

Janelle Mayes-Henry  
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### Critique of Rewards

Rewards are a way to get a child's attention towards the desired behavior the teacher wants them to engage in. When critiquing rewards, we as teachers must understand that there are different types of awards. Students can earn material rewards (tangible gifts), activity rewards (special privileges), academic rewards (grades and recognition), praise and social rewards (verbal), and teacher rewards (special attention) (Wentzel and Brophy, 2014, p. 49).

When choosing to use rewards as a way to reinforce desired classroom learning behaviors teachers will want to make sure the rewards will be accessible for **all** students. According to Stipek, if rewards are only attainable for some students, then only those students who already work hard will continue to put forth "good effort" to obtain the rewards being offered (Stipek, 2002, p. 27). Students who consistently fail at being on task, completing the work in a timely, and producing only the best quality of work will not get to feel what it's like to be rewarded for the effort they do show towards completing the assignment. Some students may need more time, others students may need the assignment to be modified, or some students may need verbal encouragement. Yet, the teacher gets caught up or more focused on what the best work looks like and praise only the students who produce just that.

In addition to having to know what kind of rewards there are and how to make the rewards accessible to all students, you also have to know when and how to reward your students. Wentzel and Brophy (2014) wrote that teachers should, "Deliver rewards in ways that provide students with informative feedback and encourage them to appreciate their developing

knowledge and skills, not just to think about the rewards (p. 50). The first thing a teacher wants to do is establish the behavior that the rewards will reinforce. Rewards can both elicit positive and negative behaviors. Positive behaviors would be that students will start to pay attention more and do the work the teacher has assigned. The rewards would be something that the students will want to receive and would put forth the amount effort it takes to obtain those rewards. The negative factors are that students are only completing classwork just to receive something in return for their compliance. The effectiveness of the rewards can be short lived because students are only engaging in the desired behavior but only under the reward conditions (Stipek, 2002, p. 29). For example, if I were to tell my Kindergartners that the only way they can earn the 25 classroom points to receive cool pencils and erasers for doing their classwork is to complete the classwork quietly. Only then would my students make sure to finish everything within the time constraint I gave them. But, in trying to please me and earn points for the tangible rewards, my students might compromise their work by rushing through it. My students may miss the purpose behind the assignment and miss the learning target of the day. In addition to missing the learning target, once the 25 points have been reached and the rewards have been given out, my students might be noisy again and the students might not be as willing to complete classwork or activities for the rest of the day or week until another incentive is achievable. Although the effort was there to complete the work, the comprehension was lost, the intrinsic motivation was missing, and the quality of work suffered.

I actually like using rewards. I think that rewards get the students excited when **all** the students have a chance to obtain them. When I had 5<sup>th</sup> graders during student teaching, I had a classroom store where students earned points for more than just completing work. They could

earn points for thinking outside the box, doing something good, getting good grades, putting forth collaborative effort when engaged in group work, completing homework and classwork assignments, good behavior, class participation, and etc. The rewards were things that I had purchased from Walmart, Dollar Tree, and Sam's Club. I would buy cool looking school supplies with designs on the pencils, homework folders, erasers, pens, and notebooks. I would also buy stuff that the students liked to play with like bouncy balls, a gum ball machine, and other small inexpensive toys. Last but not least I would buy this big container of Twizzlers. I don't know what it was about Twizzlers, but my 5 grade girls loved them. I would like to use rewards in my classroom again, but this time I really want my rewards to be less tangible and more verbal and activity based. For example, I would like for my students to sing the Good Job song once everyone in the classroom completes the assignment or task. Maybe the class can have extra recess time when everyone meets the target of the lesson successfully, even if the assignment was modified for some.

In the end It is useful for teachers to reflect upon the kinds of rewards and punishments they use, the behavior upon which these consequences are contingent, and the degree to which rewards are available to all students (Stipek, 2002, p. 31). As the teacher I just have to find a way to motivate my students to *want* to engage in classwork, group work, and other learning activities so that they can see the value in learning these meaningful lessons rather than only engaging in class for a tangible reward or gift.

Stipek, D. (2002). Chapter 3. In *Motivation to learn: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Wentzel, K., & Brophy, J. (2014). Chapter 3. In *Motivating students to learn* (Fourth ed.).