

If a program is based solely on behavior change through the use of rewards, the results will be short-lived...

Many students who participate in alternative programs are at odds with mainstream education and their behaviors are considered unacceptable. Educators are aware that punishment is counterproductive with this group, but the question remains whether offering rewards for positive actions produces lasting changes in attitudes and behavior.

Research has proven that behavior modification programs, based solely on rewards without a cognitive component are rarely successful at producing lasting changes in attitudes or even behavior. When rewards stop, people usually return to the way they acted before the program began (Eric Digest).

Both rewards and punishments are forms of manipulating behavior but do nothing to change the thought processes that underlie those behaviors. Intrinsic motivation is qualitatively different from extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan).

If a program is based solely on behavior change through the use of rewards, the results will be short-lived and will not transfer those behavior changes to other settings. Rewards motivate students to get rewards but do not facilitate the students' need to analyze and change the behavior patterns that have led to their difficulties in the school system.

Rewards as a Motivational Factor

Teachers may be reluctant to use tangible rewards in their programs since many believe that the goal of education is to help develop self-discipline using problem-solving and self-control.

Rewards often seem counterproductive to these efforts because students are taught to rely on external control. This statement is true if rewards are over-used. It is important, however for educators to recognize that students go through a stage in their moral and emotional development when a major motivator for obeying rules is the provision of external rewards.

Some students at the beginning stages of an alternative behavior program, who are yet uninterested in returning to a regular school setting, do not participate thoughtfully in goal setting for behavior change.

The Difference Between Rewards And Bribes

These students, however, will work for rewards such as:

- extra time in class to do their own activities
- lunch privileges
- activities within the community such as swimming or playing a sport.

Kohlberg outlined stages of moral development that he found to be sequential, but not age-related. Students who are at the earliest stage of moral development, known as the Pre-conventional or Pre-moral stage, obey rules to obtain rewards or favor, or to avoid pain or punishment. Therefore, some students may require a behavioristic intervention, using tangible reinforcements, as part of their program.

It is important to distinguish between tangible rewards and bribes. A bribe is given contingent on stopping misbehavior, ensuring that students will misbehave in order to set up the same rewarding consequence in the future. A reward which focuses on the accomplishment of a set of positive goals can help motivate the continuation of acceptable behaviors in the future. In the sample program described in this handbook (see pages 34-37) students earn additional free time privileges by demonstrating appropriate pro-social behaviors.

In Support of Rewards

There is still a case to be made for the use of some rewards within a behavioral-cognitive approach.

The work by Proschaska on stages of attitudinal change also shows that cognitive behavior modification is effective for students at the Determination/Preparation and Action stages. Rewards used in this manner:

- provide information
- mark achievement of certain goals
- are not contingent on a specific set of individual behaviors.

Rewards applied systematically become targets for students, who are gaining the cognitive awareness of their behaviors. Students who are committed to a program of behavior change that is well constructed will work to achieve the rewards at specified achievement levels. Examples of these rewards include:

- earning lunch time away from the program
- community mentorships.

Rewards can be used as a means of recognition and a way of monitoring growth towards behavioral goals. However, it is important that ownership to meet these targets rest with individuals' achievement and

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