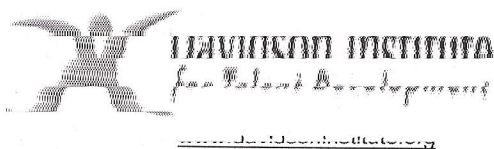


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Tips for Parents: Where's the Spark? Managing Boredom In/Out of School

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Boredom has been associated with early dropout rates, school dissatisfaction and lack of achievement in the scholarly literature of education (Fogelman, 1976; Gjesne, 1977; Robinson, 1975). In the health sciences, eating disorders (Abramson & Stinson, 1977; Leon & Chamberlain, 1973), hostility (Broadbent, 1979) and depression (Giambra & Traynor, 1978) are linked to boredom.

However, the construct is elusive since there is no consistent definition for boredom that is agreed upon in the literature, or in life. Indeed, boredom like beauty is often in the eyes of the beholder; described in myriad ways (see Figure 1).

Vodanovich and Katt (1990) conducted a factor analysis study related to an instrument for measuring boredom (The Boredom Proneness Scale), but just what the five significant factors mean, and what utility they have for alleviating boredom remains obscure. We just don't know very much about boredom, just as we don't know much about how to define time other than to give examples of it.

I could make a plea to scholarly colleagues to begin exploring this construct; but, dare I say, it just might be a little too depressing of a topic? Or, perhaps a more accurate comment would be that the construct is so loosely defined it is very difficult to even begin empirical work.

Either way, a scarcity of scholarly effort is being spent on describing or defining this construct; which leads to some very intriguing questions:

1. How often are gifted students bored in school? In life?
2. What effect does this self-perceived boredom have on these individuals?
3. How does boredom affect motivation and/or task completion (achievement)?

What Parents Can Do

The above questions might be intriguing, but they do little to address the needs most parents of gifted and highly/profoundly gifted (HG/PG) face on a daily basis. In a recent parent seminar, I had the opportunity to discuss the issue of boredom with parents. Together we developed a set of guidelines you might consider when faced with the issue of boredom at home or school:

Definition "boring" or "boredom" in an understandable form. The construct is often stated by learners as, "I'm bored" or "It's boring." This description does little to help a parent or a teacher address or alleviate the situation. Indeed, boredom can mean a litany of things (see Figure 1).

Parents and teachers should zero in on the construct and continue to question the meaning behind boring or boredom until a statement is made that is addressable. Once the meaning behind "boring" is understood, something can be done.

For example, at the end of the day as our son comes in the house we ask how his day was. Very commonly, his immediate response is that school is boring. As parents, we can sympathize with this state of affairs since our jobs often leave us feeling this eerie sense of emotional letdown as well.

Yet, it is unlikely the entire day was boring. Our perception as parents that his day was a depressing miasma of worksheets and lectures is hardly on target. As we press for information, we eventually gain insight (sometimes!) that not all is wrong in the world. Sometimes we find out our son had a grand time during the day.

We also have learned that our son is not a fan of worksheets that drill and then redrill information. He finds this redundancy a waste of time; and becomes frustrated and angered when required to show what he knows again and again to be sure he has a good grasp (for "the Test") instead of moving on to more interesting or different work.

As parents, we can address and advocate for a change, but we are unable to do so without knowing the meaning behind the

