Using reinforcement and self management in classrooms to increase motivation

Sherri Aitken
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd

Part of the Elementary Education and Teaching Commons

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.
USING REINFORCEMENT AND SELF MANAGEMENT IN CLASSROOMS TO INCREASE MOTIVATION

by

Sherri Aitken

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Science in Teaching Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University June 29, 2006

Approved by

Professor David Hespe

Date Approved July 10, 2006

©2006 Sherri Aitken
The purposes of this study is to investigate the implementation of classroom management strategies in a Team Approach to Mastery (TAM) classroom which will include both regular and special education students. This research study will identify the most effective strategies in terms of ease of implementation, time, effort, generalization, reliance upon the system, and personal ratings. Small focus groups will also be conducted with the students in order to have a clearer view of student motivation and their likes or dislikes of the current system. A successful plan must be motivating and enjoyed by both students and teachers within the classroom. More than half of the participating students did not believe that self monitoring helped them in reaching their goal as many students thought that this task was rather difficult; however, all participants in the class indicated that they enjoyed working toward a group reward as it increased their motivation to work in the classroom as a community. Implications and recommendations for implementing classroom management strategies to motivate students are discussed.
Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ......................................................... Page 1
Chapter Two: Literature Review ................................................. Page 7
Chapter Three: Research Context and Design ................................ Page 19
Chapter Four: Findings ................................................................. Page 23
Chapter Five: Discussion ............................................................... Page 31
References .................................................................................. Page 38
List of Charts

Chart A: Question 1 Page 27
Chart B: Follow up to Question 1 Page 27
Chart C: Question 2 Page 28
Chart D: Question 3 Page 28
Chapter One: Introduction

“According to the U.S. Department of Education, services offered in regular education environments often fall short of what is needed to provide successful academic and social experience for students with emotional and behavioral problems; however, the percentage of those students that are taught in regular classes, as compared to resource room arrangements, has increased slightly in recent years from approximately 9 to 12%” (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002, p. 126).

Regular education classroom teachers are now faced with new situations where most have not had any special education students within their classrooms. Most of these teachers do not have the resources or training in terms of specific behavior modification programs or classroom management plans (Baker, 2005). As there is a push to mainstream special education students into the regular education classroom, many teachers are faced with problems or accommodations they have never had to make before. With both general education and special education students, teachers must be able to successfully manage their classrooms for all learners (Christensen, Young & Marchant, 2004).

Most special education classrooms are highly structured containing incentive or behavior modification programs where students work towards a reinforcing outcome. Many of these students have trouble with transition therefore making structure a key to success. As yearly evaluations are analyzed and discussed, many students in special education classes simply cannot transition into a regular classroom due to the different
classroom management programs (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002). Moving a student who has always worked towards incentives to a classroom where he/she is expected to complete their work with self management skills, only sets students up for failure in most cases. Both students and teachers are entering a world of confusion of what to do and how to do it in these mainstreamed classes (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002).

Significance of Study

As students are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms, there must be adjustments made to the classroom itself in order to enable all students to achieve their potential success (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002). Teachers must create a management system that can be adapted to all learners and that is feasible for them to conduct. Teachers are faced with a great amount of work and do not want to add something that will be difficult to implement and time consuming. A classroom management plan must reinforce the learning of all students, be easy to implement, and be effective (Baker, 2005). Although there is a known need for this system, what plans work for all students and teachers?

Behavior management and the increasing population of mainstreamed students must go hand in hand. It is important now for regular education teachers to examine the different strategies used in the special education classroom that will be helpful with the mainstreamed students and in many cases every student in the class. Although in the past behavior modification programs have been primarily used in special education where students are more likely to act out or disrupt the class, these programs could be helpful for all classrooms regardless of classifications (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002).
In our world today, every person is reinforced in one way or another and works harder to achieve higher reinforcement as well. A person graduating from high school has the opportunity to work or to further their schooling in order to receive more education in a specific field or area. Many higher paying jobs today do require a higher degree in education, therefore making the enrollment in colleges or training programs rise. These individuals attend their classes in order to eventually achieve a higher status in the job market when they have completed their degrees. They will then get a job to get that paycheck which will lead to reinforcing items such as cars, houses, and money to spend in leisure time. Every person works toward something and the higher the reinforcer, the harder the person will strive to reach the ultimate goal (Cook, 1999).

Teachers need to take this perspective of reinforcement and realize that each of their students will work effectively toward goals as well. It is important, however, to understand and recognize that students will not all want to work toward the same things in many cases since something may be an incentive to one person while it is aversive to another. An effective classroom management plan will fit the needs of all learners making the motivation the key in a successful and productive classroom (Baker, 2005).

The previous research in classroom management has focused on special education students specifically on individual students at a time. Although reinforcement in each study was effective, the study was only conducted in a short period of time and they were only focusing on one student. Rather than researching classroom management as a whole, these studies looked at various individual behavior management systems that have been created and modified to meet that specific individual’s needs and motivation (Swain & McLaughlin, 1998).
Teachers simply cannot create and implement specific programs for each of their students as it would be extremely time consuming and confusing to keep track of every difference in every program. If a teacher focuses their time on these plans, it would take away from instructional time as well. Although every student is different and unique, a teacher must find a plan that is effective for the entire class and is easily implemented without requiring a great amount of time (Baker, 2005).

This research study will focus on classrooms as a whole and what is the most effective management strategies that are both user friendly and motivating to all students. As teachers are faced with the question as to which is the most effective, this study will involve various aspects of the implementation of a management program in an actual class. It will also provide feedback from students, teachers, and administrators regarding the motivation, ease or difficulty in terms of implementation, and what an ideal system would look like to meet the needs of all classes regardless of special or regular education.

Story of the question

For my field experience, I was placed in a classroom with nine to eleven year olds with behavioral disorders. The school was a private special education school that received students from districts county-wide in order to give them a more structured environment which will fit their individual needs. The behavioral strategy of the school was based on an entire token economy points system which was also supplemented with specific behavior management programs within each classroom. Many of the students seemed to respond well to earning specific amounts of points per period. Points could be earned through showing good voice/body control, following directions, maintaining a positive attitude, and completing assignments. Additional points were received through
good bus behavior, bringing signed points sheets back to school, completing homework assignments, and for individual target behaviors.

Although I saw how highly structured environment helped students control themselves as the classroom remained in order, I began to notice that some students had an “all or nothing” approach to the points system as well. As certain students lost points for the period at the beginning of the day, they basically gave up and acted out more so there after because they felt as if they had nothing to work for anymore. I wondered whether they should be able to have the opportunity to earn points back or if that would be against the token economy system in place. It seemed as if losing points just added to a lack of motivation which increased the classroom disruptions.

On the other hand, there were students in the class that relied heavily upon receiving points or “caught being good” tokens throughout the day. Anytime they did something that they should be doing, they automatically expected something in return. Between having students that were not motivated and others extremely reliant upon the token economy system, I wondered if there was a classroom management system that can work for all students. Is there one specific item that would be reinforcing to every student within a class?

I then began to think outside of this classroom to other classrooms regardless of the special education context. I thought that a token economy system could be effective in any classroom which may prevent sending students to a private special education class or self contained class separated from their peers. I hope to find a simple classroom management plan that can be implemented in any classroom that effectively reaches and motivates all students. As the idea of mainstreaming students increases, it is important
for all teachers to be aware of management plans that could easily solve common
disruptions and create a productive learning environment.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction: Classroom Management Plans (past, present, future)

In the past, token economy systems and teaching students self management skills were used mainly in special education classrooms since they had the greatest need to control disruptive behaviors with all classified students (Kehle, Bray, Theodore, Jenson & Clark, 2000). As more students are mainstreamed into regular education classrooms, these teachers now see a need for an easy and effective management plan to implement in their classrooms. Kehle et al. (2000) recognized that there is an extreme need for effective interventions within classrooms that must not only be economical in terms of teacher’s time but also effective and easy to implement.

According to teacher beliefs and self efficacy, Baker (2005) discovered that teachers were hesitant to implement a plan because they have enough work as it is and do not want to add any additional time consuming work to their jobs. In the survey completed by teachers, most teachers were not only unwilling to implement programs, but they felt unable to do so as well. Baker (2005) explained that in order to establish a successful program, especially to support challenging students, a strong sense of self efficacy is a crucial component that must be instilled within the teacher.

Patterson’s coercive model

Disruptive behaviors within a classroom not only take away time from academic instruction, but in many cases as described by DeMartini-Scully, Bray, and Kehle (2000) are “addressed by reinforcing nondisruptive behaviors without consideration of promoting academic competence” (p. 149). Most disruptive behaviors result from
noncompliance to the teacher’s requests in Patterson’s coercive model (DeMartini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000). Patterson’s coercive model explains that teachers and students are both negatively reinforced as they argue until the teacher eventually takes away the original request and the student wins the battle. This cycle is never ending as students try to escape or avoid academic requests by the teacher; thus, it is important to implement a plan that can address reinforcing appropriate behaviors (DeMartini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000). Inappropriate classroom management techniques will only increase undesirable non-compliant behaviors. As students become more insubordinate, the teacher responds negatively toward the student as it is a constant struggle between the two individuals. In situations such as these, dealing with resistive students in a negative way only takes away academic time and not the undesirable behavior (DeMartini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000).

**Token Economy Systems**

Many classrooms have a type of token economy system in place whether it is earning points or tokens in order to earn a larger goal or to be reinforced for their appropriate behaviors or completion of work. As students strive for these goals, they tend to complete their work and these reinforcing items tend to motivate their decision making throughout the day (Gunter, Coutinho & Cade, 2002). Although token economy systems are effective, some students tend to rely on being reinforced and do not complete assignments or comply with the teacher’s demands if they aren’t going to get something in return or are working toward a large incentive (Swain & McLaughlin, 1998). For other students it may be an “all or nothing” perspective since they lose points toward their ultimate goal, they simply shut down and many times act out even more than they would have before because they know that they will not get their reward due to their
already loss of points (De Martini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000). Gunter, Coutinho, and Cade (2002) believe that interventions both within the classroom and school wide prevent behavioral issues that could occur. Gunter et al. (2002) argue that there were “no adverse side effects observed in the class at any time when the token program was in effect” (p. 2).

Students involved in token economy systems become more engaged in lessons and showed higher academic performance (Gunter, Coutinho, Cade, Swain & McLaughlin, 2002). It is important to allow students to be successful as many disruptive behaviors are a result from escaping from work that is too hard to easy. With token economy systems, students can also have target behaviors set by themselves and the teacher that they will work on to increase or decrease. Ingrim (2000) also states that it is important for incentives used within a classroom to not only be motivating for the child, but should give them recognition for their success. By implementing these reward programs, the teacher is allowing students to meet their full potential and is recognized for doing so. The implementation of extrinsic motivators help student develop positive self esteem as it is focused on what they do correctly and what is expected of them (Ingram, 2000).

What is Assertive Discipline?

Desiderio and Mullennix (2005), explain that “assertive discipline” should be used in classrooms to emphasize positive reinforcement “as the key to students making appropriate choices regarding classroom behavior” (p. 383). Students have set rules to follow in the classroom as well as a discipline plan if rules are not followed and reward systems for compliant behaviors. Assertive discipline is best when used consistently
within a classroom as it is important for the teacher to remind students of the
directions/rules as well as the positive reinforcement that could be earned as well
(Desiderio & Mullennix, 2005). Appropriate behaviors are expected in this type of
classroom as “freedom” in the classroom could serve as a reward. As students
understand what is expected of them, they will work to obtain their goals or incentives
(Desiderio & Mullennix, 2005).

Reinforcement in classrooms can also be implemented as a group contingency
rather than individual or can be both at the same time. Kehle, Bray, Theodore, Jenson,
and Clark (2000) recognize the need for interventions to be effective, economical, and
easy to implement. These effective interventions should be incorporated into the daily
activities of general education. The components of token economy systems should be
clear for students to understand and for the teacher to clearly reinforce and implement the
plan effectively. There are three forms of classroom-based contingencies: independent,
dependent, and interdependent. With different forms of contingencies, students can work
together to receive reinforcement for their collective behavior or teachers can recognize
individual student performance so that all positive behaviors are recognized and
reinforced accordingly (Kehle et al., 2000).

Fading Reinforcement

Although token economy systems are effective, it is important for teachers to use
a fading technique where reinforcement will be differentiated so that students do not rely
heavily upon receiving tokens or rewards for all behaviors expected of them. As
DeMartini-Scully, Bray, and Kehle (2000) state, it is important for teachers to have plans
in order to fade reinforcement. Although at the beginning of any token economy system,
it is important to have high frequency of reinforcement to get the students involved and familiar with the classroom system, it is also important to change the reinforcement as time passes so that the students do not rely heavily upon incentives. As students get into the routine of the class and know what is expected of them by constant reinforcement at the beginning, eventually teachers can use less incentives yet continue to achieve the desired behavior shaped by the management plan. (De-Martini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000). If implemented incorrectly, extrinsic reinforcers can go both ways. Reinforcers or motivators can increase or decrease the desired behavior depending on how they are used and if they are implemented consistently (Ingram, 2000). There should be rewards that are contingent upon completion of tasks, performance, and reach of success. Students will learn that the reinforced behaviors in the classroom should continue as eventually they will be able to be self motivated to keep up the positive performances they were taught in order to become successful learners (De-Martini-Scully, Bray & Kehle, 2000).

Self Management/Contingency Contracts

Due to the reliance on receiving praise instead of having self motivators, there is a movement from the implementation of token economy systems to teaching students self-management skills (Cavalier, Ferretti & Hodges, 1997). Students become aware of and in charge of their own behaviors and completion of work throughout the day. They are able to monitor their own performance and can rate themselves on how they are working or behaving in the classroom. Rather than relying on a tangible goal or item, students learn to motivate themselves by obtaining self satisfaction with their performance which will be essential to them later in life (Cavalier, Ferretti & Hodges, 1997). As students
become more independent, teachers will have more time to focus on instruction rather than rewarding students for every time they act appropriately during class. Cavalier et al. (1997) explain that “the training of self management skills holds the promise of reducing students’ dependence on others and ensuring greater control of their own learning” (p. 168).

Fox and Garrison (1995) argue that token economies may not be the most effective choice in classroom implementation. Fox and Garrison (1995) decided to assess differences in student’s goal orientation when having a token economy system in comparison to a contingency contract condition. It was found that students with contingency contracts in fact set more learning goals than performance goals compared to other students with reinforcement systems (Fox & Garrison, 1995). These students worked toward personal improvements and progress toward their individual goals set by their contracts. These contracts allow students to become active participants in their own learning. It was also found that students with token economy systems were rewarded for meeting normative standards. Whereas contingency contracts allow students to learn skills to help them excel rather than to be rewarded for what they should already be doing as a student (Fox & Garrison, 1995).

Teachers must also realize that students are not motivated by the same reinforcers or amount of tokens and it could therefore have negative effects on students if the token economy is not reinforcing for all (Fox & Garrison, 1995). Mathews and Self-Brown (2003) also researched and found that aside from the fact that students may not be motivated by the token economy, that it also may “discourage students from setting goals that involve learning and effort” (p. 109). When goals are set for the entire class, those
students that could in fact achieve higher standards choose to only do what is needed in order to get rewarded (Mathews & Self-Brown, 2003).

Reinecke, Newman, and Meinberg (1999) state that individuals could increase the rate of their academic behavior through self-monitoring only. With self management systems, teachers are able to show their students how to not only manage their own behaviors within the classroom but can generalize this information to outside the classroom in the natural environment. According to Fox and Garrison (1995), “Teaching young children to manage their own behavior allows teachers to spend more time teaching and less time dealing with occurrences of challenging behaviors in their early childhood classrooms” (p. 3). As students are able to pay attention to their own behaviors and clearly understand what is expected of them, they can keep track to whether or not they have completed set tasks successfully. As students are able to rate themselves based on their behaviors, they can compare their ratings with the teacher to see areas in which they can improve and ways to reach higher standards that have not yet met. As each child can engage in their own learning, there will no longer be a need for a set self management system as they are able to clearly engage in their own appropriate behaviors independently (Fox & Garrison, 1995).

Cavalier, Ferretti, and Hodges (1997) also show that students can engage in self recording procedures where they will be able to reduce their dependence upon others and be responsible for their own actions. “A self management package may be particularly effective as an adjunctive intervention for students with learning disabilities who fail to keep pace with their peers in group motivational systems such as classroom token economies and assertive discipline programs” (Cavalier, Ferretti & Hodges, 1997, p.
Token economy systems place a heavy reliance and emphasis on external control which decreases the individual responsibility of students for managing and keeping track of their own behaviors. As students become aware of their own behaviors, they can monitor the amount of times they are disruptive or acting out inappropriately which in many cases may be a realization as the behaviors are tallied and they can clearly see them decrease (Cavalier, Ferretti & Hodges, 1997).

Combination of Token Economy and Self Management

Although token economy systems are supported as effective classroom management plans (Swain & McLaughlin, 1998) and teaching self management skills allow students to become more independent (Cavalier, Ferretti & Hodges, 1997), research is moving toward the idea that a combination of both is the ideal for a classroom environment and ultimately is the most effective management plan. Token economy systems are practical and effective; yet, by teaching students self management skills, the teacher reduces the reliance upon receiving tokens for every appropriate action (Young & Marchant, 2004). Students receive either individual or whole class reinforcement, but learn to monitor their own performance and to complete activity schedules on their own. As the whole day does not rely on constant reinforcement for positive actions, students learn to work independently. Young and Marchant (2004) argue that this plan is seen as the best of both worlds and ultimately the easiest to implement and most beneficial for teachers and students.

DeMartini-Scully et al. (2000) explain that the intervention used is a combination of contingency contracts, mystery motivators, token economy with response cost, and public posting of classroom rules. With this intervention, students fully understood what
was expected of them as tokens were used as reinforcement for compliance. When implementing a token economy system, teachers can also have a piece of paper at each students’ desk where they can record check marks which gives them feedback on their performance. This would clearly show students how well they are doing or what they should be doing to receive more points as they keep track of their own behavior while receiving points as well (Higgins, Williams & McLaughlin, 2001). As token economies are very powerful, the teacher must make sure to change the reinforcement schedule to intermittent where the students will eventually continue to keep track of their own behaviors with less reliance on reinforcement for doing so (Higgins, Williams & McLaughlin, 2001).

Teachers can also teach self management by having class meetings or even modeling appropriate behaviors through coaching. It is important for teachers to not expect specific behaviors that students may not be familiar with (Miller, Lane & Wehby, 2005). Teachers must “teach students new skills that were not currently part of their behavioral repertoire so that the students would acquire the skills necessary to more successfully negotiate their teacher’s social and behavioral expectations (Miller, Lane & Wehby, 2005, p. 31). Although token economies do increase desired behaviors, students can not increase behaviors that they are not familiar with as expectations may be unclear. Each student should be able to evaluate their behavior throughout the day and can have the opportunities to give out points to their peers as they show examples of outstanding positive behavior (Miller, Lane & Wehby, 2005). Through behavioral points, academic engaged time increased as inappropriate behaviors decreased as the students strived to
earn points and give points to others as positive role models (Miller, Lane & Wehby, 2005).

“Self management strategies fit the criteria of being cost effective and socially valid, as well as achieving maintenance of desired outcomes” (Christensen, Young & Marchant, 2004, p. 200). In self management systems, teachers can also have peer monitoring as they receive praise and reinforcement from their peer partners. Children strive for acceptance from their peers as this is a way to increase social skills as well as self motivation to do well in order to be looked upon as a successful role model from their peers. Students serve as models for appropriate behaviors for each other as they strive to be on their best behaviors in order to receive positive comments from others (Christensen, Young & Marchant, 2004).

Tips for Implementation

“They must focus on both decreasing inappropriate behaviors and teaching replacement behaviors that will help the student function better in the classroom” (Reid, 1999, p. 8). Teachers also need to be aware of the reinforcers used as some are more reinforcing than others for specific students. Reinforcers must be powerful in order to be effective in changing and increasing behaviors to positive ideals of the classroom. As teachers clearly explain their expectations of the class, the students are able to assess themselves in comparison to their teacher’s observations.

Perspectives from the Implementers

Although it is clear that interventions in classrooms are effective whether it is a token economy, self management, or a combination, it is important to observe which is most effective or feasible in terms of the participant students and teachers. If the program
implemented is not favored by the teacher, it will be difficult for the teacher to successfully implement a program that is not seen as a positive program. Teachers must be able and willing to implement the program in order for it to reach its full potential within the classroom. Baker (2005) examined the teachers’ beliefs about their self-efficacy regarding general classroom management skills and their readiness to implement behavior management programs to meet the needs of all learners within their classrooms. Teachers reported a high willingness to collaborate and consult with other colleagues and administrators as they were able to work together rather than alone in creating classroom management guidelines and programs. Teachers reported high self-efficacy to ask for advice, implement clear rules, and use a consistent routine. On the other hand, teachers reported low self-efficacy to keep defiant students involved, keep problem students from ruining class, use varied reinforcement schedules, individualize reinforcement, and implement a behavior intervention program (Baker, 2005).

In most cases, teachers do have positive perceptions of programs implemented in their own classrooms because if not, they probably would not continue to implement an undesired program (Baker, 2005). However, it is important as a teacher to evaluate their current program individually through observations and success, but also by asking the students to rate how much they like or dislike the program since they are the participants. If the program is not liked or reinforcing for students, the implementation will not be successful and undesired behaviors may be the result (Baker, 2005). DeMartini-Scully, Bray, and Kehle (2000) used a rating scale that was employed in order to judge the student’s satisfaction with the current reinforcement system. The scale measured how much the students liked or disliked the rules, reinforcers, response cost, contingency...
contract, and precision requests. The scale used was a Likert-type scale that measured their responses from 1 (hated) to 4 (liked a lot). Teachers can also measure the effectiveness by having interviews with the students, but in most cases will be able to clearly see whether students like or dislike the program by simple daily observations of desired behaviors and success in the program itself (DeMartini-Scully, Bray, & Kehle, 2000).
Chapter Three: Research Context and Design

Introduction

As classified students are mainstreamed into the regular education classroom, it is important for teachers to implement an effective classroom management system. Management systems containing token economies will make the transition easier for not only the students, but the regular education teacher as well. Token economies should be easy to implement and motivating for all students in order to be successful.

I am taking a qualitative approach to this study and will present my findings in a narrative which is common to qualitative research (Creswell, 2003). I plan on collecting "open-ended" data through small focus groups, observations, and through my own teacher research journal.

Context

The study will be conducted in Main Elementary School. The school is part of the Monroe Township school district being one of the four elementary schools in the district. There are 646 students attending the school. Students in the schools primarily speak English (96.4%) and 1.7% speak Spanish. Other languages include Igbo, Mandarin, Polish, Vietnamese, and Wu consisting of 1.9% of the student population.

The management system will be implemented in a 4th grade TAM (Team Approach to Mastery) classroom. A TAM classroom is a class that is collaboratively taught by two teachers consisting of one special educator and one regular elementary education teacher. Special Education students are mainstreamed in this classroom as all expectations of these students are the same for the regular education students; however, any modifications necessary are provided. There are 25 students, 5 of whom are
classified special education students and 5 are TAG (Talented and Gifted) students. Both male and female students will have the opportunity to participate. Participating students will have the opportunity to give the researcher feedback on the implementation of the program and suggestions from their points of view.

Research Design/Methodology

The design of the research is qualitative teacher research. Several qualitative strategies will be implemented including whole group discussion with students and my own teacher research journal which will include my thoughts throughout the implementation of the token economy system and self management program.

This study will focus on the implementation of classroom management strategies in a Team Approach to Mastery (TAM) classroom which will include both regular and special education students. Based on interviews with students along with observation of the management system, this research study will identify the most effective strategies in terms of ease of implementation, time, effort, generalization, reliance upon the system, and personal ratings. Small focus groups will also be conducted with the students in order to have a clearer view of student motivation and their likes or dislikes of the current system. A successful plan must be motivating and enjoyed by both students and teachers within the classroom.

Since the majority of past studies focus on only individual students, this research study will focus on overall success of the entire classroom related to the implementation of the management plan. The effects of the reinforcement strategies used on the entire class will be observed and documented to determine why the plan is successful or how it could be improved.
Sources of Data

The management system will be first implemented in the classroom. The management system will consist of two parts including a self management piece and a whole class token economy system. As a class, the students will choose a goal to work toward as their progress will be posted on a bulletin board in the classroom. I will then hold an open class discussion with the participating students to collect personal experiences or outcomes based on reinforcement and the correlation with motivation. Small focus groups will be conducted with participants in the classroom in order to get a clear view of the students engaged in the program.

In the group discussion, I will ask a variety of questions that will establish exactly what motivates students, how easy or difficult the program was to follow, aspects of the program that they liked or disliked, and what they would suggest to add to a program that would be helpful in increasing classroom motivation. The questions asked are as follows:

1. Do you think that earning something or working toward a goal increased your motivation to complete work?
2. By monitoring your own progress, do you think it helped you complete your assignments more accurately since you were evaluating yourself?
3. Was it difficult to monitor yourself?
4. What did you like?

Journal

A teacher research journal will also be kept as it is important to have observations and examples of this experience in the actual classroom. The journal will also serve to help develop recommendations for other teachers as the researcher will be implementing
the program and will be the teacher of the classroom as well.

Data Analysis

During the implementation of the program, the researcher will complete a teacher research journal that can be reviewed at the end of the study for implementation and recommendations for future studies as observed in this particular classroom.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

In this study I implemented a reinforcement and self management system into a fourth grade TAM (Team Approach to Mastery) classroom in order to see if the program increased student motivation.

Focus Group (Students)

The students are members of a fourth grade TAM classroom at Main Elementary School. A whole class discussion was held as all participants were encouraged to give their individual responses. Following their responses, students were asked to raise their hands in showing whether they agreed or disagreed to the questions asked. There were 18 participants who consisted of ten girls and eight boys. Students ranged from five TAG (Talented and Gifted), two special education, eleven regular education. All students were encouraged to respond to questions asked as well as follow up questions and to vote by raisings their hands.

The following were questions asked to the class as well as their responses:

1. Do you think that earning something or working toward a goal increased your motivation to complete work? 94% or 17 students believed it was a good idea. 6% or 1 student did not believe that it was a good idea.

The majority of the students did believe that working toward a goal was beneficial to themselves and the entire class as a whole. One student responded that “it allowed me to work really hard for something and get something at the end for my hard work.” Most students agreed that they enjoyed the implemented system because it was “fun” and they were able to get their work done more successfully. They also
stated that it was “a good feeling to work for a reward or to be rewarded for hard work.”

Other students that also believed working toward a goal was a good idea discussed the fact that it kept the classroom together as the end result was a group reward. “We did our work not to just get good grades, but to be part of our classroom community.” They also recognized the fact that “people always work for rewards” in terms of them getting older and working for a paycheck as an adult.

One student did not believe it was a good idea because she felt that it was “not fair.” “Even though some people worked and others didn’t want to work, everyone still got the reward at the end.” This student expressed concerns of having group rewards when she felt that certain members of the class did not participant maybe as much as she did, but was still able to be rewarded.

A follow up question was asked “Would you prefer having an individual reward or group reward system within your classroom?” 56% or 10 students responded group reward system and 44% or 8 students responded individual reward system.

Students that supported a group reward system expressed the positive aspects such as working together as a team and coming together as a class. Students also responded that it was nice to “help others that may have difficulty with their work so that everyone is able to understand and finish their work.” These students believed that they were able to encourage others to participate and complete assignments more successfully since their actions reflected on the class as a whole.

Students that would prefer an individual reward system believed that they should be rewarded for their own efforts rather than having to rely on their classmates to do
well in class too. “I don’t have to suffer if 1 person decides not to do their work since I can work harder toward my own goal.” They also stressed their concerns regarding people in the class that did not deserve the final reward as it was not fair to all students in the classroom.

2. By monitoring your own progress, do you think it helped you complete your assignments more accurately since you were evaluating yourself? 61% or 11 students believed self monitoring did not help them and 39% or 7 students believed self monitoring did help them.

Students that did not think self monitoring helped them with their assignments stated, for example, that “it was just too much work and added to the work I already had to do for a grade.” Other students did believe that it helped as it was “a good progress report where I was able to see how I was doing in school before my report card comes.”

3. Was it difficult to monitor yourself? 72% or 13 students believed self monitoring was difficult 28% or 5 students believed self monitoring was easy.

Students that thought self monitoring was difficult, one student stated that “it was extra work and hard to remember to complete.” These students believed that self monitoring did not really help them but rather resulted in extra work for them. One student indicated that “if I don’t get my assignment book signed, I know I will just get in trouble and I don’t like that.”
One student that thought self monitoring was easy stated that "I always do my homework and get my book signed so it was nothing that I don't normally do everyday anyway." They thought it was easy to "keep track" of themselves and it was not hard work to complete at all.

4. What did you like? 100% or 18 students liked using reinforcement in the classroom and 0% or 0 students did not like using reinforcement in the classroom.

Students expressed that they liked working for reinforcement. For example, "everyone worked hard as it gave us an incentive to do more things that we normally would not do" and "it was more challenging and pushed us to make us work harder for a bigger goal." One student also stated "it really showed us what we could really do!" All students agreed that reinforcement in the classroom helped "make school more fun" as well as "giving a purpose to our hard work and learning."

As all students indicated that they did like the reinforcement system, I decided that it would be essential to ask them if they would change anything. Most students believed a change should consist of the system being on more of an individual basis rather than an entire class reward and goal. Others believed, for example that "the teacher should just think of a goal since we did have a choice and we ended up fighting at first." One student also expressed that "maybe we can have a group goal, but everyone can work for different things which would make everyone happy."

Another student indicated "I really liked being able to see the scoops of ice cream we earned on the back board because we knew how well we were doing and what we needed to do to get our reward."
Student data was aggregated and presented in chart form and set forth in charts A-D below.

Chart A

Question 1
Do you think that earning something or working toward a goal increased your motivation to complete work?

Chart B

Follow up to Question 1
Would you prefer having an individual reward or group reward system within your classroom?
Chart C

Question 2
By monitoring your own progress, do you think it helped you complete your assignments more accurately since you were evaluating yourself?

Chart D

Question 3
Was it difficult to monitor yourself?
My Observations

As the student teacher of the classroom in which the plan was implemented, I was able to clearly see how time consuming aspects of this plan actually were. Establishing a self management system was difficult due to the fact that many of the students only saw this component as extra work. I then modified the system to have them focus more on managing their homework since that was the biggest concern and problem of the students within the class. I did see an increase in students having their parents sign their assignment books as they checked off each assignment that was complete; however, this did not last long as students just chose to not manage themselves.

It was difficult as a teacher to facilitate the management system as some of the students simply did not care if they did their work or what the outcomes of that were. Many students that did participate in managing themselves were those that always handed in their homework as this task was simple for them in being rewarded for something they always do regardless. For struggling students, the management system made it more difficult for them as they only saw it as another burden or assignment that needed to be completed regardless if it was for homework or an in class assignment. I also believe that in many cases some of the students truly did want to try to manage themselves, but it was difficult to have their parents sign their assignment books as they are working or not at home to do so.

In terms of the other component of the system, the reinforcement system started out not as successful as I had wished. I wanted to find something reinforcing that the entire class wanted to work toward which ended up being very difficult to come to one conclusion. As the idea of being part of a community of learners and having one group
goal was constantly brought up, I had to limit the choices the students received to come to a final decision. The students worked toward an ice cream party as the bulletin board in the back of the room was clearly showing how many scoops they received on the class sundae. The students really enjoyed watching scoops being added as it showed that their efforts were being gradually rewarded toward their ultimate goal.

The reinforcement system worked really well in the classroom as students began to help struggling students finish their work and it really gave motivation to others as they did not want to disappoint their peers. It served as a very positive way to bring the class together as they recognized the fact that without each other, they would not be able to reach the goal. There were no clear indications to the students when the scoops would be added, but they were simply told that completing their work and working together in class would indicate success. This worked well since I was able to add scoops when I truly saw them working which only reinforced and kept their work ethic strong at all times.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of the Study

The objective of the study was to implement a management system based on reinforcement set in place to determine if it effects the motivation of students. The management system was first implemented in the classroom in which I was the student teacher. I then held a group discussion with participating students within the classroom in order to collect personal experiences or outcomes based on reinforcement and the correlation with motivation.

Discussion of the Findings

Students in the classroom responded well to a whole group token economy system. All participants in the class indicated that they enjoyed working toward a goal as it increased their motivation to work in the classroom as a community. A token economy system was created in an environment where students received a reward for their hard work as they expressed that it made learning fun. A group reward system brought students together; however, about half of the class would prefer individual rewards as they indicated that they did not want to suffer any consequences if other students did not complete their work as shown in Chart B.

More than half of the participating students did not believe that self monitoring helped them in reaching their goals as many students thought that this task was rather difficult as shown in Chart D. Self monitoring was seen as an extra assignment to complete especially for those that had trouble handing in homework on a daily basis. Although self monitoring served as a daily progress report for students, it was very difficult to monitor as a teacher on an everyday basis.
Conclusions

Desiderio and Mullennix (2005) indicated that the use of positive reinforcement increases the occurrence of assertive discipline in the classroom. In the classroom that was studied, students in the class were well behaved and when getting off task would be reminded of their group reward and would encourage peers to behave appropriately. With the reinforcement system, students knew what was expected of them and followed through with their behavior as they encouraged the same positive behavior from their peers as well.

Ingrim (2000) stated that it is important for “the characteristics of incentives to suggest that it is important to provide students with avenues for success and recognition” (p. 14). As the plan was implemented I was able to reward students for working toward their full potential as well as working together with their class as a whole learning community. Ingrim (2000) also recognized that extrinsic motivators help students develop positive self esteem as it is focused on what they do correctly and what is expected of them. In this classroom I could clearly see that students enjoyed being rewarded, completed their work on time, were more focused in the classroom, and most importantly felt good about themselves and their entire class as they strived to reach their goal.

Ingram and DeMartini-Scully, Bray, and Kehle have stated that it is important for teachers to have plans in order to fade reinforcement; however due to time constraints, I was not able to fade the reinforcement in this study. These studies explained that although students do respond well at the beginning of the reinforcement system as they experience high frequencies of praise, they tend to rely heavily upon being rewarded for
all activities or they will not complete activities as successfully. With the implementation
of my reinforcement system, students had to work consistently as an entire class to earn
scoops of ice cream on their incentive chart. They did not receive reinforcement after
every activity, but were constantly reminded of their group goal. Since students were not
constantly rewarded by small reinforcement during the day for every activity, I believe
that the students did not rely on the reinforcement system and will be able to continue
their positive work ethics after the goal was reached by the class.

Fox and Garrison (1995) assessed the differences in student’s goal orientation
when having a token economy system in comparison to a contingency contract condition.
Their study states that contingency contracts or self management systems are in fact more
successful as students are able to set individual goals and can work toward them as active
participants in their learning. As the self management system was implemented in the
studied classroom, it was actually very difficult to have students successfully manage
themselves as it was less reinforcing since it seemed like more work to complete. Many
students did not complete their self management checklists and were not motivated since
many of their individual goals were not met. As they did not reach their own goals all of
the time, the self management system became more aversive to them since they did not
receive reinforcement and motivation to strive to reach individual goals.

Fox and Garrison (1995) also had a concern with token economy systems because
they believed that it could not meet the needs of all learners. Teachers must also realize
that students are not motivated by the same reinforcers or amount of tokens. It could
therefore have negative effects on students if the token economy is not reinforcing for all.
Mathews and Self-Brown (2000) also found that, aside from the fact that students may
not be motivated by the token economy, it also may “discourage students from setting
goals that involve learning and effort” (p. 110). As the token economy system was created and implemented, I was aware of this concern and felt that I would be able to address this by finding something common that all students would identify as a reinforcing goal.

I thought that the best solution to finding something reinforcing for all students would be to have a class discussion and vote to see what every child could agree on to have as their final goal. It was very helpful to hear from the students of what they thought was rewarding; however, the students began to disagree with their classmates as their ideas were much different. Taking a vote on a final goal was not helpful since the decision was split and it was difficult to find a goal to implement when I knew that some students would not like it and as a result would not work toward that goal.

As the student teacher in the classroom, I discussed with the class how different students like different things or may dislike what one would like. For example, a group of students may enjoy sports whereas others that are not athletic see sports as a more aversive reward rather than being reinforcing for them. After the class meeting, students were able to talk amongst themselves and think of a goal that would be appropriate for all students since they were working as a whole and should celebrate as a class without excluding anyone. The students decided that a compromise would be to watch a movie and have an ice cream party since all members did see the party as motivation for the entire class.

Young and Marchant (2004) believe that a combination of self management and token economy system would be the most beneficial for both teachers and students and
easiest to implement in a classroom. Through this study, I had found that implementing both systems was in fact more difficult. Due to the time constraint on this study, it was difficult to teach students, especially in the middle of their school year, how to effectively manage themselves without having them see this as an extra item of work to complete. It was in fact easier to implement the group token economy system as students worked together effectively with their classmates and were able to encourage others through help and positive peer pressure. The group reward and goal not only had them working accordingly, but at the same time reinforced the idea of a learning community.

Limitations to the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

Although the study was implemented and the token economy system was successful in creating a positive learning environment, there were many factors that negatively affected the study. The time constraints on the study was the biggest setback as I had to first get to know the class and establish a relationship with them before the system could be implemented. By the time the token economy was in effect, I was not able to see the long term results given that I could not successfully fade the reinforcement or even identify the reliance on tangible reinforcement.

I believe that a self management system could be effective and easier to implement if it was started at the beginning of the school year so that students are aware of what is expected of them. The two systems could work together cohesively, but should be clearly drawn out and implemented immediately. I also noticed that this task was much easier for students that always completed their work regardless of the system in place as they only had to do what they had always done in the past. Other students may try to strive and work harder to be a member of the group, however this would
require more work and pressure put on them specifically.

Another limitation was the fact that as a teacher you are not able to ensure that the work required for self management is completed once students leave the classroom for home. Many students in the class did not complete the self management checklists or charts because they would either forget them at home or did not have someone at home constantly reminding them as they would have in the classroom setting. Having the incentive chart on the bulletin board, students clearly knew what behavior and work ethic was needed in the classroom, but many times this idea did not carry through once they were at home.

Implications for teaching

Teachers need to first develop a system that is clear and understandable for all students so that they are able to know what is expected of them and are able to work successfully. With the implementation of a token economy or self management system, the teacher needs to also serve as a facilitator to help guide students especially at the beginning or start of the program. As students become more self sufficient, teachers are able to monitor with less influence. It is also helpful to post the incentives or expectations around the classroom as students are constantly reminded of what they should be doing in class and what they are working toward.

As a teacher, I would also suggest that parents are made aware of any system that is implemented in their child’s classroom as it gives them a sense of belonging as well. With the hopes of creating a more positive environment, including parents in this system will only create a stronger bond between home and school. This will also open the communication between parents, teachers, and students so that they can successfully
operate as a true learning community.
References


