



# Exploring Student Engagement

## *What Did You Do in School today?*



Sharon Friesen, PhD



CEA



ACE



# Overview

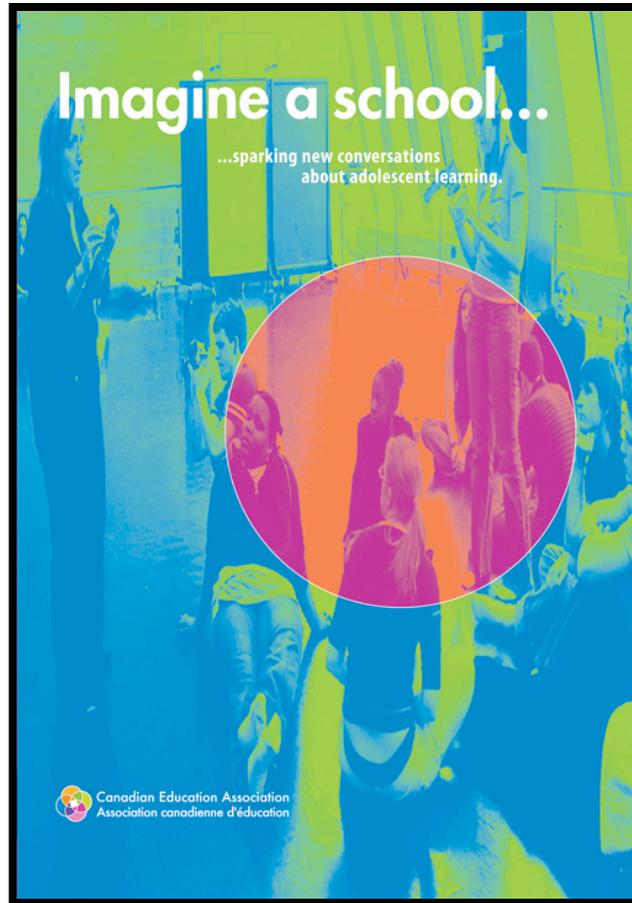
1. Context
2. What is student engagement?
3. Why does it matter?
4. Are Canadian students engaged?
5. Implications



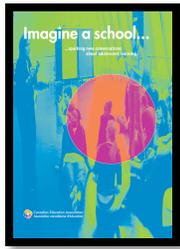
CEA

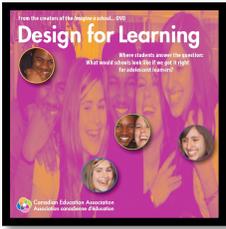


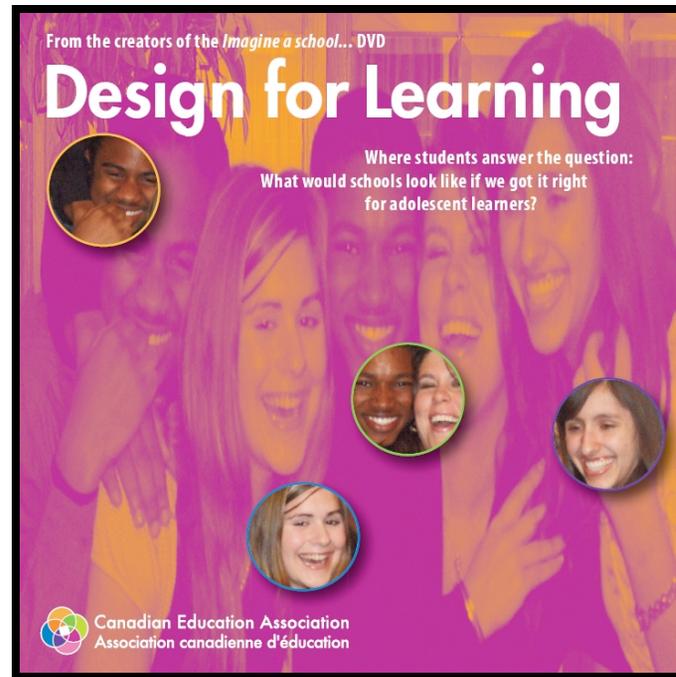
ACE



Kathy Gould Lundy  
Penny Milton







Pat Clifford  
Sharon Friesen  
Penny Milton

# Learning Program



- Here is what we want to know?
- Here is what we want to be able to do?



# We Want To Know and Do



Passionate Learners



- Real Stuff... (Real Science, Real Math, Real Social Issues)
- Subjects that are connected to other subject disciplines.
- “Hands on”

## **We Need:**

---

- ▶ To solve real problems
- ▶ To work creatively with ideas to create new theories, new products, to innovate, to make a difference
- ▶ To know that we can help someone
- ▶ To know that we can make a difference to our world
- ▶ To connect with ourselves, to feel our passion, to know our passion



# Relationships



- Here is what we want.
- Here is what we need.



# To Learn With and From



- have a passion or love for their subject
- are knowledgeable
- do more than teach
- exercise authority not superiority
- know the possibilities of technology
- have strong teacher-teacher relationships.



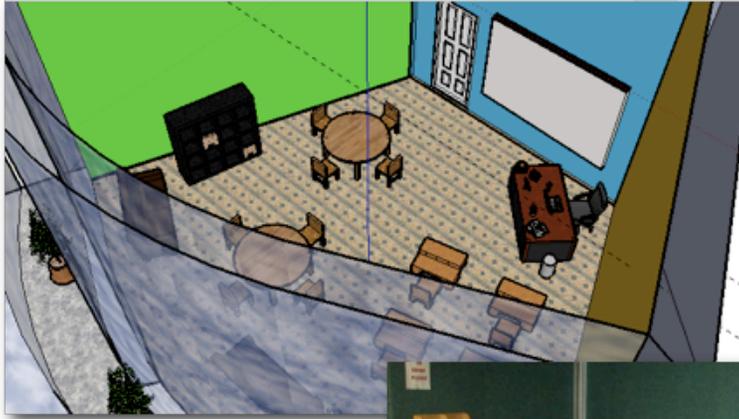
# To Learn With and From



- People in our community
- Other people in the world
- Discipline experts
- Each other



# Learning Spaces



- That connect us with expertise
- Quiet reflection
- Dialogue and conversation





# What Did You Do In School Today?

WHAT DID YOU DO  
IN SCHOOL TODAY?

Welcome to the  
**WHAT  
DID YOU DO  
IN SCHOOL  
TODAY?  
Survey**



- We are asking you these questions to learn about what happens to students during the teen years.
- We want to know more about how students feel about themselves and their learning experiences.
- We are very concerned about the privacy of students who do our survey.

We want to you to know that 

1. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.
2. When you submit your questionnaire, only the computer program reads your responses
3. Your answers are then mixed with those of other students and the answers you give will never be identified as yours.



# Research Study

---

A multi-year research and development initiative



- ▶ Penny Milton, Canadian Education Association
- ▶ Dr. Doug Willms, The Learning Bar Inc
- ▶ Dr. Sharon Friesen, Galileo Educational Network, University of Calgary

Funded by: Districts, Canadian Council on Learning and Canadian Education Association



CEA



ACE



# Measuring Student Engagement

## The sample

5 provinces

10 school districts

93 middle and secondary schools school

32,322 students

## Research Framework

Student Demographics

Student Engagement - social, academic,  
intellectual

School and Classroom Climate Factors

**And what are the relationships among these?**



CEA



ACE



# The Study Examines?

---

- ▶ What students are actually doing in their classrooms;
- ▶ Whether and how these activities affect their learning, engagement and achievement; and,
- ▶ How classroom practices could be improved to create more effective learning environments.

# How is This Research Different?

---



- ▶ There is mounting evidence that effective teacher practice is key to student engagement.
- ▶ Attention has been paid to school climate, socio-economic status and many other variables but not to students' reports of their learning activities and their connection to engagement.



# What Is Student Engagement?

---

The extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet the formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning.

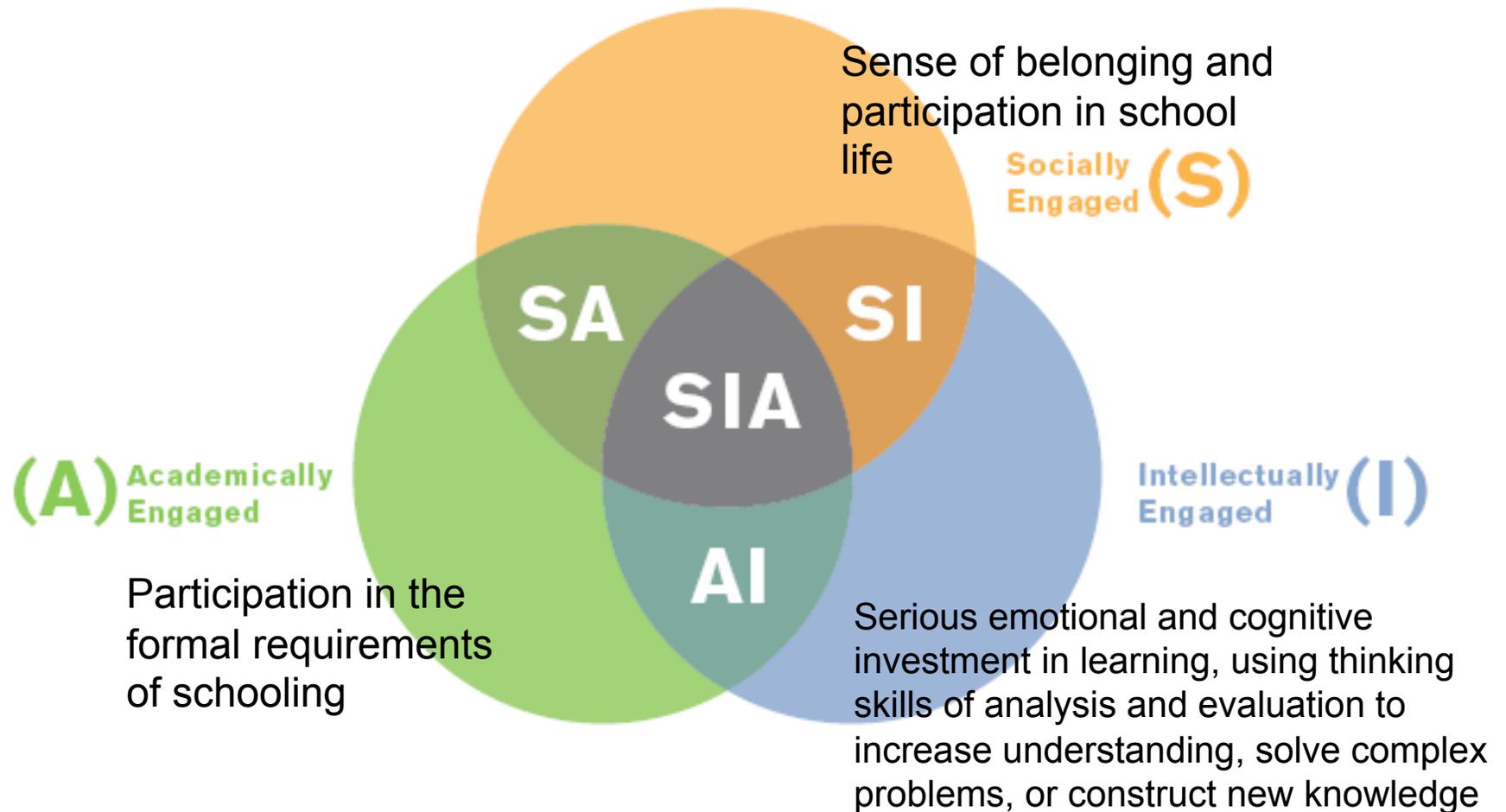




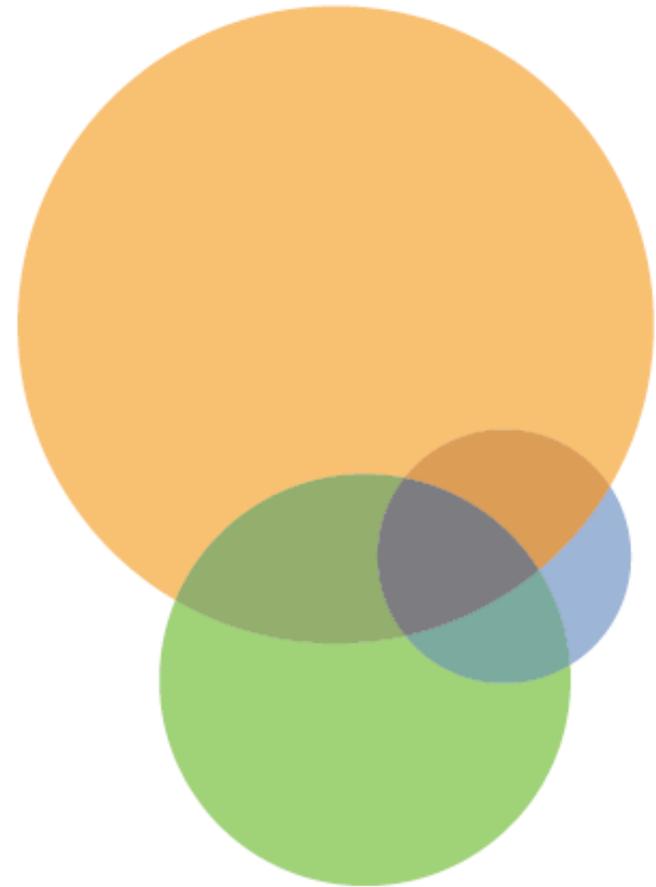
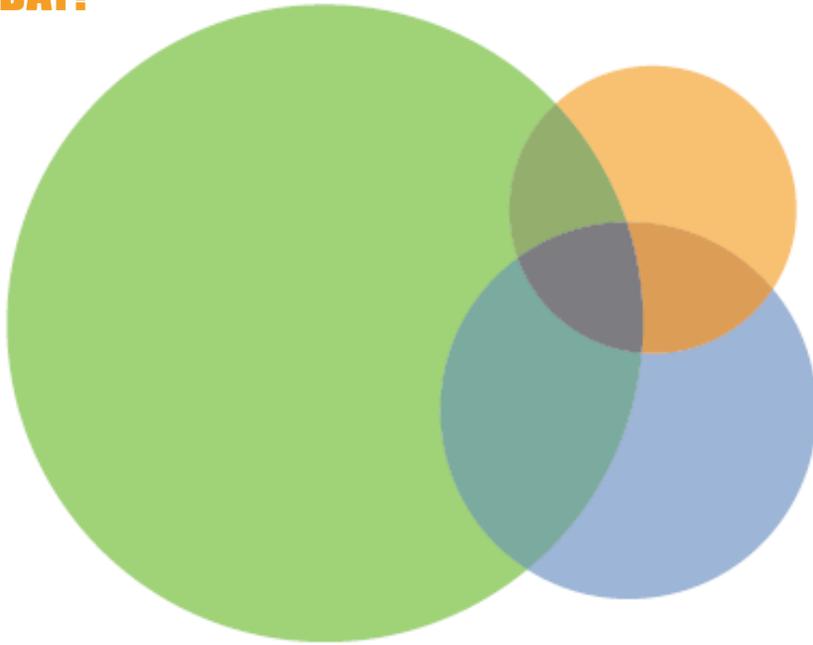
Social	Academic	Intellectual
<p>A sense of belonging and participation in school life.</p>	<p>Participation in the formal requirements of schooling.</p>	<p>A serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher-order thinking skills (such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems, or construct new knowledge.</p>



# Engagement - Disengagement



Interaction among dimensions of a student's engagement



● **Socially Engaged**

● **Academically Engaged**

● **Intellectually Engaged**

*Hypothetical distributions of dimensions of engagement in a school population*



## **Why focus on intellectual engagement?**

because it's all about learning!



CEA

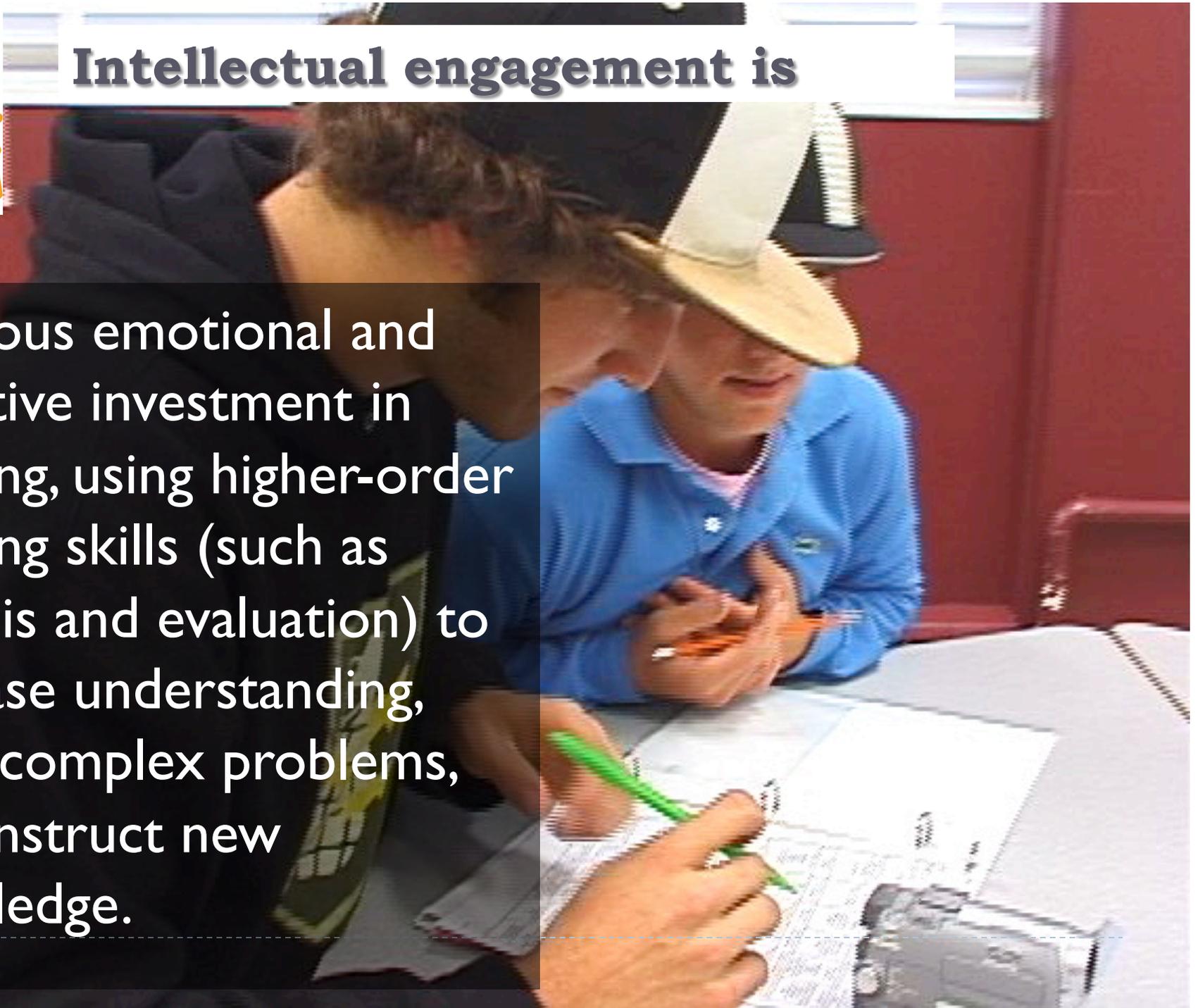


ACE



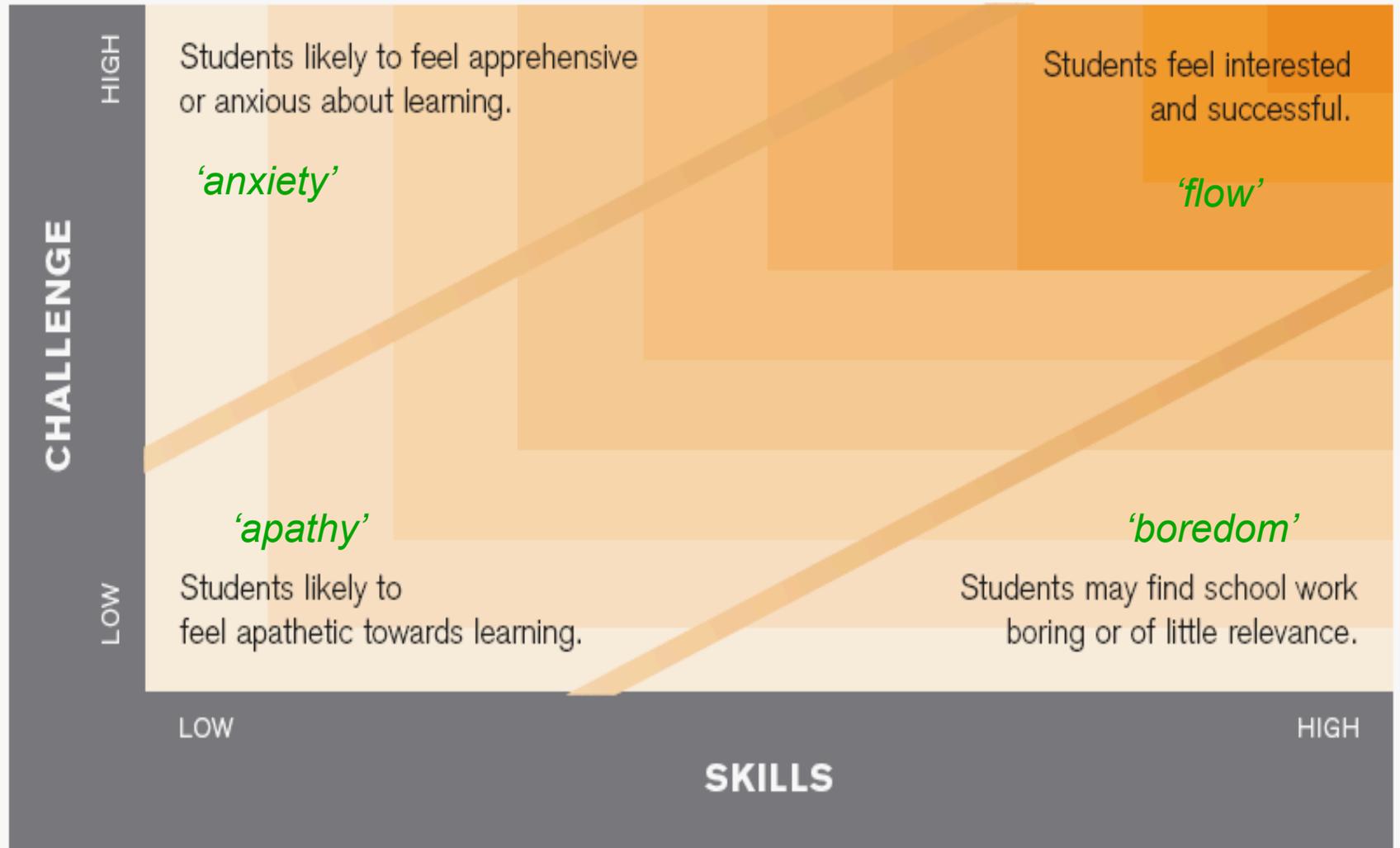
## Intellectual engagement is

a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning, using higher-order thinking skills (such as analysis and evaluation) to increase understanding, solve complex problems, or construct new knowledge.





# Instructional Challenge



Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihaly





# Are Canadian students engaged in school?

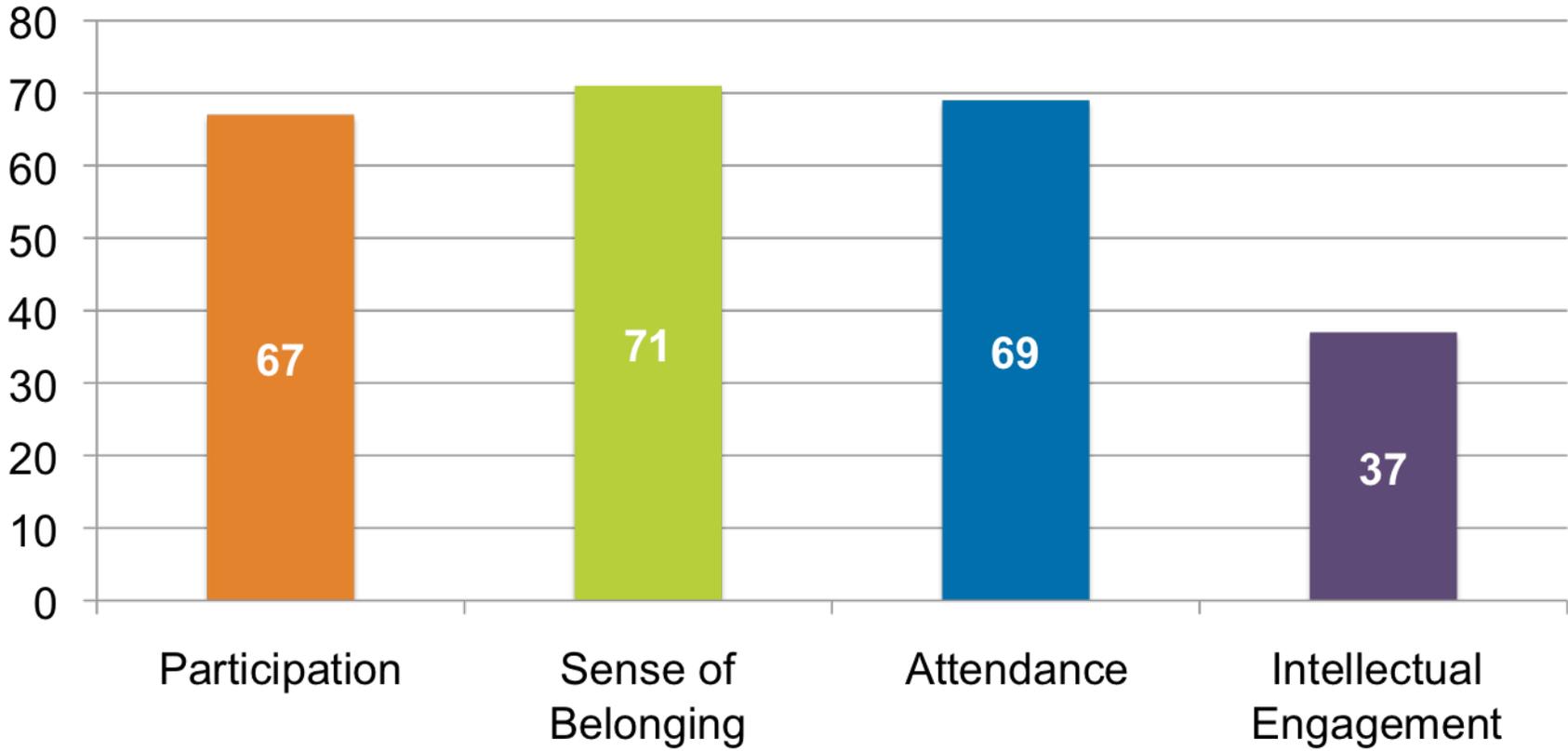
## Findings



CEA



ACE

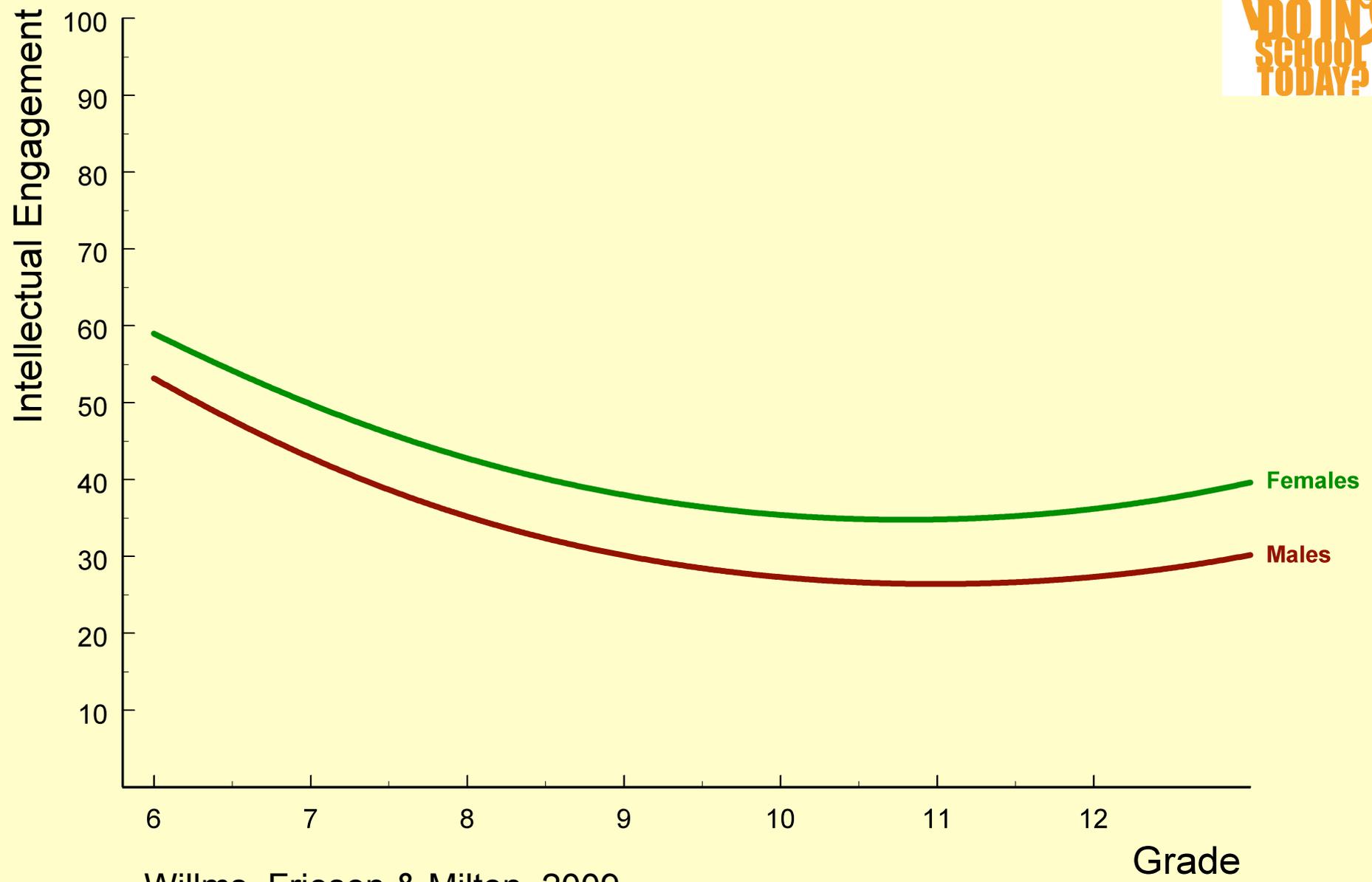




CEA



ACE



Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009



## Do Schools Make a Difference?

- Levels of engagement vary substantially among schools
- Sense of belonging remains relatively constant in elementary, middle and secondary schools
- But levels of participation, attendance and intellectual engagement are between 15 and 30 percent lower in secondary schools
- Between 50 and 70 percent of the differences in the levels of student engagement among the 93 schools were a result of school and classroom climate factors





## How Much Does Family Matter

---

- ▶ **SES matters but:**
  - ▶ **“Moreover, the outcome differences among schools in the *What did you do in school today?* sample, far outweigh the differences associated with students’ family background. These findings reveal that levels of engagement vary among schools, and suggest that the role of the classroom teacher may be as important, or even more important, than students’ family background.”**
- 





# Effective Use of Learning Time

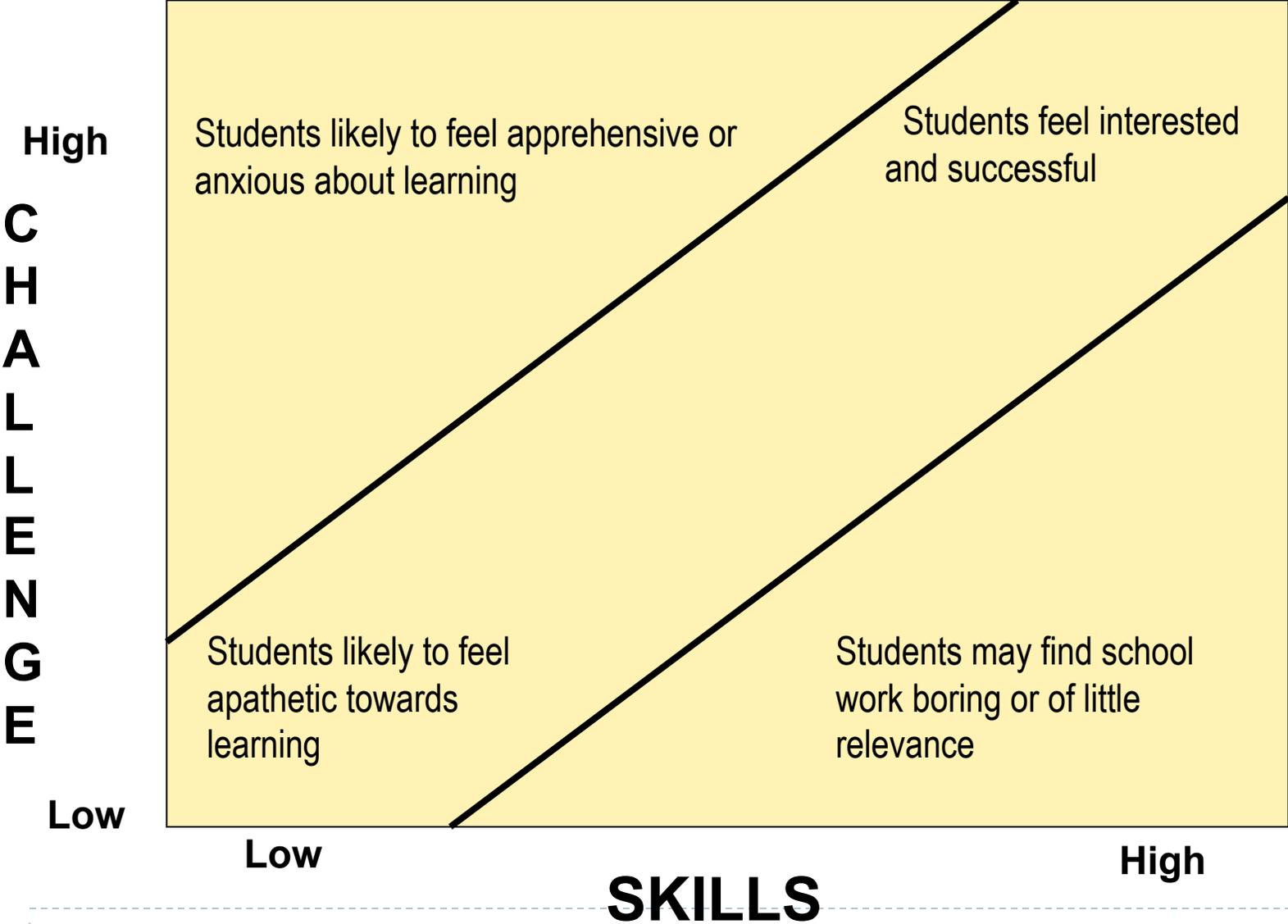
---

1. I spend a lot of time day-dreaming, socializing, or pretending to pay attention.
2. I enjoy learning new concepts and ideas.
3. We explore ideas and topics that are meaningful.
4. I enjoy our class projects so much that often I do not want to stop.
5. I wish we did not have to take language arts.
6. We cover topics that are useful in everyday life.
7. I enjoy language arts classes so much that I lose track of time.
8. I try hard to improve my skills in language arts.
9. I find myself thinking about what we are learning even after the lesson is over.
0. I know the purpose of what we are learning.
1. I spend a lot of time day-dreaming, socializing, or pretending to pay attention.
2. I enjoy learning new concepts and ideas.
3. We explore ideas and topics that are meaningful.
4. I enjoy our class projects so much that often I do not want to stop.
5. I wish we did not have to take math.
6. We cover topics that are useful in everyday life.
7. I enjoy math classes so much that I lose track of time.
8. I try hard to improve my skills in mathematics.
9. I find myself thinking about what we are learning even after the lesson is over.
0. I know the purpose of what we are learning.

Students respond to these statements on a five-point scale that is scored as follows: 0 (strongly disagree), 1 (somewhat disagree), 2 (neither agree nor disagree), 3 (somewhat agree), and 4 (strongly agree). The scores are averaged across the ten statements to yield an average score that ranges from 0 to 4. Students with an average score that is above 2.4 (i.e., slightly higher than neutral) are considered to have positive intellectual engagement.



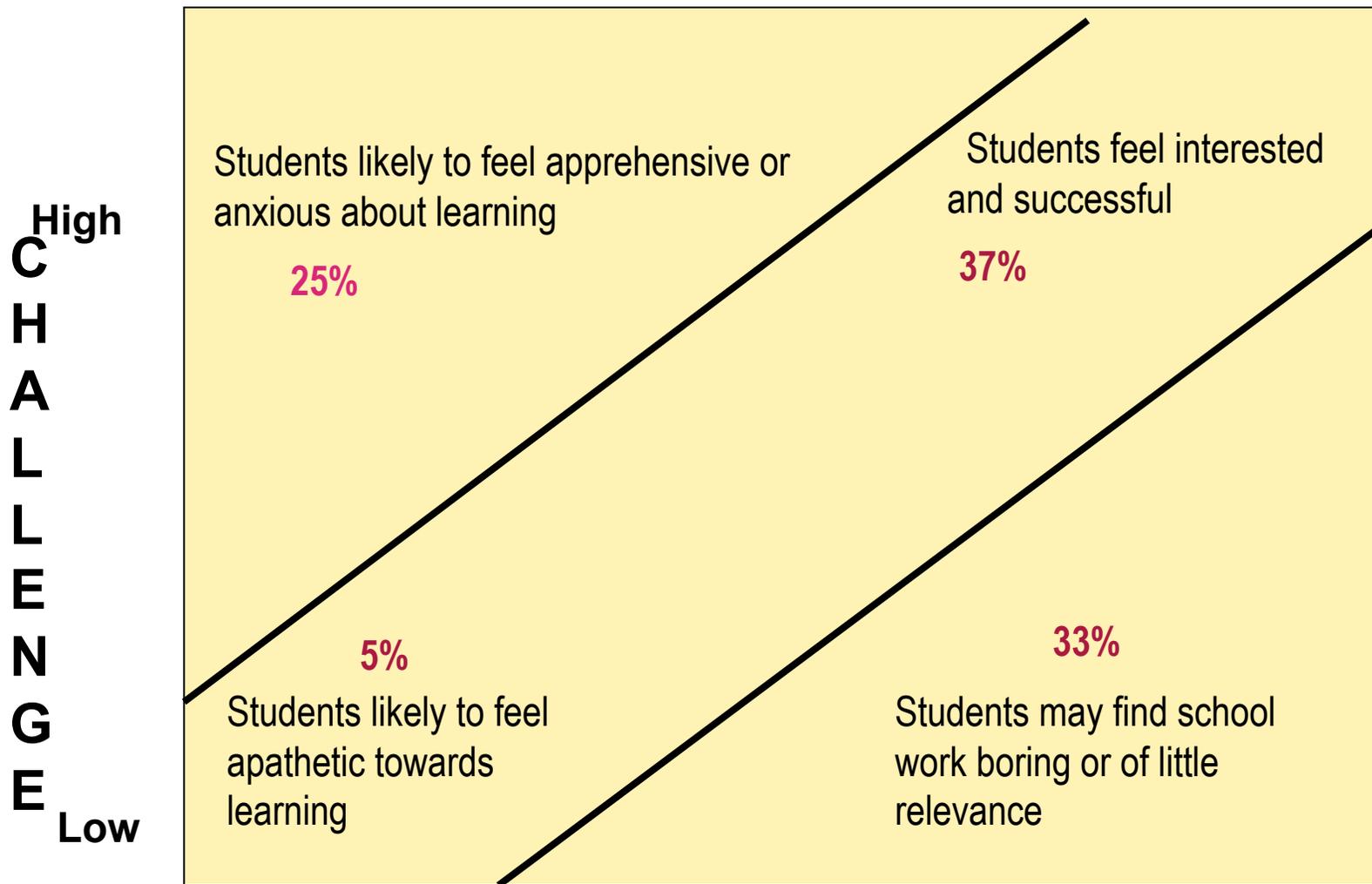
# Instructional Challenge



Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihaly



# Instructional Challenge



Low

**SKILLS**

High

Adapted from Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Less than 50 percent of Canadian students feel both confident about their skills in language arts and mathematics and sufficiently challenged in their classes to keep them interested.





Although policies at school level and beyond affect what goes on in classrooms, classroom instruction – how and what teachers teach – is the proximal and most powerful factor in student engagement in learning.

American National Research Council  
Engaging Schools, 2003



## Implications For Classrooms and Schools

---

- ▶ Findings regarding challenge and skills suggest that there are two separate but parallel issues facing Canadian Schools:
  - ▶ How do we design instruction to engage more students
    - ▶ Those with low confidence
    - ▶ Those with high confidence





# Classroom Practices That Make A Difference

1. Teach For Today's World – Design
2. Make It Mean Something – Authentic, Relevant
3. Focus Assessment Practices On Improving Learning
4. Build Relationships – teacher to students, students to students, students to discipline, teachers to teachers
5. Create A Scholarship For Teaching





# Transforming Classrooms

“If we are going to change how students are engaged, we have to agree on one thing ... We must keep it to learning ... social, academic and intellectual engagement. I think everyone is capable of balancing all three. Now we ask, how is it going to work?”

William Zhang, Student  
International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement  
*Student Blog, Vancouver 2009*





# Three Resources to Support Engagement

*What did you do in school today? Transforming Classrooms through Social, Academic and Intellectual Engagement*

J. Douglas Willms, Sharon Friesen and Penny Milton

*Exploring the Concept of Engagement and its Implications for Teaching and Learning in Canada*

Jodene Dunleavy and Penny Milton

*Teaching Effectiveness: A Rubric and Framework*

Sharon Friesen

[www.cea-ace.ca](http://www.cea-ace.ca)



CEA



ACE