

Motivation, Motivation, Motivation

For over twenty years School Leadership Today has been stressing the value of critical praise in motivating staff to perform beyond their own expectations. As far as Sir Michael Wilshaw, the new Head of Ofsted is concerned however, he would not consider he is doing his job properly unless he could see low staff morale spreading across the country.

No doubt this is a caricature of his real sentiments, set free into the world as a disastrous, sticky sound bite by a loose comment to the press. But it chimes with Ofsted's general demeanour towards schools, particularly those having difficulties (or those with a difficult intake). It chimes with government legislation over enforced academisation, and it chimes with the constant political abuse aimed at teachers.

If you had to use a word that sums up Ofsted's attitudes and practice, in its review of school stats or its style of lesson observations and its appliance of New Framework mantras the one that springs to mind is 'mechanistic'. There is very little room for positive human relations in the relationship between schools and inspectorate, at any level. And mechanistic has to be a pretty good candidate as an opposite leadership style to motivational leadership.

The ASCL and NAHT conferences revealed the utter frustration of heads at this mechanistic approach to the problems they face on the ground. So much so that Gove came close to apologising for the inquisitorial image of Ofsted under its new bullish leader and promised to step back from unannounced inspections.

But this is only the surface of the problem. As Debra Kidd points out in her article (page 14) Ofsted's mechanistic mantras about what constitutes a good lesson reach deep into the bowels of what the profession is about. Their obsession with lesson objectives and the 'three-part-lesson' is now beginning to conflict seriously with Ofsted's ostensible aim to make education more engaging, creative and learner centred.

It's a brave head that does this, as Andrew Morrish demonstrates (page 30). He instituted a more creative curriculum in his school and was told he was not improving fast enough, and that he didn't understand his own school. He stuck to his guns and turned the school round in five years using strategies and approaches that are the antithesis to Ofsted's mechanistic notions of teaching but which they love when they see in its full realisation. Andrew Morrish will be writing regularly for us on implementing this new approach to the curriculum, which School Leadership Today and its sister publication, Creative Teaching and Learning, believe offers an important new direction for teaching.

And if you wanted to know how important this is then you only have to read our Trend report on PE in our schools. It has failed to move with the times, it is generally unresponsive to children's own interests, it significantly fails to achieve its desired goal of getting children fit and children themselves, particularly girls, hate it. The problems of engagement, as ever, start with secondary schools and when girls start to become more conscious of their bodies. At this point participation declines dramatically to less than half that of boys. (This is really saying that schools are not responding to an important issue of child development!) Only 12 per cent of girls at 14 have reached the level of fitness they are supposed to have, but only 24 per cent reach the desired level. The whole discipline is completely dysfunctional. If a business was confronted with this level of customer satisfaction or marketing effectiveness it would be case of a redline through the budget head, or of radical reform.

What is interesting about the survey is that the girls questioned said they were keen to be fit, but they wanted consideration for uneasiness about their bodies, they wanted their personal interests reflected more and they wanted more encouragement rather than being shouted at.

In other words they want a motivational environment where their interests and needs as human beings are recognised. Otherwise, they just won't play ball.