

*A 19TH CENTURY PREDECESSOR
OF THE TOKEN ECONOMY*

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The token economy is a reinforcement system in which the occurrence of appropriate behavior (or the absence of problem behavior) produces secondary reinforcement in the form of tokens (e.g., poker chips) that can periodically be exchanged for other reinforcers (e.g., food, toys, free time). Montrose Wolf, the first editor of this journal, has been credited with the development of the token economy as a formal behavioral intervention (e.g., Risley, 1997); however, it is possible that precursors or approximations of the token economy developed prior to Wolf's pioneering work. We found an example of a precursor of the token economy in a textbook published in the 19th century by Avendaño y Carderera (1859). In the fourth chapter, which deals with the topic of discipline, the authors state, "among the rewards that can be delivered in schools the tickets (vales) are in the first place because by nature they are applicable to all students" (p. 344).

Unlike the modern token economy, neither the responses that led to the delivery of tickets

nor the specific exchange rates were well defined in this early motivational system (e.g., "The child who responds well will win one or several positions," p. 345). In addition, the delivery of back-up reinforcers could be delayed for exceedingly long periods of time (e.g., "These rewards will be exchanged, three times a year, for objects of value and useful for the children," p. 345). Nevertheless, the basic elements of the token economy were clearly present in this classroom discipline system developed in the 19th century.

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