

Overcoming boredom

September 1 2011, By Jamie Hanlon

“I’m bored.” It’s a line that parents likely hear throughout the year. But, as students prepare to head back to classes for the start of a new school year, one University of Alberta researcher says these understimulated learners may hold the solution to their own problem.

New findings by University of Alberta researcher Lia Daniels indicate that boredom may be an internal issue for the student no matter how interesting the class may be.

She says that, while the responsibility is often placed on the teacher to make the class more interesting, the students must also use strategies to overcome their feelings of boredom in order to maximize their learning opportunities.

“As instructors, we know that no matter how interesting your lesson is, there are some students in there that perceive the situation as boring,” said Daniels, an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education. “We wanted to put the onus on students—what are they themselves doing?”

Students come in threes

Daniels and her German colleagues from the University of Konstanz found from their research that students fall into three categories: re-appraisers, criticizers and evaders. Daniels says the re-appraisers are the most resourceful of the three as they are able to adapt and find challenges in their classes on their own. Another group, the evaders, follow true to their name and tune out of class work in favour of finding

other ways to entertain themselves.

Daniels is particularly interested in the middle group, the criticizers, a label that she says may be hard for many of that group to accept. However, she says that this coterie can possibly bring about effective change in the class delivery. The caveat, of course, is finding the best way to communicate the need for change to the teacher.

“They are the students who might say to a teacher, ‘you know, this isn’t particularly challenging. Can I read a different book; can I do some extra research on this? How can I change this so that it is not as boring for me as an individual,’” said Daniels. “I actually think that could be a very adaptive strategy if it was well-received within learning environments. However, finding the right place and the proper context for those discussions are very important.”

Learning a valuable lesson?

The evaders are perhaps the most challenging group, says Daniels, and one of the main reasons this group gets bored is that they don’t see value in what they are learning. In this case, she says, [parents](#) and teachers need to find ways to constructively help them understand the real value in their learning, something that may alleviate their negative view of their work.

Determining the root cause of boredom is key, she says, and is the crucial first step for parents who want to help their children overcome their academic ennui. The issue may be that they are under-challenged in the class or that the material is too difficult and they are unable to understand the concepts necessary to do the work. Many parents may be inclined to go to the teacher first, but Daniels cautions that without knowing where the issue lies, making a beeline for the school may be a wasted trip.

“As parents, we need to stop and think, ‘why might my child be bored? Is it the work or are they bored because they tend to be bored by everything that’s in their life,’” she said. “Identifying the source of [boredom](#) is one of the things parents can do that can help them understand whether that’s something that they can help their child work on or whether it really is an issue to take up with teachers.”

Provided by University of Alberta

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