assembling students for instruction took too long, and students were very often off-task which resulted in low physical activity levels. Next, a token economy was implemented in a five-lesson parkour unit. Students (11 girls, 8 boys, 11-13years) were divided in four similar teams (each four to five students). Three desired behaviors were defined: (1) being dressed and ready for instruction in the gymnasium within four minutes, (2) standing quietly in front of the teacher within four seconds after a whistle blow ready for instruction, (3) achieving the target number of steps for that lesson. Behaviors related to getting dressed and gathering quietly in front of the teacher were assessed through live observation. The number of steps during each lesson were recorded by means of pedometers.

Findings and implications

Sixteen students were each lesson dressed and ready for instruction within four minutes. Three students were repeatedly tardy. More than 80% of the time all teams were within four seconds in front of the teacher. All teams achieved the proposed amount of steps (3000-3500 steps). The token economy increased active learning time and physical activity, which should lead to higher learning outcomes.

References

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