



## Schools, Rewards and FFS

### Description

Chatting to my daughter today and she was telling me about the latest incentive/bribe scheme the school was running to get kids using RM Easimaths – a gamified maths app. The app, by the way, is brilliant.

The set up was this. Most hours on the app gets a prize...

So, anyone know where this is going?

[I've written about this in the past](#)

The first thing that happened was a couple of kids got caught out logging in to the app and just leaving it running for hours and hours. The rules, such as they were, did not prevent this as they were looking at a quantitative analysis – the number of hours, rather than qualitative for example, number of questions done per hour of use. Anyway, they put a stop to that, to an extent, but still were only really measuring time, but with a few sense checks in there. Score one for lack of understanding.

The second, rather brilliant part of this plan, was a secret target that no one knew about. The teacher set a target that only she knew that all the kids had to try and reach as a minimum number of hours logged on the app. This actually isn't a bad idea, it plays into curiosity. The problem is that when the kids are already aware of who has destroyed them time wise in the game, they just are not motivated to worry about the secret goal.

The third and final nail was a comment from my 9-year-old. "It's sad actually. RM Easimaths is really good, but most of the people in my class were only playing it so that they could win the prize" Once again, overjustification effect rearing its head.

This all goes back to measuring quantity over quality. What would have been better would have been a more complex set of qualitative metrics. How many questions have you answered vs how many hours? How many did you get right? How have you improved over the time you have played. You could have a prize for the person who has improved the most, the one who was consistently good, the one who answered the highest percentage of questions right compared to the number of questions they actually

answered (so you can't just answer one question right and say you had 100%)

I do get it. Teachers and schools are under pressure to get results and I also appreciate that most truly care about the education of the kids (even if the government and various governing bodies are only interested in numbers). However, just bribing quantity of activity is not enough to create good engagement or learning. It creates competition where there doesn't need to be any, it creates negative behaviours and it demotivates large sections of your audience. I've said it before and I'll say it again – stop using rewards when you don't understand the unintended consequences!

### **Category**

1. Gamification
2. Education

### **Tags**

1. education
2. overjustification effect
3. prizes
4. rewards
5. schools

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