

Reinforcer Roundup

OBJECTIVES

The student will list types of reinforcers used at school and then design a system of reinforcement.

MATERIALS

- paper
- pens or pencils

BACKGROUND

In animal training, a reinforcer lets the animal know when it has performed the desired behavior and encourages the animal to repeat desired behaviors. The reinforcer tells the animal, "Yes, you have done that well." When an animal responds with a behavior that is close to what the trainer wants, the trainer delivers a reinforcer. As a result, the animal increases the frequency, intensity, and duration of that particular behavior.

Often new reinforcers can be conditioned by pairing something unfamiliar to the animals, such as a toy, with a known positive reinforcer. Eventually, through repeated pairing, the unfamiliar stimulus (toy) takes on positive characteristics and becomes a new reinforcer. We call it a *conditioned reinforcer*.



ACTION

1. Lead a discussion about the rewards and conditioned reinforcers students at your school get for correct behavior such as above-average schoolwork, good conduct, sports participation, extracurricular participation, and special achievements. Which reinforcers work best? What do students like best?
2. Have students design their own reinforcers and reinforcement system for the school and share it with the class. Have the rest of the class analyze each student's ideas. Would they work? Why or why not? Discuss how the rewards might vary for students of different ages and cultures.
3. Try some of your students' ideas in your classroom. Give the plan a trial period and discuss the results in class. Discuss why the system worked or failed.



A tail fluke rub-down is a reinforcer for this killer whale.

DEEPER DEPTHS

Ask the students to brainstorm and try various types of reinforcers on their pets (or siblings and parents) at home.