

September 15, 2023

To the Members of the Press:

ICU Associate Professor CHAN, Christian (Major: Psychology) to receive Ig Nobel Prize in Education

On September 15, Associate Professor Christian CHAN of International Christian University (ICU; President: Shoichiro Iwakiri; Mitaka-shi, Tokyo;), together with Dr. Katy Y. Y. Tam and Dr. Wijnand A. P. Van Tilburg, was awarded Ig Nobel Prize in Education. The Ig Nobel Prize, established in 1991, is awarded for achievements that make people laugh and think. The award ceremony was held online on Friday, September 15, Japan time. This year's award is for the research published in 2019 and 2022 on boredom in the classroom at secondary schools and universities.

Research conducted in Hong Kong Secondary Schools (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12309>
Research conducted in Hong Kong and UK universities (2022)
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12549>

Comments from Associate Professor Christian Chan

The two studies cited by the Ig Nobel Prize committee are part of the quest my former PhD student Dr. Katy Tam (now at University of Toronto), collaborator Dr. Wijnand van Tilburg (University of Essex), and I are on searching for reasons why students feel bored in the classroom. In one study, we were interested whether teachers' own boredom affects students (it does, to some extent) and the second study examined how students' expectation of being bored would exacerbate their boredom in class (again, it does, to some extent). A lot more work is needed to confirm these findings but more generally our work is demonstrating that:

- 1) boredom usually arises when there's a gap between how engaged we are and how engaged we want to be and
- 2) teachers' wellbeing can affect students' wellbeing and learning - thus we should take better care of teachers.

I never thought our research on boredom would be considered as a topic that makes people laugh then think, which is the premise for the award. In hindsight, however, maybe that's because we have been too serious about what we do (or taking it too seriously) that we failed to see the inherent humor in trying to understand why people, especially, students, might feel bored in the classroom.

This Ig Nobel Prize is a gift; It isn't something I aspired to win but for which I'm truly grateful. I'm a firm believer that happy teachers make happy students. That is not to say we should force our teachers to display happiness in the classroom. Rather, I think if teachers believe that they are valued and are supported, they would have more psychological resources to do what they are

called to do: to teach, to educate, to raise up the next generation. If our work can help demonstrate that teachers' well-being matter, and that to support our students we should also (if not first) help their teachers, then we've done some good to the society as researchers. Also, of course, I like that fact that one of our papers suggest that students feel bored because of their prejudice and not (only) because I'm a boring lecturer...

Boredom is such a ubiquitous feeling. We quite often want to distract ourselves from it. I think many boredom researchers are on the quest to show that boredom, like other emotions, serve important functions. Perhaps we are too quick to label our internal experience as boredom and something undesirable and run away from it. This can backfire. Rather, boredom teaches us, among other things, to seek better control of our attention. If you are fully engaged in what you do, boredom will leave you alone (for a while).

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