



ISASA

WEEKLY BULLETIN

9 TO 17 APRIL 2009

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MEMBERSHIP

- **Salary Survey Analysis**

The Salary Survey Analysis was sent to the Heads of all participating schools on Tuesday.

Many schools may have wanted to participate but for various reasons missed the deadline for submission of returns. We will therefore accept further returns between now and the end of May. During this time the analysis will not be updated, but schools that submit returns will be sent a copy of the current analysis.

Returns should be emailed to John Lobban or faxed to 011 648 1467 for John's attention.

Contact: John Lobban. Tel: 011 648 1331. Email: johnl@isasa.org

CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

- **Employment Relations for People in Leadership Positions**

Judith Griessel is ISASA's Employment Relations and Labour Law consultant and edited the most recent copy of the ISASA Employee Relations Manual.

In her work with ISASA schools Judith has identified a need for educators in leadership positions to be trained in respect of the various aspects of employment relations, and how to deal with these in practice.

Some questions often asked (do *you* know the answers?)

- What can I do when a staff member is not performing at the required standard?
- Do I need to have a full disciplinary hearing if a staff member needs to be disciplined?
- How do I ensure that my disciplinary measures are fair and will stand up at the CCMA?
- What do we do if staff who are due to retire want to continue working?
- What questions can I ask at interviews to obtain the necessary information, but that will not be regarded as discriminatory (e.g. pregnancy; family responsibilities; religion; etc.)
- Can I retrench a problematic employee?
- Why can I not simply give contractual notice to end the employment contract when I don't need / want an employee to work for the school any longer?
- Can I dismiss an employee who is chronically ill or permanently injured?
- Must our school comply with Employment Equity legislation, and what does it involve?
- Are my sport coaches / therapists / music teachers employees or are they independent contractors?
- My cleaning staff belong to a union – is it true that a warning issued to a cleaner is not valid unless the union official was present or had been informed?

Judith is presenting half-day workshops on this topic. School principals, deputies, department heads and anyone acting in a management capacity will find this of value.

There are still some places left for the next workshop in Johannesburg (Laerskool Jan Celliers) on **25 May 2009**. The [Registration Form](#) can be downloaded from the ISASA website.

Further workshops will be arranged according to interest and demand from ISASA schools. Please complete the relevant section of the [☞ Registration Form](#) to indicate your interest to attend (or host) a workshop in your region.

Contact: Judith Griessel. Tel: 082 928 2990, Email: jmgriessel@mweb.co.za

- **Gifted and Talented Children: a Brief Course**

Studying Gifted and Talented Education is almost impossible in South Africa as no courses exist other than a brief one at UNISA. Eva Biebuyck, the former Director of the Schmerenbeck Educational Centre for Gifted Children, has agreed to develop a six-week course on gifted education.

The course will be presented at St David's Marist Inanda, who would like feedback as to feasibility, time, length and scheduling. Schools that are interested should please download the [☞ Course Questionnaire](#) and return a completed copy to Sue Soulsby at St David's. The Questionnaire also includes further information about the proposed course content.

Contact: Sue Soulsby. Tel: 011 215 7632, Email: soulsbys@stdavids.co.za

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- **Research Shows Girls' School Graduates Have an Edge**

UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies recently released the results of a well-documented, national study which shows the statistically significant edge girls' school graduates have over their coed peers. This peer-reviewed research disentangles the effects of single-sex education from confounding demographic influences.

A summary of the research and links to the study report are available on the [☞ NCGS Website](#).

- **Private Schools Closing as Crunch Sends Families to State System**

One UK private school is forced to close every fortnight as the credit crunch means families can no longer afford the fees. At least 30 fee-paying schools have shut or merged in the past year, according to teachers' leaders.

The full article is available on the [☞ Mail Online](#) website.

- **Report Envisions Shortage of Teachers as Retirements Escalate**

Over the next four years, more than a third of the 3.2 million teachers in the US could retire, depriving classrooms of experienced instructors and straining taxpayer-financed retirement systems, according to a new report.

The full article is available on the [☞ New York Times](#) website.

• Why Real Thinking is Hard – and How to Maximize it in the Classroom

In this thoughtful article in *American Educator*, University of Virginia psychologist Daniel Willingham presents a theory on why it's so difficult to get all students engaged and happy in the classroom: people enjoy challenging mental work *only if they experience success*, and orchestrating successful learning experiences for diverse groups of students is really difficult.

"Your brain serves many purposes," says Willingham, "and thinking is not the one it does best." This is because most of the real estate in the brain is devoted to the more complex tasks of seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, tasting, and moving. Willingham illustrates this by posing the following problem:

You are in an empty room and are given a candle, some matches, and a box of tacks. The challenge: how can you get the lighted candle about five feet off the ground without holding it? You've already tried melting some of the wax and sticking the candle to the wall and that didn't work.

Given twenty minutes, most people cannot solve this problem. But once they hear the answer, they realize that it's not particularly tricky: dump the tacks out of the box, tack the box to the wall five feet off the ground, and use it as a platform for the candle.

This problem demonstrates three things about thinking through an unfamiliar problem, says Willingham. First, thinking is *slow* (as contrasted with our instant visual "take" on a new room we've entered). Second, thinking is *effortful*; it takes concentration and a lack of distractions. Third, thinking is *uncertain*; trying to solve the candle problem, our brains go up a number of blind alleys and might not even get us close to the solution.

If we're so bad at thinking through problems, asks Willingham, how do people hold down a job or manage their money? How do teachers make the hundreds of decisions they have to make every day? The answer is that we rely on memory. "Most of the problems you face are ones you've solved before," he says, "so you just do what you've done in the past." This is why the candle problem would be a cinch once you've heard the solution. "Most people think that they have a terrible memory, and it's true that your memory is not as reliable as your visual or movement systems," says Willingham, "but your memory system is much more reliable than your thinking system, and provides answers quickly and with little effort." All of us have myriad procedural memories – how to drive, for example, or how to solve a standard dispute between two students on the playground – which we use every day without having to "think" at all.

But what about real thinking – solving challenging, novel problems? Willingham says it can be intensely rewarding and pleasurable (brain scans confirm this) and people are drawn to this kind of thinking, but the conditions have to be just right. The pleasure and satisfaction come from successfully solving a thinking problem. "Working on a problem with no sense that you're making progress is not pleasurable," he says. "In fact, it's frustrating. And there's no great pleasure in simply knowing the answer either." If you didn't solve the candle problem yourself, there was little satisfaction in being told the answer, just as there's less satisfaction in having a joke explained to you than if you "got it" yourself. There's also minimal satisfaction in solving a problem (or getting a joke) that's too easy.

So the key is hitting the "sweet spot" – not too easy and not too hard. "Working on problems that are at the right level of difficulty is rewarding," says Willingham, "but working on problems that are too easy or too difficult is unpleasant... If the student routinely gets work that is a bit too difficult, it's little wonder that he doesn't care much for school."

Willingham devotes the rest of the article to a number of suggestions on how to make thinking easier – thereby helping students have more success and enjoyment in school.

1. *Orchestrate four key factors.* He suggests that successful problem-solving depends on four things:
 - Sufficient information from the teacher or other sources;
 - Helpful information in the student's long-term memory; facts really matter to thinking;
 - Helpful procedural memories learned previously;
 - Sufficient space in the student's working memory to process the problem in real time.

These factors matter whether we are solving a problem as simple as 18×7 or as challenging as the candle problem (what makes the latter so difficult is that most people have nothing in long-term memory to help them).

2. *Give students appropriately challenging think-work every day.* Too many lesson plans consist of a string of teacher explanations, says Willingham. If students are going to get better at thinking, they need to do real cognitive work. He urges teachers to make sure their lesson plans contain a good mix of challenging problems and tweak them so most students can solve them successfully.
3. *Take into account what students know.* Imagine that a fifth-grade teacher began a lesson with this question: "You've all heard of the Boston Tea Party; why do you suppose the colonists dressed as Indians and dumped tea in the Boston Harbor?" If students didn't have the necessary background knowledge – the relationship of the colonies to Great Britain in 1773, the social and economic significance of tea, alternative courses of action for the colonists – they would very likely brand this question as "boring." What they mean, says Willingham, is that it's not a well-timed question; the teacher needs to do some teaching first!
4. *Take into account limits in students' working memory.* "Remember that people can only keep so much information in mind at once," says Willingham. "Overloads to working memory are caused by things like multi-step instructions, lists of unconnected facts, chains of logic more than two or three steps long, and the application of a just-learned concept to new material (unless the concept is quite simple)." The solution: slowing the pace and using visual aids so students can hold the necessary information in working memory and solve problems in real time.
5. *Pose interesting questions that will draw students into the subject matter.* "Sometimes I think that we, as teachers, are so eager to get to the answers that we do not devote sufficient time to developing the question," says Willingham. "But it's the question that piques people's interest. Being told an answer doesn't do anything for you." He urges teachers to start with the end in mind – the information and understandings we want students to have at the end of a lesson or unit – and then frame interesting questions at the right level of difficulty so students are hooked.
6. *Avoid baffling puzzlers.* Provocative "essential questions" are a good way to engage students, but some teachers overreach, says Willingham. For example, a classic science demonstration is putting a burning piece of paper inside a milk bottle, putting a peeled hard-boiled egg over the opening, and, after the paper burns out, watching the egg get sucked into the bottle. Students ooh and ah, but unless they have the background knowledge to understand what's going on, this is like a magic trick and no real learning takes place. Willingham suggests that the demonstration would have more impact after students have learned a little about how cooling air contracts, forming a partial vacuum.
7. *Differentiate.* All children can learn, but it's naïve to believe that all students have the same level of preparation and background knowledge, says Willingham. He urges teachers to differentiate assignments and give extra support to students who lack certain skills and background knowledge.
8. *Regularly shift gears.* "When you change topics, start a new activity, or in some other way show that you are shifting gears, virtually every student's attention comes back to you," says Willingham. It's smart to plan these events to maximize student engagement.

9. *Keep a diary.* In the extremely busy life of a classroom, it's easy for teachers to forget successful – and unsuccessful – lessons, says Willingham. He urges teachers to jot down how different lesson elements went for future reference.

*“Why Don’t Students Like School? Because the Mind is Not Designed for Thinking” by Daniel Willingham in **American Educator**, Spring 2009 (Vol. 33, #1, p. 4-13).*

*This article is excerpted from Willingham’s new book, **Why Don’t Students Like School?** (John Wiley & Sons, 2009).*

Contact: Lindsay McCay. Tel: 011 648 1331, Email: lindsaym@isasa.org



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CONDOLENCES

- **Daphne Mthombeni**

We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of our colleague and friend, Daphne Mthombeni.

Mr Paul Channon and all SAHISA members extend deepest sympathies to Daphne's family. Daphne will be remembered as an exceptional lady who touched so many lives with her warm and generous spirit. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family during this difficult time.

HEARTFELT CONCERN

- **Kate Paterson**

It is with deep concern that we learn from Father Angus Paterson, that his daughter, Kate, has been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease.

Although Kate will need chemotherapy, it is believed that the disease has been diagnosed early (stage 2). We most certainly will be holding Kate, Father Paterson and the family in our thoughts and prayers.

Father Paterson, we offer you our support and wish you strength during this difficult time.

Contact: Jenny Mundell. Tel: 011 648 1331, Email: jennym@isasa.org

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- **Most Likely to Succeed**

In the New Yorker – December 15 2008 – Malcolm Gladwell penned an article entitled “How do we hire when we can't tell who is right for the job”. He examines who is most likely to succeed and discovers that “effective teachers have a gift for noticing what one researcher calls “withitness.”

The full article is available on the [ISASA website](#).

- **Story Time from School to School**

In the article, Ruda Landman provides interesting statistics about the reading skills of South African children. She highlights the problem and explores possible solutions.

The full article is available on the [ISASA website](#).

Many schools are already actively committed to various reading programmes. However, if you are interested in becoming involved in this particular reading programme, you are encouraged to contact Ruda directly.

Contact: Ruda Landman, Tel: 011 726 1468, Email: rland@iafrica.com

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Leadership in Extraordinary Times**

LeadershipWorks and GIBS are pleased to present Jim Collins, the best-selling author of *Good to Great* and *Built to Last*. Live via satellite on **Thursday 9 July 2009**, in a leadership workshop designed exclusively for South African leaders.

The workshop is designed to produce maximum leadership growth, explore the latest breakthrough research and provides a unique opportunity to engage directly with Jim Collins.

Contact: LeadershipWorks. Tel: 011 467 4198, Web: www.leadershipworks.co.za

- **Klingenstein Heads of School Programme**

Heads are urged to make application to the Klingenstein Heads of School Programme and are reminded that the closing date for applications is 1 May 2009.

Detailed information and application forms can be obtained through www.klingenstein.org

- **Annual SAHISA/ISASA Conference**

The annual SAHISA/ISASA conference will take place from Sunday 6th September 2009 to Thursday 11th September 2009 in Swaziland. All Heads who are not yet members of SAHISA are encouraged to submit application forms to Jenny Mundell.

Marina Henwood (Conference Coordinator) is responsible for organising accommodation, transport and coordinating arrival and departure dates.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Marina.

Contact: Marina Henwood. Tel 00268 409 0124, Email: mhenwood@realnet.co.sz

- **The Ripple Effect ECD Conference**

The SAHISA/ISASA Early Childhood Development Conference takes place on 29 and 30 May 2009 at Oakhill School in Knysna.

For further information please contact Elna Brown, or visit the conference page on the Oakhill School website:

<http://www.oakhillschool.co.za/conference.php>

Contact: Elna Brown. Tel: 044 382 6506, Email: E.Brown@Oakhillschool.co.za

GENERAL

- **“Get It Right”**

We try to “get it right” and communicate information that you can trust.

If we have neglected to communicate any relevant details or if you would like to contribute to the SAHISA *Weekly Bulletin* – please contact Jenny Mundell.

Contact: Jenny Mundell. Tel: 011 648 1331, Email: jennym@isasa.org

- **Quote of the Week**

“Good leaders make people feel that they're at the very heart of things, not at the periphery. Everyone feels that he or she makes a difference to the success of the organization. When that happens people feel centered and that gives their work meaning.”

~ Warren Bennis