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Learning Is Its Own Reward?

The purpose of this investigation was to evaluate if 3rd grade students would score better on their CSAP test if they knew there was a reward for good performance. I hypothesized that if an extrinsic reward was applied, then the students' performance would increase. This experiment involved gathering 76 3rd grade students in 4 different classes and randomly separating them into Group A and Group B. Group A, made up of two classes, was told that they would receive a toy for high performance on the practice test. Group B, made up of the other two classes, was not offered any extrinsic motivation. The test administered to the students was the 2004-2005 CSAP Demonstration Grades 3 and 4 Mathematics Test. The students were given 15 minutes to complete the test. The data collected partially supported my original hypothesis. The Extrinsic Reward Group had more than 1% higher average test performance than the Control Group. Additionally, the Extrinsic Group's data formed a "Normal Distribution," or commonly called a "Bell Curve," while the Control Group's data had a more random dispersion. These findings led me to conclude that with the extrinsic reward the students likely tried harder and thereby performed more to their "normal" potential on the test. Although offering an extrinsic reward does not make 3rd grade students smarter, the data supports a conclusion that an external reward encouraged the students to try harder, performing closer to their true potential.