

**Book Title:** Why Don't Students Like School: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom.

**Author:** By Daniel T. Willingham

**Publication date:** 2009

## **The review**

### **1. What is your overall impression of the book?**

This book aims to address the bridge between between what cognitive scientists have learned about the mind and what teachers do every day in school to keep students focussed and to enhance their learning.

The overriding message throughout this book for me is that Willingham is not afraid to challenge theories in education that have been prevalent throughout my teacher training. For example I read the chapter on learning styles and he points out that there isn't actually much evidence that matching teaching style's to learning styles has an impact on learning. Individual learning styles can be unrealistic to meet and there is little evidence to show it works.

The chapters I have read focus on challenging or supporting principles through using a cognitive principle where the author then proceeds to explain how this may affect the classroom.

### **2. Who do you think would benefit most from reading the book? What will they learn?**

This book is particularly well accessible due to its lack of professional jargon, which I also came across in its current reviews- meaning I was enticed to read! I think all teachers/trainee teachers or staff in schools would be interested in reading this book and would benefit from it because it is very relatable to our classrooms every day. The book addresses common practises and allows us to take a step back and see the impacts of them on learning.

I also think that the 'snippets' of good ideas for lessons such as begin with the ending in sight when planning a lesson is an example of how the book can help us as practitioners to reflect on our own practise.

### **3. What did you think about the quality of the writing? Please consider the tone, structure and ideas. Does it suit the audience?**

Firstly I feel the writing is excellent quality due to its use of scientific background, the level of studies used to support its principles and for the way it addresses its arguments. However, I really enjoyed the tone of the book, using less formal approaches in some parts with a subtle comic value, which I

find is relatable and keeps you keen to read more. The book is very well structured, clearly labelled and flows well. The author also uses visuals to illustrate lots of his points such as tables, diagrams and images which look unrelated but provide a significant purpose to understanding the theory he is presenting. For example: When explaining memory and learning new things.....



FIGURE 2: Your memory system operates so quickly and effortlessly that you seldom notice it working. For example, your memory has stored away information about what things look like (Hillary Clinton's face) and how to manipulate objects (turn the left faucet for hot water, the right for cold), and strategies for dealing with problems you've encountered before (such as a pot boiling over).

Throughout the book there are segmented paragraphs or short sentences which provide a separate glance at a specific topic through a riddle like passage.

In an empty room are a candle, some matches, and a box of tacks. The goal is to have the lit candle about five feet off the ground. You've tried melting some of the wax on the bottom of the candle and sticking it to the wall, but that wasn't effective. How can you get the lit candle five feet off the ground without having to hold it there?<sup>1</sup>

**4. Please discuss the research used to underpin the ideas. What evidence does the author use? Is it robust and up-to-date?**

The research used ranges from current studies on differentiation, learner groups and scientific background on thinking, learning and storing information but it encompasses older research such as

types of learners. I think the use of anecdotes and relatable images are what makes this books stand out.

**5. What did you learn from reading the book? What ideas/approaches/practice will you change or adopt as a result of reading this book?**

I will definitely be looking closely at my visions of the ending of my lessons in order to enable the children to learn more effectively throughout a lesson. When they have a goal in mind themselves (which is much more than a learning objective) this may enable them to focus more, use more of their thinking skills (channelling their thinking skills because they want to! After all thinking is effortful and we all as humans avoid doing it as much as possible).

For example, presenting the children with a relatable problem in maths at the beginning of the lesson as a hook, sharing with them the end goal of a lesson. In science this could particularly work well, through using "wow experiments" which have recently been introduced to our school, consisting of short, simple experiments which induce the wow factor for children.

Secondly, I read part of a chapter which focussed on the idea of differentiated lessons and how much they actually enable our children to learn.

The chapter deflated multiple intelligences and what I took from it was that perhaps children don't learn better with differentiated lessons because in their different groups they do better under each approach, but more like a range of activities at a range of levels keeps them less likely to get bored. Therefore, although I still feel that differentiation is vital in the classroom for our diverse learners to access their learning, I think a range of activities in lessons where it is appropriate, so things that will be quick, easy and mental for the children to engage them and challenges to make them think much more deeply could be jumbled up throughout the lesson. Hence, the structure of my lessons will be thought about from now on!

**6. Could you share a quote from the book that particularly resonated with you?**

*"Intelligence can be changed through sustained hard work."* Although there are many chapters which address the difficulties of learning, such as thinking being "slow, effortful and uncertain" this quote wraps up why we put in so much hard work for our children in the classroom.

