



Well done!

The Trouble with Gold Stars

*Gifted student's thoughts on
motivation*

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What is common?



- *Tangible extrinsic rewards are commonly used as motivators in the school, workplace and home*
- *Typically used as a tool intended to reinforce student learning and behaviour or encourage compliance*

The Dilemma

Many of our brightest students do not achieve at a level reflecting their potential in school, yet will immerse themselves for long periods of time in activities out of school where there is no promise of an extrinsic 'reward'.



Intrinsic Motivation

- *stems from within*
- *motivated by curiosity, interests or values*
- *primarily the enjoyment of an activity for its own sake, for the pleasure of conquering a challenge*
- *Intrinsically motivated students use a greater range of strategies, show greater task involvement and learn more effectively*
- *Might look like Betts and Neihart Autonomous Learner (Type VI), Dweck's mastery oriented learning goals*

Extrinsic Motivation

- *stems from external factors,*
- *Involves reward systems, evaluations or the opinion of others*
- *work on a task even when have little interest in it because of the anticipated satisfaction they will get from some reward*

- *Good for short term compliance*
- *'Teacher pleasers' might actually be seeking extrinsic validation*

The balance shifts.....

Babies and young children show high levels of intrinsic motivation.



They are highly motivated to explore and understand their world and persist at learning new skills, learning to coordinate their body and developing their interactive language ability.

Where does all that intrinsic motivation go??

*Children will engage in a task for
one of two reasons*

*Either they enjoy the activity for its
own sake*

or

*They value the result of the activity in
some way*

What does the research say about motivation?

- Studies abound on the effectiveness or otherwise of extrinsic motivators and their impact*
- Kohn (1999) advises caution in use of rewards in enhancing intrinsic motivation*
- Is rewarding mindless compliance a 'pre packaged punishment'?*
- The finding that extrinsic rewards do not always act as positive motivators but can act to undermine intrinsic motivation has been highly controversial (Deci 1971)*

Concerns

Kohn also warns rewards are devastatingly effective in smothering enthusiasm for activities children might otherwise enjoy

Rewards may focus undue attention on the pay offs of the task and thus decrease student's appreciation of what they are learning. When rewards are no longer available, the student may have little inclination to continue a task, even if it was previously of interest.

What about gifted students?

Fewer studies look directly at gifted children

Appropriately challenging curriculum, supportive environment, peer acceptance, like minds and choice are all important for intrinsic motivation

Easy tasks lower self esteem

Boredom adversely affects motivation

The voice of the children themselves is rarely heard

This study...

The goal of the study is to provide perspectives on the effectiveness of extrinsic motivators for learning with gifted students

and

insights into what might contribute to optimal conditions for motivating and engaging gifted students in achieving their potential and becoming life long learners

This (initial) study

13 gifted students in Year 4, 5 and 6, (ages 7 - 11 years), in WA

To be considered 'gifted' for this study children will have been identified by at least one of:

- IQ testing*
- having attended a Thinking Ahead holiday workshop program, some of which require students to provide evidence of qualifying criteria*
- having been selected for a school or system wide program*
- having a sibling who has been identified as gifted.*

Recruited via the Thinking Ahead e-newsletter

Focus groups

Composition of the groups were representative of the ratio of boys:girls

Silverman - 60% boys

Fiona Smith - 58% boys

Thinking Ahead - 62% boys

9 boys and 4 girls

Rural and regional = 3 (2 boys, 1 girl)

What sort of rewards?

What sort of rewards do you get at school?

Academic awards, lollies, stickers, free time, excursions, game, group points

What might you be rewarded for?

Behaving a certain way, doing good work, trying hard, honesty, being well behaved, neat work, no mistakes.....

- Some difference between those focussed on mastery and performance*

At home

What sort of rewards do you get at home?

Go out with friends, stay up later, money, new clothes, being with friends, extra computer time, something special like a gift

What might you be rewarded for?

Good listening, helping out, getting on with things, behaving a certain way, doing good work, trying hard, honesty, being well behaved, neat work, no mistakes.....

No-one mentioned being rewarded for being creative or problem solving

Effectiveness?

Do they 'work'?

"I try to work hard to make my parents happy" (10 yr old girl)

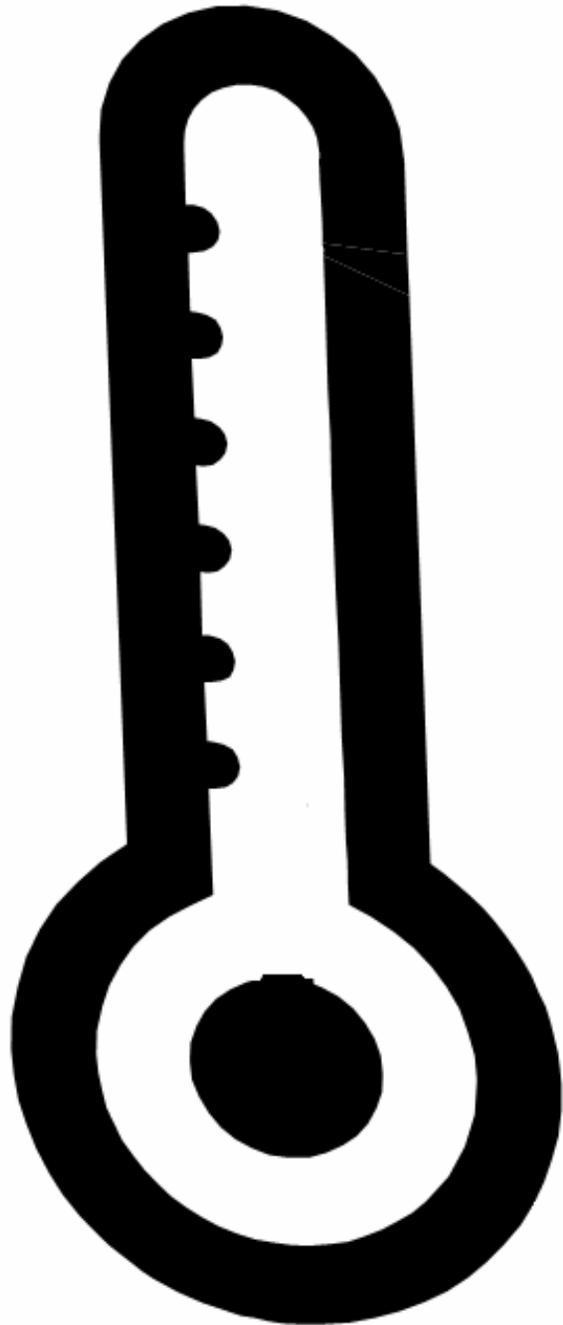
"Not really, I just want to be my normal self" (7 yr old boy)

Are some rewards more effective than others?

"The best ones are the ones you don't expect" (10 year old boy)

Does it matter whether it is verbal or tangible reward?

General preference for tangible rewards, except for feedback on their work



Challenge-o-meter

On a scale of 1 - 10 show how challenging you find school (i.e. how hard the work generally is)

Results for all were 2 or 3

Then in a different colour show what your ideal level of challenge would be?

For 11 of the students ideal challenge was in the 8 - 10 range, 2 marked it at 6.

Imagine that you have been transported to a situation where the challenge is now ideal. Would this change how much effort you put into school work?

“If the target was realistic I would still work hard even if there was no reward. If it gets too hard it is the same as too easy - I fall asleep” (9 year old girl)

“If it is hard enough, that is a reward itself” (10 year old boy)

“If you have to do it anyway, its better to get a reward” (10 yr old boy)

Would it affect the importance of rewards to you?

“Kind of. I always try to do my best so it wouldn't really make a difference but I might work even harder, beyond my best” (7 yr old boy)

Making Mistakes

Does making a mistake impact on getting a reward?

“You can learn from a mistake but it might mean you get excluded from something like the library” (9 year old boy)

“Mistakes are important for learning but if I make too many mistakes the person teaching me might get upset, so I would move to somewhere else to work. Maybe I am too hot or too cold. And it doesn't make any difference to a reward if it is for effort” (7 year old boy)

Choice

Is having a choice of activity motivating?

“It depends on whether it is a real choice or not. If you still have to do all the things and only choose which order, then it doesn't matter what reward there is, you haven't got a choice” (10 year old boy)

“If the choice is hard work and no reward or really easy work with a reward, I would choose the hard but try to work out how I could a part of the reward anyway” (9 yr old boy)

Feedback

Would you prefer comments and feedback or a mark on your work?

“Comments are better, so you know what she is looking for” (10 yr old boy)

How can you know what to improve if you don't get comments? If I only got a mark I would ask for comments anyway.” (7 year old boy)

“Comments are good but you can forget them so a mark is better” (10 yr old boy)

Perseverance and motivation out of school

*Think about something you enjoy that
you have learned to do completely out
of school*

What was the 'reward' for learning it?

"Getting to the next level"

"Being able to do it by myself"

In your opinion, what is the best reward?

A motor bike...(9 year old girl)

Getting to do what ever you want...·

A computer...

“But not if you keep getting the same one over and over” (10 year old boy)

Rank these rewards in terms of how hard you might work if one was offered as the reward:

(Most to least desirable)

All scores combined

Free choice of activity

Money

Merit certificate

Comments, positive feedback

Pencil or rubber

Smile

Gold star or stickers

Considering Theory of Intellect Responses varied

Performance orientation: *Mastery orientation*

Money

Pencil or rubber

Merit certificate

Free choice

Smile

Comments, +ve feedback

Gold star or stickers

Free choice

Money

Comments, +ve feedback

Merit certificate

Smile

Pencil or rubber

Gold star or stickers

To ponder

- *Many factors are likely to influence the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels, including social, cultural and gender issues.*
- *The child's mindset appears to have an influence on how readily they respond to extrinsic motivators*
- *The message our gifted students take from what we say and do might not be what we intend*

“Rewards are like animal training”

(11 year old girl)



Well done!

*Perhaps best used mindfully and with
discretion*

Please feel free to contact me

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