

RUNNING HEAD: Rewards

Effective Rewards in Education

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Every teacher has it. Every parent has used it. It's that treasure box filled with stickers, small toys, candy, and prizes. It seems at some point or another every person who deals with children has utilized the above mentioned items as a motivational tool. However, there are conflicting views on the effectiveness of rewards as behavior modification tools. In the two readings of this unit, both Brophy and Stipek address the concept of using rewards to increase or illicit a desired behavior. There was much information about when and how rewards can be used effectively, as well as, how they can be detrimental to the learning process. Teachers, and other professionals with a desire to motivate others, have a responsibility to understand when and how to utilize rewards. The use of rewards, while highly debated, is a common practice in our society. Frequently, children are rewarded for everything from setting the table to using the toilet. Unfortunately, an elevated amount of tangible rewards does not necessarily result in a student with excessive motivation.

According to the research, rewards do have a place in the modern classroom. Offering extrinsic rewards does not seem to effect intrinsic motivation. According to Brophy, "intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are relatively independent" (Brophy, 1998). Therefore, use of rewards is not necessarily detrimental to a student's intrinsic motivation. However, Stipek warns "research on the use of rewards to control student behavior suggests that rewards should be used thoughtfully and sparingly" (Stipek, 2002). Thus, it is important to understand how and when to supply rewards in order to maintain their effectiveness (Brophy, 1998).

Research indicates that rewards are most effective when they are offered for improvement or mastery of "routine tasks, specific intentional learning tasks, and tasks

(with) steady performance or quantity of output” (Brophy 1998). In addition, both Brophy and Stipek agree that rewards are only effective if students want to achieve them and feel that they can achieve them. Rewards that do not appeal to a student, seem unattainable or irrelevant to a student will not be effective in eliciting a desirable behavior. In fact, if a teacher does not know what is desirable to a student, a perceived reward could actually illicit a negative result. For example, in middle school, many adolescence place more value on peer acceptance than teacher acceptance. In this case, positive attention from the teacher could actually decrease the desired behavior and increase an undesirable behavior. Teachers also need to be aware of what students are capable of and set clear expectations and processes to reach the goal (Brophy, 1998).

While research indicates that rewards can indeed increase the likelihood of observing a desirable behavior, it also highlights the drawbacks of utilizing rewards to illicit a specific behavior. First, if the criteria mentioned in the previous paragraph are not met, rewards can undermine the intrinsic motivation of students. Specifically, Brophy suggests that rewards with high salience, non-contingency, and that are unusual or unnatural are most likely to be detrimental to performance and motivation (Brophy, 1998). Stipek also discusses the effect of rewards with these characteristics. Offering rewards for high quantity rather than high quality can cause students to choose less challenging opportunities. In this case, students will begin to choose the task that requires just the minimum amount of effort necessary to achieve the reward and no more. In addition, rewards can instill in students the idea that one should only participate in learning activities in order to receive extrinsic rewards (Stipek, 2002).

In summary, research suggests that in the past, it was believed that extrinsic rewards would decrease intrinsic motivations. Recently, research has shown that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can increase and decrease independently. Therefore, rewards have once again been introduced into classrooms and other educational settings. However, this realization is coupled with the knowledge that not all rewards are effective in increasing a chosen desirable behavior. In order for rewards to be effective, they must be desirable, attainable, and relevant to the student. It is also imperative that the educational progress or achievement is highlighted with the reward. Students should receive feedback on their educational efforts with each and every reward. This increases the likelihood of the student to present the behavior in the future. In conclusion, with the right guidelines and strategies in place, rewards can play a vital role in a student's educational experience.

References

Brophy, Jere. (1998). Motivating students to learn. Boston: McGraw-Hill

Stipek, Deborah. (2002). Motivation to learn: Integrating theory and practice
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