SAMPLE READING AND WRITING PLACEMENT EXAMINATION/TEACHING AND LEARNING ASSESSMENT

This is a sample only. This topic will not be used on the actual Placement Examination.

Read the following article and write a single essay in response to it. The article was written by Bruce Chadwick, Adjunct Professor of English and Chair of the Assessment Committee of the English Department at Long Island University's Brooklyn Campus.

Cash-Rewards for Educational Achievement By Bruce Chadwick

How do we promote learning in the public school system? This is a question addressed by Barry Schwartz in his *New York Times* article, "Money for Nothing." His premise is that "the intrinsic awards of learning aren't working in New York's schools, at least for a lot of children." Schwartz writes about the plan to offer extrinsic rewards in the form of cash to students in order to motivate them to learn. For example, students would receive money for good grades, good attendance, or high test scores. Schwartz cites the work of Roland Fryer, an economist appointed as "chief equity officer" of the city's Department of Education. Fryer believes that "people respond to incentives. If you want people to do something, you have to make it worth their while. This assumption drives virtually all of economic theory."

Schwartz notes that this assumption stems from the belief that the traditional "rewards" for learning are no longer working. Such "rewards" as "gaining understanding (of yourself and others), demonstrating mastery, satisfying curiosity, inhabiting imaginary worlds created by others" as well as the prospect of "getting into good colleges and getting good jobs…are not doing the job." On this basis, Fryer suggests that real, extrinsic incentives, such as cash rewards, will help improve learning.

Many experts believe that such traditional "rewards" still work, noting that learning is essentially intrinsic. It helps build character, understanding, and judgment, qualities that students will find beneficial in the long run. Fryer disagrees. He believes that many students work better under pressure for explicit rewards because they cannot see the benefits of learning in any other way.

Schwartz cites an experiment to investigate this issue of short run vs. long run incentives. Nursery-aged children were asked to draw with colorful pencils. After the children did their work, some were given "good player" awards and others were not. At a later date, the children were asked to draw with the same colorful pencils. The researchers found that "[t]he youngsters given awards were less likely to draw at all, and drew worse pictures, than those who were not given the awards."

Schwartz concludes that the rewards of drawing were intrinsic to the activity itself. While giving the "good player" award is a form of "recognition," Schwartz found that the chance of winning an award took away the fun of drawing as an activity. He found that

the children given the "good player" awards found drawing less fun and weren't interested in drawing. Schwartz states that he found that the same trend held true for experiments with adults: "When you pay them for doing things they like, they come to like these activities less and will no longer participate in them without a financial incentive. The intrinsic satisfaction of the activities gets 'crowded out' by the extrinsic payoff."

But if intrinsic satisfaction is its own reward, then why aren't children learning? What must be done to help children learn? Letters in response to Schwartz's article were varied. One writer, Catherine Schildknecht, feels that "the recognition or reward must be given to everyone so as not to engender negative self-image." Otherwise, she feels, those who do <u>not</u> receive awards will begin to lose confidence in their abilities and develop a low self-image about their learning. She believes that the parents must instill the desire for learning, not the schools. She feels that this plan of extending extrinsic rewards in the form of cash would only reinforce the problem inherent in American society today: "the belief that there must be a monetary reward or recognition for anything that one does."

However, another writer, Mark Roman, maintains that there already <u>is</u> a system of what he calls handing out "M&Ms for each accomplishment," the built-in incentives for attending school: High school students want that high school diploma, so that they can get that college degree which will lead to another post-graduate degree, or a well-paying job. And how are students evaluated in these efforts? By grades, of course, a very extrinsic reward.

So what to do? Ultimately, Schwartz believes that the cash-incentive program will work <u>only</u> if educators are prepared to follow the program every step of the way, because they will have conditioned students to learn only by offering them cash incentives. What happens when educators ask students to learn without them? Another letter writer, Thomas G. Szabo, thinks that this program can work only if educators consider "how and when to fade those [incentives like cash, grades, and attendance] to the natural contingencies of learning. If a coherent fading plan is designed, the New York City school incentive system will have a higher probability of success."

The question remains whether or not such an incentive program will work. It seems to coincide with our American form of extrinsic recognition: Money. Yet, it also seems to negate the value of learning: Acquiring knowledge and understanding for their own sake.

Now that you have read the article, write an essay in which you first identify the issue raised by Bruce Chadwick. Then, explore the possible consequences and advantages of paying students for doing well in school. Do you agree or disagree with this policy? Be sure to explain your position using specific evidence and examples from the reading and from your own experience and observation.