GONGOLA, LEAH C., Ph.D., December 2008   Educational
                                                                          Foundations and
                                                                          Special Services

THE INFLUENCE OF A DIFFERENTIAL REINFORCEMENT OF OTHER
BEHAVIORS (DRO) PROTOCOL WITH AN EMBEDDED TOKEN ECOMONY TO
REDUCE CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS AMONG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM
(149 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Lyle Barton, Ph.D.

        Recently, there has been an increase on the insistence that evidence-based

methods be used when working among children with challenging behaviors and autism

(Horner, Carr, Halle, McGee, Odom, & Wolery, 2005; National Research Council, 2001).

In addition, the current trends of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) and Response to

Intervention (RtI) advocate for preventative and proactive strategies (Coleman, Buysse,

& Neitzel, 2006). The integration of these trends with the principles of Applied Behavior

Analysis offer procedural options to improve socially significant behavior among

children (Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 1987). Ethical conversations support the need for

reinforcement based procedures particularly within applied settings (Lerman, Vorndran,

Addison, & Contrucci Kuhn, 2004).

        The purpose of this study was to extend the evidence-based literature on

reinforcement based protocols when diminishing behaviors. The DRO with an embedded

token economy treatment package explored the efficacy of scripted instruction and praise

among two school aged participants with autism. A whole interval DRO procedure was

utilized with interresponse times determined on a weekly basis to enhance feasibility for

applied practitioners. If a target behavior occurred during the interresponse time, an

interval reset application was applied and scripted instruction was verbally administered.

Results found that upon application of the treatment package, target behaviors

significantly reduced while the embedded token economy, on a three to one ratio, was

found to maintain near zero rates of target behaviors between both participants. The

utilization of intermittent praise was thought to support near zero behavior rates as

participants worked towards accumulating three tokens. Treatment integrity was

monitored throughout the intervention with data supporting the ease in application for

applied practitioners. The DRO with an embedded token economy treatment package was

found to be efficacious for reducing target behaviors and maintaining near zero rates

among children with autism in a special education classroom; holding potential as a

simplistic, reinforcement based treatment option.