

Developing classroom motivation through positive reinforcement



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Introduction:

During my placement in my second year, I was based in a primary school and found it interesting seeing how various children reacted to different positive reinforcement. This is where my interest in motivation from positive reinforcement arose from. I began to question does positive reinforcement in a classroom really motivate children to become more engaged with their work?. The purpose of this research is to analyse the use of positive reinforcement and to explore whether it helps to motivate children.

The research is carried out by interviewing staff based within a classroom environment in a mainstream academy with children aged between 5-10 years old. During my research I analysed the methods that various practitioners use to motivate children and listen to their opinions as to what works effectively and what does not. To help me undertake this study I set myself three questions that I would need to answer, these being:

Does positive reinforcement influence the child's behaviour?

Do different methods of praise work better than others for the practitioner?

Does praise help to motivate children and encourage them to focus on their work?

Praise plays a huge part in teaching, especially within a primary school, and can be extremely beneficial to a classroom environment, however I am under no illusion that sometimes the use of praise can become drowning, over used and unsuccessful, it is up to the practitioner to ensure that this is not the case.

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Praise is a key part of teaching and learning and is an essential tool to enhance a child's development and attitudes.

Current research shows that praise is an effective tool in positive reinforcement and can have a positive effect on behaviours (Moore et al) however it is shown that praise can also cause a negative effect on children's motivation (Dweck 2000; Amabile 1996; Brophy 1981 cited in Crow, Sherry R.; Small, Ruth V 2011) and cause them to become too performance ability focused (Muellar, C and Dweck, C 1997). These arguments will be explored fully in the literature review.

Literature Review:

To begin to undertake my study I need to fully understand what positive reinforcement is mainly done using praise. and what the term means, how it is used and how it impacts a child.

Praise can be viewed by different people in different ways, the best definition I have found so far is in an article on performance feedback and teachers use of praise by B Cavanaugh in which he explains praise to be " Praise, and particularly behaviour specific praise, refers to the verbal acknowledgement of expected appropriate social or academic behaviour exhibited by students (e. g., " great job walking," " correct, 5 + 7 is 12," etc.). Praise is one of the most effective school-based strategies to decrease problem behaviour and increase positive behaviour". Due to praise being so simple to use and so effective it is a vital and simple use of positive reinforcement to motivate children within a classroom.

Moore et al researched praise and the opportunities of it within a classroom-based environment and how it promotes classroom behaviour. When giving praise you need to ensure that it is not only given to those that overpower the others, but to give praise to the children that are not always doing the norm and standing out. Praise is a motivational method and can encourage children to work harder and to act in a well behaved way it has been proved that “praise that is delivered contingent on a desired behaviour leads to increases in the desired behaviour” (Moore et al 2010) therefore Moore et al is suggesting that if you praise a child for behaving correctly they will note that what they have done is good and correct, influencing them to behave. In this way due to knowing they will be praised for it. This can also create a motivation for the child, as they will be wanting to do more to please. A classroom environment is a busy place, you have lots of children the same age in the same room together, all with different backgrounds, different personalities, different life experiences and different behaviours, thus meaning you are bound to at some point face some challenging behaviours. However, you are also bound to meet behaviours that shine through and work that deserves rewarding. Praise plays a huge part in the classroom environment and a teacher using praise affects a child both mentally and physically, it can help with their self-esteem, their confidence, and their emotional, physical and mental development. Praise shows to a child that the teacher has noticed what they have done and that they are pleased with the child, it helps to engage and connect the child with the positive behaviour or work they have done as they notice the attention being given. When using praise, it is hard to know what techniques to use with each child, one child might react positively to a simple “well done that was really good”

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what you just did” whereas another child may need a bit more of a clear and visible praise such as a star being placed a star chart. It can be hard deciding when and how to use praise, you don’t want to give too much praise, however you don’t want to give too little and you want to ensure the praise has been positively taken on board by the child,

Crow et al suggests that giving relevant rewards to children may temporarily motivate them, “ Giving rewards that are irrelevant to the task (e. g., a pizza party, extra time on the playground) may temporarily motivate some students, but only for the next reward rather than for the task itself” (Crow et al, School monthly 2011), Trying to get children to focus upon their work can be a difficult challenge, however praise can be used to encourage this, for example simple solutions such as a star chart where when the child/children are focusing correctly they get a sticker on the chart and when so many stickers have been reached a rewards is given at the end. The discussion arises as to what methods of motivation to use and how to use them, you want the praise to be motivating the child rather than giving the child a reason for a reward. Practitioners have the responsibility to ensure that the reward is relevant and suitable for the action that is being rewarding, motivating a child is a positive thing to do, however motivating the child through praise not in the correct way can cause a lack of motivation and more of a waiting for the next reward.

M, Pringle suggests that a child’s attitude towards themselves will determine how effectively he/she learns. It’s believed that until a child reaches adolescence their attitude towards themselves is determined by the influence and recognition from those around them, “ a child’s attitude to <https://assignbuster.com/developing-classroom-motivation-through-positive-reinforcement/>

himself and to learning will determine how effectively he learns, as much as, if not more than his actual abilities. Recognition from his teacher and his peers assumes increasing importance with increasing age” (Pringle, M 1986). Thus, meaning that praise would play a vital part in how a child acts and the effort and attitudes towards learning. At this stage in life a child is unable to recognise the good in themselves and relies on others recognising this, praise being one of the ways it can be recognised. This again highlights how praise is key in motivating a child to succeed.

Current research carried out by Dweck (2009) believed that the reason for praise is based upon the judgement and decision by the adult/practitioner as to if the child is progressing in a positive way and as to when it is suitable to praise them for it. This can be hard for children to understand as different teachers can view different things as to being worthy of being praised, creating a stigma around what behaviours are right and what is wrong. Continuity and stability needs to be put into place and a clear praise or reward system needs to be established so that praise is consistent within the classroom regardless of which practitioner it is. Motivation could be lowered as the child could become disheartened that one teacher is not as pleased with him/her as another teacher could be, the child could of behaved in a way which one staff member has praised and the other has not, resulting in the child’s motivation being lowered due to feeling they have not met the expectations of that member of staff and thinking as to why they are not praising them unlike the other teacher.

As much as praise can be used as a motivational tool, it needs to be considered that sometimes it can in fact cause a decrease in motivation for <https://assignbuster.com/developing-classroom-motivation-through-positive-reinforcement/>

other children in the classroom, Dweck et al, researches how praise can also have some negative effects and how there is a need for a fear of not wanting to cause a negative effect on the other students in the classroom the research has revealed that “ the way praise is typically given can have the same negative effects on student motivation as other extrinsic motivators, i. e., decrease students’ confidence, feelings of autonomy, creative thinking and problem solving, and overall intrinsic motivation.” This responsibility is upon the practitioner to ensure praise is not being over used and it is shared effectively within the classroom, even praising those that are not normally doing the normal behaviours that is expected in the classroom environment can show that all children in the classroom are considered as individuals. (e. g., Dweck 2000; Amabile 1996; Brophy 1981). Praise and rewards can be demotivating to the students that are not getting them, resulting in a child having the thoughts of “ well I’m not getting praised so I may as well carry on with what I’m doing”. The feelings one child can get that is not being praised compared to a child that is being praised is a huge difference, praise needs to be given in a considerate way to all the children in the classroom and not just the child or children being praised.

Research carried out by Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck in ‘ Praise Can Undermine Children’s Motivation and Performance’ found that “ *praise for ability or intelligence may lead children to adopt a performance goal orientation toward their achievement in which the documentation of high ability levels through successful performance becomes their primary motivational aim.*” (Muellar, C and Dweck, C 1997) this can result in children becoming too performance focused and the risk of becoming obsessed with

achieving targets and performing successfully. This can become a problem for a child when they do not meet a target and give them unrealistic expectations in life that every time they achieve they will be rewarded with praise. This could cause the children's motivation to be lowered and make them not want to attempt to reach a target due to the fear of not being rewarded with the praise they wished to receive.

Children's self-praise can be encouraged to be used, this helps to teach children that praise comes from within, a research was carried out using a sticker system where the child gave themselves a different coloured sticker for the piece of work they had done with their opinion on how much effort they put into it. This showed the children that motivation needs to come from themselves and that as much as praise is nice to receive but it is not essential for success and that the success should be from the efforts put in and what is achieved. (Frank Lloyd Wright in cited ' Essential Motivation in the Classroom')

Methodology:

The methods I used to carry out this research is qualitative. I used a mixed method research approach " *mixed methods research means adopting a research strategy employing more than one type of data research method. The methods may be a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods, a mix of quantitative methods or a mix of qualitative methods*" (Wilson, E 2013) and chose to do a mix of qualitative research through interviewing and using a questionnaire that I created for a variety of staff at the school, all with different responsibilities to gain a wider view on the research. Qualitative

research is reliable as it is consistent and can be used throughout my research (Cohen et al 1993, p146). I chose not to use quantitative data due to the fact that figures would not be detailed enough for me to gain an insight to the views of a practitioner.

My research is a case study, as it was researched within one setting, the setting for my research is a one form entry primary school, serving a socio economically deprived community in Birmingham. The academy has a diverse range of children, the majority of pupils are of different heritages, with 39 different languages spoken through the academy. With having such a variety of children at the school the study would be able to give an unbiased view and see how a variety of children react rather than children who are very similar. A case study was the best approach for me as it would allow me to gain the best insight within the time scale that I had, Adelman et Al, 1980 said that a case study is “ *the study of an instance in action* ”, this meant it was ideal for me as I was able to get insight first hand of instances that have taken place.

Wilson E suggests that “ *interviews and focus groups are communications that aim to consult teachers and student about their points of view, interpretations and meanings* ” (Wilson, E 2013). Due to this I chose to use individual face to face interviews to gain an opinion, interpretation point of view and meanings of a teacher and other practitioners within a school on praise, the styles of praised use and how they think it is used and its effectiveness. The practitioners were interviewed individually hopefully resulting in gaining an honest answer to the questions asked. The

participants for the interviews were chosen at random to ensure that I had a <https://assignbuster.com/developing-classroom-motivation-through-positive-reinforcement/>

selection of practitioners with various rolls within the school rather than just focusing on certain members of staff. I took audio recordings during the interviews, so I was able to listen effectively while taking notes and being able to come back to the interviews in my own time and listen over them again if needed.

Research that has been carried out shows that interviews are a popular qualitative research method, Scott et al's study shows that "*one of the most popular qualitative research tools is interviews*" (Scott Et Al 2008) meaning that interviews must work well as so many people choose to use them.

Interviews are the best choice of method for my research as I was able to gain a real feel to how the practitioner felt, not just through their words but also through their body language. I tried to use a informal interview structure to enable to practitioner to feel at ease hopefully resulting in honest opinions. At first I was hesitant of using this structure, due to being on placement at the school before, I was worried that it would cause a hinder to the research as the staff would feel at ease with me and risk of it turning into an informal chat could be present. However this turned out to work in my advantage as due to the members of staff feeling comfortable with me they felt able to open up and answer the questions honestly and give their true opinions.

As well as interviewing the practitioners I created a questionnaire for them to fill in, it consisted of open and closed questions resulting in me gaining a more in-depth insight into the opinions and views of each individual. P

Newby explains how open questions do not have a response framework

imposed on them by the researcher, and that respondents are given space
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where they can answer the question in their own voice, this will be effective for me as I can get a variety of voices views on a shared question rather than a simple yes or no answer “ *open questions are valuable in giving a sense of the respondents own voice*” these questions can be vital to me when analysing the various opinions and experiences of the use of praise. (Peter Newby, Research methods for education). Giving the participants a chance to write their own answer can help them to give a answer that is not influenced by any way, it means it will create a unbiased answer where it is only the practitioners view and nobody else’s considered. This was effective in my research as my whole researched relies upon the opinions of practitioners and questionnaires provided me with practitioner’s opinions. The questionnaire used a mixture of tick boxes and boxes to write answers in. The questionnaires were given out face to face (Lambert, M 2012) to practitioners within school at the start of the week and collected at the end. This meant that the practitioners had time to think about their answers, do it in their own space and to add to it when they felt they needed to, this meant that if the practitioners thought of something else they could go back and add to the questionnaire whereas with the interview once it was over I was unable to gain any more opinions if the practitioner remembered something they wanted to say at a later date. I received 100% of the questionnaires back that I handed out, I believe this was due to the fact that I gave the questionnaires out in person and collected them in person making it convenient for the people taking part in them.

I used a triangulation approach to improve my research, triangulation is said to be a “ *method used in research to strengthen the design to increase the*

ability to interpret findings through the use of multiple data sources.”(

Denzin, 1970; Thurmond, 2001 cited in Renz, Carrington and Badger (2018)).

Using both questionnaires and interviews meant that I had two different ways and methods of interpreting the opinions and views of the practitioners and I was able to enhance my validity of research due to gaining multiple perspectives. Denzin (1970) suggested that “ the use of triangulation has the potential to increase the validity of the study”. The questionnaires and interviews gave me the ability to gain multiple perspectives from the same people in two different ways based around one on issue resulting in me gaining as much opinions and views as I possibly could.

To further enhance my validity of research I have piloted my research by doing a trial run on a colleague, interviewing them and them filling out the questionnaire allowed me to see how effective and efficient the research was, the time scale I was looking and to ensure the questions were understood by the participants. I was also able to analyse if any improvements needed to be found. The pilot run was important to me due to being a student and this being a research project I needed to ensure I was using my time as effectively as I possibly could so I was able to see how time consuming the interviews were.

Having a selection of various practitioners taking part in my research meant I got the view of different roles and analysed the effectiveness of praise being delivered through a variety of staff and got to see how staff with different roles in the school found certain praise methods compared to those with a different role. I chose to select a variety of practitioners rather than doing a random sample to ensure that I gained views from various roles. This was <https://assignbuster.com/developing-classroom-motivation-through-positive-reinforcement/>

the best choice for my research as if I had done a random sample I would have been at risk of only getting teachers or only getting teaching assistants etc would be present, resulting in my research being at risk of being a biased opinion of just teachers.

I have ensured my research is ethical through various ways.

One of the guidelines that BERA gives when carrying out research is “ *It is normally expected that participants’ voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent*” (BERA 2018). Due to these guidelines before carrying out the research I obtained consent in writing by a gate keeper (this being a member of the senior leadership team) and the practitioners that were taking part, I made it clear that the research was optional to take part in, that everything that was being carried out would be ethically and morally correct and ensured the practitioners understood they had the right to withdraw at any time.

Anonymity was protected during the research by ensuring all participants remained anonymous to those outside of the research this is expected by BERA as one of the guidelines is that “ *The confidential and anonymous treatment of participants’ data is considered the norm for the conduct of research*” (BERA, 2018). Confidentiality was protected by not sharing any information about the participants involved. The recordings that have been taken, have been done so on a password protected and encrypted device and were destroyed as soon as the recordings were transcribed.

An information sheet was also given to all participants and they had a chance to ask me any questions they wanted or express any thoughts they had on the research. Ethical approval has been obtained from my personal tutor and all relevant BERA guidelines were followed at all times.

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