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# Self-Management Within a Classroom Token Economy for Students With Learning Disabilities

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*Students with disabilities who are served in restrictive educational settings often display inappropriate behavior that serves to preclude their integration into the mainstream. One approach to managing difficult behavior is a levels system (Smith & Farrell, 1993), which typically consists of a hierarchy of levels in which students must meet increasingly demanding standards of behavior before advancing through the hierarchy. In the present study, two middle-school students with learning disabilities participated in a classroom-wide token economy based on a levels system. The levels system, which was used in a self-contained classroom, targeted the acquisition and maintenance of academic skills and social behaviors with the goal of integrating these students into an inclusive classroom. The two participants showed little or no progress within the levels system because of a very high rate of inappropriate verbalizations. Therefore, a self-management system that involved training on the accuracy of self-recording these verbalizations was added to the levels system for these students. In addition, the investigator discussed with these students the consequences of inappropriate behavior and socially appropriate behavioral alternatives. A multiple-baseline-across-subjects experimental design revealed that the intervention resulted in a substantive reduction in inappropriate verbalizations, as well as greater progress through the levels system. Implications of these findings for the use of self-recording within a token economy, the importance of students' accuracy of self-recording, and methodological issues are discussed.* © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

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Most instructional approaches for children with learning problems place the primary emphasis on external agents (teachers, parents, counselors, and other professionals) to arrange the instructional conditions, monitor student performance, and implement appropriate classroom contingencies. Kazdin (1975) identified many potential drawbacks to the heavy reliance on external agents, including: (a) the external agent may not notice many important student behaviors, especially when the agent is simultaneously monitoring many children in classroom situations; (b) the external agent is associated with the contingencies and, therefore, becomes discriminative for the occurrence of the desired behaviors; and (c) the desired behaviors may not transfer to situations in which externally-administered contingencies have not been in effect. As a consequence of these limitations, and motivated by the movement to educate individuals with disabilities in inclusive settings, there has been increasing interest in the development of procedures that reduce students' dependence upon highly structured learning programs and increase their capacity for self-regulation (Ferretti, Cavalier, Murphy, & Murphy, 1993; Ryan, Weed, & Short, 1986).

The training of self-management skills holds the promise of reducing students' dependence on others and ensuring greater control over their own learning. These skills include the self-definition of the to-be-accomplished goal, self-recording of information about task performance, self-evaluation of task performance relative to self-defined or externally-established standards, and self-reinforcement (Ferretti et al., 1993). Each of these components has been the focus of previous interventions, either in isolation or as part of a multicomponential intervention designed to affect behavior change. Self-recording procedures have received particular attention because of the well-documented therapeutic concomitant known as reactivity (Lloyd & Landrum, 1990; Nelson & Hayes, 1981). Reactivity refers to changes in a client's behavior that arise from observing and recording that behavior. While the theoretical mechanisms that underlie reactivity effects have been the subject of considerable discussion (Ferretti et al., 1993; Nelson & Hayes, 1981), the effects nevertheless have been demonstrated across many different behavioral domains (see Lloyd & Landrum, 1990).

The effects of self-recording on the attention-to-task of students with learning disabilities have been comprehensively studied (Hallahan & Sapona, 1983; Kneedler & Hallahan, 1984; Lloyd, Bateman, Landrum, & Hallahan, 1989; Snider, 1987). However, the investigation of its use with other classroom behaviors, especially disruptive or inappropriate behavior, has not been as extensive. In one experiment, Broden, Hall, and Mitts (1971) obtained a 48% increase in study behavior with an intervention package consisting of self-recording and praise from a counselor. In a second experiment, self-recording alone resulted in an initial decrease in inappropriate verbalizations, but this effect gradually dissipated back to pre-treatment levels. In both experiments, student recordings of the target behavior differed markedly from the recordings of an independent observer. Thus, the effects of self-recording on the disruptive behavior of students with learning disabilities were equivocal.