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Vol. 2, Issue 1 **FEBRUARY 2009**

FEATURE ARTICLE: Does Boredom Matter?

By Frank J. Kros, President of The Upside Down Organization



Does Boredom Matter? More Than You Might Think...

In the last couple of months, I've come across several articles and presentations regarding the brain and boredom. At first, I didn't see the point. Sure, all of us get bored once in a while. Then we move on. No big deal, right? But the more I read and understood, the more surprised I became about the significant impact boredom can have on one's learning and quality of life.

Did You Know?

- Males are **more prone** to boredom than females.
- Extroverts are **more likely** to be bored than introverts.
- Adolescents are **more vulnerable** to boredom than adults or children.
- Boredom is the **most frequently** reported reason for students skipping school and dropping out of school permanently.
- Boredom and curiosity are the **most commonly** reported reasons for drug use.
- People who are often bored are at **greater risk** of developing anxiety, depression, drug or alcohol addiction and aggressive behavior, and performing poorly at school or work.
- You can't take a test to determine how prone you are **to being bored**.

It's More Than Just the Environment

The reason I didn't think boredom was that relevant an issue was my assumption that boredom is externally driven. We all get bored with tedious and limiting activities like waiting in line at the motor vehicle administration, right?

But nearly a century of research on boredom exposes much too simple. Environmental boredom (like wait in line) is only one subtype of a vast boredom spectrum. Individualized boredom--is part of a person's personality--is far more interesting to scientists. Early studies on factory workers performing repetitive assembly line tasks showed a remarkable range in boredom experiences: "There are still people not bored by work of this kind and people who, even on the most varied work, maintain a steady expressed attitude to life and complain bitterly of monotony." (Davies, 1926). Davies' research suggested that boredom was as much a personal disposition as an environment. In other words, you can't always blame boredom on the circumstances. Some people just get bored a lot easier than others.

The Consequences of Boredom

Fast forward 60 years to the Boredom Proneness Scale (BPS). The BPS was developed in 1986 by psychologist Norman Sundberg and Richard Farmer, Sundberg's student at the University of Oregon. The BPS was the first psychometric scale designed to measure boredom as a personality trait. Armed with the BPS, researchers could now design studies that compared participants based on how easily they were bored. The research results put boredom in a whole new light for some. Here are just a couple examples.

A 2003 study using the BPS found that among 148 college students, scores on the BPS were correlated with ADHD, suggesting that a high level of boredom may be the result of an attention problem. (Vodanovich, Wallace and Kass, 2003).

In a 2007 study of 304 college students, Canadian researchers found a high correlation between boredom proneness, attention failures and depression. (Smilek, Cheyne and Carriere, 2007).

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In a 1998 study of 308 students, high boredom proneness correlated with negative self-awareness--defined as a persistent pattern of negative rumination. On the other hand, low boredom proneness correlated with positive self-awareness. (Vodanovich and Seibert, 1998).

In a 2007 study, students scoring high on the BPS had difficulty in understanding and describing their own feelings and emotions. (Eastwood, 2007).

In an ongoing study of drug addicts, researcher McWilliam argued that the addicts' reported level of boredom was the only reliable indicator of whether they would stay clean following treatment. (Todman, 2008).

While it is clear that much more research is needed, the relationship between boredom and attention drug abuse and recovery warrant a new appreciation to be an unpleasant but neutral, transient condition. Boredom may be much more damaging than we thought. If highly likely to be depressed, vulnerable to drug abuse, and struggling with significant attention problems, it can have a major impact on our schools and communities.

to better understand boredom deficits, depression and for what once was thought to be a neutral condition. Boredom is not neutral and bored kids are also predisposed to dropping out then boredom has a huge impact on our schools and communities.

What To Do?

Because our understanding of boredom and what happens in the bored brain is still preliminary, strong anti-boredom interventions are still emerging. For teachers, I recommend you check-out the website of Bryan Harris at <http://www.cgelem.k12.az.us/departments.cfm?subpage=570617>. Click on the January 2009 tab "Battling Boredom." Bryan is the Director of Professional Development at Casa Grande Elementary School District in Arizona. I attended Bryan's terrific workshop on boredom at the Learning Brain Learning Corporation earlier this year. Bryan's presentation was the stimulus for the "Did You Know" section above. In addition, Eric Jensen's book *Tools for Engagement* and Marcia Tate's book *Worksheets Don't Grow Dendrites* are excellent resources I have used to make the presentation possible to fight off boredom in my audiences.

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For parents, two of the leading researchers on boredom (and its opposite construct, flow) urge us to encourage children to be active and imaginative ways and to avoid passive, quick-fix entertainment to reduce boredom. "We provide children lots of entertainment and iPods to prevent them from developing their boredom. Engaging in active entertainment, such as playing sports or games, is also much more likely to produce flow." (Norman Szentmihalyi, quoted in *Scientific American Mind*, Volume 18, Number 6, January 2008, p. 27).

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UDO Welcomes a New Trainer: Tracy Kessler, LGSW



The Upside Down Organization is pleased to welcome Tracy Kessler to our training faculty. Tracy is a clinician for The Children's Guild's Outpatient Mental Health Clinic and brings with her six years of social work experience with diverse populations.

Tracy earned her BA in social work from McDaniel College while also pursuing Sociology and Cross Cultural Studies. She received her Master's Degree from the University of Maryland, Baltimore School of Social Work, majoring in Clinical Social Work and specializing in working with children and families.

Tracy is a licensed graduate social worker (LGSW) in the state of Maryland.

Prior to starting her work with The Children's Guild included working with children and adolescents in residential treatment centers, serving children and working with the elderly.

d, Tracy's experiences in therapeutic foster care with special needs, and

Outside of her work, Tracy has a passion for international missions work and has traveled to Africa twice to work with children. While in Ghana, Tracy volunteered to work in an orphanage and run a village educating the community. In Kenya, she worked with children with mental and physical disabilities, and educated the community about special needs and that "disabilities are not disabilities." Tracy is currently preparing for her third trip to Africa and will leave later this month! She lives in Maryland and is busy planning her wedding for Summer 2009.

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Tracy has jumped right in and already been out in the field in on behalf of UDO. She recently presented UDO's elementary school faculty and to foster parents.

he community presented AD/HD workshop to

Tracy's enthusiasm and energetic personality are contagious and we are thrilled that she has joined the UDO team!



UPSIDE DOWN WORKSHOP --- Register today for only \$139 per person; 3 or more registrations and pay only \$119 per person!

Beyond Poverty: Brain-Inspired Ways to Understand and Respond to Poverty

Presented by

Frank Kros, MSW, JD

Feb. 20, 2009

Hilton Garden Inn - Inner Harbor

Baltimore, MD | [\[Directions\]](#)

9 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. / Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.

CEU credits: 6

Early Bird Registration rate : \$139 (until 2/11)

Registration rate: \$159 (after 2/11)

Group rate: \$119 (three or more registrants)

Poverty has a synergistic and pervasive impact on children's brains. In this workshop, participants will learn the specific impact of poverty on the developing brain, what this impact often looks like in the classroom, and the unique interventions that can be used to overcome poverty's effects.

Known as "neuroplasticity," the brain's ability to change and grow through exposure to environmental stimulus offers exciting new approaches and strategies for educators, parents and child-serving professionals.

[\[REGISTER NOW\]](#)

ORGANIZATION HIGHLIGHT: THURSTON HOUSE

Thurston House is a program for pregnant and parent enrolled in an approved high school or GED program. Assistance in accessing transportation and childcare, parenting and child development education, career counseling, vocational counseling and nutrition and healthcare education.

Based in a house adjacent to the Crawford County Vocational Technical School, Thurston House provides services to high school or GED students who are pregnant or parenting, both mothers and fathers and also grandparents. The Thurston House Program provides services to custodial and non-custodial parents.

The program reaches through six counties in northwestern Pennsylvania providing services in Crawford, Erie (except the city of Erie), Warren, Venango, Clarion and Forest counties.

UDO has partnered with Thurston House to help educate the staff, schools, agencies, community and parents about the impact of poverty, understanding the adolescent great brains from birth to age eight, and managing chronic stress.

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Services include assis-



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ASK FRANK

Frank Kros, UDO president, answers your questions about adults, kids and the brain.

Dear Frank // I am easily distracted and can't seem to focus my attention on putting together engaging lesson plans. I think I'm just bored with being a teacher. This seems to be a pattern of mine. Any suggestions? //
Shemille from Maryland



Dear Shemille // Given this issue's feature article on boredom, you may be more prone to boredom than other people and therefore, find yourself in a pattern of starting a career or project with great effort only to quickly lose your enthusiasm. One way to check this out is to take the **Boredom Proneness Scale** (Sundberg and Farmer, 1986). I have reprinted it below for your convenience. If you find that you are, in fact, highly prone to boredom, consider using a teacher mentor, a professional coach or consulting a counselor through your school's Employee Assistance Program to help you develop some strategies for effectively coping with boredom.

BOREDOM PRONENESS SCALE

After each statement, score yourself from 1 (if you strongly agree) to 7 (if you strongly disagree) to 4 is neutral. Score the statements marked by an asterisk in the reversed direction: give yourself 1 point if you strongly agree and up to 7 points if you strongly disagree.

Add the numbers from all 28 responses.

In a study population tested by clinical psychologist John D. Eastwood of York University, the average score was 99. The "normal" range — into which two thirds of the population fell — was 81 to 117. **Ascores significantly higher than 117 on the scales suggest that you get bored easily.**

- ___ 1. It is easy for me to concentrate on my activities.
- ___ 2. Frequently when I am working I find myself worrying about other things.
- ___ 3. Time always seems to be passing slowly.
- ___ 4. I often find myself at "loose ends," not knowing what to do.
- ___ 5. I am often trapped in situations where I have to do meaningless things.
- ___ 6. Having to look at someone's home movies or travel slides bore me tremendously.
- ___ 7. I have projects in mind all the time, things to do.*
- ___ 8. I find it easy to entertain myself.*
- ___ 9. Many things I have to do are repetitive and monotonous.
- ___ 10. It takes more stimulation to get me going than most people.
- ___ 11. I get a kick out of most things I do.*
- ___ 12. I am seldom excited about my work.
- ___ 13. In any situation, I can usually find something to do or see to keep me interested.*
- ___ 14. Much of the time I just sit around doing nothing.
- ___ 15. I am good at waiting patiently.*
- ___ 16. I often find myself with nothing to do, time on my hands.
- ___ 17. In situations where I have to wait, such as in a line, I get restless.
- ___ 18. I often wake up with a new idea.*
- ___ 19. It would be very hard for me to find a job that is exciting enough.
- ___ 20. I would like more challenging things to do in life.
- ___ 21. I feel that I am working below my abilities most of the time.
- ___ 22. Many people would say that I am a creative or imaginative person.*
- ___ 23. I have so many interests, I don't have time to do everything.*
- ___ 24. Among my friends, I am the one who keeps doing something the longest.*
- ___ 25. Unless I am doing something exciting, even dangerous, I feel half-dead and dull.
- ___ 26. It takes a lot of change and variety to keep me really happy.
- ___ 27. It seems that the same things are on television or in the movies all the time; it's getting old.
- ___ 28. When I was young, I was often in monotonous and tiresome situations.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[ConnectionsCount!FamilyFocus ProfessionalDevelopmentConference](#)

"LeadershipandtheModernMind: AnUpsideDownLookatWhatit TakestoGetOtherstoChange"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
LakeCharles,LA

"GivingaFishaBath:TheUntold StoryoftheAdolescentMind"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
LakeCharles,LA

LuncheonPlenary-"ChartingtheCourse"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
LakeCharles,LA

Feb.17-19

[TheNationalAt-RiskEducationNetwork\(NAREN\)2009 Conference](#)

"GivingAFishABath:TheUntoldStoryoftheAdolescentMind"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
PanamaCity,FL

"WhoseChildIsThisAnyway:PowerToolsforFosteringAcademic SuccessinOurFosterChildren"

PresentedbyShawnReagleKros,LCSW-C
PanamaCity,FL

"RethinkingAttention-Deficit/HyperactivityDisorder(AD/HD):What Works,WhatDoesn'tandWhy"

PresentedbyHeatherHiggins,LCSW-C
PanamaCity,FL

Feb.20

[OPENWORKSHOP:"BeyondPoverty:Brain-InspiredWaystoUnderstandandRespondtoPoverty"](#)

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
Baltimore,MD

Feb.24

[Alliance41stAnnualSeniorLeadershipConference](#)

"LeadingtheGreatestChange:ImplementingBrain-InspiredProblem SolvinginYourOrganization"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
St.PeteBeach,FL

Mar.3

[NationalYouth-At-Risk2009Conference](#)

"BeyondPoverty:Brain-InspiredWaystoUnderstandandRespondto Poverty"

PresentedbyFrankJ.Kros,MSW,JD
Savannah,GA



Mar.6

University of Maryland School of Social Work

"Giving a Fish a Bath: The Untold Story of the Adolescent Mind"

Presented by Shawn Reagle Kros, LCSW-C

Washington, DC

Mar.14

California League of Middle Schools Annual Conference

"See, Experience, Tell"

Presented by Anade Gea-Coombs

San Diego, CA

[\[Register for an Open Workshop\]](#)

[\[Full Event Calendar\]](#)



The Upside Down Organization (UDO), formerly The Institute for Transformation Education, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the education and advocacy of Transformation Education, an organizational philosophy and operating system for child-serving organizations. UDO offers professional development experiences, mentoring services, learning tools and organizational branding that help improve the skills of people who educate, parent, guide and care for young people.

Visit UDO online, contact 410-444-5415 or e-mail info@upsidedownorganization.org.