Investigating the effects of extrinsic rewards on the elementary student

Jennifer Thatcher
Pacific University
Investigating the effects of extrinsic rewards on the elementary student

Abstract
Investigating the effects of extrinsic rewards on the elementary student

Degree Type
Thesis

First Advisor

Keywords
Investigating the effects of extrinsic rewards on the elementary student

Subject Categories
Education

This thesis is available at CommonKnowledge: https://commons.pacificu.edu/educ/3
Investigating the Effects of Extrinsic Rewards on the Elementary Student

PRESENTED BY:

Jennifer Thatcher

May 17, 2007
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to all of those meaningful people in my life who have encouraged and supported me throughout my educational career. To my wonderful, goal-oriented husband, Jeff, who for the last ten years has been my rock, is continuously confident and optimistic about life, education and my abilities. For Brockton, the new edition to our family, who sits playing in his high chair and gives me a toothless smile that makes my day brighter when I am frustrated!

My greatest appreciation to all those in my family who have watched Brockton so I could observe, interview, write, edit and rewrite my paper. Thank you to the staff at Pacific University for helping me improve my paper by giving me positive feedback.
### Table of Contents

**Section I-Introduction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction with Significance of Study</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Definition of Terms</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations and Limitations</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section II-Literature Review**

School and Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The use of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards within the classroom setting.</td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The debate of whether extrinsic rewards can be beneficial or problematic for students.</td>
<td>10-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longevity of Rewards</td>
<td>12-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section III-Methodology and Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for Qualitative Design</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Selection/Participants</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Researcher</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collections and Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>20-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Verification</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>24-31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary/Conclusions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendixes**
Reflecting over years of schooling, I can remember a time when I sat paralyzed in
my chair, answering the teacher’s questions in my head. Once answered (by another
student, of course), I would think to myself “why didn’t I answer that question, I knew
it?” In part shyness played a role in this behavior, yet the underlying issues were being
afraid of letting the teacher down, feeling pressure to always be the perfect student and
also fearing the thought of being chastised by peers. Although, I liked going to school
and appreciated learning, the fuel of my fire lay within getting verbal praise from the
teacher and “making the grade.”

As years passed I became somewhat obsessed with getting good grades and being
“smart.” At the high school level, I received my first bad grade on an exam. Although
this grade was considered average, I pleaded with the teacher to allow me a retake the
exam.

He did not allow me to retake the exam stating the following reasons; “Jennifer
accept you are not going to be perfect at everything you do; you make mistakes so take
advantage and learn from them. School is not about getting the best grade possible but
learning, discovering and exploring interests.” At the time I found this hard to believe
but as time passed, I began to understand what my high school accounting teacher was
telling me; stop worrying about getting the perfect grade or approval, enjoy learning for
the sake of learning.
Fortunately, as I became comfortable with myself and exploring my interests, the less concerned I was with "making the grade" and what others thought. Currently, I understand that my desire for praise was extrinsically driven whereas my high school accounting teacher was showing me the value of being intrinsically driven to accomplish my goals.

Reflecting over my educational career inspired me to pursue researching what types of extrinsic rewards are being used within the classroom setting. I chose to research at the elementary level because I am interested in teaching elementary children. Within this paper I will investigate the types of extrinsic rewards being used both school wide and within the classroom, develop an understanding of teacher perceptions of the use of extrinsic rewards and also observe the affects of the use of extrinsic rewards on student behavior.

Throughout the education world, teachers use a plethora of classroom management techniques that have positive and negative effects on student behavior and motivation within their classrooms. One of the most studied and controversial issues in classroom management has been the use of rewards to motivate and teach students to follow classroom rules, routines and to complete assignments (Witzel & Mercer, 2003).

Veenman as cited in Extrinsic Reinforcement in the Classroom (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004) believes that classroom management is one of the most common problems facing teachers, mostly beginning teachers; for numerous reasons including lack of experience and inconsistency in teaching methods. Two classifications of motivation will be discussed, extrinsic and intrinsic rewards or motivators.
Extrinsic and intrinsic rewards have advantages and disadvantages, depending on the frequency with which the educator chooses to use the method. Some researchers believe that extrinsic rewards have a negative impact on behavior and motivation and that this management technique is used as a short-term fix. Maag’s study, as cited in Extrinsic Reinforcement in the Classroom (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004), states rewards, although seemingly positive, do not always equate to positive reinforcement. It is possible for the student to find the tangible reward not worthy; therefore, the students’ behavior may not change.

On the other hand, teachers who foster and support intrinsic reward and motivational techniques gain long-term results (behaviorally and motivationally) on their students. In the Sprick study, as cited in Using Rewards to Teach Students with Disabilities (Witzel & Mercer, 2003), intrinsic rewards are considered task completion, feedback or result, acquisition of knowledge or skills and a sense of mastery. Intrinsic methods are considered to make students feel more motivated to learn, not only throughout their educational careers but also during their lifetime.

Although the use of intrinsic reward is believed most beneficial for students, possibly for a lifetime, many educators become caught up with using an extrinsic reward system because it generally modifies student behavior quickly and efficiently at the given time. As stated earlier, however, beginning teachers generally use extrinsic methods more frequently than any other management technique (Witzel & Mercer, 2003). It is this extrinsic orientation that will be the focus of this paper. Please note that it is not within the scope of this study to fully investigate intrinsic motivation, although it is mentioned briefly throughout the paper.
This study is significant because it is imperative for the classroom teacher, both beginning and veteran, to recognize how extrinsic reward systems affect their students and to be aware of the negative and positive implications of using this method as a classroom or behavior management technique. The results of this study will provide feedback for the classroom teacher and information for the researcher who is searching for best classroom management techniques.
**Purpose Statement**

The intent of this case study is to explore what types of extrinsic reward systems are being used in the classroom and throughout the school. The researcher also intends to gather information on teacher perceptions of the use of extrinsic rewards through interviews. This study will investigate the affects of the use of extrinsic reward systems on student behavior and motivation.
Research Questions

The following questions for this qualitative research project are:

- What extrinsic reward systems are being used currently in Elementary classrooms and throughout the studied school?
- How do educators use extrinsic rewards to keep students on task behaviorally and academically?
- What effect do extrinsic reward practices have on student behavior?
Operational Definitions of Terms

The following is a list of vocabulary and definitions which will assist the reader in the analysis of this paper:

For the purpose of this paper, motivation can be defined as “the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits” and also “the tendency to find academic activities meaningful and worthwhile” (Brophy, 1998, p. 3).

Intrinsic motivation is when students are engaged from within, rather than by external forces or rewards. There is no recognizable reward except the activity itself or how the student(s) feel after completing the activity, for example reading just for the sake or pleasure of reading. Whereas, extrinsic motivation is the desire or drive, to behave because of external consequences of that behavior; for example receiving stickers for an assignment, receiving a tangible item for good behavior, receiving grades, verbal praise or social acceptance. These rewards could be given by the teacher or parents and are generally considered pleasurable.

The “positive behavior system” (PBS) is a school wide approach to enhance the capacity to educate all students, especially students with challenging social behaviors, by establishing clearly defined outcomes that relate to academic and social behavior (PBS handbook). Administrators and educators are trained by professionals on how to implement and apply the program within their district or school. Leadership teams are formed to develop an action plan for their school, complete an assessment of student behavior and also to establish an action plan for the district or school.
**Delimitations and Limitations**

This qualitative study was conducted at an Elementary School in Western Washington County, Oregon. Observations were primarily taken from one first grade classroom. The study is narrow in scope due to the nature of research constraints. Research constraints include observation of a small group of students within one classroom over a short period of time. Interviews were with individuals selected at random and arranged with staff (certified and classified) throughout the school. As a qualitative study, every attempt has been made to report current and correct information.
Section II-Literature Review

The literature concerning the use of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom is somewhat overwhelming because of the extent of available information. There are two focal points in much of the current research. First the use of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in the classroom setting and second the debate over whether extrinsic rewards can be beneficial or disruptive to student’s intrinsic motivation.

Society/Schools

How the public views their children and the school system is pertinent in the discussion of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. “[The] school system as an institution retains the stigma of authoritarian control […] where the decision-making freedom of students is limited and often curtailed” (Noll, 2001, p. 31). Some may wonder why the school system has such a reputation. Certain behavioral expectations are implemented school wide and in individualized classrooms. Expectations and routine establish classroom management practices designed to allow the day to run smoothly. Classroom management techniques include the use of positive and negative reinforcement, which is believed to control and manipulate student behavior in the favor of the adult (Kohn, 1993).

Stipek states in Motivation and Instruction, a person’s response is “strengthened when it is followed by a positive outcome and weakened when it is followed by an unsatisfactory outcome” (Berliner & Calfee, 1996). For example, when a student sits quietly and pays attention; he receives a reward. The student who disrupts the class and does not pay attention receives an additive punishment. Within the American society the
reinforcement system is used from early childhood throughout adulthood. The reinforcement system's purpose is to keep things running smoothly and orderly in day-to-day operations; from school to work. Therefore, the daily lives of children and adults alike are immersed with reinforcers and punishers.

*The use of Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards in the Classroom*

As cited in Re-Examining the Overjustification Effect (Akin-Little & Little, 2004), educators use rewards systems, such as a token economy, in order to enhance academic performance and/or appropriate behavior. This theory of learning has been used for decades across the United States in a movement known as behaviorism.

A plethora of educators have examined the effects of extrinsic rewards and or reinforcements on students' behavior and academics within the school setting. Observations of classrooms frequently reveal evidence of some type of reward or token system for academic output and/or appropriate behavior (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004), whether it is a point system or other tangible rewards.

For example, students may receive a tangible item for turning in their homework on time for the week or some type of incentive for appropriate behavior while at an assembly, in the classroom or during a guest speaker presentation. In Slavin's study, as cited in Extrinsic Reinforcement in the Classroom (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004), schools have successfully employed the use of external rewards for decades by delegating specific times to reward students. Implying that when a student displays certain positive behavior, he or she will receive a reward for their actions.

If verbal praise and tangible rewards are given surprisingly to the student, "after they have finished a task, the rewards are less likely to be experienced as the reason for
doing the task" (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001), therefore being less harmful to the
student's intrinsic motivation. Researchers suggest that when rewards are given
spontaneously after the fact, students are more likely to enjoy the activity itself, rather
than working toward the specific reward. It has been found that when rewards are
offered before a task is performed, students are generally concerned with the reward and
not the activity. Therefore, the task becomes less important and student not only spends
less time doing the necessary work but also is no longer intrinsically motivated (Kohn,
1993).

Central questions that I would like to address include what programs are being
used (school wide and within the individual classroom), how effective are the
reinforcements and punishers, and are they the best technique to motivate students to
learn and behave?

To fully comprehend the dynamics of these classroom management techniques,
one must understand the definitions of both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated
behavior. In Deci's study, as cited in Extrinsic Reinforcement in the Classroom (Deci,
Koestner & Ryan, 2001), intrinsically motivated behavior exists when there is no
recognizable reward, except the activity itself.

Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsically motivated behavior refers to behavior
controlled by stimuli external to the task (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004). With these
definitions in mind, one must consider if using one method is better than the other or if a
combination of extrinsic and intrinsic is more effective. Although, there is debate over
both practices, each researcher has his or her own beliefs on the effectiveness of rewards
on students. Therefore, after reviewing the literature, one might believe that the best
practice will depend on what the school values and teacher preference within his or her classroom.

**Extrinsic Reward Debate: Beneficial or Problematic**

Controversy began over the use of extrinsic reinforcement in the 1970s with studies attempting to examine the effects of reward on an individual's intrinsic motivation (Akin-Little & Lovett, 2004).

Some researchers believe that a balanced approach, in using both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, can be beneficial to a student's self-esteem, confidence, work ethic/performance and personal growth (The Institute of Academic Excellence, 1997). In reality, most behaviors are probably sustained through a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic consequences (Williams & Stockdale, 2004). The majority of researchers agree that external, extrinsic motivators should be used in moderation within the classroom setting for student development of intrinsic motivation. Educators must take into consideration that extrinsic rewards are not universally effective, meaning that one student may consider a good grade to be motivating whereas another may not care about a grade (William & Stockdale, 2004). Therefore, when offering a student an incentive for learning and/or behaving it must be meaningful to change the response.

Cook (2003) states motivation must first be external before it can be internal. Some activities could have an external reinforcement aspect before the person internalizes the importance of activity for themselves. In Covington and Mueller's (2001) study, as cited in Classroom Management Strategies (William & Stockdale, 2004), human beings always anticipate some payoff for their actions, intrinsically driven...
or not. Generally, I agree with this statement because we are inclined to complete a task, if we are given something.

Arguments in favor of extrinsic motivators include that it is necessary for educators to use tangible rewards for immediate feedback of certain student populations. These populations may include students with learning disabilities, the behaviorally challenged and minority students (Witzel & Mercer, 2003). It has been argued that tangible rewards can communicate to minority students the value that school places on academics and provide immediate reinforcement of their success (The Institute for Academic Excellence, 1997).

Therefore, it could be beneficial and not problematic to use tangible rewards or praise for children that need immediate feedback on their behavior or academic progress within the classroom setting. Yet, this does not signify that educators should hand out rewards or praise like business cards to students. Kohn suggests in Punished by Rewards that educators and parents should make praise as specific as possible (Kohn, 1993). Do not praise people, only what people do and also avoid phony praise (Kohn, 1993). Educators need to identify the purpose of the activity and the reward. Then determine the child's underlying motives for the behavior; is it on behalf of extrinsic persuasion or for the sake of doing the activity?

Other researchers describe the distinct value of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. These researchers believe that extrinsic rewards can be detrimental to a student's academic and behavioral progress. Williams and Stockdale (2004) state a principal advantage of intrinsic motivation is that the student is not dependent on the teacher's presence, prodding, or encouragement to keep actively engaged.
This could be a major benefit, seeing that educators have numerous students to attend too and if each student needed extrinsic reward to energize them, it would take up a considerable amount of time, energy and possibly money from the teacher. Another factor that must be considered is that a tangible reward may become insufficient to the student and he or she will expect larger or different rewards in the future that the educator is unable or not willing provide (Kohn, 1993).

Intrinsic reward systems are believed more beneficial because they promote personal growth, curiosity, and social interaction among peers (Sweet, 1996). It is also believed that students will become risk takers and participate regularly in challenging activities. Intrinsic motivation lasts longer, supports sustained thinking and is critical in the development of higher order strategy skills (Sweet, 1996). Due to the lasting affects of intrinsic rewards, students will possibly be able to use higher levels of thinking and make connections across the curriculum because of their curiosity and love of learning.

Longevity of Rewards

Many researchers believe that rewards are effective in the short term because the value of the reward changes over a period of time. For behavior changes to last, it is usually necessary to keep the rewards coming (Kohn, 1993). For example, when you offer a child a reward for picking up scraps around the classroom each day, he or she will expect a reward each time you ask them for their help doing the activity. Yet, at some point it is possible that the student will devalue the reward and therefore no longer want to participate in the activity. These reinforcements usually do not change the child's underlying behavior; he or she either wants to help or not. Kohn (1993) states that if your objective is to get long-term quality, to help students become careful thinkers and self-
directed learners...tangible rewards are counterproductive because they are believed to work only temporarily.

Summary

Within the educational system, teachers use many classroom and behavioral management techniques that can impact motivation and behavior. Extrinsic rewards have been a popular technique throughout the education world for many years. Yet, it is undecided whether this practice is beneficial or detrimental to students’ motivation.

Professionals continue to disagree on whether extrinsic rewards should be eliminated because of their impact on intrinsic motivation. It is my goal to observe the use of extrinsic rewards, gather perceptions of the effect of extrinsic rewards on student behavior via interviews and therefore observe the affect of the reward practices used on student behavior. The results of this study will provide feedback for the classroom teacher and information for the researcher.
Section III-Methodology

Rationale for Qualitative Design

The qualitative design was chosen because the researcher is investigating the affects of extrinsic rewards on behavior and motivation. It is qualitative in nature due to that the fact that the research takes place in a natural setting (a mainstream classroom), methods for data collection include observation of students/teachers, the review of documents (educational journals, books, & handbooks) and teacher interviews. This study was extremely flexible because it was in an elementary classroom setting with young students. For the purpose of this study, I tried to triangulate the data by observing the students within the classroom study, interviewing teachers throughout the school and conducting a literature review. Based on a review of research, I decided that interviewing students would not be valid or reliable due to their age.

Qualitative research is defined as “investigative process where the researcher gradually makes sense of social phenomena by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of the study” (Creswell, 2003). Throughout Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, Creswell distinguishes the differences between Quantitative and Qualitative research. The following is a collection of characteristics that qualitative research displays.

1) Research takes place in a natural setting. For example the participants place of work, school or home. This allows the researcher to observe the participant(s) in a setting he or she is familiar with.
2) Multiple methods are used for data collection. Some methods used for qualitative research include: open-ended interviews, documents (vary in nature), informal observation and visual data (video recordings, etcetera). Researchers seek to gain a rapport with their participant(s) and do not disturb the site more than necessary.

3) Qualitative research is flexible. As research progresses questions may change and data collection procedures might change. Due to the inductive nature of qualitative research, the researcher begins by gathering information (in the beginning) and generally ends with their theory. Therefore allowing flexibility throughout the research process.

4) Qualitative researcher is interpretive because the researcher filters his or her findings through a personal view.

5) The researcher continually reflects on his or her self throughout the study by acknowledging biases, preconceived notions and self interests.
Site Selection/Participants

This study was conducted at a title one elementary school in Washington County, Oregon. The school currently has an enrollment of 400 students for the 2006-2007 school year. The majority of the student population is considered to be low socioeconomic status, with the minority population at an eighty percentile. The student population consists of approximately eighty percent Latino and twenty percent Caucasian. Within the school there are three classrooms of each grade, Kindergarten through fourth. In first through fourth grades, two classrooms are broken into dual immersion classes (students switch every other week between English and Spanish learning activities) and one classroom is English-speaking only.

This site was chosen for the study because the researcher is familiar with the staff and the classroom management techniques that are used, not only within the classroom but throughout the school. The study took place in a first grade classroom where student age is approximately six to seven years old.

Daily activities that occurred at the site during the research study included carpet time, leveled/language reading groups, mathematics, center time and art activities. This study was not intended to be disruptive in nature due to observation of the children and classroom teacher(s). The researcher also completed a series of short interviews with both the classroom teacher and teachers throughout the school. Educators interviewed have different classroom levels (1st, 2nd, 3rd grades and title one) and a wide range of teaching experience. During my investigation, I also interviewed both special education assistants and general instructional assistants. This allowed me to acquire multiple perspectives on the positive behavior system program.
The Role of the Researcher

As a substitute teacher and special needs assistant, I have become interested in, and somewhat familiar with, multiple classroom management techniques that involve using intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for altering student behavior or academic performance. Throughout this study, my role was to evaluate the students by way of observation, reviewing documents and school-wide policies and conducting interviews. Due to the age group of the students, it became necessary to be involved with classroom activities and rotate from small group to small group. Therefore, some classroom participation took place to fully understand the dynamics of the classroom management technique.

This study looks at the affects on student behavior and motivation due to the practice of using external reward systems. As the researcher I brought some biases to the study including, the assumption that the elementary teacher uses an extrinsic reward system based on the age group that is being taught. Also, that the extrinsic reward system prevails over intrinsic because students find it difficult to manage their behavior and this reinforcement "motivates" the student(s) to change their behavior. Questions that required further exploration were how extrinsic rewards or motivators affect the student’s behavior? Do these young students expect a reward to follow directions and be good listeners?
Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection and observation took place predominately in a first grade classroom for four weeks, two and a half to three hours per week. Within the classroom there were twenty-nine students; sixteen males and thirteen females. Data collection was hand written in a spiral notebook with pencil. Observation tables of raw data and interview tables are located in appendix one.

Guidelines for observations included watching the children and teacher in their natural learning environment. The focus of observation included the ambiance of the classroom, student/teacher interactions, student involvement in assignments (both carpet time and desk work), individual student behaviors and extrinsic reward practices within the classroom. After each observation session, the researcher debriefed with the classroom teacher to clarify any questions about classroom practices.

The researcher also had the opportunity to copy the Positive Behavior System (PBS) handbook that is handed out to staff at the beginning of the year; notes were also hand written in pencil on the back of this document. This document will not be included within the project due to confidentiality.

During the four week period, interviews were also conducted with eight teachers throughout the school (both classroom teachers and instructional assistants). Each interviewee was read questions and the researcher hand wrote the answers using pen and pencil on an interview sheet. A copy of the interview document is located in appendix two.

In the process of analyzing the data collected, I looked for patterns within my observations and interviews. These included reoccurring phrases and perceptions of
extrinsic reward practices and also student reactions to reward practices displayed. To ensure that researcher bias was kept to a minimum, I had three different methods to gather data, including classroom observations, teacher interviews and literature review. By triangulating the collected data through these methods, it was the researcher’s intent to uncover best classroom management techniques using extrinsic rewards.

2) Consistent observations of students and the classroom teacher over a period of one month (three hours a week), in order to acquire motivational patterns within the classroom.

3) Research Sources—A variety of sources were used as a foundation for the research, including journals and books.

4) Correspondence with Academic Advisor throughout the duration of the research project.
Methods of Verification

The following methods were used to demonstrate validity:

1) Triangulation of the data-Data was collected from several sources including informal observations of students/teachers, interviews with the classroom teacher and instructional assistants working within the classroom/school.

2) Consistent observations of students and the classroom teacher over a period of one month (three hours a week), in order to acquire motivational patterns within the classroom.

3) Research Sources-A variety of sources were used as a foundation for the research including journals and books.

4) Correspondence with Academic Advisor throughout the duration of the research project.
Ethical Considerations

The researcher has shared a detailed research plan with the principal and the classroom teachers. The researcher has obtained the required permission from the school principal before beginning research within the elementary classroom. Also, the researcher has explained to the principal, teachers and instructional assistants interviewed, that names (both the teachers and students) will be omitted within the report to maintain student, teacher and school confidentiality.
Data

Data for this project was gathered predominantly in a first grade English-speaking classroom due to language barrier of the researcher. Within the classroom there were twenty nine students; sixteen males and thirteen females. Individual desks were arranged into five small groups that consist of four to five students. Two students were isolated from the groups due to extensive behavior issues. The atmosphere of the classroom was always dynamic with students busily working and chatting amongst themselves.

During the time I spent in the classroom, I observed that students have difficulties staying seated on the carpet and listening to the teacher while she is giving directions. Yet, when students were able to move around, do their seat work and chat with one another they seem to have a considerable attention span. My first objective when collecting data was to observe the ambiance of the classroom and also to find out what types of extrinsic rewards were given to students both school-wide and within the classroom.

What extrinsic rewards systems are being used currently in Elementary classrooms and throughout the studied school?

In 2005, administrators and educators throughout the school decided to use a positive behavior system (PBS). PBS is a school-wide program that has been developed to enhance the learning of all students by using a proactive approach to social and educational challenges. The purpose of the program is to use numerous strategies for promoting important social and learning outcomes while preventing negative or problematic behaviors. It is stated by some as a process for individualized decision making, planning and problem solving. PBS has an instructional approach, teaching
students behavioral expectations, social behaviors that are expected in an academic setting and encouraging academic excellence.

The positive behavior system instills student behavior expectations that the staff develops. Expectations are developed for the playground (recess), office, library, cafeteria/lunch line, restrooms, hallways, bus safety rules and also what is expected during assemblies, an emergency and after school activities. For each place and/or situation there are four categories in which students are encouraged to show exemplary behavior, including be respectful, be responsible, be safe and always do your best. For example the following are displayed under playground/recess expectations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Be respectful</th>
<th>Be responsible</th>
<th>Be safe</th>
<th>Always do your best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Play fair and be a good sport</td>
<td>*Follow adult directions</td>
<td>*Stay in assigned areas</td>
<td>*Be kind to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Include everyone</td>
<td>*Get and use the equipment the right way</td>
<td>*When whistle blows freeze and listen</td>
<td>*Solve your problems by talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*Put equipment away when done</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source (Schools PBS handbook)

When students display these positive behaviors they have the opportunity to earn a special coupon/ticket from an adult (administrator, teacher, instructional assistant or substitute) that indicates one of the four behaviors he or she displayed. After receiving the ticket, he or she can put it into a classroom can and have the chance to get their picture taken and put on a bulletin in the main hall. One ticket is chosen for each grade per week. Therefore, there is approximately a one in ninety chance that a student will be chosen a ticket winner.
When a student is chosen he or she goes to the principal’s office, has their picture taken, shares what positive behavior they were displaying and gets a prize (pencil, candy, etcetera). Within the classroom, teachers are encouraged to choose three students as pride winners; prizes vary from classroom to classroom.

Expectations are reviewed within classrooms throughout the month. Approximately every two weeks a specific area is chosen to review. For example, teachers are responsible for reviewing the four school-wide expectations (respectful, responsible, safe, and always do your best), what these expectations “look like” in the particular area or during a situation and brainstorm why these rules are important with students.

It is also recommended that teachers demonstrate these rules and provide opportunities for the children to display these behaviors via role playing, performing skits, drawing, writing, class discussion and/or reading a book that demonstrates the expectation. All students participate in a PBS celebration assembly that reinforces positive behaviors and expectations.

Reviewing expectations is an important aspect of PBS because it is designed to be proactive, meaning that it focuses on positive behavior and future events instead of negative behavior and the past. When using the positive behavior system model, one must consider that it takes three years to address all student behaviors. PBS is included as an extrinsic system because students receive a reward (a pride ticket and a possible prize) for outstanding behavior.

While observing the first grade classroom, I noted that six males and one female are on an individual behavior plan called red card/green card. This program is designed
for selected students to reflect upon their individual behaviors and choices. Students who participate within this program have a formal behavior plan, which includes both teacher/specialist and parental input.

When the student is making good choices he or she receives a green card, whereas if he or she is making poor choices a red card is given by the teacher. Each time a card is given, the student reflects over the behavior that led them to the particular color. Cards are counted at the end of the day. If students have more green cards they receive a treat; red cards indicate a possible note home from the teacher.

Another extrinsic reward system that is used daily is a point system (teacher versus class). When students follow directions, stay on task and finish their work the class earns points but if they are doing the opposite the teacher earns points. If students receive more points than the teacher, the children celebrate with a round of applause clap, a group song or possibly a sweet treat.

Lastly, students can earn color spots on “Spotty the Dragon.” Once Spotty’s spots have been filled, students celebrate by having lunch and a short movie within the classroom. These rewards are examples that are used within an individual classroom. Rewards vary throughout the school, depending on the classroom teacher.

How do educators extrinsic rewards to keep students on task behaviorally and academically?

After observing what types of extrinsic rewards are given school wide and in the first grade classroom, I had the opportunity to interview eight adults within the school to gain insight about teacher perceptions of the effect of extrinsic rewards on student behavior. I interviewed classroom teachers and instructional assistants. The interview
consisted of eight questions about the positive behavior system and what methods teachers find most effective for their students. Interview summary tables are located in appendix three. All responses are anonymous due to confidentiality purposes.

Observations and teacher perceptions demonstrate that educators at the elementary school find the PBS program effective in keeping students on task behaviorally and academically by structuring the day with expectations. These expectations range from how to conduct oneself in the hallway to proper assembly behavior. The positive behavior system's initial goal is to reward positive behaviors verses reflecting over negative behavior. Although, when a student is out of control consequences are enforced.

For example, when a student is found hurting another child, he or she is sent to the office and must speak with the principal or counselor. These students may receive a "stop and think," which allows the child to take a break and think about what he or she has done. This gives the student an opportunity to reflect over their negative behavior and develop a plan for change. When a student is sent to the office for a stop and think session, his or her parents are called. Stop and think slips are sent home for review by the parent and require a signature.

It is my interpretation upon interviewing educators that throughout the last two years, many educators have found PBS to be a functional and promising program for their students. They are optimistic that the program is teaching students positive behaviors both for their educational career and beyond. Extrinsic rewards such as verbal praise, computer time, free time, class points, treats and tangible rewards are given to students depending on the classroom teacher's management philosophy.
The effect of extrinsic reward practices on student behavior

During the observation period, I observed the first grade teacher use several management methods such as the PBS program, a group point system, red card/green card and other extrinsic rewards including stickers, stamps, the treasure box and eatable treats (lollipops and other candies). The most popular reward being the pride ticket (from the PBS program) or for students on behavioral plans the red card/green card pieces.

These rewards were given out to several students for many different reasons such as being respectful (of classmates and the teacher), be responsible (turning in work, listening to directions) and practicing safety (no running, etcetera). For example, when a student was being respectful by sitting quietly at carpet and listening to the classroom story, she received a pride ticket.

Another example is when a student pushed in classmate’s chairs; he received a ticket for being safe and responsible. These students took initiative and displayed positive behavior. When speaking to the classroom teacher, she explained that some children always display positive behavior, whether they get a reward or not. Not all children need an incentive to be well behaved or enticed to do well academically because they are intrinsically inclined to do so. Yet, some students need constant, immediate feedback, which can be verbal or tangible.

When discussing intrinsic motivation we must take into consideration that perceptions of intrinsic motivation vary from educator to educator. Therefore, it is challenging to measure or find evidence if a student is truly intrinsically inclined to do something or if they are seeking teacher praise or acknowledgement. Some observations I made during my time in the classroom of possible intrinsic behavior include a student
coming into the classroom, putting her back pack away and getting reading books out without being asked to do so, a student volunteer taking another child down to office to get daily medication or putting ones head down during transition time without being told to do so or expecting a treat as some students seemed too.

As educators we must remember that developmentally, first graders need time to move around and generally have short-lived attention spans. Therefore, the teacher uses rewards such as special claps (a round of applause), sign language and dancing as rewards. These activities keep students on task by allowing them time to move and a short break.

Tangible rewards such as stickers and candies seem to keep students on track momentarily within the classroom. The teacher seems to use these as "quick fixes," meaning they extrinsically motivate the students to stay on task or facilitate appropriate behavior for a short time. Due to the variety of perceived behavioral challenges within the classroom, the educator uses multiple reward systems to keep the children on task. Behavioral challenges include not listening, continuously disruptive to the teacher or peers, not respectful, yelling, and wandering around the classroom and refusing to do work.

As a result, one method that is effective for one student may not be effective for another. The majority of students do not expect a reward for their behavior and rewards are generally given spontaneously. However, some students have a behavior plan that focuses on using rewards to modify how they behave such as red card/green card.

Unfortunately, the students who participate in the red card/green card reinforcement do not seem to internalize the importance of behaving. Therefore, the
program is just something they do and does not permanently affect their inappropriate behavior. This makes me wonder if extrinsic rewards change student behavior temporarily or lastingly.

Throughout my investigation of reward practices, I have read that many researchers believe extrinsic rewards change student behavior momentarily because once a reward is given to a child so many times, it becomes devalued. Furthermore, we must also take into consideration that what one child values may not be valued by another. For example, a child may disregard a pride ticket because they do not care about being praised for appropriate behavior and following expectations.

I observed this lack of desire from one male student within the first grade classroom. The student blatantly stated, "I don’t care about getting a pride ticket, they are stupid." Either the student does not value what the reward is or there is the possibility that he does not believe he can obtain the ticket. This wealth of information leads me to believe that most extrinsic rewards change behavior momentarily because the underlying behavioral issues are not being addressed. Students need to be intrinsically motivated to do their best behaviorally and academically.
Summary and Conclusions

There are numerous approaches to classroom management. Commonly, at the elementary level, educators use external manipulators such as grades, verbal praise, stickers, stamps, treats, point systems and behavior plans to keep students on task. Within the target school these methods and others were used to reward students for displaying positive behavior. Educators believe that these methods work to keep their students on task behaviorally and academically. More importantly, they have implemented the PBS program to instill values and rules for the academic setting and possibly for the future.

After observing the first grade class and becoming familiarized with the school wide program, I have come to the conclusion that the PBS program is effective for students with "average" behavioral issues. These students are intrinsically inclined to do well at school. PBS gives these students structure and guidelines for what is expected of them during the day. I believe that these children would display appropriate behavior with or without the use of PBS.

PBS tries to promote intrinsic motivation by being proactive and focusing on positive behavior versus negative. Allowing children to know what is expected of them; [be respectful, responsible, safe and always do your best]. If used appropriately, teachers will not bribe the students by the reward (the ticket) each and every time they show positive behavior. Teachers will not hand rewards out like business cards but identify the positive behavior (what the child accomplished) and make sure the child understands what he or she did to receive the reward.
Although PBS seems to promote community throughout the school, there is a small percentage of students that it does not reach; students with intensive behavioral issues. These students are bombarded with numerous rewards systems including PBS, red card/green card (behavioral plan), smiley charts and other incentives. My observations lead me to conclude that these methods are ineffective in helping motivate these students to behave themselves and be academically successful because they are not addressing underlying issues. Exploration of the reasoning behind these issues could be explored within another research paper. Further investigation of intrinsic motivation also could be addressed in the future.

My fundamental question for my research project is what affects do extrinsic reward practices have on student behavior? I have come to the conclusion that reward practices play a large role on what the elementary student does throughout his or her day. By extrinsically rewarding the student, teachers obtain the desired behavior. Tangible rewards provide behavioral and academic motivation for a short time. Unfortunately, research and observations suggest that students may become reliant on the reward, expecting something each time they show a positive behavior and for some students the reward becomes insufficient.

As a beginning teacher, I wanted to understand how extrinsic rewards affect the student’s behavior and learning process. Throughout my short career, I have given students extrinsic rewards such as grades, free time, verbal praise, stickers, candy and points for good behavior and academic success. I admit that these rewards have been given without much thought because I did not understand the theories behind extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. My intentions were for the students to listen quietly, raise their
hands, finish their work and stay on task. Therefore, I was handing out rewards like business cards, just to keep the class under control or to do what I needed or wanted them to do.

Upon the realization that these rewards are quick fixes to the problems that arise throughout the day and that many children become fixated on making the grade or obtaining teacher/classmate approval, I will strive to change my practices. I want children to have a sense of classroom community where they feel safe to share their ideas, to enjoy learning, to become life long learners and be intrinsically motivated. We must focus less on giving phony praise for meaningless tasks and focus more on the positive attributes the student brings to the classroom community.
References


Observations

Table 1
Week One-Focus on the ambiance of the classroom, school and classroom dynamics. Observed and spoke with classroom teacher for approximately three hours.

1. Approximately 400 students within the school. Minority population is eighty percent. Caucasian/English speaking population is approximately twenty percent. School has a large population of students who are considered under the poverty line/free-reduced lunch. Title one school. School houses grades Kindergarten-fourth grade. Three classes of each grade. School is located in Western Washington County.

2. Classroom dynamics-First grade classroom. English speaking classroom (not two way immersion program). There are twenty-nine students (16 male students and 13 female students). Age of students is six to seven years old.

3. Students are broken into five small table groupings. 4-5 students per group. 2 students are isolated from the group setting-behavior issues (concerns with getting along with other students-arguing, hitting, kicking).

4. Classroom schedule displayed on the blackboard (SSR, reading groups, calendar, mathematics, lunch/recess, centers, PE/music, recess, special projects, go home).

5. When children come in they put their back packs away, get sharpened pencils from teacher's desk and get reading books for SSR out—intrinsically motivated? Get acknowledgement from teacher (thanks for getting books for your table--) Students come in from reading groups (they are grouped by reading ability and first language) and sit on the carpet for calendar. Teacher sang “rain, rain go away” in sign language, which seemed to get students attention. Posted around the calendar bulletin is the alphabet in sign language. All students participated in this-Two children are the leaders of calendar time. Call on students to help. One boy shouted out the answers, teacher asked him to raise hand. This behavior continued. One student sent back to desk for continually misbehaving—sat at desk and watched other children on carpet.

6. Students sent to desk where math packets are waiting for them—teacher wants to give some direction during transition—goes to blackboard where point system is—they put heads down and get some points for themselves. Listen and start working. Teacher seems to observe some of the students on red/green card. Hands out a red card to a boy who is excessively talking to group mates. Stop short on math and read a story—some students receive pbs tickets for actively listening. Go to lunch.

Table 2
Week Two-Familiarization of reward practices used in school and classroom. Observed and then followed up with teacher for two and a half hours.

1. Teacher has a point system. Ms. ------ versus student. Students earn points when they sit quietly at desks during transitions and teacher earns points when they don’t. It doesn’t seem there is a certain amount of points that each receives on a given time. Just whatever the adult feels living giving either side. This is on the blackboard; white paper divided down the middle student vs. teacher. Points are given throughout the day. Teacher states students generally “win” and receive a “round of applause” clap or sing the bubble gum song.

2. On calendar wall there is a drawing of a dragon that has spots. The spots are filled in
with marker. Students can earn these points when they receive a compliment from another teacher, adult or cafeteria staff. Upon completion, students get to eat lunch with teacher in the classroom and watch a short movie.

3. Sign language-teacher uses sign language to calm students and get their attention. Alphabet, Humpty Dumpty, Rain Rain Go Away, signs student names (kids guess). Students get real quiet and participate-seems to be a calming/transition exercise for children.

4. Jelly Bean Reading-students read/fill out jelly bean, have parents sign and turn in. Periodically, teacher chooses a jelly bean from each grade. Student receives a book of choice to keep.

5. Smiley charts-students are judged on behavior and academics throughout the day. Sent home and signed by parents-eight students within the class use this to tell parents how their day went.

6. Red card/green card for students who need extra behavior modification. This is implemented by the school psychologist, special education department, parent and the classroom teacher. If the target student is displaying “positive” behavior he or she gets a green card, “negative” behavior-red card. Cards are counted at the end of the day-more green cards-win a prize, more red cards-nothing or note from teacher (depends on the students).

7. School wide program-positive behavior system. Adopted in 2005. Promotes school and learning outcomes. Proactive approach. Educators develop expectations for school wide practices, including hallways, cafeteria, office, library, restrooms and safety guidelines. If respectful, responsible, safe or get “caught” doing your best receive a ticket. Put in classroom can. Principal chooses one ticket from each grade—get picture took-tell why you got it and it is posted on a bulletin board in the hallway-receive a small prize (pencil, toy or bracelet). Ninety percent chance student will be chosen to go visit the principal. At end of the week three tickets are chosen from each can to receive a classroom prize (in first grade students get to choose a prize from the treasure box).

8. Students transitioned to math packets. Sit at their desk and individually work on leveled math packets. Upon completion or in need of help go to adult within the classroom. Quietly working, getting up when needed—one boy got up and wandered around, teacher told him to sit and he did. IA (instructional assistant) handed out pbs coupons to students who were staying on task and do a good job. Lunch time, one student collects math packets, groups are chosen by readiness-determined by teacher. Some students did not push in chairs—little girl pushed in for others, received a pbs ticket.

9. Students come in from lunch-go potty and get drinks of water. One student tells the teacher he is going to take the student who needs medication down to office-asked classroom teacher about this-kids help to remind her, this happens three times a day—she stated that some kids expect a treat for doing this others just do it—at the beginning of year she offered a treat, now it is not as common.
### Table 3

**Week Three**-Two hours of interviewing and thirty minutes of observation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewed staff throughout the school and received a PBS handbook (skimmed and reviewed—asked a few questions of teacher.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Twenty minutes—Classroom teacher explained to students why one student received a pride ticket and another didn’t. Put emphasis that this student always displays positive behaviors at school. Went around the class and pointed out students that are always “good.” Then they reviewed some of the expectations for the hallway and also other ways to get a pbs ticket—be respectful, responsible, safe and always do your best. Talked about what these mean—students and teacher examples. After conversation students volunteered answers about what classifies a mammal. All students actively participated-

### Table 4

**Week Four**—Observed for two and a half hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students come in from lunch get drink of water and bathroom. One student takes another down to office for medication—asks for treat, does not receive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students break up into the six centers; rotate throughout centers over the next hour. Teacher reinforces one female. This child has emotional concerns and often doesn’t like to participate in doing any activities or seat work. Teacher praises student in front of class by saying ----is doing a great job, using her as an example for the other students. Says theses types of things throughout get time. During this time students are offered a sweet treat and so am I—skittles. Teacher reminds a few of the male students to get to work—hands out four green cards and a red one to a boy who is continuously not work. Students are asked to go back to desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher goes to blackboard—point system—students receive points. Tables are called to line up for music by group color in sign language. Some tables are still talking teacher reminds that they will not go until they settle down. Kids get in line and teacher waits until students are ready to go. While students are at music I clarify questions with teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Go out to playground—some students are reminded of behavior rules (don’t run on bark dust or on play structure). Kids just running around. Bell rings—kids stop and freeze. Aides blow whistles, kids walk to class. Students caught running have to go back to starting point and walk. Some students come back with pbs tickets and put in can. All adults can handout pbs tickets—for being responsible, respectful, safe or doing best. Tell their teacher about the tickets and why they received them. Kids act like they are proud of themselves for receiving them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Students come in and sit on the floor for a story and get ready to go home.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interview Summary Table

#### Table 1

| Question One: How is the positive behavior program implemented throughout the school? |
|---|---|
| “Students receive praise for being responsible, respectful, safe and doing their best.” |
| “Students are recognized for positive behaviors [that are set about the school—including pathways, office, bathroom, etcetera], either verbally or with a pride ticket. These are placed into a classroom can and then a student from each grade is selected/recognized on a school bulletin board. Students that don’t follow the rules may receive a verbal warning or a stop and think. If negative behaviors continue other action maybe necessary, such as contacting the parents or developing a behavior contract.” |

| Question Two: What are the benefits for the children in using the positive behavior program? |
|---|---|
| “It improves the child’s self esteem and gives them a goal to strive for.” |
| “By using this program children are learning life long goals and expectations.” |
| “We [adults] get to explain school wide rules and students are recognized for positive behavior.” |
| “We’re always looking to reward positive behavior and not punish bad behavior. This system helps show students conduct for life.” |

| Question Three: What are the shortcomings of the positive behavior program? |
|---|---|
| “The reward system is weak. Three students are chosen for the prize and it is random picking. It is unrealistic because children in kindergarten through fourth grades need immediate feedback.” |
| “The system takes three years to be fully effective for all students.” |
| “Students should display many of these behaviors without being rewarded.” |

| Question Four: In your opinion is the method [positive behavior program] effective? Why or Why not? |
|---|---|
| “Yes because students have a positive response to it.” |
| “It depends on the student’s temperament, their average behavior and how his or her day is going.” |
| “Yes, it is very effective because it is not just limited to school.” |

| Question Five: What are your students learning from the positive behavior program? |
|---|---|
| “What is expected of them at school and in life.” |
| “How to be respectful, responsible, safe and always do their best.” |
| “Their learning how to work together and also to check one another” (meaning they remind each other of the rules and expectations.” |

| Question Six: In your opinion, does the positive behavior system change student behavior momentarily or lastingly? |
|---|---|
| “Lastingly, students show a long term behavioral change.” |
| “Lastingly, students learn what is expected of them at school.” |
| “Momentarily, for some; lastingly for others. At this school, children move to Mexico or to schools throughout the district so PBS is not always successful. I believe that PBS will work lastingly for students who stay at the school for the majority of their elementary
Appendix One, page 5

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Seven: What other methods are used within the classroom for positive reinforcement?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“In my classroom I use verbal reminders, class recognition for good behavior and treats.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When the whole class shows good behavior, I give them a treat.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I use verbal praise, a point system and at the end of the week (generally Fridays) they receive an edible treat or a treasure.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Treats, free time or time on the computer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Eight: What method do you find most effective within your classroom?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The most effective method for my classroom is pride tickets.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I find that it depends on the student(s). Some just need a pride ticket, others red card/green card or verbal praise. Class points for the whole group.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It depends on the age group. For first graders, extrinsic motivators such as pride tickets, points, stickers, treats or treasures work best because they receive immediate feedback. Self reflection is also an effective method.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix Two

Interview Questions

1) How is the positive behavior program implemented throughout the school?

2) What are the benefits for the children in using the positive behavior program?

3) What are the shortcomings of the positive behavior program?

4) In your opinion the method (positive behavior program) effective? Why or Why not?

5) What are your students learning from the positive behavior program?

6) In your opinion, does the positive behavior system change student behavior momentarily or lastingly?

7) What other methods are used within the classroom for positive reinforcement?

8) What methods do you find most effective within your classroom?