

How can we improve engagement through positive reinforcement in the classroom?

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1. Aim, focus and purpose of the research

The matter of interest that I was drawn to was the way in which positive reinforcement can be employed within a classroom to influence good behaviour and promote higher levels of engagement. I am highly interested in researching this further as I believe it to be common knowledge that classroom management is an ongoing obstacle facing teachers within education (Skinner 1969).

In my school, which is situated in one of the most prominent areas for positive reinforcement, uses the merit card system, in which all pupils have a merit card they can fill with merits that can be awarded for anything from politeness, imagination, completion of work or even good sportsmanship. On completion of each merit card, pupils receive a certificate in front of the entire school during the end of week assembly. In my class, positive reinforcement is primarily given primarily through a combination of verbal praise and merits. Within my research partners' schools, they have similar methods of reinforcement which will be discussed later on. Over the small number of observation days I've found that pupils are highly motivated by merits and praise and the potentiality of their efforts being recognised. The main aim of this research study is to see if by monitoring behaviour such as this, myself and my partners can decide whether or not our findings corroborate already published analyses. The outcome will enlighten us as to whether or not more research needs to be carried out in this particular field.

2. Research context

Within the first few days of my placement, it became apparent that the 31 pupils within the year two class responded better to the teachers and had a more improved work ethic once their efforts had been recognised by a member of staff. This recognition was often in the

form of verbal praise or being awarded a merit, though it didn't just motivate the individual. The act of the teacher rewarding the good behaviour motivated the pupils and his peers to emulate similar if not higher levels of engagement throughout the lesson. This distinctly relates to our research question, which is "how can we improve engagement through positive reinforcement in the classroom?"

For my class, this means that my partners and I will be looking closely at the merit system and how well it works in promoting desirable behaviour and maintaining their engagement to the tasks within the lesson. In order for our research to be successful, the discussed methods of reinforcement would be implemented in my classroom immediately. My class would soon become accustomed to receiving praise and rewards for their efforts and work ethic, thus not finding these actions alien when it came to the observation.

3. Short overview of relevant literature

It is evident upon analysing the already published works, that the effective use of positive reinforcement can positively impact a child's levels of engagement and enhance the frequency of the desired behaviour (Foust, 2018). This is further supported by Dad (2010), who reasons that positive reinforcement can be used to reward desirable behaviour in order to extirpate any bad behaviour. Although this is an excellent method to manage a classroom, knowing your class and your pupils is essential to ensuring that this method actually works (Kyriacou 2009). Positive reinforcement won't always work for every child. According to Morgan (1984), studies show that rewards can have one of two effects on children, they can enhance or they can undermine, although current research leans more toward the positive outcome.

The School of Behaviourism puts forward the argument that ideal behaviour can be achieved through operant conditioning (Skinner 1969). Skinner's studies deduce that learners will avidly seek to accomplish things they think will raise their confidence, thus raising their levels of engagement. When children feel confident in their abilities, they work harder and thrive on new opportunities to learn (Kyriacou 2009). Positive reinforcement can amplify a learner's sense of accomplishment, not only that, it will instill in them the importance of acting this way, which will likely result in the learners displaying the desired behaviour more frequently (Abreu 2008). These researchers support what we pose in our question, that positive reinforcement proves to be the most effective way to encourage learners to remain engaged while exhibiting ideal behaviour (Maag 2001). It is believed that as a teacher, by giving positive reinforcement to your class, there is likely to be significant reductions in undesirable behaviour, as reinforcement further instills in children that they are doing good, which elevates their levels of well-being (Auld 2010).

A strong factor of improving levels of engagement is behaviour management, which can be achieved through positive reinforcement (Skinner 1969). Though in some cases, learners can sometimes lack positive relationships with adults outside of the classroom and thus are less likely to possess the self-esteem needed to believe positive comments and accept rewards (Felker 1971). While engagement is vital to understanding, accepting praise is one of the key methods teachers use to keep learners on task. Making frequent use of praise allows the opportunity for the teacher to reinforce appropriate pupil behaviour (Kyriacou 2009). This is why positive reinforcement should be "immediate, frequent, enthusiastic, descriptive, varied and must involve eye contact" (Kennedy 2008:213). In doing this, the teacher can have a more long-term effect on the pupils' engagement and that of those around them.

It is always beneficial to both the teacher and the learners if the level of engagement amongst the class remains high. Understandably, engagement can dip throughout lessons due to a number of common factors such as the time of day, birthdays, arguments etc. (Kyriacou 2009). But praising learners for their efforts during a task can seriously reduce their risk of losing interest in what they are doing and make them less likely to cause a distraction (Stephens and Crawley 1994). While I am not saying that positive reinforcement is the be all end all in maintaining active engagement amongst pupils within a lesson, I am saying that it can more often than not enhance a lesson and aid greatly in sustaining pupil concentration.

To maintain engagement, when rewarding success, it is most desirable to give appropriate levels of praise to keep learners on task. Overdoing it by making a greater deal out of the positive reinforcement can have an adverse effect on the learning, and also holds the possibility of embittering other pupils (Abreu 2008). In addition to this, drawing attention to a pupil by way of praise within the context of there being an anti-school ethos in the class, may not be reinforcing or engaging at all. In fact, in some cases, where there is somewhat of an anti-school clique within the class, receiving verbal praise or a visible reward for exceptional work or outstanding behaviour in front of peers that the pupil wishes to gain acceptance from could be undermined and thus having a negative affect on their learning and their willingness to engage in the lesson (Kyriacou 2009). On the contrary, Winter (2011) advocates that on some occasions, positive reinforcement should be used as somewhat of a celebration within the classroom since it is possible to use rewards and positivity to promote enthusiasm and levels of motivation. Thus creating a sense of community wherein students are encouraged to share their and their peer's accomplishments, which in turn will promote a higher level of engagement throughout the class (Winter 2011).

As mentioned above, positive reinforcement can work on most children, but it cannot simply be done at random or without justification. In many cases, there can often be a desire to give an abundance of rewards within a class. But if rewards such as merits or dojos are improperly given, without justified meaning or communication as to why, it can fail to have the desired effect and can instead damage personal effectiveness and engagement (Tyrell 2018). When discussing negative reinforcement, it can be argued that it is a better tool than positive reinforcement. Maag (2001) suggests that punishment and negative reinforcement can be seen as the easier and quicker tool for classroom management. It is argued by Hulac (2016) that using these tools is something that an inexperienced teaching professional would likely to and argues that reprimanding misbehaviour as opposed to rewarding the good can, in the long term have a detrimental effect to the overall environment of the classroom and decrease the overall level of engagement displayed by learners. Although, while rewards and positive reinforcement should always outweigh the idea of negative reinforcement and punishment, rewards should never be given out just for simply completing a task. This has the potential to send the wrong message, that students need a reward as a motivation to engage in an activity, which can also be seen as a type of pay off (Marzano et al 2001).

4. Explanation of the lesson study design

The methodology being used is lesson study research, which is a form of action research used as a tool to observe, reflect and modify. This will be the base of our approach, with other contributing areas that will later be discussed. As a trio of researchers, we will follow the steps of planning, observation and reflection (Dudley 2012). In accordance with Dudley (2012), we will also be choosing three target pupils to focus on in each class, the choice will be up to each teacher and will be finalised during our PTE as we will have gained a greater understanding of pupil engagement levels and outcomes within our respective classes.

Lesson study, being a classroom-based, collaborative mode of professional learning, is a specific type of investigatory research conducted by a group rather than an individual (Tsui and Law 2007). In my case, I will be working alongside two other researchers. The overall aim of our question and the study is to improve our own quality of teaching and the learning of the pupils. While lesson study cycles will typically involve one lesson that has been collaboratively planned and then taught to students by each teacher, we have chosen to change this factor within our study. Instead of planning one lesson to teach across our three classes, we made the decision to teach separately planned lessons to maintain the schedule of each school and to not stray away from the relevant curriculums in which each class are currently following. An additional reason for this is that each of our classes are different year groups, which means that teaching them the same lesson wouldn't be wise. Our focus is solely on engagement and the pupil responses to praise and visible rewards, the lesson topic is irrelevant in these cases, especially since each of our classes are of varying year groups.

The researchers will take turns to teach as the others take part in a non-participant observation study. By using this technique, the two observers will remain inactive during the lesson and will not contribute in any way to the progression of the lesson and will refrain from communicating with the pupils. Their task is solely to observe the pupils for the desired effects on engagement and learning. Prior to the lesson, the chosen three target pupils will be identified to the observers. These pupils will be specifically chosen based on their usual levels of engagement within the lesson. There will be one pupil who is usually disengaged, one who is sporadically engaged and one who is consistently engaged in each lesson. This decision has been made to allow us to compare the scales of engagement and give us a fair representation of the class as a whole. This will enable us to compare their levels of

engagement using the Leuven scale (Laevers 2008), which we have taken inspiration from to create an observational grid. The pupils will be observed throughout the lesson and later interviewed by the teacher, with the presence of the observers for ethical reasons which will be discussed further in this assignment. In the event of one of the three target pupils being absent, we will look at replacing that pupil with another who possesses similar levels of engagement to the absentee and who has consent from their parent/guardian.

The first research lesson will be a phonics lesson, taught by SA to a reception class of pupils aged 4-5. The second research lesson will be an English lesson, taught by LJ to a year 4 class of pupils aged 8-9. The final research lesson will be a maths lesson, taught by GH to a year 2 class of pupils aged 5-6. Each research lesson will later be evaluated and revised for further teaching, save for the final lesson, after which we will conclude our studies and analyse our findings. The reason for calling them research lessons is owed to the fact that the observational and evaluative parts of the study will focus primarily on the lesson and the learning, not the teacher. During the lessons, the two observers will each have an observation grid, where they will monitor each incident of positive reinforcement they witness and grade how they feel each of the target pupils was affected by the incident in regards to levels of engagement (see appendix for my observational grids).

Once the each lesson concludes, the three researchers will sit down with the three target pupils in a focus-group setting, wherein the pupils will be asked a series of questions. These questions have been decided upon prior to the embarkment of the study and will solely be in reference to the lessons and their perceptions of positive reinforcement. We will use open-ended questioning, with clear, concise and uncomplicated language. This will limit confusion and make it easier for the pupils to divulge in discussion. We will ensure that it is made clear to the learners that there is no wrong answer, that it is all about their perception,

which will limit the occurrence of vague or general answers (Cohen, et al., 2011). The interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim, this will enable us to have a clear recollection of the necessary data whilst protecting the identities of all involved. Our reasoning for choosing to utilise the method of a focus-group are to bring the pupils away from a larger group of students and teachers to allow them a better opportunity to vocalise their thoughts. This will hopefully give us a deeper insight into their opinions of positive reinforcement and how they felt about the lesson. The questions we ask them will not vary as the classes change. The list will remain consistent for all three lesson studies (see appendix for list).

To finish each observation day, as a trio, we decided to create a pro-forma based on the Gibbs reflective cycle (1988). The teacher from each day will complete this, which will allow us the opportunity to rate how we as the educator felt the lesson went. The pro-forma, once completed will aid us in the modification of the way in which we deliver verbal praise and visible rewards, the questions will be tailored specifically to our study and relevant questions we feel are necessary to the progression and advancement of our study (see appendix for my pro-forma). We intend to take what we learn from each lesson to develop and alter our approaches as the study progresses. It is expected that many of our methods will have flaws, it is an integral and unavoidable part of the process (Dudley 2011).

5. Ethical considerations

There are many ethical considerations when completing a research study in a classroom, some of which which are anonymity, ensuring that any names of pupils who participate in the study are either redacted or replaced with pseudonyms or code names such as "Child A". Consent is a huge factor in our study. It is vital that we make parents aware of the study and

allow plenty of time for consent forms to be given and returned. Any child who does not return a slip of consent will still be permitted to be present in the lesson, it just means that the child will not be permitted to be one of the target pupils. In addition to this, it is cardinal for the researchers to keep in mind that it is at the discretion of the parents to remove their child's consent at any time, meaning we should keep in mind alternate pupils to use in the study should this occur.

There is a possibility that participants may suffer from some form of emotional distress during the interview or even the lesson. This may occur because pupils feel pressured to provide a 'correct' answer, or they may feel nervous to share their thoughts amongst two researchers who until said day, were unknown to them. Similarly, children who have not been chosen as a target pupil are at risk of feeling a minor sense of exclusion, which could negatively impact their engagement in future lessons. To avoid this, no favouritism will be showed and the researchers will remain completely professional and unbiased towards all pupils. The complete process, including observations and interviews will be conducted under the guidelines set out by BERA in order to comply with the correct safeguarding procedures for the entirety of our research process and analysis (BERA 2018). An example of this would be that we will be transcribing our audio recordings on school premises and then deleting the recording before we leave the campus, also the transcriptions and evaluative notes will be stored on encrypted devices. In addition to this, we will preserve the anonymity of the pupils by referring to them as 'Pupil A' and so forth in order to keep their identities completely untraceable.

6. Lesson study 1 results and analysis

The pilot of our research lessons began in a large city school, west of Swansea City Centre, where there are 535 pupils enrolled across 17 classes. 11% of pupils are entitled to free school meals and 31% speak English as an additional language. The lesson objectives, to spell common CVC words and to sound out speed sounds were met by all of the pupils. As a whole, their engagement was above average, with there being no incidents that required serious intervention. Verbal praise was given throughout the lesson and the visible rewards were in the shape of post-it notes, which were to be given to children when SA felt they had achieved above her expectations. From my perspective as an observer, I noticed that engagement fluctuated particularly when a post-it was awarded to any child. A great deal of positivity was placed on the giving of the visible reward, which motivated and enhanced the lesson for its entirety. I felt that the post-its had a greater effect on the pupils than verbal praise did. It was clear to me that when verbal praise was given, other pupils, including the three target children, emulated the model behaviour praised. This is exactly the outcome we had hoped for. A summary of the pupil observations are listed below (see appendix for the full observation grid).

Pupil 1 - usually sporadically engaged	From the get go, his engagement was extremely low on the scale, he was disengaged, fidgeting and sought to distract other pupils, however when SA called the class to attention he sat very still and began to listen. This action was apparently out of character and as a result, SA awarded him a post-it, which engaged his attention fully, enough for me to grade him as highly engaged for the remainder of the lesson. His high level of engagement was further enhanced by other pupils receiving praise, as it motivated him to want verbal praise too.
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Pupil 2 - usually disengaged	Pupil 2's level of engagement was mostly low and medium for the majority of the lesson. At one moment he behaved at a high level of engagement, but it was displayed by calling out over another child, which led his level of engagement to drop to low. He responded well to a friend receiving a reward, which is a reaction that was actually quite common throughout the class. Seeing another person be rewarded was the biggest motivator here. Close to the end of the lesson, this was proved further when several pupils received post-its, which made Pupil 2's level of participation rise at the prospect of also being rewarded. While Pupil 2 did not receive a post-it during the lesson, he was given some general verbal praise along with other members of the class, for sitting well on the carpet.
Pupil 3 - usually consistently engaged	Pupil 3 was not easily distracted from the beginning and visibly appeared to thrive from verbal praise. She looked around at her peers seemingly to seek approval or to check if everyone had seen her accomplishment. Her eagerness to answer questions and her alertness to everything the SA said, told me that her engagement level was extremely high. I was not expecting her level to drop, but when she raised her hand to volunteer for an exercise and was not immediately chosen, her level of engagement dropped to medium, she looked visibly disengaged and even made brief conversation with a pupil sat next to her. She also played with her post-it, which caused a high level of distraction. However, when it came to her turn to have a go at the task, her engagement picked right back up and didn't falter again. She saw others being praised, which motivated her to emulate

	the behaviour. As the lesson came to a close she proudly compared her post-it with another pupil who had received one, which told me that it was an excellent motivator for young pupils.
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The interviewing process was fairly successful, for their young age, their responses were very mature. When asked how he felt about other pupils getting a post-it, Pupil 2 commented that "It made me happy because I want one." (see appendix). This statement told us that our goal had been achieved. That although he wasn't awarded a post-it, he wanted one and understood that he needed to model the desired behaviour in order to get one. An interesting factor I noticed within the observation was that the post-its had the biggest effect on engagement, not just to those who were given them, but to the other pupils who quickly set to mirror the behaviour that warranted a post-it. Although the visible rewards at this age make children feel that they have more to gain while learning, I found the fact that the rewards were given directly to the children had a negative effect on levels of attention, they quickly became a distraction and a hindrance, particularly to those who were given one, as it served as an object to touch and play with while the lesson continued. During our evaluation of the lesson, we came to the decision that the rewards should be modified. They didn't necessarily have to be given directly to the children, since we wanted to eliminate their desire to fuss with them. But the rewards still needed to be visible. We decided that dojos would work well and that we would try them out in LJ's lesson tomorrow. It was our conclusion that this would serve as a better visible reward as it could be listed on a server to display pupil's participation, progress and their efforts. It is something that could be referred back to by any member of teaching staff. Another issue that we noticed was that pupils with no post-its and those who had been given little praise seemed much less engaged, although we weren't observing them specifically, it was clear that they had less motivation to

participate. We put forward the idea that those performing below expectations should be encouraged more within the lessons to model good behaviour and strive for rewards.

7. Lesson study 2 results and analysis

The second lesson was conducted in a year 4 class in a large rural school situated in the County Borough of Bridgend. The lesson was mainly comprehension using prior knowledge from several previous lessons. The goal for this lesson was to use dojos and verbal praise to see if they had an effect on pupil engagement. From the target pupils, this is what I observed during the lesson.

Pupil 1 - usually disengaged	Began at a low level of engagement, his head was resting on the table. After LJ awarded several dojos to students, there was no visible impact on this pupil whatsoever. He was disengaged and his eyes were elsewhere. It was clear that he understood the task, but was just choosing to not engage. His engagement remained low for the duration of the lesson, dropping to extremely low at one point when he became a visible distraction to those around him after dojos had been given to Pupil 2. It was only when LJ suggested that us, the observers be granted permission to award dojos that he picked up his pen and began working. He managed to complete half of the task at a medium level of engagement, however towards the end of the lesson his engagement levels fell and he became more distracted. Did not achieve the lesson goals.
Pupil 2 - usually	Began at a medium level of engagement, she responded well to

sporadically engaged	verbal praise, but did not respond when other pupils received dojos. Her attention remained on her own work. Throughout the lessons her engagement fluctuated between medium and low. One particular aspect that affected her was LJ held up a piece of work completed by a non-target pupil, who was awarded a dojo for neat presentation. Pupil 2 looked at her own work and began to cry because she believed that her work wasn't up to that standard. After some reinforcement from classmates and LJ, she got back on track and her engagement remained at a medium level until the end of the lesson. She met the lesson objective.
Pupil 3 - usually consistently engaged	Pupil 3 began at an extremely high level of engagement, shown by raising his hand often, visibly eager to answer every question LJ posed and had a big desire for his opinion to be heard. He ignored conversations happening around him which showed an impressive engagement level. When pupils were set to work independently, conversation ensued and ultimately engagement levels depleted. LJ checked in on his progress which he was eager to share with her. However his need to converse with his friends appeared to outweigh his desire to complete the task at hand. He was unresponsive to dojos being awarded to others and engagement dropped significantly low toward the end of the lesson. He became a distraction to his entire table, which ultimately affected the entire table's achievement of the lesson objective.

The three target pupils had surprising responses to reinforcement within the class, their engagement levels were surprising to me. Among the three, only Pupil 2 managed to complete her work, though sadly, she had a negative reaction to an element of reinforcement that came unexpectedly, but was handled with appropriate care and empathy. The interview that followed told a different story to the one SA and I witnessed in the class. Despite having low engagement within the lesson and failing to respond to dojos, all three pupils admitted that they understood dojos were a reward for hard work and that they were happy with the lesson (see appendix). It was clear that all three pupils understood the importance of positive reinforcement, unfortunately I believe that there was an overuse of dojos in this class as they didn't have the desired effect on the target pupils nor the rest of the class. As I mentioned previously, giving an abundance of rewards can diminish the novelty of being given praise/rewards and can have the opposite of the desired effect in regards to maintaining engagement among pupils (Felker 1971). Within LJ's lesson, dojos were awarded excessively for a period. The transaction of reward from teacher to pupil didn't seem special or deserved and as a result had no visible effect on the and of the pupils whatsoever. This can be linked to the idea that the quality of the interaction administered weighs much heavier than the quantity of interactions (Abreu 2008). In our meeting afterward, we were all in agreement that the dojo system caused just as much, potentially even more of a distraction than the post-its. Our modification for the next research lesson would be to award merits instead, but have the pupils wait until the end of the lesson to put the stickers on their merit cards to avoid making too much of a fuss with them during the lesson and to avoid a larger distraction.

8. Lesson study 3 results and analysis

The final research lesson was mine to teach. The lesson took place in a small rural school situated in the Gorseinon area of Swansea. The school has approximately 255 pupils on roll, 25.4% of which are entitled to free school meals and roughly 3% of pupils speak English as an additional language. My class consisted of 31 pupils in total, though the group that was observed consisted of only 14 pupils for scheduling purposes. Implementing the merit system appeared to maintain their engagement throughout whilst managing to maintain their focus. Because I had eliminated the physical rewards until the end of the lesson they were unable to cause my pupils a distraction, while managing to have the same positive impact on their motivation. All of the pupils in my group managed to achieve the lesson goals, which were to better understand new fractions and complete the worksheets in their books. I feel that my giving verbal praise, using pupil's work as examples and asking their opinion on awarding merits to their peers really aided in the overall engagement of the lesson. Involving them in the reward scheme acted as a great way to activate their desire to learn and complete the tasks. The three target pupils were observed by my two research partners, after reading their data, I compiled it into a table, see below:

Pupil 1 - usually consistently engaged	Remained actively engaged for the duration of the lesson. Her level raised when her friend (Pupil 3) received a merit. While her engagement remained high, it fluctuated momentarily when she didn't get chosen to answer a question after raising her hand several times. It became clear that she had a desire for recognition, evident when another pupil received praise for neat work and she began rewriting her work on the mini whiteboard to show to GH. When her efforts were recognised by GH her level of engagement elevated and she finished the task faster than most, confidently meeting the lesson objective without much aid.
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Pupil 2 - usually sporadically engaged	Maths appeared to be a subject he was passionate about. He was eager for recognition, so much so that his need to speak interrupted the lesson several times, which caused minor disruption for the other learners. He was determined to get the most from his learning, was incredibly involved and engaged for the first half of the lesson, offering answers and interesting facts. However toward the second half of the lesson, he appeared to feel that his efforts weren't being recognised enough, which dropped his level of engagement significantly. This saw him straying from the task and doodling on his mini whiteboard. He no longer responded actively to the rewarding of merits to other pupils, which he had done prior to becoming disengaged. Though GH noticed this and picked up on the fact that he'd strayed from the task, but had done good work thus far. His efforts were publicly recognised among his peers, which was the motivation he needed to boost his engagement levels back to high and met the lesson objective.
Pupil 3 - usually disengaged	Engagement fluctuated throughout the lesson. She began at a medium level of engagement, where she was listening but slightly distracted. After gaining a merit and some verbal praise, her engagement peaked for a short while before dropping back to low. Within the lesson, given some independence, she deviated from the task, emulating Pupil 2's behaviour of doodling on the mini whiteboard. Though after seeing Pupil 1 receive verbal praise for neat work, she began to model the good behaviour in the hopes of gaining recognition too, which she inevitably did once she had met the lesson objective.

Within the interviews, it was surprising to find that Pupil 1, who is normally an avid talker, suddenly became shy and too nervous to deliver answers. Though despite this, all three pupils answered the questions clearly, clarifying to us as researchers that they knew exactly why merits were being used and what was required of them in order to receive them (see appendix).

After discussing the lesson with my research partners, we concluded that the merits worked the best out of all three of our methods. Removing the visible reward meant that the pupils could focus more on their work whilst still keeping in mind that they had earned rewards. My pupils seemed to have a greater and more positive response to verbal praise, which could say something about either the particular year group or the area of the school, or, SA theorized it was down to the fact that I gave explanations as to why exactly each merit was being awarded, which is said to have a longer lasting effect on pupils (Auld 2010).

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Overall, in regards to collecting evidence, I firmly believe that a video recording of the classes would be very beneficial in order to have a documented account of all of the reactions within the class. As we were only watching three children, there will have been things that we missed from other pupils as well as our target pupils that could have been useful in supporting our research. If I could do the lesson differently I would choose to focus the research on the same year group across the different schools in order to collect more solid data. To collect better evidence it would also have been great if instead of trying out the reinforcement on three different classes with three different schools, to have had the opportunity to observe one class for several days throughout the week in order to better document their responses and their progress in order to see if the changes we made throughout this process affected their learning and engagement in any way.

9. Discussion of research findings in relation to related literature and research

Relating back to Kennedy's research (2008), I found on several occasions, when using immediate, descriptive praise whilst maintaining eye contact with the pupil, had a visibly beneficial effect to the individual pupil and those around him. I have found this act of praise to be beneficial to the progression of the child's learning and wellbeing. Throughout the observed lesson as well as previous days, I have found verbal praise to be a great enhancer for children as they clearly exhibit the desired behaviour and remain on task when told exactly what has been positively noticed in their behaviour.

It is my understanding that, from viewing the collected data (see appendix), our study has had a positive impact on the wellbeing of the pupils and had provided us with the confirmation that positive reinforcement does impact engagement levels in many ways. Through the means of positive reinforcement, we encountered minimal levels of bad behaviour and very little disruption than we had experienced in our classes before. This supports the ideals of Auld (2010) who theorized that when you instil pupils with positive reinforcement and teach them in a positive environment, you are teaching them to believe that they are doing good. While some of the target pupils did not exhibit the expected actions and behaviour, it could be said that perhaps their levels of self-esteem weren't high enough, or perhaps they didn't feel the motivation to work for the rewards (Felker 1971).

It was clear from the research that one of the main strengths of our study was giving verbal praise during a task. We saw a visible change in some pupils that made them less likely to cause distraction (Stephens and Crawley 1994). For example, Pupil 2 in the third research lesson displayed a medium level of distraction, though on being given verbal praise, he refrained from talking and began to model excellent behaviour. The data we collected was all

qualitative, requiring immense responsibility on our parts as researchers to evaluate and interpret the data collected (Miles and Huberman 1983). This put a level of limitation on our study as our research is all deemed interpretative. With there being no statistical figures involved it prevented us from being able to create analytical spreadsheets based on solid figures. With our findings being down to interpretation and observation, our chosen methods of data collection had the potential to seem biased or even controversial, which is why it was so vital to our research that we remained impartial, entering the observations with a completely unbiased mentality (Bryman and Burgess 1994).

10. Conclusion

As I mentioned previously, qualitative data collection can sometimes seem unreliable, however I believe that what we were able to compile over our three day study evidently proves that our study was a success. I feel we had a slight advantage being able to modify our methods twice, meaning our research was much more fulfilled. However, despite having three lessons to develop our research, we only had one taught lesson each to record our findings. Each class was only observed once, which unfortunately doesn't make the data completely viable. I believe that given more time to observe and compile more evidence, this study could have delved much deeper into the analysis of whether positive reinforcement has a larger impact on pupil engagement than previously stated in already published findings.

I'm happy I was able to pilot the method of removing visible rewards from the lesson and utilising them as a post-lesson activity. I believe that it aided in maintaining the engagement of the pupils as it made less of a spectacle of receiving rewards but did not diminish the pupil's motivation for seeking such reward. This is a method I will likely implement in my next

teaching practice. From this experience I have learned some excellent ways to reward model behaviour whilst preserving pupil engagement in the lesson. This experience has also opened my eyes to methods that don't work as well and how to utilise better means of reinforcement as a teaching professional. The reading most definitely supported our research question and reaffirmed for us that our research corroborates already published findings. This has led us to the understanding that more research definitely needs to be carried out in this particular field. We believe that from our time and research, we contributed to promoting levels of engagement through positive reinforcement and believe that there is a plethora of discoveries yet to be made in this particular area of learning.

11. Recommendations

In light of the research, it is likely that moving forward I will implement positive reinforcement in my classroom. It is impossible, as a teacher, to not use positive reinforcement. But this study has helped me to realise just how much of an impact different types of reinforcement can have on a class and on individuals. The study has taught me that I will need to get to know my class and see what works for them and tailor-make a positive reinforcement method that works for them all. While some elements of reinforcement could work better for some pupils in the class, it does not necessarily mean they will work for all of them. With the knowledge I have gained, I hope that I will be able to implement multiple methods of reinforcement to best benefit my students and further maintain their engagement.

If I had to undertake this study again there are many things I would like to change. First, instead of having three different classes being observed once, I would, given a larger time constraint, would have each class be observed over several days in several different lessons in order to have more results to analyse. I feel that this is an area of research that warrants

much more time and concern, as it has such a wide potential to impact other teachers and learners. Given the time to explore this further, I feel that further research could definitely benefit a potential to grow and expand our knowledge as educators and researchers in creating the best possible tailormade methods for engagement within the classroom. If time hadn't been such a novelty, I likely would have implemented charts and graphs to better display over a longer time-scale, the levels of engagement throughout each class. However, given the shortness of this particular study, this research method wouldn't have been viable due to the little time we had with each class.

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