Mrs. W., the second-grade teacher, had been having trouble with Trang. She had been asking for ideas on how to handle his disruptive behavior. He had been evaluated by the school nurse and did not seem to have any medical problems. At the nurse’s suggestion, Mrs. W. established a token economy for Trang.

Trang would need to earn tokens that could be traded in for a reward that he would value enough to want to earn. The first step was to identify a reward (reinforcer) that Trang could earn. “Oh, that’s easy,” replied Mrs. W. “He loves basketball. That’s all he talks about. He idolizes the high-school boys on the team.” That gave the nurse an idea. What if Trang could earn points toward watching a practice, or serving as an “assistant” during a game and sitting on the bench? The basketball coach was agreeable to giving it a try.

The next step was to set up a series of desired behaviors Trang could successfully accomplish.

She decided to start by having Trang raise his hand before speaking out in class and waiting to be called. She discussed this with Trang and explained that if he waited until he was called, he would earn a sticker on a card she would keep at her desk. When the whole row was filled, the basketball coach had agreed to let Trang watch part of the practice. At first, Mrs. W. called on Trang quickly to give him confidence in his ability to succeed. After his first basketball practice, she made him wait just a little longer to be called on. She gradually added other tasks after discussing her expectations with Trang. The rewards also became larger. Trang’s greatest achievement came after several weeks of reaching his goals, which were becoming increasingly difficult. He had been rewarded with going to practices, and now would be allowed to sit with the team at a game. He was thrilled, his mother was excited, and the boys on the team enjoyed having Trang there.