

THE MENSA CHRONICLE



SPRING 2009

The Chronicle



The members' magazine of Mensa South Africa

SPRING 2009

National Committee update

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Dear members,

I know your committee has been pretty quiet up until now, but we *have* been busy, getting going on the various projects discussed at the NAG, among other things.

MENSA SHOP

This was discussed at our meeting in August and it was decided to once again acquire some Mensa branded items for sale. We'll keep it small for now as we can't carry too much stock, and we'll work on designing an efficient ordering system via our website. To this end, we will be ordering a quantity of the Mensa lapel pins, and having some t-shirts for sale as a start. We'd like to hear from you which items you'd like.

T-SHIRT COMPETITION

We have many creative inventive members, so instead of importing - at great cost - someone else's designs, we thought we'd challenge our members to unleash their inner artist/copywriter and send in designs for t-shirts. Designs may be in any form you like - words, cartoon, pictures, but bear in mind we have to be able to print the shirts for a reasonable fee.

Entries to be submitted:

cinzia.mensa@gmail.com

Three winners will be chosen and will each receive a year's membership, and their t-shirt. **The closing date for entries is 30 November 2009.**

OUR WEBSITE

Due to circumstances, the brand new website that was mooted previously had to be abandoned and the committee decided to revamp the existing one in stages. Work on the first stage has begun: this will enable members to update their own membership details, make secure online payments etc. This should be in place 3 months from now.

The next step will be to host a discussion Forum on the site. We also plan to completely revamp the 'look' of the site, something more fresh and inviting.

All these proposed changes will take place over time, so it's still a space to watch. In the meantime, the info on the site will be kept as up-to-date as possible.

ADMIN CLERK

We wish to thank all of those who sent in applications for this post. Yvonne Steyn has been appointed as our admin clerk and took up her duties from September. Admin queries may be sent to mensa@krs.co.za

MENSA SURVEY

We are carrying out a survey to determine what our members get out of South African Mensa. With the information, we will be able to create a better organization for our members, which will in turn improve the overall experience within Mensa SA. Notices will be going out shortly to everyone with all

the details.

EASTERN CAPE NEW CHAIRMAN

Ettiene Joubert, who started this region, resigned as chair due to work pressures and health reasons. His duties were taken by Deane Lo Ning, an enthusiastic and keen Mensan, whom we met at the AG in August. Deane is keen to continue working towards launching this region. He will be working with Tim Knights who has pledged his considerable talent and knowledge to helping him succeed. Deane hopes to hold a testing session sometime in November.

NEW CHRONICLE

As you see, the new issue of the re-born Chronicle is out. We hope to bring you one quarterly or every 2 months. This depends, of course, on material available for the Chronicle and to this end I urge you all to not be shy about submitting pieces. I know there are many superb writers among our membership! And it needn't be just prose.

Please have a go and participate in our efforts to make a better Mensa for us all in South Africa.

Your suggestions, comments and input are always appreciated; please feel free to contact any of us.

Cinzia Busi
Chairman, Mensa South Africa

The Dinokeng scenarios

This winter saw the release of the Dinokeng scenarios – a product of debate around what South Africa would probably typify in 2020.

The forum and report was conducted by 35 prominent South Africans, which describe three pathways into the future.

The three scenarios are:

Walk apart

The most pessimistic of the three scenarios; dis-

trust of the state and disengagement by civil society. Failed state machinery and politics.

Walk behind

the state becomes authoritarian and leads civil society and weakens private enterprise.

The party rules rather than governs.

Walk together

citizens have matured along with democracy and push the state forward, both being vibrant and

dynamic.

The democracy that its likely most people would want.

The report is actually pretty honest, and the largely non-partisan nature of the forum has made it an important document.

This should be of interest to anyone who needs to consider scenarios for South Africa, be it in one's public or private



<http://www.dinokengscenarios.co.za>

Marie Claire feature

Marie Claire magazine did a feature in the October 2009 issue of 3 Mensans— Nicola Peisl, Anna Germanis and Rogeema Kenny.

The article, entitled **The Prodigies**, examines how the three became Mensans and their experiences of being 'different'.

The article is a major coup for the marketing of Mensa South Africa. If you have a copy, or can source one without violating any social taboos, do so!



Running with the RAMs in Spain

Each December Mensa Spain holds its annual gathering (RAM). An exceptional opportunity to get to know and enjoy each other's company.

This year Puerto Banús, Marbella, Málaga has been chosen as the location for the meeting; the entertainment centre of the Costa del Sol.

The RAM offers probably Mensa's best and most

stimulating intellectual and social environment. It represents a golden opportunity to make new friends within a diverse group of Mensans.

The organized activities are optional and diverse, trying to satisfy all preferences. Sightseeing tours are scheduled (Ronda, Gibraltar, Sierra de las Nieves), entertainment activities (hiking, sports, music) and diverse pres-

entations of fellow members. But we shouldn't forget the stimulating discussions about a coffee or beer, or the never-ending games.

View our website where you can get more details and register before November 30. Space is limited so write to secretaria@mensa.es



Puerto Banús on Spain's Costa del Sol

1. <http://www.panoramio.com/map/%23lt=36.4873085&ln=-4.9554159&tz=4>
2. <http://www.mensa.es>

Tapping The Delphic process



Local Mensan Garth Zietsman is looking to start a new SIG called the Delphi SIG. It will essentially be a discussion forum that utilises the Delphi technique.

The Delphi technique is a method that structures interactions between experts with the aim of converging on the truth about something.

It involves submitting a number of questions about an issue to a panel of experts (each member independently). The answers are collected and collated by someone and sent to the experts independently again. The answers are kept anonymous and anything irrelevant - like personal attacks - removed.

The experts are now encouraged to revise their answer in the light of the other answers and the process repeated. The belief is that there will be a convergence on the 'truth'. The process is

halted after a set number of steps or a convergence.

Summing up across independent diverse viewpoints always produces better results than face to face committees - mainly because it side-steps the hi-jacking of experts groups by personalities and more influential individuals. The advantage of the Delphi technique is that it does this while also allowing some debate.

Now Mensans aren't necessarily experts but they are bright and usually well informed about a wide range of things and I think discussing issues and applying our minds in ways that might actually lead somewhere will be fun, especially since personal animosities, egos and grandstanding that plagues the Mensa Forum will be eliminated. Non-Mensans - especially experts - can be added to the group from time to time.

I believe one topic can be covered every two weeks but the first one or two will serve as experiments. The idea of the SIG is not only to have fun but to make the results known, perhaps alongside the popular opinion on the topic.

Background

The Delphi technique was developed by that US think tank, the Rand Corporation as a way of forecasting future events of national and international importance.

Today's wider social group has technology which facilitates collaboration and a general world culture of discourse and debate.

At the same time, business and government leaders don't seem to have the answers we're looking for. It seems the forum for the oracle is set.

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphi_method
2. <http://www.rand.org>

***“The belief is that there will be a convergence on the 'truth'.*”**

IBD report

It's difficult to put into words one's first experience of Mensa International and the realization of belonging to a truly huge Family from all over the world.

I arrived at the IBD meeting with some considerable trepidation. This wasn't helped by the absence of my luggage, which was evidently en-

joying tea and crumpets at Heathrow so much it missed the flight.

But meeting everyone at the first evening's ice-breaker function many, having just arrived, looking as rumbled as I felt, was wonderful. I can't properly express in mere words the feeling of fel-
lowship, as if I had always known these people.

They're all instant friends, so willing to share and help with anything.

The three days of meeting were an education and thoroughly enjoyable, certainly entertaining at times, and always efficient. Being completely new, I was allocated a buddy who patiently answered my questions, and

1. <http://ibd2009.mensa.se/>
2. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtD0pQC8OJO>

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filled me in on background info when needed. I collected so much information about resources available to us, and so many ideas, seeing what other national Mensas got up to.

The whole conference was flawless organized, every detail taken care of. We were in the Hotel Gothia Towers, a lovely hotel with splendid views of a serenely beautiful city.

The small part of Sweden I saw was open, green and full of great people, always friendly, helpful and polite.

After being in meetings all day, we yet had time to see some of the city, sample its cuisine and walk about a bit. At the end of the weekend we were taken on a wonderful tour of the city, by bus and boat - great, and my only, chance to take photographs.

Mensa Sweden certainly hosted a great event with panache and flair and will be a hard act to follow. Next year's event will take place in Auckland, New Zealand, but the next time the IBD is hosted in the southern hemisphere, we are determined that it will be here in South Africa, where you'll have a chance to attend an event that everyone should experience at least once.

Cinzia

1. <http://www.gothiatowers.com/>
2. <http://www.panoramio.com/map/%23lt=57.696981&ln=11.9863834&z=4&k=2>
3. <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=82885995580>

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The members' magazine of Mensa
South Africa

www.mensa.org.za

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

OCTOBER 2009, ISSUE 529

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

(Extra)

OCTOBER 2009, ISSUE 529



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siblings, and first born sons would get more attention and better nourishment in families with limited financial resources.

*The Resource Dilution Model*⁸ offers a simple explanation both for higher IQ scores of first born children and for

their overrepresentation among the college population of the eminent. It depends upon three

assumptions: 1) Parental resources are finite, 2) Additional siblings reduce the share of parental resources received by any one child; 3) Parental resources have an important effect on their children's educational success.

*The Confluence Model*⁹ was proposed by R.B. Zajonc and Markus (1975) and Zajonc (1976; 2001), and explains the first-born IQ advantage in terms of the ever-changing intellectual environment within the family. It uses a simple formula to compute the relative advantages and disadvantages of various factors such as later-born sibling competition for parental attention, explaining the Belmont-Marolla finding that first borns from smaller families have higher IQs than first borns from larger families. First borns are also exposed to more adult-level

vocabulary than their siblings, affecting their performance on verbal scales of intelligence tests. The linguistic immaturity of first-born children's brothers and sisters also gels with the finding that children from larger families have lower IQ scores.¹⁰

"...first borns from smaller families have higher IQs than first borns from larger families."

First borns (and older siblings in general) often have to answer questions and explain things to their younger siblings. It is

believed this act of tutoring helps the older children to cognitively process information. With rare exceptions, younger siblings do not get the opportunity to tutor their brothers and sisters, effectively explaining why only children usually do not have a higher IQs than first borns.

If first borns do indeed have higher IQs than their siblings, this fact may not be important. Recent studies suggest that intelligence is not the most important factor in the achievement of eminence. Several studies have indicated that personality traits such as consciousness and openness to experience are up to ten times more important than IQ. Additionally, in studies showing a statistically significant advantage for first borns, birth order accounts for only one percent of the variance in IQ. First born IQ

advantage is tiny - about one point higher than the second sibling, two points higher than the third, and so on. A minute difference of one or two points on an IQ test is meaningless, since it is within the margin of error, and is highly unlikely to be a significant predictive factor in the pursuit of greatness in any intellectual endeavour.¹¹

¹ London: Macmillan, 1874.

² Galton did not count female children when he reported the results, so, theoretically, a boy could be considered the "first born" even if he was the last born, providing that his older siblings were all females.

³ A longitudinal study is a correlational research study that involves repeated observations of the same items over long periods of time, often many decades.

⁴ Page, EB. & Grandon, G. (1979). "Family configuration and mental ability: Two theories contrasted with U.S. data." *American Educational Research Journal*, 16, 257-272.

⁵ Cross-sectional studies (also known as Cross-sectional analysis) form a class of research methods that involve observation of some subset of a population of items all at the same time in which groups can be compared at different ages with respect of independent variables, such as IQ and memory. The fundamental difference between cross-sectional and longitudinal studies is that cross-sectional studies take place at a single point in time and that a longitudinal



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study involves a series of measurements taken over a period of time. Both are a type of observational study.

⁶ Hally, Thomas (September, 2008 issue number 518). "Are we smarter than our ancestors?" *Mensa International Journal* pp. 01-02.

⁷ Research shows that IQ gains have been mixed for different countries. In general, countries have seen generational increases between 5 and 25 points. The largest gains appear to occur on tests that measure fluid intelligence (Gf) rather than crystallized intelligence (Gc).

⁸ The resource dilution model posits that parental resources are finite and that as the number of children in the family increases, the resources accrued by any one child necessarily decline.

⁹ Zajonc, R.B. & Markus, G. (1975). "Birth order and intellectual development." *Psychological Review*, 82, 74-88

¹⁰ As more children enter the family, the general intellectual environment becomes less mature.

¹¹ Even within science, IQ is only weakly related to achievement among people who are intelligent enough to become scientists. Research has shown, for example, that a scientist who has an IQ of 130 is just as likely to win a Nobel Prize as a scientist whose IQ is 180 (Hudson, L., 1966). *Contrary Imaginations: A Psychological Study of the English Schoolboy*. London: Methuen.

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Land Bridge

ScienceDaily.com, 9 June 2009. *Archaeological Evidence of Human Activity Found Beneath Lake Huron*. (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences)

When stone age hunters went after caribou, with primitive weapons, they needed to know where the animals would be. To achieve this, they constructed "drive lanes" to direct the animals into ambushes.

Scientists from University of Michigan think they have found such a drive lane on a submerged ridge 100 feet under Lake Huron between Alpena, Michigan and Ontario, Canada.

The quarter mile long row of big rocks terminates with boulders that could have concealed paleolithic hunters 9,000 years ago, when the Great Lakes were much lower. Underwater exploration of the area will continue this summer using sonar and remotely operated vehicles. The scientists hope to find more evidence of ancient habitation.

Conspiracies

Science News, 20 June 2009, p. 11. *Tracing the Inner World of Suspicion*. (Applied Cognitive Psychology)

Do you know anyone who steadfastly believes in conspiracy theories? Ever wonder what makes them tick? A team of psychologists in England has put

together a profile of people who believe in the alleged 9/11 conspiracy. Such folks practise selective skepticism in that they accept information that supports their ideas while shutting out any contradictory facts. They use their strong belief in one conspiracy as support for a belief in other conspiracies, while rejecting all contrary information. They think they can discover the "truth" and share it with the world. Experts say conspiracy believers suffer from feelings of powerlessness and low self esteem.

The Old Skin Game

New Scientist, 4 July 2009, p. 10. *Dinosaur 'Cells' Shed Light on Life 66 Million Years Ago*. (Proceedings of the Royal Society B)

Ten years ago, a 66 million year old mummified hadrosaur thrilled paleontologists. It was so well preserved that they could even see the pattern of scales in its skin. Now, the long dead creature is providing even more information. Scientists think they have found traces of amino acids in its skin along with cell-like structures they identified with an electron microscope. The amino acids could represent the remains of ancient proteins, which could probably not survive intact for millions of years.



from the words... files

kate nacard



Symposium anyone?...

Why I've always been fascinated by words is a complete mystery to me, but every time I stumble across a plethora of new (to me, anyway) words, I'm unaccountably thrilled! So you can imagine my delight when a friend - who clearly recognised my predilection - presented me with a whole bevy of additions to my lexicon.

Bellibone (a woman excelling in both goodness and beauty),

biggin (a silver coffeepot with separate heater which holds the coffee as it's heated),

bumblepuppy (a game played with a tennis ball tied to a post) and **battology** (the continuous repetition of words or phrases in

speech or writing) – just a few of the unusual words in a great little book, Peter Bowler's *The Superior Person's Little Book of Words*.

Where else would you find such exotic words for the more commonplace 'foolish or empty chatter' (bavardage), 'to grow dull or stupid' (hebetate), 'stretching and yawning' (pandiculation), or to bruise (suggilate)? And how fabulous to be able to say, in apparent admiration, to the pompous bloke next door as you enter the new mansion he is inordinately proud of, "My goodness, Mr Pemberton-Smythe, your home is perfectly nosopoetic!" How

useful for your teenager to be able to say, "Sorry, Mum, can't do the washing-up tonight; I have to attend a symposium." (Wish I'd known that one when I needed it!).

And to all our older members, be ready to bristle when someone says enviously, "Heavens, I'm years younger than you but don't have a complexion nearly as rugose as yours! How do you do it!"

Nosopoetic: producing disease, unhygienic, infected; symposium: (originally) a post-prandial drinking party with dancers and music; rugose: corrugated with wrinkles.

The most unkindest cut of all...

Ever been guilty of repeating yourself unnecessarily? Ever had someone look at you with that raised eyebrow when you've talked about SAM missiles and PIN numbers? Well, if it's good enough for Shakespeare to be pleonastic, you're in good company! And no one should be raising their eyebrows anyway since some pleonasm have become so much an idiom of the language, that their usage is hardly noticed: *safe haven, she wept tears of joy, and HIV virus*, for example.

Pleonasm which is the unnecessary repetition - or redundancy - of words, such as *new recruit, join together, climb up, anonymous stranger, tuna fish* and *free gift*, is often used - as by the Bard in the *most unkindest cut* - for poetic effect, to reinforce a point or simply to make communication clearer and easier to understand.

However, if you're like me (and William Strunk Jr, author of *The Elements of Style*, 1918), I'm all for the argument that too

much pleonasm is a detraction from meaning and obstructive to communication. As Strunk wrote, *Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.*

Hear, hear, Mr Strunk!