A TOKEN REINFORCEMENT PROGRAM IN A PUBLIC JUNIOR-HIGH SCHOOL¹

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In recent years, the technology of contingency management has been shown to be of increasing value in regular classrooms and public-school systems with both groups and individual pupils (Ayllon and Roberts, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1974, 7, 71-76; Glynn and Thomas, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1974, 7, 299-306; Lovitt and Curtiss, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1969, 2, 49-53; Lovitt and Smith, *Exceptional Children*, 1974, 40, 357-358; Medland and Stachnik, *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1972, 5, 45-51). In addition, established procedures are being systematically replicated across grade levels and differing subject-matter areas. A series of studies initiated by O'Leary and Becker (*Exceptional Children*, 1967, 33, 637-642) form the basis for the present investigation. The token reinforcement program described by O'Leary and Becker (*Exceptional Children*, 1967, 33, 637-642) was managed by the teacher of an adjustment class and involved 9-yr-old children described as emotionally disturbed. An elaborate replication of the 1967 O'Leary and Becker study conducted by O'Leary, Becker, Evans, and Saudargas (*Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1969, 2, 3-31) with a grade-two class introduced several variables to examine their separate effects. The authors specified their treatment levels as baseline, classroom rules, educational structure, teacher praise and ignore, token I, withdrawal, token II, and follow-up. The present research modified the general design of O'Leary *et al.*, (*Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1969, 2, 3-31) to study how to maintain treatment effects. In the modification, rules were eliminated as a treatment variable because they are frequently associated with aversive practices in the school system, and it was deemed desirable to have mainly a positive orientation. A second difference was that the present subjects were grade-nine pupils functioning in the regular public-school system. The six students were older (average age = 16.2) and well behind their peers in achievement. They were considered behavior problems and as potential dropouts by teachers and counsellors. They were not considered to be emotionally disturbed. Finally, procedures designed to maintain behavior change generated by the token system were added. The operant level of unacceptable classroom behavior was obtained for six students receiving an individualized program of instruction in mathematics and science in a nonacademic grade-nine class in a public junior secondary school. Initially, two conditions (educational structure and praising appropriate behavior while ignoring inappropriate behavior) were introduced successively. Both procedures reduced inappropriate behavior slightly. When a token system, using backup reinforcers readily available in the school, was introduced in conjunction with the initial two conditions, inappropriate responses declined dramatically in all subjects. Withdrawal of the token program for a three-week period, leaving educational structure and praising and ignoring in effect, increased inappropriate behavior in five of the six subjects. The token program was then re-introduced in conjunction with contingency contracts. The result was a decline of inappropriate behavior below the mean of the first token condition for all subjects. Tokens were thinned and finally removed toward the end of this condition, leaving teacher praise and attention and the contract system in effect. Data obtained during a four-week followup

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indicated that the low level of inappropriate behavior was maintained in all subjects. This extension of the O'Leary *et al.*, (*Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 1969, 2, 3-31) program, designed and implemented by the regular teacher, demonstrates that these procedures may be highly effective within the constraints found in an ordinary classroom in the junior secondary school.

DESCRIPTORS: token program, attending behavior, disruptive behavior, classroom behavior, backup reinforcers, contingency management, high-school classroom, adolescents

Received 18 February 1975.

(Final acceptance 22 April 1976.)