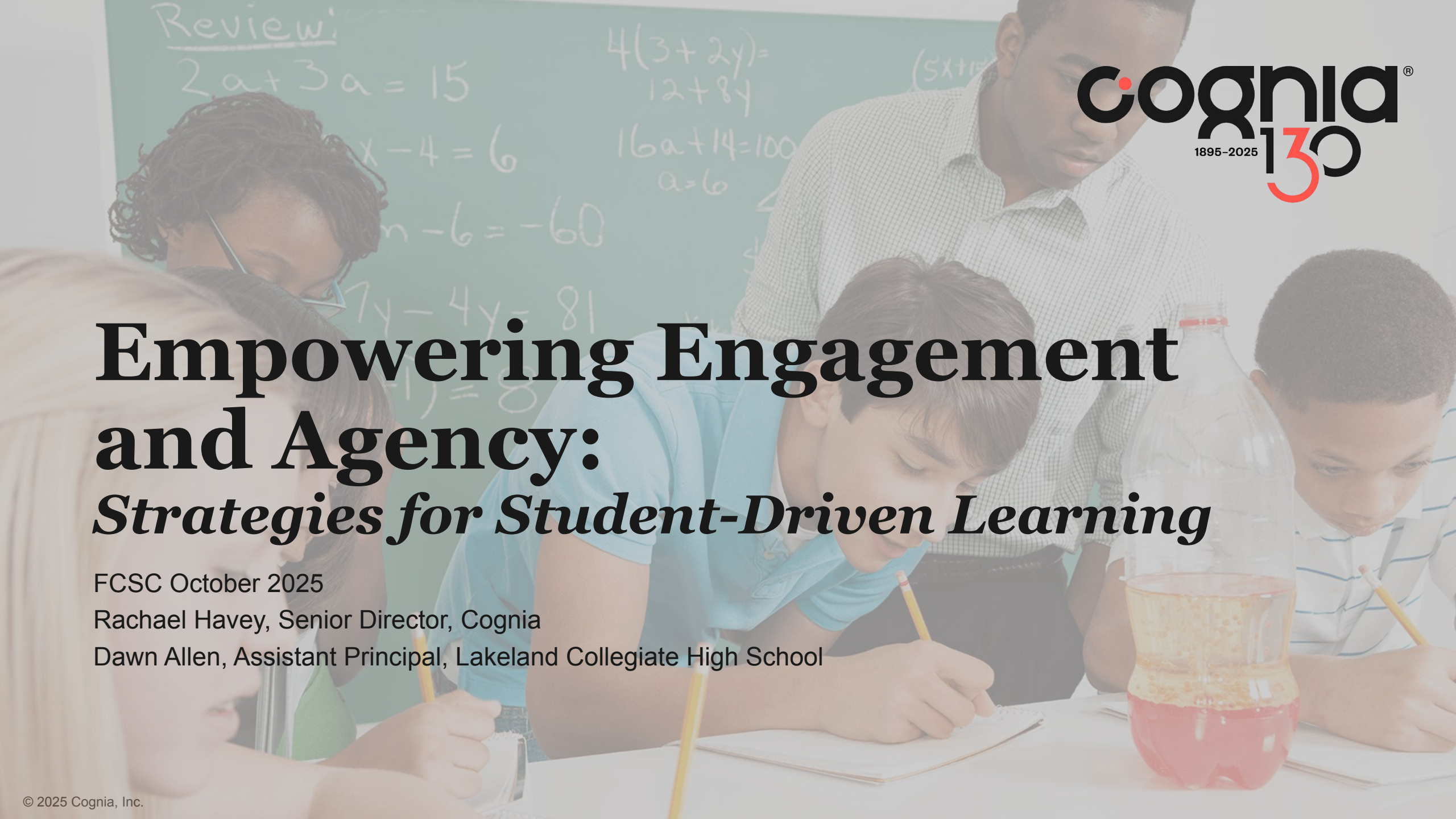


The background of the slide is a photograph of a classroom. A teacher, a Black woman with glasses, is leaning over a desk, assisting a group of students. The students are focused on their work. In the foreground, a boy in a light blue shirt is writing in a notebook. To his right, another boy is also writing. A large plastic bottle with red and yellow liquid inside is on the desk. In the background, a chalkboard is visible with various math problems written on it.

Empowering Engagement and Agency: *Strategies for Student-Driven Learning*

FCSC October 2025

Rachael Havey, Senior Director, Cognia

Dawn Allen, Assistant Principal, Lakeland Collegiate High School

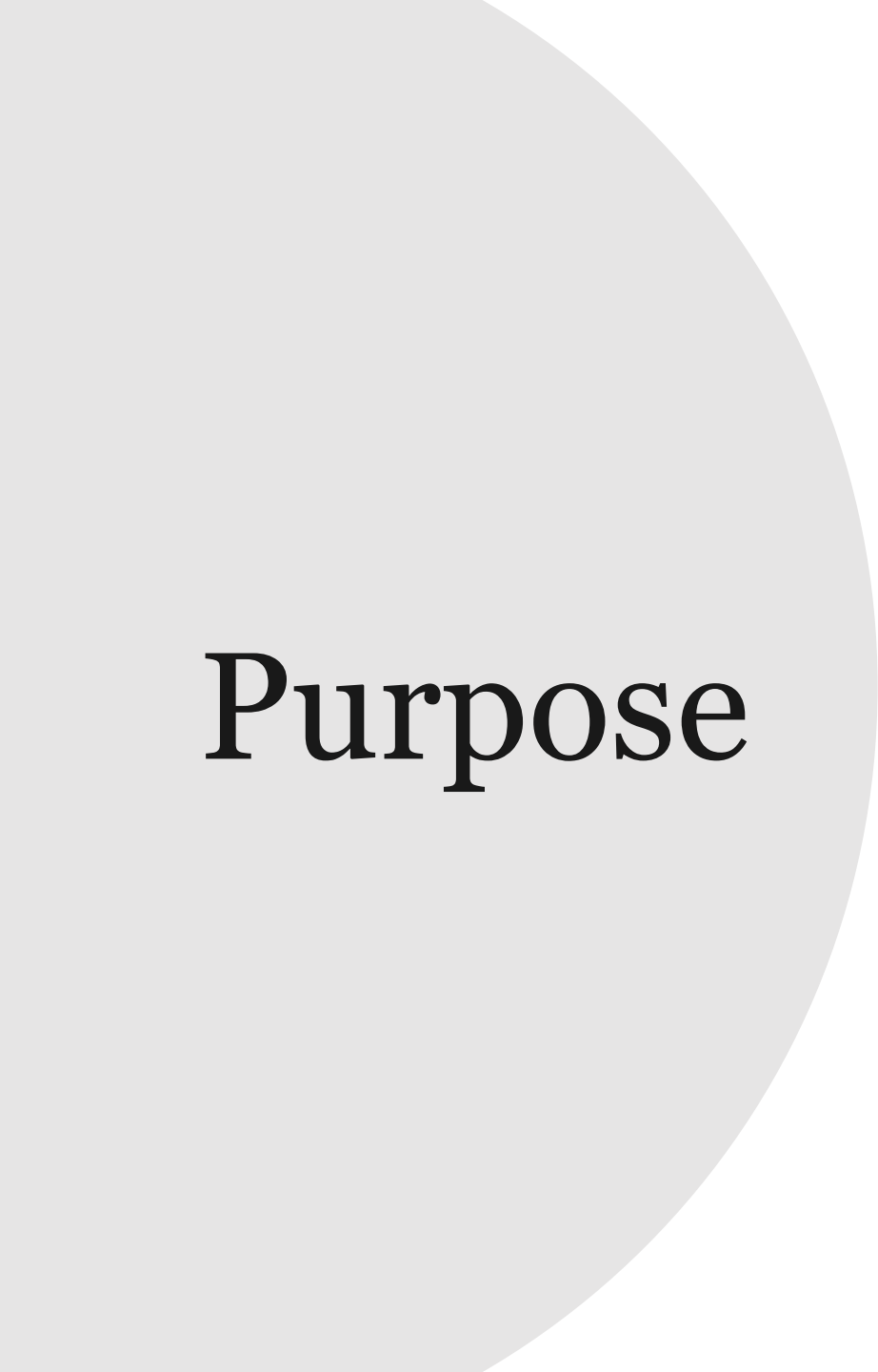


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Impact

- **Key Characteristic:
Engagement of Learning**
 - **Standard 18:** Learners are immersed in an environment that fosters lifelong skills including creativity, curiosity, risk taking, collaboration, and design thinking.
 - **Standard 19:** Learners are immersed in an environment that promotes and respects student voice and responsibility for their learning.
 - **Standard 20:** Learners engage in experiences that promote and develop their self-confidence and love of learning.



Purpose

Reflect on current instructional practices, **explore** engagement and agency, **focus** on self-directed learning, and **gain** new strategies that promote active learning.

Self-assessment: *Pre-learning*

Date:	Self-assessment rating
Learning targets	New to me  I got this
Definition of student engagement and agency	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	
Explain self-directed learning	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	
Explore strategies that promote active learning	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	

What does student engagement look like to you?

Inside-Outside Circles

- What does student engagement look like, sound like, and feel like?



Engaged students

- Are supported and treated fairly
- Know and follow classroom and learning expectations
- Feel safe and take risks
- Actively participate in class discussions and activities
- Set learning goals to complete assignments that meet their personal learning needs
- Complete challenging work connected to real life in collaboration with others



Disengaged students

- Rarely participate in discussions or learning activities
- Lack ample opportunities for differentiated learning
- Seldom receive or respond to specific feedback about work from others to improve their learning
- Lack clear learning targets or how work will be assessed
- Seldom work on real-life problems or complete challenging work

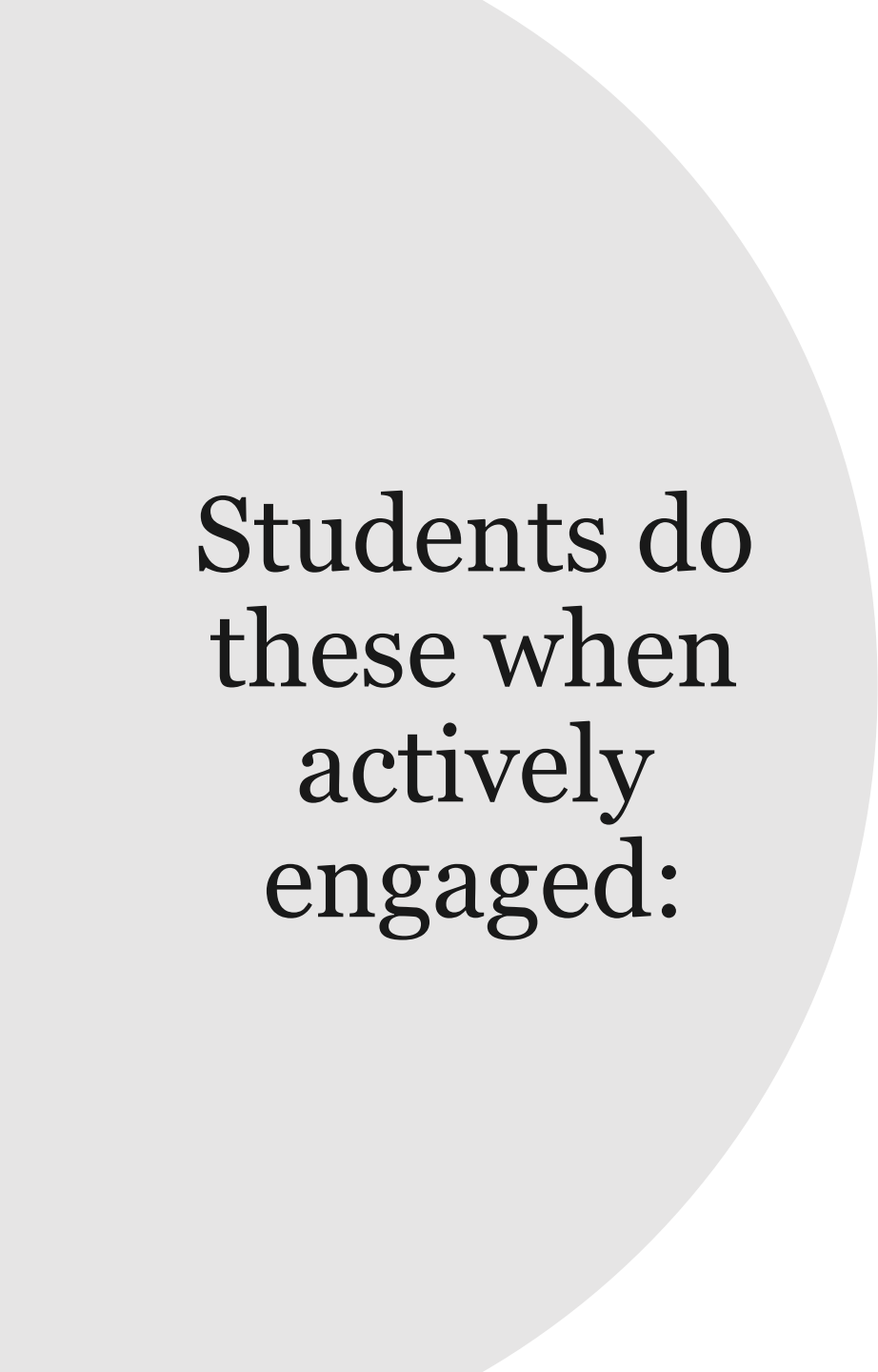
Activating thinking: *Synonym and antonym connection*

1. Select a record keeper at your table.
2. Use a sheet of paper and draw a line down the center for a column on the left and a column on the right.
3. Brainstorm and share ideas for what **passive learning** looks like in the classroom. Record keeper writes responses in the left column for the group.
4. For each statement listed for **passive learning**, the group shares the opposite, or what **active learning**, looks like in the classroom. The record keeper writes the response for **active learning** in the column on the right.
5. Discuss as you go along.



Student engagement

- Student engagement affects:
 - Motivation
 - Joy of learning
 - Persistence
 - Curiosity
 - Ability to thrive in the future
- Data show student engagement levels decline from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school*



Students do
these when
actively
engaged:

- Act, move, think, write, investigate
- Solve problems
- Ask questions
- Respond to ideas
- Analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information
- Collaborate and cooperate
- Self-reflect and reflect with others

Let's share our
thoughts



The background features a dark teal color with several hands raised in the air, creating a sense of participation or learning. A prominent red circle is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping one of the hands. Two large, white, curved shapes resembling stylized 'C' or 'G' are also present on the left side, framing the central text.

Self-Directed Learning Through Agency

The individual and collective
perspective and actions of
students within the context of
learning and education.

Cognia – student voice

The ongoing, voluntary, and
self-motivated pursuit of
knowledge for either personal or
professional reasons.

Cognia – love of learning

What is agency?

Teachers foster learners' ability to self-direct and self-regulate their learning by using strategies such as: setting and communicating learning targets, providing aligned activities, sharing appropriate feedback, and assessing progress toward targets. The process of building learner agency has a proven impact on learner achievement. When teachers convey high expectations, learners “learn to believe in themselves and in their futures, developing the critical resilience traits of self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and optimism” (Benard, 1995, p.3).

Cognia Teacher Observation Tool: Agency Dimension

The teacher:

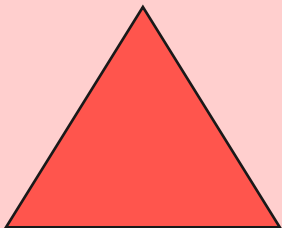
1. Empowers learners to be responsible for the learning at hand
2. Gives learners choices about the learning activities or tasks
3. Provides assistance for learners to navigate and monitor their learning progress
4. Encourages learners to persevere with or seek challenging activities or tasks
5. Builds learners' growth mindset and self-efficacy

Summary of definitions and information: *square, triangle, circle summary*



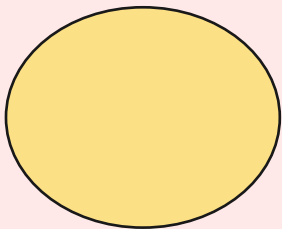
What is one thing that “squares” with your thinking?

- This is a connection to the learning with which you agree.



What is one “angle” with which you are at odds in your thinking?

- This is a point with which you disagree.



What is one thing that is “circling” with your thinking?

- This is a question you have.

Let's share our
thoughts



A photograph of a classroom where a teacher is reading a book to a group of young students sitting on the floor. The teacher is standing and holding a large book, while the students are seated in a semi-circle, facing her. The background shows a red wall with various educational posters and a computer monitor on a desk. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from a window with blinds on the right. A large white graphic element, consisting of a semi-circle and a red circle, is overlaid on the left side of the image.

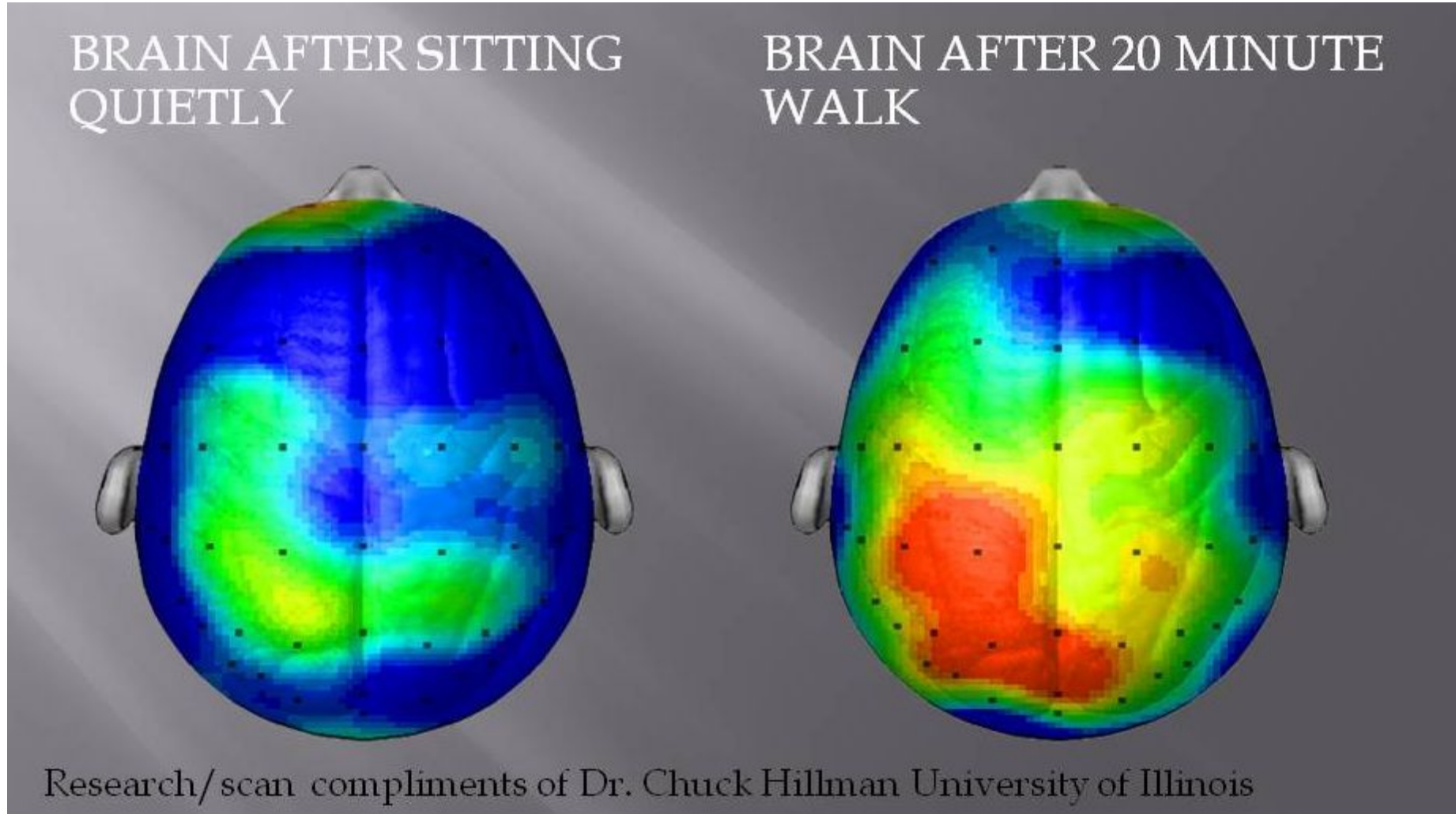
Student-Centered Learning

Secret spy instructional strategy

Effective for allowing students to gather information or get new ideas from peers to share with their group.

Great for “**struggling**” learners who can be the “**secret spy**” to actively gather information to bring back to their group.

Is movement linked to engagement and learning?



Let's talk about movement

Brain Break Ideas

- Stop and stretch
- 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- Sign language
- Facial gymnastics
- Groove
- Yoga

Movement Instructional Strategies

- Line Up Rally Coach
- Gallery walk

Strategies to engage at lesson closure

Provide less talk and more processing.

Explore self-assessment.

Lead the students toward taking ownership of the learning.

Have students sum up the lesson.

Come back to the self-assessment: *Post-learning*

Date:	Self-assessment rating
Learning targets	New to me   I got this
Definition of student engagement and agency	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	
Explain self-directed learning	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	
Explore strategies that promote active learning	
Evidence and examples (after instruction):	

Next steps for student agency

QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE



1. What is one practice you can begin using in your classroom to increase student agency?
2. How will you get started?
What do you need in order to effectively implement the strategy in your classroom?

- Pre-Post learning self-assessment
- Looks like, sounds like, feels like
- Inside-outside circles
- Synonym-antonym
- Square, triangle, circle summary
- Secret spy
- Movement
- Lesson closure
- Discussion



INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND EVIDENCE

Questions?



Learn more at Cognia.org





is here to support YOU!

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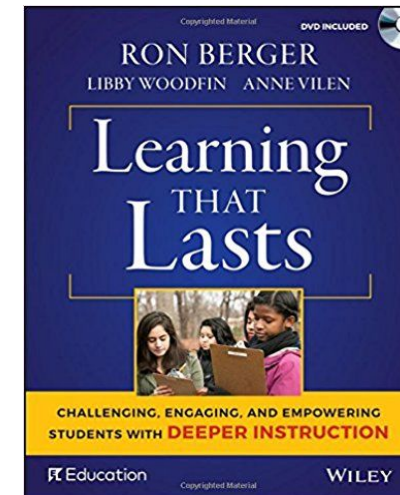
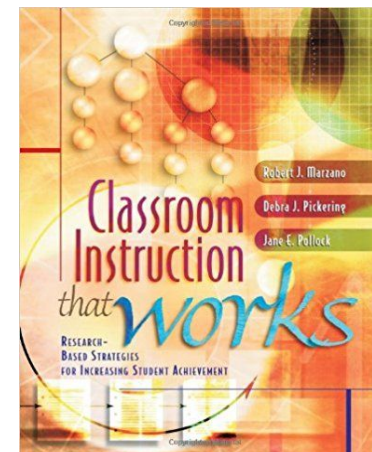
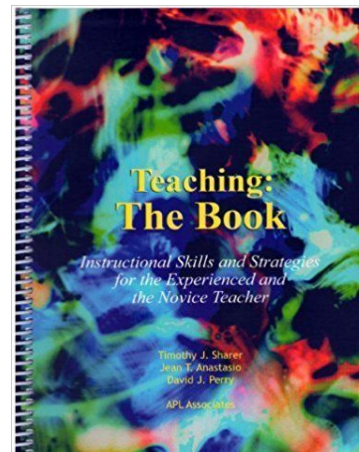
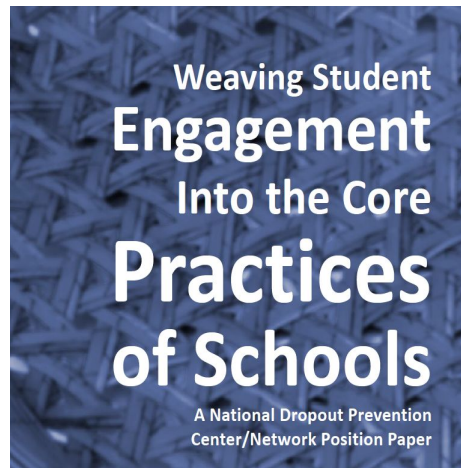
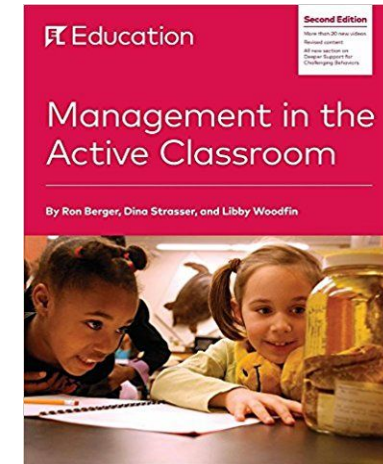
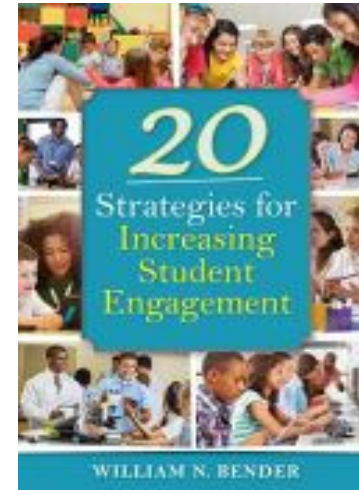
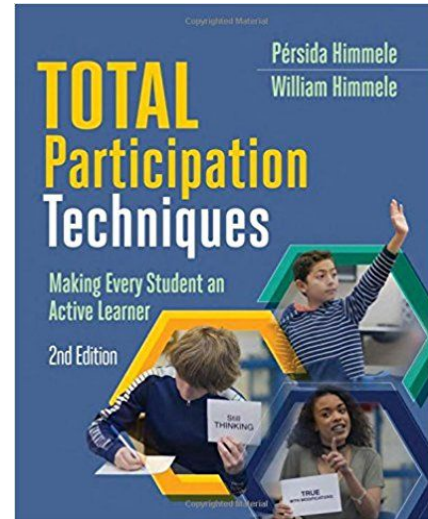
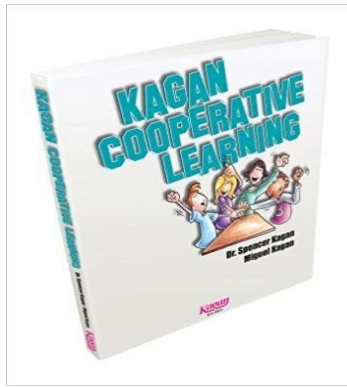
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Research-based professional learning



Teri Dary
Terry Pickeral
Rob Shumer
Anderson Williams



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