

The Impact of Reinforcer Preference and Variation on Response Rates in Preschool-Aged Children

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In the field of Applied Behavior Analysis, tangible items (i.e. toys) are often used to help learners meet goals in academic, social, and adaptive living skills. While use of high preference reinforcers has been linked to improved performance, repeated use of a single item can cause satiation and reduce effectiveness. Using a variety of reinforcers can allow therapists to minimize these satiation effects (Bowman et al., 1997; Koehler & Iwata, 2005; Keyl-Austin et al., 2012). In the current study, we used a paired-choice preference assessment to determine high, medium, and low-preference items for 6 children (aged 2 – 7) with developmental disabilities. We presented each child with multiple, concurrently available felt boards on which they were taught to place a token. Each board choice corresponded with access to a particular item. We systematically examined the child's response rates when their response resulted in access to either a single high-preferred stimulus or a variety of medium or low preferred stimuli, hypothesizing that a variety of reinforcers, of either medium or low preference, would produce higher response rates than a single, highly preferred stimulus. Data collected in this study showed variable response allocation based on the individual, with some consistently allocating more responses to the high-preference response option and others allocating more to the variable response option as sessions were run. The results of this study will allow clinical practitioners to make informed choices about the use of reinforcers to better motivate learners to continue progressing towards treatment goals.