

TCM - Chapter 6: (partial) Examining Motivational Strategies -- What Makes Your Students Care?

By John Shindler

In this Chapter:

- Comparison of Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivational Methods
- Common Extrinsic Strategies

The field of human motivation is a complex and expansive domain, not lacking in motivational experts or approaches. This chapter offers a limited survey of several classroom motivation strategies and endeavors to provide both theoretical and practical perspective for each. In the following chapter, a coherent approach to building student intrinsic motivation, or what will be referred to as a “psychology of success” is detailed.

Chapter Reflection 6-a: What do you think of when you hear the term “student motivation”? Is it the result of something that the teacher adds to the equation, or something that the student brings to the situation?

Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Motivation

When one thinks of the idea of classroom motivation it often brings to mind strategies that are used to provide incentives for students do something and/or do it with greater intensity. Yet, when we examine motivation more closely we recognize that it is not always something that is added to the situation. It can be something that comes from within us (Ryan & Deci, 2006). While an absolute distinction can be problematic, we might refer to some motivators as coming from the outside – or being *extrinsic*; and others coming from within – or being *intrinsic*. Extrinsic forms are those in which there is something added that comes from an external agent, such as a reward from the teacher (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). Contrastingly, intrinsic forms tap into internal sources. These forms of motivation may reflect the meeting of a basic need, or can come from an inner source of satisfaction, such as personal fulfillment. Figure 6.1 outlines some of the fundamental distinctions between internal versus external sources of motivation.

Figure 6.1 Comparison of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation

Love of Learning/Intrinsic	Desire for Reward/Extrinsic
Assumes the learning activity itself is satisfying	Assumes that an extrinsic motivator is necessary
Transferable to other contexts and situations	Not transferable outside the context that the reward is present
Can take time to support and cultivate	Can be relied upon after only a short period of introduction
Primarily process-focused	Primarily product-focused
Implies that the learning/task itself has value and meaning	Implies the learning/task is a means to an end (the reward)
Natural condition	Manufactured condition
Has long-term benefits	Benefits are short-term
Promotes a mentality that is useful when transferred into the context of building relationships	Promotes a mentality that may hinder the inclination to invest in the relationship-building process
Promotes ever-increasing levels of self-motivation	Promotes an ever-increasing need for rewards
Can be difficult to rely upon with a new group of students who are not accustomed to using these sources of motivation	Can be useful to incorporate to motivate a behavior that is unfamiliar or unformed

Examining the side-by-side comparison of intrinsic versus extrinsic sources of motivation in Figure 6.1, we can see that the advantages of extrinsic motivational techniques include their ability to help initiate and shape behaviors, and that they can be relied upon after only a relatively short period of introduction. In comparison however, supporting the development of our students’ intrinsic motivation will have substantial long-term advantages. Over time students with a more intrinsic motivational orientation, working within a needs-satisfying

environment, will tend to outperform those who have become accustomed to extrinsic rewards, reinforcement, and incentive (Dweck, 1999; Glasser, 1986; Ryan & Deci, 2006).

EXPLORING THE MOST POPULAR CLASSROOM MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

While it is true that there are few absolutes in the field of motivation it may be helpful to the practitioner to classify various motivational strategies into those that are more extrinsic and those that are more intrinsic. Given that it is true that at any time there are a multitude of motivational influences that exist inside and outside of any learner, it is still useful to examine each strategy independently. In the following section, many of the most common intentional strategies used in schools to motivate students are examined. These strategies (outlined in Figure 6.2) are divided into those that can best be characterized as extrinsic, those that encourage intrinsic motivation, and those that will have a variable effect depending on how they are applied.

Chapter Reflection 6-b: As we examine the most popular forms of motivation used in the classroom, reflect on your own classroom experience of each. Which forms of motivation did you find effective? Were they typically those that could be classified as intrinsic or extrinsic? In your mind, what were the benefits and problems of each type?

Figure 6.2 Survey of Common Classroom Motivational Strategies

Group A: Motivational Strategies that could best be characterized as Extrinsic/External		
Form/ Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
Grades and Rewards	Tangible, familiar, motivating to students who value them. Similar to monetary motivators in that they work as rewards.	Shift focus away from learning goals. Increased levels of the reinforcement may be necessary to maintain effect. Can rob students of intrinsic sources of motivation.
Incentives	Can be useful to define valued outcomes or processes. Help clarify the focus of the effort.	Can lose their value over time if used repeatedly. Students may expect them after a while.
Personal Praise	Feels good. Works to make student work harder. Works in short-term.	Can be addictive. Can reduce student's internal locus of control. Can be manipulative.
Punishments, Shaming and Threats	Works in the short-term. Motivates students who are used to that technique. Can help clarify the boundaries in a class.	Can promote students' merely avoiding getting caught. Does not inspire high quality behavior. Can create hostility and resentment.
Public Recognition	Can reward behavior and effort that may not be rewarded by peers. Feels good to recipient.	Can reinforce pre-existing "haves" and "have-nots." Requires consistency and thought.
Phone Calls Home	Can alert parents to patterns of which they may not have been aware. Demonstrates a commitment to the student's success. Positive calls can have a profoundly positive outcome.	Sends the message that the teacher may not be able to handle the student alone. Parents may not be helpful, may be the cause of the problem, or be enablers of the problem. Acts as public shaming. Can appear as a sign of weakness.
Group B: Strategies that can promote either Extrinsic or Intrinsic Motivational Mindsets depending upon how they are applied		
Form/ Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
Positive Reinforcement	Helps shape the desired behavior. Can be done quickly, efficiently and without much cost or planning. Can provide useful feedback for self-improvement.	Can create a dependence on the teacher's energy to motivate. Is external. If in the form of praise, essentially extrinsic.
Assessing Behavior/Effort	Can promote high quality behavior and effort. Begins working fairly quickly. Helps promote the concept of "good behavior." Can reward effort and process outcomes.	Can be very manipulative. Can make students dependent on an external evaluation of their behavior. Can be a tool for favoritism and bias.

Competition	Can raise the level of interest in the activity. Can bring the “team” aspect into an effort. Comparison is motivational to those who aspire to the top. Brings a “game” feeling to work.	Comparison can shift focus away from the quality of the effort. Breeds “fear of failure.” Promotes shortcuts and cheating to get the prize. Creates winners and losers.
Teacher Relationship	Can send a message that the student is valuable, accepted and special. Can help students care about academics. May be the only thing that some students respond to.	Takes time and energy. Can produce students who become excessively “needy.” Can work against students’ developing more internal sources of motivation.
Instructional Design	Can promote a context in which students are engaged, self-directed, feeling successful, invested and empowered. Can create a context where success leads to a love of learning and self-efficacy.	Can promote a context where students learn that schoolwork is mostly meaningless and irrelevant to their lives. Can reinforce the learning process to be an artificial exercise that involves little critical thinking or a sense of purpose.
Avoiding Penalties	If negative consequences are built into a context of a social contract and clear set of expectations, students learn not only to be responsible but also that there is a clear cause-and-effect relationship between their choices and their opportunities.	If negative consequences take the form of punishments, lectures, threats, or public humiliation and shaming, they learn to avoid the external agent of the penalty but do not learn any meaningful lesson. Is founded in pain-based logic (see ch’s 11 and 19).

Group C: Motivational Strategies that could best be characterized as Intrinsic/Internal

Form/ Strategy	Advantages	Disadvantages
Self- Improvement	Promotes intrinsic motivation. Helps students clarify their own goals and desires. More long-lasting sense of satisfaction.	Takes a lot of time to promote. Students who are used to more external motivation may not trust its value.
Increased Responsibility	Can create cause-and-effect between responsibility and freedom. Can increase responsible behavior.	Have to give away power to students. Creates more unpredictability in many outcomes.
Problem-Solving and Inquiry-Based Learning	Can promote greater resourcefulness. Can promote an emphasis on process. Motivational to students when they solve the problem/reach the goal.	Can be messy. Potentially less teacher control of outcome. Requires a great deal of intention and planning.
Basic Needs Satisfying Environment	Allows students to experience inner sources of satisfaction. Activities feel inherently meaningful and as though they are “going somewhere” psychologically; as a result there is little experience of boredom. Promotes student creativity and sets the stage for communal bonds among students.	Requires the teacher to be aware of students’ needs. Requires teacher to be purposeful and skilled at instructional design and classroom management. Teacher cannot entirely control other students who may undermine the quality of the environment.

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION TECHNIQUES

The following section examines what could be considered the leading *principally extrinsic* motivational strategies used in classrooms historically. These include grades, rewards, praise, punishments, public recognition and phone calls home. This section also includes recommendations for applying these strategies in a manner that produces more beneficial and effective results.

Grades

Grades are the most prevalent example of a formal extrinsic motivator used in schools. Their primary purposes are: 1) provide a concrete representation of either the completion of a task and/or the quality of a performance, and 2) act as an incentive for later benefits and opportunities. As representations of the level of quality performance, grades have only a symbolic meaning. They only represent something of value (e.g., quality work, scores on a test, assignments completed, etc.), and have no inherent value. Therefore, in practice, grades become more effective when they are clearly related to a meaningful outcome (Reeve & Deci, 1996).

This is why grading systems that incorporate more authentic measures such as performance assessment rubrics will be more motivational than more artificial uses such as a total of the number of correct responses on a worksheet. Moreover, the way that a grade is derived can help it become more meaningful and tap into an intrinsic source, rather than being entirely an extrinsic reinforcement (Reeve & Deci, 1996).

Grades also act as an incentive. As students progress in their academic careers, grades have the effect of creating future opportunities. These opportunities vary greatly depending on several variables (e.g., importance to parents and/or schools, scholarship or financial aid opportunities, etc.). Moreover, as we know, only some students are much more influenced or even aware of these incentives. As a result grades are a more motivational influence on some students than others. A survey of a typical high school will support the wide discrepancy in how students view the importance of grades. And those teachers who rely primarily on students' being motivated by grades are commonly frustrated with the number of students who are unaffected by the threat of a poor grade if their performance does not improve. In most cases, students who see a relationship between their grades and their ability to reach their personal goals will be most influenced by this source of motivation and therefore more concerned with the kinds of grades that they receive.

However, students commonly see grades as something "given" to them by the teacher (the external agent). Too often they view grades as a representation of their aptitude, ability, or even self-worth rather than the quality of their investment. While this is rarely the intention of the teacher for giving the grade, it is common for students to perceive the grade as such. So for example, when a student gets a C on a paper they may perceive that grade as a reflection of themselves or their ability in that subject. Given this reaction they find themselves in the position that they must respond to the level of the grade by either *accepting* or *rejecting* it as an accurate reflection of their ability. While each of these two responses--accepting the grade as consistent or rejecting it as inconsistent—may appear somewhat different, they are similar in that neither will result in motivation to do better in the future. If the student views the C grade as consistent with their academic self-concept, they will find no need to do any better or adopt any different strategies in the future. If the student perceives the grade as inconsistent with their academic self-concept, they will likely feel shame, confusion, and inadequacy along with resentment toward the teacher. Even if there is a great deal of intensity to the emotion connected to this second response, if the cause is viewed as external and the student does not feel that their grade reflects concrete and constructive feedback, the result will be little or no motivation to change future behavior. The result is the all-too-familiar phenomenon -- the student gets used to getting Cs. As we will discuss throughout the remainder of this chapter and in the next, there are very effective strategies for helping the student desire excellence. Giving more Cs is not one of them.

Chapter Reflection 6-c: Recall your response to various grades that you were given as a student. Did they motivate you to do better? Did you view them as including a personal component (i.e., the teacher either liked or did not like you)? Did they confirm or conflict with your expectation and academic self concept?

In Chapter 10, we will discuss how the assessment of meaningful learning targets that are clear and standing still will produce better student performance as well as higher quality behavior. When students recognize that their grade results from a valid representation of their performance as assessed in relation to meaningful criteria, they are more likely to experience the assessment process as meaningful and a process that leads them on a clear pathway to achievement (Reeve, 2006).

Rewards Such as Tokens, Sticker, Stars and Prizes

Another common extrinsic motivational strategy, used primarily at the elementary level, is to give tokens and other prizes to student when they perform a desired behavior. These extrinsic rewards act as concrete representations that something of "value" has been accomplished. Therefore they are intended to act as the reinforcement in the process of *operant conditioning*. This technique originated in the field of psychology called *behaviorism*, and is most associated with one of its pioneers, B.F. Skinner. In operant conditioning, the operant--or desired behavior that is being conditioned--is reinforced by an extrinsic reinforcement/reward (Alberto & Troutman, 2003). In this case the operant is the act of desirable behavior on the part of the student, and the extrinsic reward is the token or prize (Reeve, 2006).

Incentives

Incentives can take many forms such as prizes at the end of the week for successfully performing a task or refraining from an undesirable task, or group privileges for being first or best, or rewarding students who do well on one task the chance to opt out of a further task. They concretize the non-verbal bargain: "If you (the student) do something that the teacher has determined is good, you will get something that you should like." In this way, incentives can be helpful in clarifying what is desirable behavior. At their best they can help promote good habits and shape more functional patterns of action (Hickey & Schafer, 2006). For example, if a mother provides a child an incentive to make the bed every day, the child may become comfortable with that behavior and continue it throughout their lifetime, even after the incentive is no longer present. In the case of healthy behaviors that become intrinsically satisfying once they become habits, this can lead to positive long-term benefits. However, with any extrinsic reward, we must question whether the incentive has contributed to the development of good behavioral patterns, or has just bribed students to do something that they would not have done without the bribe, and will not do once the bribe has been removed. And if over time the students do not experience any internal satisfaction from the behavior being induced, the incentive will eventually lose its power.

Chapter Reflection 6-d: Recall situations in which you were given rewards for doing a task others wanted you to do, or to do better. Were you motivated? What is your association with that task today?

One popular incentive strategy is that of *Preferred Activity Time* (PAT) (Jones, 2000). PAT sets up the bargain that if you (in this case, the student) apply yourself acceptably to an academic task now, you will be given the opportunity to do something that you really *like* to do later. On the surface, this strategy "works." That is, it motivates the student to do what it takes to attain their "preferred activity." However, as we examine this strategy closer, we discover that when put into practice, it has two undesirable by-products. First, while it may work in the short run, like other bribes it will lose its effect over time. Students will eventually return to their previous level of motivation for the academic activity. Moreover, they will become accustomed to the bribe and likely demand it. Second, it will reinforce the principle that the work that is being done in the academic time is something that is undesirable. If we bribe students with a preferred activity, we actually generate the previously-unconsidered question, "preferred to what?" What is the association that we are creating? Is it that academics are inherently un-enjoyable? While this strategy is attractive, consider its costs and long-term effects. And if you feel you need to bribe your students to engage in learning, you may want to consider the alternative of making the learning activities in your class engaging and inherently motivating.

Chapter Reflection 6-e: Reflect on the following parable:

There was once an old man who lived by a park and worked the night shift at the factory. During the day he liked it to be quiet so that he could get some sleep. He lived alone and did not like children very much. So when the children began to play ball at the park and make lots of noise, he became angry. He tried to ignore the noise, but it did not work. As he reflected on his dilemma, he was struck by a cunning plan. The next day, he went to the field and addressed the children. He told them that he loved the sound of their play, and that he once had children and it reminded him of them (neither was true). Then he told them that if they came to play faithfully, he would pay them each a quarter. The children were pleased to say the least, and thought the old man was the greatest. The next day the old man arrived and paid each child a quarter. He did the same thing the next day. The children were very happy. The next day he arrived right on time, but gave the children some bad news. He told them how much he loved to hear their voices as they played and how it made him so happy, but he did not have much money and could only pay them a dime each. The children were a little disappointed, but agreed to come back and play for the smaller amount. As promised, he paid them a dime for the next three days, but on the fourth day he again had some bad news. He told the children that he really hoped that they would come out and play, but that he was out of money and could no longer pay them. At this the children were very upset. After a quick conference, the children decided that they could not play if they were not going to be paid, and they left, never to return. The old man went home and was able to sleep in peace and quiet that afternoon.

Do you think the story represents a valid reality? Can you think of an example of this same principle in your own experience?

Adopting a More Intentional and Effective Approach to the Use of Extrinsic Behavioral Reinforcement

It is a well-established fact that human behavior can be conditioned by environmental stimuli (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006; Reeve, 2006). While we can debate the extent to which one's behavior is externally conditioned or has its source in more internal drives, as educators we need to recognize the power of environmental conditioning. If we examine an effectively managed classroom, we will see a teacher who understands behavioral principles (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). That does not mean the teacher will overuse extrinsic conditioning or even rely on it as a motivational strategy, but will understand that the forces of behavioral conditioning are operating continuously.

The starting point to making sense of behavioral conditioning is to understand that in a conditioning situation there will be something that acts as a focal event/action/operant and then there is something that happens afterward to reinforce it (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). For example if we wished the family dog to consistently fetch a stick that we throw, we might give the dog a treat each time he/she brought back the stick, and *only* if he/she brought back the stick. In this case the dog learns that when she does the desired behavior (bringing the stick back), it will be reinforced (obtaining the doggy treat). Yet it is important to remember that in one's efforts toward behavioral conditioning, especially when it relates to humans, little or none of the actual conditioning/learning that actually occurs will necessarily resemble the conditioning/learning that was intended. For example if we examine most punishments, the intention is to create a disincentive related to the unwanted action. But what is actually learned is much more complex and typically takes the form of a disincentive to interact with the source of the punishment (person meting out) or the creation of a new set of skills to get around the punishment in the future (Kauffman, 2005)

Under examination, the popularity of extrinsic rewards is understandable; however, consider as well the reasons their byproducts are considered undesirable. In most cases, they work in the short-term to motivate behavior. But there are several questions that should be asked if one is to use extrinsic reinforcements for an extended period. They include the following:

1. Is the motivation to perform the behavior increasing, or just the motivation to obtain the reward?
2. Will the schedule of reinforcements be sustainable? Or will a greater amount of reinforcement be needed in the future (see discussion on weed-pulling later in the chapter).
3. What is ultimately being learned?
4. Like the man in the story above, are we replacing an internal source of motivation with an external one, and as a result extinguishing our students' intrinsic motivation?

If you are attempting to develop a student-centered 1-Style classroom, the frequent and/or sustained use of extrinsic rewards will be inherently counterproductive. They will work against the development of such outcomes as self-responsibility and the inclination to reflect on what will lead to one's personal growth and/or the common good of the group -- dispositions that are essential to the 1-Style classroom (Kohn, 1999; Ryan and Deci, 2006). On the other hand, they can be part of a very effective teacher-centered classroom and assist the teacher developing a 2-Style approach in his/her effort to promote more efficient student behavior (Reeve, 2003).

For those who feel compelled to include extrinsic forms of reinforcement among their motivational strategies, it may be helpful to consider the following guiding principles for using them effectively:

- Relate the reinforcement to a clearly identified desired behavior. The primary focus should be on accomplishing the desired behavior rather than attaining the reward.
- The closer in time the attainment of the reward is to the desired behavior the stronger effect the reinforcement will have.
- Intermittent and/or random schedules of reinforcement will be more powerful than regular and predictable schedules of reinforcement.
- Reinforcements that are given after the display of an "expected" behavior will be more effective than arrangements and "deals" made before the desired behavior is performed.

- Avoid putting students in situations in which they are competing for rewards, especially meaningful rewards. Only use competition in cases where all students are in an equal position to display the behavior if they so choose. Rewarding effort, good choices, cooperation and other things that students can control can be effective at attaining more of those behaviors. But competition that includes rewarding winners for ability, personality, parental support, and/or academic performance will undermine the level of motivation in the class and can even backfire with many students when it comes to the desired behavior change.

Following these guidelines will not lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation, but they will likely be effective in changing behavior in the short-term. Moreover, they will help reduce the dependency of students on rewards and make it easier to remove them over time. When we do gradually remove the reinforcements, we should be left with a substantial amount of new “learned behavior” and only a minimal amount of “withdrawal” from the students who have developed a dependency on the reinforcement.

Below are three examples of typical but problematic uses of extrinsic rewards followed by a more effective strategy in the same situation:

Typical but Problematic:

“If you all do your work, I will give the class a prize on Friday.” Problems include: the reward is too far removed in time; the probability that a reward is going to be needed for every desirable behavior; and when Friday comes, you will likely be in a difficult spot. It is a certainty that some students will have met their end of the bargain and others will have not. Do you see the potential problem?

Better Idea:

“You have just spent the entire period focused on a task; that is the first time you have all been able to do that. I am going to give you all ___ (extrinsic reward or removal of a negative reinforcer).” This is better because it was random, immediate, and will promote behavior change. The students know what they did, so they will repeat it. They will not expect it, but will exhibit behavior that they understand may be reinforced. A lesson was learned, when we ___ (e.g., do our jobs), the teacher will reward us.

Typical but Problematic:

“The group that does the best job of ___ at the end of the day will get a prize.” Problems include: this is competitive and there will eventually be some resentful people; the work is done in anticipation of the prize -- the prize is primary and the purpose of the behavior is secondary; and the reinforcement is not well connected any particular repeatable behavior (good reinforcement promotes the repetition of desired behavior).

Better Idea:

“I asked you to put away ___ and take out ____, this table did it right away without being asked again, so they will get (thing, time, being first, first choice, etc).” This is better because: it will change behavior, as the other tables will be much quicker in the future anticipating that something similar might happen again; it reinforces your expectations -- real learning took place in a very concrete example; it was immediate and clearly related both in time and causality; and the focus is on the “expected” behavior first and the reward second.

Typical but Problematic:

A “token economy” or arrangements where students get points for certain behaviors and the points are added up for some reward at the end of a certain period. Problems include: behavior done primarily for extrinsic rewards. This is essentially paying students to do what they should be doing and what we want them to love to do for its own sake. We are *destroying* both of those goals. The schedule of reinforcement is continuous. Continuous reinforcement leads to a gradual decrease of motivation. It ends up creating a lose-lose decision, “Do I increase the reward to maintain the motivation level, or do I slowly watch my students begin to demand an extrinsic reward for everything and increasingly avoid behaviors that are not rewarded (including just about everything that we want them to care about in our class)?”

Better Idea:

If you are committed to the use of a point system:

1. Use it for a short duration at the start of the year (three weeks or less).
2. Use it to clarify your expectations. Relate your reward system to the critical expectations that are necessary for the class to function, such as listening, cooperation, efficient procedures. This process may be useful when attempting to shift from a 2-Style to a 1-Style classroom.
3. Use only random and/or intermittent reinforcement schedules. Random is the best. That is, students realize what the desired behavior is supposed to be (working cooperatively, listening, being on task, raising hands, etc.) but they do not know when the reinforcement will occur (If you compare the level of the desired behavior in a random reinforcement condition vs. a fixed condition, you will be amazed at the difference).
4. Give points and take points away without warning. Warnings always weaken reinforcements.
5. Do not give a large amount of attention to the points. Attach your emotion to the accomplishment of the behavior rather than the attainment of the points.
6. The ultimate reward cannot be meaningful or substantive. It cannot relate to grades, your affection, or something of real material worth. In fact, simply achieving the most points can be enough of a reward in and of itself, and may be a preferable reward in our effort to emphasize that the process was the point, not who won or lost.
7. Make it a game for fun and mutual entertainment, and focus on how it is leading to behavior change. Again the extrinsic is always presented as a material reminder of something of real and intrinsic value such as learning or becoming a better class.

Chapter Reflection 6-f: Recall a situation in which you were rewarded with points or prizes for certain behavior. Do you remember if you won, or were rewarded with prizes? Do you remember what you were asked to do to achieve those rewards? Which memory is more powerful? What does your memory tell you about the source of your motivation to perform?

“Giving students extrinsic rewards for engaging in learning tasks makes the implicit statement that the activity was not worth doing on its own merits.” - Alfie Kohn (1999)

Punishments/Threats/Avoiding Penalties

The desire to avoid undesirable conditions can be motivating. Therefore, punishments can have the effect of changing behavior. As we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 9, avoidance of a punishment is based in fear and founded in a pain-based logic. There are a great many ways to alleviate the source or feeling of fear but only one of these many is to change behavior to achieve or improve the behavior others desire. Others include avoiding school, avoiding the teacher, giving up, self-destructive behavior, and/or changing the definition of failure to success (see negative identity student in Chapter 14). Like extrinsic rewards, punishments lose their effect over time (Kauffman, 2005; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). Moreover, they do not support more positive forms of motivation or behavior as they offer no pathway to success, only a source of discomfort for failure.

However, if the consequential penalty is natural or logically related to the misbehavior and is associated in the student’s mind with his/her own choices, then it can have the effect of supporting real learning at the same time as it represents a disincentive to misbehave (Reeve, 2006). And as we will examine in the Chapters 8, 9, and 10, developing logical consequences is a critical feature to creating a classroom social contract that helps students become more responsible and the class more functional.

Positive Reinforcement

When asked about their favorite motivational strategies most teachers and pre-teachers respond by saying something to the effect that they want to be “positive,” and use a lot of “positive reinforcement.” On the surface, this is encouraging, especially when compared with the possibility that they would rely heavily on strategies defined by destructive criticism, shaming, pain-based logic, and what we referred to earlier as “coercive power.” However, not all of what we call positive reinforcement is the same or will have the same effect

(Lerman, 2003). Positive reinforcement is used to describe a wide range of practices including the use of extrinsic rewards, praise and approval, encouragement, having positive expectations, being warm and accepting, using positive recognitions, providing increased opportunities, or using systems for rewarding quality behavior (Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). On the one hand, these all share a couple of features in common -- they are each given purposefully and are controlled by the teacher and therefore external to the student. On the other hand, they will have dramatically different effects on student behavior and motivation. In our discussion above, we outlined the differences in the effects of different extrinsic reward strategies. Some of what we might refer to as positive reinforcement can remain largely external, while other forms can lead to the development of more intrinsic sources of motivation. This distinction will be made throughout the remainder of the book, yet is especially compelling when it comes to the use of praise -- a practice that is wide-spread, but largely misunderstood and misused.

A Closer Examination of Healthy vs. Unhealthy Praise

Encouragement can take many forms. While we want our students to feel appreciated, the language that we use to show that appreciation can have dramatically different effects (Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 1999). Many people in and outside of education use the term “praise” to refer to generically supportive messages to students. As we examine the term “praise” and the common uses of what might be considered praise, we will see that different types of messages have very different effects on both the student being praised and the class as a whole. Ultimately, we might compare what is commonly referred to as praise -- essentially external personal messages, to a more healthy and effective alternative -- internally focused positive performance recognitions.

Problematic “Praise” Messages

What is commonly referred to as “praise” is at its essence a personal comment from the teacher that conveys the message that the student is “being and/or acting in a manner that pleases the teacher.” For example when the teacher says, “Good work, Nasi,” or “I like the way Anders is working,” they are using messages that sound very encouraging on the surface. And the intention *is* to encourage good behavior. But as we look more carefully at the messages, we will see that these types of messages have potentially negative effects.

Messages such as “What a good boy,” or “Quinh-xiao is doing such a good job,” have the effect of essentially giving “love” for obedience. The message they send tells the students that the teacher gives affection to those who please her/him. As we look more closely at these messages we find that they are very “external.” That is, they originate from the wishes and desires of the teacher. The net result could be best characterized as the use of the teacher’s affection as an external reward. When we compare this type of message to what was referred to in the previous chapter as “positive recognitions” we observe that it is significantly less effective in the effort to clarify appropriate behavior or promote learning. In fact, in the long run personal praise can promote a very dependent and helpless pattern of thinking in students (Dweck, 1999). If we are attempting to create externally motivated “affection addicts” then this form of praise is an effective means. If we include disappointment for behavior that displeases the teacher, we can be even more effective in creating dependent “failure fearers” and students who are easy to manipulate. As we examine the effects of praise more closely we can see that the negative effects reach beyond the object of the praise to the class as a whole.