BACKGROUND

• Tokens are a conditioned stimulus that can be used to reinforce behavior when delivered following a response. ¹
  • Accumulating groups of tokens before exchanging them means that the exchange response only has to be executed once rather than repeatedly, decreasing satiation and potentially increasing the overall reinforcing value of the back-up reinforcer. ¹
  • Token reinforcers bridge the gap between the behavior and the delay of a back-up, often primary, reinforcer.
  • The ultimate goal is to then have these tokens become generalized so that they can be paired with a variety of back-up reinforcers.
  • Many studies have demonstrated that the token economy can be very effective in delaying reinforcement and maintaining high responding in students. ²
  • Charlop-Christy and Haymes (1998) examined the use of a learner’s “obsessions” as tokens. The tokens were then exchanged for an edible. They found that the obsessions as tokens was associated with the highest correct percentage on tasks while the typical tokens resulted in decreased responding or no progress on tasks. ³

CURRENT STUDY

• The purpose is to determine if components of highly preferred items can be used as tokens. For example, a learner whose current highly preferred or most reinforcing item is a puzzle, is it possible to use the pieces of the puzzle as tokens?
  • Using a current preferred item as a token may add more reinforcing value to the token than if a traditional token was used.

METHOD

• Non-concurrent multiple baseline across children with a within-child reversal to assess the differential effectiveness of the two token programs: tradition tokens & preferred activity tokens.
  • Components:
    • Traditional Token: For each correct response the learner will receive their traditional token. After earning all of their tokens the learner can exchange for the backup reinforcer (preferred activity)
    • Activity as Token: Same as the traditional token except the learner will earn a piece of the preferred activity as the token upon a correct response. After earning all of their tokens (equivalent to the number of tokens on their traditional token board) the learner can exchange the tokens for the preferred activity.

PROSPECTIVE RESULTS

• Traditional Tokens: Students should have a lower percentage correct (20%-50%) on tasks during this condition because these tokens are not as reinforcing.
  • Activity Tokens: Students should have a higher correct percentage (~80%) on tasks during this condition because the tokens are more reinforcing and is similar to receiving the primary reinforcer for every response.
  • Reversal: During reversal to the traditional token, the student’s performance should retreat to “baseline” and then return to about 80% correct when back in the activity token condition.

References