

Group Contingency Product Outline: The Behavior Buffet

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Introduction

Group contingencies are utilized to enhance positive behaviors (i.e., compliance, attending, work completion, etc.) within groups of students. The theoretical framework of group contingencies could be expanded to include any group of people, however, for the purpose of this outline, students with serious emotional/behavioral difficulties will be the target population.

Why This Intervention is Evidence Based Practice?

Group contingencies were originally defined by Litow and Pumroy (1975) as independent, interdependent, or dependent. They conceptualized the independent group contingency as each individual student having the opportunity to receive reinforcement if he or she met the criteria set forth for all students in the classroom. The interdependent group contingency is defined by the students in the classroom earning a reward if every student in the group or specified groups of students attain a certain level of performance, thereby making each student in the group interdependent on the others to gain the proposed reinforcer. The dependent group contingency is in effect when the performance of a selected group member or members determines the rewards or consequences for the entire group. All three group contingencies have been shown to be effective in reducing inappropriate classroom behavior (Theodore, Bray, & Kehle, 2001).

Materials Needed for this Intervention

Posted classroom rules. Make sure there are no more than 5 rules, make the positive, measurable and attainable.

5 variations of fake, plastic fruit or food items, (i.e., banana, apple, grapes, chicken, mashed potatoes, etc.)

Labels or tags for each piece of plastic fruit (simple post-it notes, or labeling stickers may be utilized).

Markers to write on labels.

Steps to Implement the Intervention

Identify at least 3 specific behaviors you would like to see increase among the group of students, (i.e., work completion, on-task, following directions, using nice words, having nice hands, etc.)

Once you have identified the behaviors, write the behaviors on a label. Then, attach the label to a specific plastic food item, (e.g., work completion attached to a banana, nice hands attached to mashed potatoes, etc.)

Place the plastic food items in a basket, or even on display like a buffet.

Have your students select and agree upon 5 reasonable reinforcers that can be provided in school. Remember to “refresh” this list as the year goes on to keep students motivated.

Once the students and you have agreed upon a list of at least 5 reasonable reinforcers, explain to the students that in order to gain access to the selected reinforcers, they must display the behavior the teacher has selected at random from the “Behavior Buffet” (e.g., nice hands-pineapple, nice words-donut, etc.)

Explain that the entire group must display the selected behavior to gain access to their preferred reinforcers.

Troubleshooting this Intervention

Avoid targeting only the behaviors that are extremely difficult for the students. Label some of the fruit with behaviors you are confident the students can maintain, (i.e., saying hello, sitting in their seat, etc.) Mix these behaviors up in the “buffet” to help build momentum.

If students are not responding to the “Behavior Buffet” then make sure the reinforcers are still relevant for the students.

Remember that reinforcers don’t need to cost money. Reinforcers can be time, (i.e., less homework, more recess, more time at a desired activity, etc.)

When selecting your student groups, pair students strategically by adding positive model students to groups that struggle adhering to classroom rules.

Avoid grouping all the difficult students together. Spread them out and intersperse them with groups that will have a higher likelihood of success.

Are there Specific Cautions for this Intervention?

There are no cautions for this intervention.

References

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Theodore, L. A., Bray, M. A., & Kehle, T. J. (2001). Randomization of group contingencies and reinforcers to reduce classroom disruptive behavior. *The Journal of School Psychology*, 39, 267-277.