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The Effectiveness of Token Economy Interventions on High School Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

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The Effectiveness of Token Economy Interventions on High School Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By
Jordan R. Welle

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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Abstract

With the advances in knowledge that we have had available to us as educators, we have shown that we are capable of making powerful differences in the lives of students. A major topic that has risen in education is the emotional and behavioral needs that some students bring to the school buildings across America. Our ability to recognize, be proactive, and address emotional and behavioral needs has shown great progress. The purpose of this research study was intended to investigate an intervention in particular. The intervention of a Token Economy System is the focus of this study. A token economy system praises students for expected behaviors that are rewarded by a token. However, a question arises, “Does Token Economy systems have a true effect on challenging behaviors?” This answer will be later answered in my future teaching as this action research has been interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic led to school closures and students working from home to better their education through distance learning. The abrupt change in this action research led to Chapters 4 and 5 pertaining to qualitative research through autoethnography versus the intended research question. This autoethnography contained daily journals from my experiences through distance learning in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: token economy systems, interventions, challenging behavior, emotional/behavioral disorder, COVID-19, autoethnography
Dedication

With great pleasure, I dedicate this action research to my beautiful fiancé, Emily. She has accepted my desire to further my education as a teacher, to go along with the busy life that we already have. I greatly appreciate your support and ability to inspire me in our life’s journey.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In the world of education, there are many growing concerns that may be the topic of conversation amongst people in our society. The topic that may come up is the emotional and behavioral needs of students. In many schools across our country, there are teachers who are struggling to find ways to better help students with challenging behaviors. As a teacher in the field of special education in the category of Emotional Behavioral Disorders, it is evident in my short time that this is an alarming issue that needs to be addressed. According to McDaniel, Bruhn, & Troughton (2016), challenging behaviors may lead to impaired social relationships with peers and adults, and worse, abysmal within-school and post-school outcomes. When compared to peers with other disabilities, students receiving special education services for EBD are more likely to fail courses, be suspended, and drop out of school. From this knowledge, there came brainstorming of what research based interventions exist and can be used to help students with these high behavioral needs. A common intervention that always came clear through in multiples journal throughout research was the use of a token economy system in the classroom. This positive reinforcement intervention has been shown by many researchers that there have been positive outcomes. It is my intention to examine the token economy intervention and the effects it has on challenging behaviors for students in the classroom.
**Brief Literature Review**

Throughout the history of education, challenging behaviors have always aligned with students and their learning. Many behaviors are not as extreme as others but they are always happening no matter what classroom management system a professional may have. Psychologists and philosophers have been studying behavior and finding sufficient reasoning for such high intensified behavior since the Greek physician, Hippocrates in the times of B.C.

Students with challenging behaviors or students who have emotional behavior disorders are not creating conflicts with the purpose to cause conflict to others. Their brain and body is reacting to the item that is upsetting them. Student’s with challenging behaviors can have various ways of showing the types of behaviors they have. One way is by showing externalizing behaviors, which are when students tend to make their behavior most evident by allowing others to see it. Internalizing behaviors are known to be ones that tend to be unseen. According to Yolanda Williams, examples of internalizing behavior can be low self-esteem, withdrawal, and anxiety. Williams also states that internalizing behaviors are a result from negativity that is focused inward on the body (Internalizing Behaviors: Definition & Examples, 2015). The externalizing and internalizing behaviors are shown due the lack of being able to regulate their emotions. In this review of literature, I have been amazed at the vast amounts of studies and research that have been conducted in the area of challenging behaviors. Educators should be proud of the research on the effectiveness of intervention strategies and continue to build upon what we have in order to help students with challenging behaviors. In many lines of research, there are plenty of interventions that have been proven to work and have seen success. However, working in the area of EBD with high school-aged students, I have noted that
many interventions that single out the student exhibiting the behavior, have been difficult and unsuccessful. For that reason, I have chosen a whole-group intervention that will provide positive reinforcement in the classroom and will allow me to measure the impact it makes on a single student that exhibits challenging behavior. Token economy systems are a powerful intervention that promotes positive reinforcement by providing a token that will be exchanged for a tangible reinforcement that is noteworthy to a student or class. Through the Review of Literature and the success that has been shown, I am eager to start my own research in my classroom.

**Statement of the Problem**

There have been many different interventions and strategies that have been designed to help reduce challenging behaviors, however, I believe a whole-group intervention that rewards positive behaviors has the potential to decrease challenging behaviors. Challenging behaviors can be any atypical behaviors of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy. These behaviors can be very evident or them may be hidden as students vary in the way they show their emotional response. In my short tenure as a teacher I have seen the positives in whole-group interventions versus and independent interventions with the students who exhibit challenging behavior. A token economy system that is implemented to reward students who demonstrate positive behavior may be beneficial to a reoccurring issue that has been happening in schools across our country. Students who have challenging behaviors may fall under the category of Emotional Behavioral Disorders and receive special education services. There has been much evidence in our schools and in my teaching, that shows that students
exhibiting challenging behaviors struggle to find success in their education even if they receive special education services. With this in mind, a student who may have an emotional behavioral disorder may not get the social interaction that he or she needs, they may fail classes, be removed from class (i.e., miss instruction time), and be suspended from school. This leads to students with challenging behaviors not experiencing a positive impact on their academics due to the various reasons listed above. Teachers need to provide appropriate and meaningful interventions in order to see positive growth in students who exhibit these types of behaviors.

**Purpose of the Study**

In a short period of time as a teacher, I have seen firsthand the challenging behaviors that occur for students who receive special education services under the category of Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). Teaching students with challenging behaviors can cause many hardships and difficulty when providing them an education. However, at the same time, it can be very rewarding working with students who have challenging behaviors as you can see when a student makes strides to minimize their behaviors. There is no sugarcoating the increase of students who struggle in the area of academics due to their inability to regulate the behaviors that they show. There has also been a plethora of evidence to show that the intensity, frequency, and duration of behaviors have increased in students that exhibit challenging behaviors. All schools and teachers are in need of interventions and teaching of social skills with the purpose of helping students control and reduce the behaviors that are presented. This leads into a cycle of problem solving because students vary in the way they respond to certain interventions. Schools and families need to come together to help find solutions for students with challenging behaviors so that these students can see success for many years after their
high school days. I am a huge advocate and supporter that positive reinforcement creates a huge impact on a student, a classroom, and a school climate. The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of token economies for students that present challenging behavior.

**Research Question(s)**

What is the effect of a token economy system on high school students who exhibit challenging behaviors?

**Definition of Variables**

The following are the variables of study:

- **Independent Variable:** The independent variable for this study will be the token economy system that is being implemented as a positive reinforcement intervention in which students earn tokens by engaging in desired behaviors. In return, the tokens can be exchanged for an incentive that is interest of the student. (Cosgrave, 2009)

- **Dependent Variable:** The dependent variable in this study will be the challenging behavior of the student. The challenging behavior that is interfering with this student’s learning is defiance, aggressive language, and opposition. For this study, I will use a Direct Behavior Rating Scale (DBR) to collect data for the student’s those behaviors.

**Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this research is for the growing literature that shows the need for appropriate interventions due to the increase of challenging behaviors occurring in schools. According to an article from Spaces4Learning, disruptive behaviors have increased at a high
rate in Los Angeles, California in the past three years. Tantrums and defiant behaviors have been seen daily by 25 percent of the 1,900 teachers from Los Angeles Schools that participated in this survey. I believe there needs to be more explicit information taught to teachers in order to help the success of the student. I believe there needs to be more research done on token economy systems and its potential to reduce challenging behaviors in the classroom. Though much research has been done on components of token economy systems such as positive reinforcement, there continues to be a need for more studies in regard to the impact positive reinforcement in a token economy system on challenging behaviors. My study will shed more light on the potential benefit of implementing a token economy system as well as demonstrating the importance of taking action on challenging behaviors through positive reinforcement. It is in my hopes that this study builds on a lot of important research already being conducted on this topic and helps enact meaningful change in my classroom.

**Research Ethics**

*Permission and IRB Approval.*

In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be seek from the school district where the research project will be take place (See Appendix X and X).

*Informed Consent*

Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix X) that the researcher will read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will
be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher’s Master Degree Program and that it will benefit his teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

**Limitations.**

There are some limitations to my study that need to be noted. First, because this research is in the setting of a special education classroom, where the setting pertains to small group instruction. This may limit the validity and reliability of this research for different settings. Another limitation is that this research study is being planned out to analyze the behaviors of only one student, this may extinguish the relevancy of a token economy system.

**Conclusion**

Challenging behaviors have brought educators together to analyze research-based interventions to examine what supports can be effective to benefit the students in our schools. Many parents, teachers, and most importantly the students are in search of effective interventions that will diminish the intensity or amount of challenging behaviors that are present. Token Economy systems have been proven time and time again to be a reliable intervention. With the reliability being shown, it brings confidence to educators to explore the effectiveness of Token Economies. The objective of this chapter was to address the issue, get a glimpse of the literature that has been done, and explain the significance of what research is
being proposed. In the ensuing chapter I will provide extensive literature about this topic and important theoretical framework that supports this study and its relevance.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Interventions that have provided success to students with challenging behaviors are needed, in my research Token Economy Systems have provided a certainty that it has the potential to reduce challenging behaviors. Research has shown that schools implementing using an approach called Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) that will provide support to students that are at risk. Through the MTSS process professionals can determine what students need support through a universal screening of all students in the school. From this, educators can begin collaborating what the reason and why the student is at risk, what interventions may be a best fit to student or classroom. From there, an intervention needs to be implemented that will set the student up for success and make a change in the current behavior that is being exhibited. Through a problem-solving process, a team of professionals can determine whether or not an intervention is working and either maintain the intervention or move on from it. This may be a repeating cycle as many interventions do not work for every student or some behaviors are more severe and are not a great fit. An intervention that is used quite often in a classroom is a token economy system. This intervention system can be used in a whole group, small group, or individual setting. This positive reinforcement system has been shown to be successful in building up students who demonstrate desired behaviors. In my time as a teacher I have observed an increase in challenging behaviors amongst my students. It is in my best interest that I explore different strategies that will reduce the frequency of these behaviors. This literature review will make an effort to synthesize research and case studies involving a
Token Economy System as a possible intervention to replace challenging behavior with positive behaviors.

**Review**

**Challenging Behavior**

Challenging behaviors can be culturally atypical behaviors of such an intensity, frequency or duration that the physical safety of the person or others is likely to be placed in serious jeopardy. (Emerson, 1995) These types of behaviors can be as severe as self-injury, kicking, hitting, spitting, property destruction, or just verbally and physically aggression. Some other challenging behaviors with less intensity could be defiance, impulsivity, hyperactivity, or opposition. When examining behaviors overtime, researchers have identified many possibilities of why they are occurring. Some common reasons are related to social attention, desire, escape, or for sensory purposes. These functions of why the behavior is happening can be related to many other causes. Some researchers claim that challenging behaviors can occur due to environmental factors and how the child has lived. New research about children growing up with challenging situations at home and experiences Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has shown to be a common reason for many challenging behaviors. There are also studies done that show the linkage between the brain and the emotions, ability to control impulses, and self-awareness of a human can be affected which in return may cause some challenging behaviors. With these behaviors occurring the students cannot reach their full potential in the classroom. Their behavioral needs are in the way for any academic learning that can be taking place. Many times, the behaviors occurring may challenge the ability of other students to learn as well in the
classroom. Therefore, the topic of behavior and the rise of its intensity and frequency brings up the question, “What can educators do?”

**Token Economy System**

Many questions like the one above has been asked and there are many research-based interventions out there that can help challenging behavior. Many are designed to help the individual student, a great intervention to help the whole group and individual student is a Token Economy. A Token Economy is a system that rewards positive behavior with tokens that can be collected and then exchanged for something desired. Previous research has shown that behaviors can be established, decreased, and/or maintained using token economy systems. A token can be any sort of objects such as a chip, coin, start, sticker, or slip of paper. The token can be anything that is able to be collected and later on exchanged for what a student desires. A token economy system is based on Operant Learning Theory in which rewards and punishments are what shape behaviors. This system can be set up to where the “bank” of tokens represents each individual student that they keep or there can be one “bank” for the entire class. The token economy system should be set up with what behavior or behaviors are expected of the class. For example, if a student turns in their homework on time, they will receive a token. A reverse effect would be if a student does not turn in their homework on time a teacher takes away their token. That decision can be made by the classroom teacher whether or not to have punishment when behaviors are not up to expectation. In a token economy, students can bank their tokens or exchange them for a reward on the set time for the class. If
the system is set up for the whole class, the teacher can use free time outside, board games, a movie day, or any whole group activity as an incentive in exchange for the class’ tokens.

**Research and Case Studies**

Numerous studies have been done to capture the true effects of token economy systems. Token economies can vary in structure but all capture the intended purpose of trying to engage students in more positive behavior. In the world we live in today, many token economies can be used through technology. A famous app called class dojo has boosted in popularity as it gives a classroom motivation and catches the student’s interest. Through the investigation of many case studies, I found five that caught my eye and triggered my pursuit of their results. This first study through Gonzaga University had a participant who was a 10-year-old, third-grade male. This third grader exhibited challenging behaviors such as talking out, poor seat posture, and out of seat behavior. In the classroom were a teacher, teaching assistant, and 19 other third grade students. Target behaviors were baselined and recorded just on the 10-year old student in a 20-minute period in the day. Through a token economy system, the 10-year old student would receive check marks and the number of check marks would be divided by two to find the number of minutes to use as an incentive to play computer games, reading games, math games, and play time. The number of target behaviors of talking out, being out of the seat, and poor posture decreased when 3-12 days of the token economy in place. The implementation of the token economy showed a change in talking out from an average of 6 to 0.8, out of seat behavior from 1.9 to 0.2, and poor seat posture from 11 to 5. These drastic changes show the change in behavior of the 10-year-old student and show that the token
economy system has a direct effect on change in behavior (Higgins, Williams, & McLaughlin, 2001).

Other case studies showed similar results but differed in the setup and routine of the token economy system. The most intriguing case study I found was one that had a seven-year-old boy that had autism and other challenging behaviors. This case study not only looked at whether a token economy system helps reduce challenging behaviors but also looked at if interest-based tokens would make more of an impact for decreasing challenging behavior. The results showed a significant increase in on-task behavior and decrease in challenging behaviors. However, there was a notable decrease in challenging behavior when an interest-based token was used for the token economy. For this seven-year-old, the interest-based token was a puzzle type piece that would fit into a puzzle. In this case, the participant being studied had a high interest in puzzles and was more responsive to that than any other reinforcer used in the original token economy (Carnett, et al., 2014).

**Theoretical Framework**

Numerous amounts of research behind token economy systems and positive reinforcement goes back to the Operant Conditioning Theory created by B.F. Skinner (1938). Operant Conditioning is a method of learning that occurs through rewards and punishment for behavior. With this theory, the individual makes a connection with the specific behavior that is occurring and the consequence they receive (Skinner, 1938). B.F. Skinner believes that if a behavior is followed by pleasant consequences it is more than likely to be repeated. Thus, a behavior that is followed by an unpleasant consequence is less likely to be repeated. This aligns with token economy systems and their function to reward behavior that is positive and to not
reward behavior that is negative. Skinner’s theory supports the idea that implementing token economy systems will increase positive behavior. According to Saul McLeod, a token economy system rewards a student with a token, which is the secondary reinforcer, to eventually receive a primary reinforcer in the end (McLeod, 2018). A teacher in a token economy system may also find that taking away tokens can be a way of showing a negative consequence that goes along with negative behavior. Skinner identifies three types of responses that can follow a behavior that connect with the purpose of a token economy system. The three responses are neutral operants, reinforcers, and punishers. Skinner states that neutral operants are responses in the environment that do not give any response to behavior, they neither increase or decrease the behavior. Reinforcers, are the response in the environment that increase the chance of the behavior to be repeated, they can be either positive or negative. Lastly, Skinner states that punishers are the responses that decrease the behavior of being repeated again. These responses are the fuel that make a token economy system effective. In order for a student to perform positive behavior versus a challenge behavior, B.F Skinner’s three types of responses need to be a crucial element in a well-run token economy system.

**Research Question(s)**

In response to literature and my passion to better help students who have challenging behaviors has led me to develop the following question, what is the effectiveness of a token economy system on high school students who exhibit challenging behaviors?

**Conclusions**

As we proceed forward in the world of education we need open and creative minds to help students grow no matter how high of needs they have. Through many different types of
interventions, we can find ways to help students with challenging behaviors in their own unique way. Through a token economy system, the research and case studies done have proven that they can be very effective. It has been shown that tokens that are the interest of the participant may spark an increase in on-task behavior and decrease behavior. Professionals need to analyze every variable that is being done in any intervention. In the case of a token economy, many questions should be analyzed and answered before beginning the intervention. What are the behaviors that are expected or not expected in the classroom? What are the tokens and/or reinforcers that are the most interesting to the student or students? What is the classroom like, General Ed? Special Education? Lastly, who are the people in the classroom and who is all involved in the token economy? Major examination for the findings of these questions is needed in order to have a successful token economy system. It is expected that all of these questions be answered correctly and effectively if the desired result of a decrease in challenging behaviors is wanted
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

With a strong support of research being shown in the results of positive reinforcement of token economy systems, more research needs to be conducted to measure the effectiveness that it has on challenging behaviors. If teachers and schools are looking for ways to increase positive behavior and decrease challenging behavior, there needs to be research demonstrating the positive effects of token economy systems to lead teachers to begin implementing it into their classrooms. It is in this belief that this study can contribute to the abundance and growing research and help enact positive changes in the classroom. Positive reinforcement through a token economy system has demonstrated to have positive effects on the amount of challenging behaviors that are being presented in the everyday classroom now (Zlomke, 2003).

Research Question(s)

What is the effect of a token economy system on high school students who exhibit challenging behaviors?

Research Design

According to Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2019), the study that will be the best choice for my experiment is going to be a single-subject design. I am going to look at a whole class token economy system being implemented and test if the positive reinforcement for expected behaviors lowers the challenging behavior by one student. This alternative classroom group was chosen based off disability, grade level, and math ability. Due to the classroom roster, not being decided by the teacher, this will eliminate bias from classroom construction. The type of design
that will be utilized in this study will be an A-B-A design. This design will have a week baseline for the challenging behavior, then there will be a treatment period where the intervention of the token economy is in place, and finally another week baseline that eliminates the token economy and perform another baseline of the student’s behavior. According to Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun (2019) the A-B-A design reduces the threats to internal validity because it is unlikely that something would occur at the precise time the intervention is presented to cause an increase in behavior at the time the intervention is removed.

**Setting**

The setting of the study will take place in a rural, Midwest community. The town where the district is located has a population of roughly 4,000 people, which includes that neighboring communities that also send their children to the school district. The community’s main source of employment comes from agriculture, local factories, the school, and the local hospital. For being a rural community, it’s population is diverse. The high school where this study will be taking place has a total of 479 students. Of those students, 77% are Caucasian, 22% are Hispanic, and 1% of the remaining population being constituted of other ethnicities including African-American, American Indian, and Asian. 32% of the students in the high school are classified under free/reduced lunch, 7% are English-language learners, and 11% are receiving special education services. The classroom will only consist of up to 4 students and have me as a special education teacher. This setting provides a unique sample of participants in which the research will be using.
Participants

The student that this single subject design is intended for receives special education services under the primary category of Specific Learning Disabilities and in the secondary category of Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. This Caucasian student has behaviors that consist of defiance, avoidance, aggressive language, and oppositional behaviors. This student will be in the 12th grade and will be in an Alternative Math classroom with other 12th grade students. This student has received services since he was in the 1st grade and has attended the same school. The classroom will only consist of 3 students and have me as a special education teacher. The other student’s in the classroom qualify for special education services under the category of Specific Learning Disability. The other students in the classroom are Caucasian and Hispanic. Only one of the three students in the class receives reduced lunch.

Sampling

A purposive sampling of my class and the students in my class will be done. After knowing the classroom roster and the student with challenging behaviors. My research of the effectiveness of token economies on challenging behavior is directly related to my class and the student that is in it.

Instrumentation

The instrument that will be used for data collection comes from FastBridge Learning. This software system has transformed the way schools identify and track student progress to deliver faster results. Through FastBridge Learning, I will use the tool of a Direct Behavior Rating Scale (DBRs) to evaluate the challenging behavior that is being displayed by the subject that is being monitored for the research on the effectiveness of token economy systems.
The DBRs are used to rate a student on a specific behavior on a scale of 0-10. 0 meaning that the behavior never happens, 5 being that the behavior sometimes happens, and 10 meaning that the behavior is always happening. Teachers are to mark a score that best reflects the percentage of total time the student exhibited the target behavior. At the top of each DBRs are the date, student, class, rater, and description of the target behavior. Once a baseline of data is measured using the paper DBRs, the FastBridge Learning Software’s online DBRs will be used. Researchers have shown that behavior rating scales are a valid use of measurement due to the ability to defend the data is collected. It is also shown that behavior rating scales are reliable in the fact that they give consistent results due to the setting, behavior, and rater staying the same throughout the research.

**Data Collection.**

Baseline data will be collected on paper with the DBRs instrument before the token economy system is implemented in the classroom. The baseline DBRs will be observed and rated by myself in the Alternative Math setting. Once the treatment period is started and the intervention is in place data will be collected through FastBridge Learning with an online DBRs. The online DBRs data will be stored online and be automatically graphed with the data that has been collected.

**Data Analysis.**

After data has been collected, scores from the first baseline period will be analyzed via the DBRs and graph that will be made to present the data in a more visual form. A mean score will be calculated from the data collected in the first baseline period. This will also be done for the eight weeks of treatment period. Data will be collected through FastBridge Learning in their
online DBRs and graphed automatically through their software system. Finally, the last baseline period will have the token economy removed and data from the week’s baseline will have a calculated mean. Data will once again will be presented on the DBRs and through graph. An analysis of the first baseline, treatment period, and last baseline will be conducted to see whether or not the token economy was effective on the challenging behaviors from the student of this study.
Research Question(s) and System Alignment.

The table below (i.e., Table 3.1) provides a description of the alignment between the study Research Question(s) and the methods used in this study to ensure that all variables of study have been accounted for adequately.

Table 3.1

Research Question(s) Alignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Validity &amp; Reliability</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the effectiveness of a token economy system on high school students who exhibit challenging behaviors?</td>
<td>DV: The dependent variable in this study will be the behavior of the student that presents challenging behaviors. IV: The independent variable for this study will be the token economy system that is being implemented as a positive reinforcement intervention.</td>
<td>Single Subject Study in an ABA design. Comparing the amount of challenging behavior in one student before, during, and after a token economy intervention.</td>
<td>For this study, I will use a Direct Behavior Rating Scale (DBR) to collect data for the student’s behavior in which the teacher will rate the amount of behavior being presented from the student.</td>
<td>The direct behavior rating scale performed by the teacher will give the amount of challenging behavior a rating based on a scaled of 1-10.</td>
<td>FastBridge Learning- Direct Behavior Learning Scales</td>
<td>A 12th-grade student who receives special education services for a primary disability of specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) and a secondary category of emotional behavioral disorders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

To start, I will observe and baseline the challenging behavior in the first week of the conduction of this research topic. The challenging behavior will be clearly defined as defiant responses, aggressive language, or oppositional responses to requests made by the teacher. The baseline will be 5 days and data will be collected through direct behavior rating scales on a daily basis. The teacher will rate the student on a scale of 1-10 for the amount of challenging behavior that is presented from the student exhibiting the behavior. 1 will mean a very low amount of behavior and 10 meaning a very high amount of challenging behavior.

After the first baseline is conducted I will begin implementing the token economy system and utilizing it in my daily instruction. During this period, I will continue to track the amount of behavior daily through direct behavior rating scales. I will also create and follow through with fidelity checks to ensure that the token economy is being implemented as intended. This will last for eight weeks. At the end of the last week, I will remove the token economy system and conduct another baseline of the challenging behavior that is being presented by the student. From this point, data will be analyzed again and I can evaluate if there was a noticeable impact on the student’s challenging behavior due to the implementation of a token economy system in my classroom.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the participants of this study getting informed consent form the parents is a requirement. Due to the student and students involved being under the age of eighteen years old, it important that the parents are informed of the purpose of this study. To go along with parent consent, there also needs to be a reassurance of the privacy and the identity of the
participants in this study is safe and all necessary measures are taken to ensure that occurs.

Lastly, in some situations, parents may feel that this study is putting shame and pointing out their child’s behavior. It will be required to let the parents know through the informed consent that the token economy system in this study is really part of the process of growth with their child’s education. Parents will need to be aware that this study has the potential to benefit their child’s education but will surely not harm their education.

Conclusions

This chapter’s objective was for the reader to have a better perception on the logistics of this study. This chapter describes the demographics and setting of the participants that will be included in the research of this study. The instruments that are being utilized and how the data will be collected and analyzed was also explained. In conclusion, the chapter gives an explicit amount of information on the procedure of this study and how the procedure will address ethical considerations into account. In the future, the chapters will be presented as the results of the research and the description of its findings.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Data Collection

Data was collected in a qualitative form through the use of autoethnography. This data was made and collected by myself as a single participant. The data collection of journals was analyzed through qualitative methods during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Volume 12 of Qualitative Social Research, autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze a personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2011).

The use of autoethnography was a process of daily journals that reflected on the question, “What has been my experience during the COVID-19 school closure crisis?” This autoethnography occurred during the days of March 30 through April 16. The days during this time period varied between school days of distance learning and non-school days. Due to the differentiated days, these journals were collected at differing times of the day.

Through research, I was able to perform a content analysis of the qualitative data. Qualitative analysis is defined as, a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, as cited in Wildemuth, 2017). In this process, I reviewed the autoethnography journals and found a true understanding of my writing. My writing was then coded line by line to gain a sense of common topics throughout the journals. The “coded” lines were then reviewed and used to make six common themes to summarize the autoethnography.
Results

The table below (i.e., Table 4.1, Six Themes of Autoethnography) provides a description of the alignment between the qualitative data compiled, codes, and themes created via autoethnography journals.

Table 4.1

*Six Themes of Autoethnography*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Quotes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts &amp; Solutions</td>
<td>1. Student issues and struggles</td>
<td>1. Student issues and struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Problem Solving</td>
<td>a. “A majority of the teachers did not have a high percentage of students participate in online learning through our Canvas learning platform. This shows a possible issue moving forward.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Internet and Technology</td>
<td>b. “He struggles to complete assignments on time and stay organized. It seems that he struggles because he lacks motivation to be organized and complete work.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Family Support</td>
<td>c. “This distance learning seems to find many of my students feeling lost or feeling that school isn’t really going on.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Problem Solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. “I need to step back and analyze if the student is receiving proper accommodations. If so, then I problem solve on what I can do to help the student. After those steps, I analyze if I have attempted to assist the student through distance learning”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. “Our principal made an excellent statement, “The 8 for 8 rule, our staff &amp; teachers got 8 days to prepare for distance learning to make sure everything was ready to go, our students should get the same amount of days to get ready.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. “With the parents of this student speaking Spanish I have worked with our translator to communicate the importance of work completion with the parents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Internet and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a. “My first zoom meeting of the day was a bit on the downward side as one of my students seems to be struggling with all of the online technology.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School &amp; Teaching Procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Change in Teaching and School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preparation and Planning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identifying new strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Staff Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Change in Teaching and School**

1. **Change in Teaching and School**
   a. “I know for a fact that using our online learning platform is new to many of our students.”
   b. “Never in my life did I think that I would be teaching online.”
   c. “This adjustment of virtual meetings to teach skills to help them reach their goal will be challenging. Not only will it be different from face to face skill teaching but the willingness of the student comes into play.”

2. **Preparation and Planning**
   a. “I also lesson planned for my alternative classes and enjoyed getting some items prepared for the next week of Distance Learning.”
   b. “I have prepared lessons for these classes in a whole new aspect when it comes to online learning.”
   c. “I spent my morning revamping some video lessons and making outlines for the week.”

3. **Identifying new strategies**
   a. “Recorded videos can be vital for learning in
the future. I think about students who go home or go to study hall and could use guidance when doing homework. If teachers continue to use recorded videos in the future they can be a great resource for students to use.”

b. “Technology has been vital in this process and I can’t help but think about how these advancements made for distance learning will help our staff educate our students in the future.”

4. Staff Collaboration
   a. “Today was another example of how important face to face interaction and skill teacher can be with students with emotion/behavior disorders. I was in collaboration with teachers and a parent about a rude email that was sent to a teacher by one of my students.”
   b. “With guidance from my school psychologist we have found enough information through the areas that will be reported.”
   c. “More than ever, I have found that collaboration & consultation with other staff members, teachers, and parents is critical.”
   d. “I got to meet with our SPED team, social worker, school psychologist, and high school principal in a zoom meeting today.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPED Procedures</th>
<th>1. SPED paperwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Virtual IEP Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. State Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. SPED Procedures</td>
<td>1. SPED paperwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. “With the situation that we are in, we have had to change what our plans are for our students. Our responsibility is to generate an Individualized Distance Learning Plan.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. “We had to adjust how we are going to meet the goals on a student’s IEP through distance learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Virtual IEP Meetings</td>
<td>a. “I have been thinking about a past IEP I have conducted through Google Meet and future IEP’s through virtual means.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. “Now, I have just thought about how crazy it is that I am doing meetings through virtual means or phone calls.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. “I miss the face to face interaction with my students and with an IEP team. I have came to the conclusion that there is nothing that can truly replace the true collaboration of a team in person.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 3. State Guidelines | a. “As a special education teacher we have had guidance from the state and our West Central Education District for the future of
b. “It is also amazing to see our state and other officials help us with legalities and language for new policies and guidelines in the world of special education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World and Personal Life Impact</th>
<th>1. COVID World Impact</th>
<th>1. COVID World Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. COVID World Impact</td>
<td>a. It is crazy how this world has changed in one month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Government Policies</td>
<td>b. However, in some cases we as humans need assistance or guidance from another peer/adult or multiple people. We need “Togetherness”, to get through this pandemic. It is a must.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Change in personal life</td>
<td>c. “In conversation with my fiancé, I found myself saying the stress we have is nothing to what others are dealing with during this time. Many people are suffering financially and dealing with huge anxiety about this virus. Even more, people are in danger of losing their life when tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. Government Policies        | a. “Policy Changes as a positive way for us to flatten the curve and rebound from this pandemic that has changed the lives of so many.” |

| 3. Change in personal life    | a. Easter Sunday, full of two zoom meetings with my fiancé’s side of the family and my side of the family. Never did I think I would be celebrating Easter with my family through a computer screen. |
|                              | b. We have had many conversations about how this pandemic may affect our wedding coming up in August |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Thoughts</th>
<th>1. Rewarding Situations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Rewarding Situations</td>
<td>a. “Today I was able to reach out to more students that have yet to engage with their online resources.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hope and Positivity</td>
<td>b. “Some thoughts I have after this week during this pandemic are how grateful I am to have a job that is so rewarding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Continue Success</td>
<td>c. “I am thankful to all people who are risking their life during this pandemic, especially medical staff.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positive Student Engagement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. Hope and Positivity       | a. “Distance learning brought another day of meeting with students through google meet. It was a day filled with ups and downs but some more surprising ups.” |
|------------------------------| b. “I have pondered upon this situation we are
in and thought about the word togetherness.”
c. “Today was the first day back from spring break and it seemed to be a positive day back.”
d. “I am confident that our medical experts and other professionals will soon find a vaccine.”

3. Continue Success
   a. “Online resources seem to be working for a majority of my students.”
   b. “I can tell that each day will bring a new change in our operation of Distance Learning.”
   c. “It has gone a lot smoother than I imagined. There will continue to be a lot of challenges but I know there will be adjustments made to make week 2 even more successful.”

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### Emotional Impact

1. Student-Teacher Relationships
   a. “It was so rewarding to see them smile and say “Hi. Mr. Welle!”
   b. “Out of 13 students on my caseload I got to have a zoom meeting with 7 of them. My “high risk” students were some of the happiest to see me.”

2. Anxiety & Worry for Students
   a. “I am hoping that all students are staying healthy, getting enough to eat, and are finding strength to get through this time.”
   b. “I am nervous that many of my students with not receive the assistance they need or that they simply will not put in effort without assistance. Many worries have been in my head over these last weeks.”

3. Student Emotions
   a. “Instead, stress built up and student let out his frustration in an email and at his father.”
   b. “Use his skills to be in control of emotions and advocate when he needs assistance in the future.”
   c. “This student is kindhearted and caring [JW1] but has emotional needs that do not allow him to complete work.”

4. Teacher Stress
   a. “Seeing the concrete grades in place always seems to bring an overwhelming feeling to my stomach. I believe it is in my heart that I feel responsible at times for students on my caseload failing classes.”
   b. “I feel that I am overloading myself by allowing myself to work later or work at night when I usually wouldn’t be.”
The bar graph below (i.e., Figure 4.1.) provides a visual representation of the frequency that each theme was noted in the qualitative data presented in the Auto-Ethnography Journals.

![Bar graph showing frequency of themes](image)

*Figure 4.1. Frequency of Themes*
The pie graph below (i.e., Graph 4.2.) provides a visual representation of the percent each theme was noted in the qualitative data presented in the autoethnography Journals.

![Pie Chart](image)

**Figure 4.2. Percent of Themes**

**Data Analysis**

The data results shown above has been analyzed in a meticulous fashion in order to truly understand the results of this qualitative study. The conduction of Table 4.1 was a thorough process that revealed six themes that summarize my journals. Those six themes of Conflicts & Solutions, School & Teaching Procedures, SPED Procedures, World and Personal Life Impact, Positive Thoughts, and Emotional Impact. This table of data revealed that there can be conclusions that there is a lot of uncertainty being shown in the journals. The data results can confirm that the experiences of school closure during the COVID 19 pandemic are unfortunate and bring numerous issues to students, parents, and school staff. However, with all of these
issues the results provide evidence that there is a great amount of positivity in my teaching experiences during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 provide two types of visual representation that led me to more interpretations. Through the analysis of these visuals it was shown that the most common theme of Positive Thoughts, consumed 26% of my journaling. Positive Thoughts have led me to where I am as an educator and person in my life. This provides confirmation to my dedication to stay positive no matter the situation. Although, I can interpret Positive Thoughts is the most frequent theme, there are a plethora of other themes that need to be addressed.

A different interpretation can show that the themes of Conflicts & Resolutions and Emotional Impact show that the experience of school closure have brought definite negativity to my teaching during distance learning. The theme of Conflicts & Resolutions took up 18% of my journaling, while Emotional Impact took up 17%, together they make up 35% of my journaling. This interpretation has shown that there is definite negativity to my teaching experiences during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusions

In the time of which the data was collected there was a great deal of uncertainty. This uncertainty created thoughts in mind before the start of my daily reflections of my autoethnography. Those thoughts have been confirmed in many ways by the qualitative data that was analyzed and shown as part of the results of this study. The results showed that positivity is a necessity during troubled times in the world. The results also show new thoughts that were not in any predictions that were developed in the time previous of the autoethnography journaling.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Action Plan

Before my research study was conducted, I had sought the effectiveness of Token Economy Systems on students with emotional behavior disorders. The abundance of research and literature reviews conducted has allowed me to develop a broadened knowledge on Token Economy Systems and Students with Emotional Behavior Disorders. I plan to seek answers for the effectiveness of Token Economy Systems through my future teaching practices. I will implement a Token Economy System in my classroom and collect data on student behavior through Direct Behavior Rating Scales (DBRs) and analyze the data. I plan to find closure on this original research question as it is consumed much of my desires in developing as an Special Education Teacher with licensure in Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD). The results of this research bring a bright outlook for the future of my educational career.

In the abrupt change of the world, my action research has been altered. I have found that in this process I am skilled in the acceptance of change and problem solving to make the best of a situation. I have learned that I am a great fit for the teaching position I fill and am grateful in my decision I made to be a Special Education Teacher close to three years ago. This confirmation has built upon my desire to continue to be a lifelong learner and develop myself as an educator. The results of my qualitative analysis of my autoethnography journals led to results that show how a pandemic can lead to a tragic experience to myself as a teacher and human being. More importantly, the results of my qualitative analysis led me to find that a pandemic can bring togetherness and positivity. This research has directly impacted my continued teaching philosophy of staying positive to reach the ultimate goal that all students deserve to learn.
Plan for Sharing

The common themes that I found in my autoethnography could be comparable to other teacher’s experiences during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. This experience has brought growth to myself as a teacher and to teachers around the world. I would be willing to share my common themes and compare them with any teacher who is interested. It would be enjoyable to find commonalities and differences between our perspectives.

I will be able to share these results in my professional learning community which consists of other high school special education teachers, school social worker, school psychologist, and principal. Additionally, I will share these results with other teachers that would be of interest.

Going forth, I will seek results of my original research question and develop as a teacher. The change to autoethnography and reflective practice will be used to help myself as a teacher. This thought-driven process will help guide my mind with everything that is going on in my world. I will use this experience to gain strength into my mental health. I will use the information from this autoethnography to help mentor new teachers and others in the education field.
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