

The curious nature of the Herding Instinct in humans. Can we use this to enhance good behaviour in our schools?

In schools we teach in groups. The whole school, the year group and the individual class.

Each of these groupings is sensitive to the herding instinct. In other words, unless the group (herd) is clearly shown what is required of them, it will find its own way. This could then result in children not doing what is asked of them simply because the desire to be part of the herd is a much stronger pull. This is what causes frustration in classrooms day in and day out. How many times have teachers been sat discussing the behaviour and progress of individuals to hear, 'She's not a problem for me' or, 'That class is terrible, I can't get anything out of them'?

What is the herding instinct?

Understand the influence of the herding instinct on why children behave the way they do and develop techniques to make the most of these instincts to modify behaviour in school.

In human societies, herding often involves people using the actions of others as a guide to sensible behaviour, instead of independently seeking out high-quality guidance about the likely outcomes of their actions. Herding can be particularly destructive and frustrating in school contexts. If herding can lead to outcomes that are so undesirable in schools, can we manage it to our advantage? Herding evolved to benefit individuals, not groups or societies.

However what if the herding instinct was an asset rather than a hindrance? Herding can be a positive concept within schools. Imagine the situation where pupils wanted to be part of the herd that succeeds, or is punctual, or supported their classmates. If we don't tap into this thinking we are missing an opportunity.

Reflect

What area of behaviour do you want to change in your class/year group/at your school?

Is it herding behaviour?

What would it take to change this behaviour?

Roy Matthews, Catholic Teaching Alliance SLE for behaviour, is delivering a course – Managing the Herd. How the herding instinct underpins all behavioural decisions – on Monday 22 January 2018, 4.00 – 6.00pm in the Training Centre at Our Lady's Catholic High School, Fulwood, Preston.

Full details to follow or see the website www.our-learning.org