Learning: reinforcement

Humans always need motivation to work. When we work, we get paid. our wages or salaries are our Those rewards we receive keep us investing more effort in order to receive more or continuing receving those rewards. However, Skinner do not find reward is an precise term to describe its function on organisms' behavior. Instead, he called it reinforcement. There are two types of reinforcement: positive and negative. Although both intention is to increase target behavior, their procedure on stimulus is different. Positive reinforcement is to present a stimulus (a pleasant stimulus) that following a behavior that increase the chances of a behavior. For example, we encourage students to study harder by giving positive rewards such as candies and stamps on homework. By adding those reinfrocement, students tend to study harder for those rewards. In this case, teachers apply positive reinforcement to strengthen students' effort or even study habit. Therefore, the students are encouraged to study harder in hope of getting the candies or a stamp on their test paper. On the other side, negative reinforcement remove stimulus (mostly unpleasant ones) to increase the chance of a behavior. Let's use the same bahavior, studying, to demonstrate the difference. In order to strengthen students' study habit or efforts into studying, parents can remove chores form their children if they get good grades on a test. By taking away the unpleasant tasks (chores), students are encouraged to study harder to avoid those tasks. The harder they study, the less chores they have to do. Reinforcment does not have to be a physicla matter. It can be a behavior of others. For example, I know that the more junk food I eat, I hear more complaints from my mother. In order to remove the complaining behavior from my mother, I eat less junk food. On the other hand, myself eating less junk food (remove unpleasant stimulus) is a reinforcement for my mother's smiling behavior. Either way, the intention of reinforcement is to make my mother happier.