



# “Inspire, Engage, Build Community, and Create Lasting Lessons! Experiential Brain-Based Approaches to Amplify the Power of Student Ownership and Voice”

## Facilitator Contact Information

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This document is an overview of some of the techniques Jen Stanchfield explores in her workshop and strand at the 2021 BEST institute. Hopefully these resources provide inspiration and reflective and experiential tools to fill your toolbox. To learn more about experiential education, and brain-based learning, read [this excerpt from the book \*Inspired Educator Inspired Learner\* by Jen Stanchfield](#).

## Resources on the Brain and Learning

There is a great deal of compelling research on the brain and learning that is very relevant to educators and educators. This research supports experiential practices and can inform your choices around activities and approaches you use in your classrooms. Chapters 1-3 of [Inspired Educator, Learner](#) book offers an overview of how experiential education is supported by neuroscience, as well as the power of using play, movement, and multiple pathways/multiple senses in teaching and learning.

**Here are some other books and resources on the subject. All of these authors continue to post new research on the subject online.**

Wang, Sam & Aamodt, Sandra. (2011) *Welcome to Your Child’s Brain*. Bloomsbury Publishing (Not just for parents- it gives great insights on how the brain works. Their website also has great resources:

<http://www.welcometoyourbrain.com/>

Medina, John. (2014). *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home and School*. Seattle, WA: Pear Press.

Willis, Judy. (2006). *Research-Based Strategies to Ignite Student Learning*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. [www.radteach.com](http://www.radteach.com) (Judy Willis’ website)

Mary Helen Immordino-Yang: <https://rossier.usc.edu/the-science-of-social-learning-the-research-of-mary-helen-immordino-yang/>

## Starting off with Style: Use a “Hook” or “Welcoming Ritual” to Engage Your Group

Providing an activity for learners to engage in at their own pace as the group gathers prior to a class or meeting creates a welcome focus during what can be an awkward time for some. These first few minutes are an excellent opportunity to draw learners into a positive experience and create buy-in to increase engagement. Research on the brain and learning is showing that novel activities help participants shift their focus into the learning space and create a "hook" around the topic at hand – increasing engagement and retention. These techniques also are reflective in nature and help you begin weaving reflection throughout your teaching and group work– not just at the end of a lesson or experience. This technique can also role models giving choices by engaging participants in an initial activity where they choose an object/quote/image that has meaning for them. Here is a link to a post on this subject from Jen’s Inspired Educator Blog: [Inspired Educator Blog](#)

## Conversation Starter” Pin-Back Buttons

To start our workshop – as participants entered the zoom session, we used a photo of Jen’s “Conversation Starter” Pin-Back Buttons. The “Conversation Starters” kit is a collection of playful buttons with various slogans and images. The

buttons are a way to transition into a classroom or group room space and bring humor into group settings where individuals are reluctant to participate. We asked group members to choose a button that represented their mood or attitude as they entered the room for our session. They have led to interesting reflective conversations- or even used as a reflective conflict resolution tool. *\*Resource: Contact Jen for more info about the "Conversation Starters" kits at [Experiential Tools](#) or [jen@experientialtools.com](mailto:jen@experientialtools.com). Customized sets are available.*

### **Paint Chips**

Paint chips are a tried and true, easy to obtain and free "upcycled" reflective prompt. Seek out a collection of paint samples from your local hardware store. We chose the paint chips by name as much as color, as there are many evocative color names. As an entry task you could ask participants to choose a color or color name that represents their mood or attitude as they enter class/meeting. We shared a picture of Jen's collection. You could use the Zoom "annotate" tool or Jamboard with a photo of the paint chips to invite responses with text and sticky notes as well as the chat function. And of course, in-person you can engage them in small groups or pair-sharing.

### **Quotes**

Quotes can be used as a transitional, introductory, or reflective activity. They are an effective method for creating context and framing an experience. This approach is an engaging way to introduce or explore a subject prior to a lesson or discussion. Quotes can help participants find common ground, make contextual connections, and spark creative thought. See Jen's [recent blog post](#) on this subject for specific examples, or see chapter five in her *Inspired Educator* book. Note: Try leaving some blank cards out for participants to make up their own quote. *Resource: Create your own set of quotes by looking for quotes online or in quote books. Or contact [jen@experientialtools.com](mailto:jen@experientialtools.com) for more information about her set of [Quotables](#) cards.*

### **Miniature Metaphors**

As a welcoming strategy in her teacher workshops, Jen often ask everyone to think of an important "tool" to have in their kit for effective engagement, teaching, or facilitation. She then uses her vintage toolbox or "Miniature Metaphors" and invites participants to choose a real tool or miniature object that represents that real life teaching strategy, approach, or mindset. Many restorative justice and SEL departments have been using Jen's "Miniature Metaphors" kits in Restorative Circle reflection. Language arts teachers use them for writing prompts. You can easily create your own with found objects. Scour your junk drawers or yard sales to make your own treasure chest or toolkit. *Or, contact Jen for more info about her "Miniature Metaphor" kits at [experientialtools.com](http://experientialtools.com)*

### **Postcards or Objects**

Jen refers to postcards and imagery in reflection throughout this workshop and use these tools in many different ways (see more below). For an entry activity you could Invite participants to choose a postcard or object that represents a goal or a strength they bring to the group. For ongoing reflection, you could pull them out after a group has been involved in a project or I event and ask them to choose a card that they would send to a friend to describe their experience (later you might have them send a note to themselves using that postcard--more about that [in this blog post](#)). *Create your own kit from magazine pictures or postcards and objects from flea markets. To purchase a "Pick-A-Postcard" kit or Miniature Metaphors kit visit [experientialtools.com](http://experientialtools.com)*

### **Graffiti Wall**

Graffiti Wall is another reflection and storytelling activity that and be used as an ongoing "welcoming ritual" or optimistic closing. Here is a recent article from Jen Stanchfield's blog about the online or in-person versions of this activity: [Apr 05, 2021 Graffiti Wall for Active and Engaging Reflection Online or In-Person](#)

## **Engaging Choice-Centered Pair Share and Grouping Activities with Props and Without**

Facilitating a sense of choice, control, and ownership from the very start of learning and group experiences is fundamental to maximizing engagement and buy-in. In past blog articles, Jen has shared about this principle and ideas for cultivating it (see [“Make Thoughtful Activity Choices”](#) and [“Setting the Tone”](#)). Using objects such as **playing cards, dominoes, match game cards, vintage keys/key blanks** is an effective, engaging and non-threatening technique for creating partners and then small groups for “pair sharing”. No prop activities (like the “sole mates” footwear grouping activity) also add some playfulness to the process: [Choice Centered Breakout Rooms to Increase Engagement and Buy In](#)

## **The Power of Names and Storytelling**

**Name Meanings:** The Power of our Name Story Articles and Activity Examples

- Given names represent choice, thoughts, and emotional connection on the part of the individual’s family members. Preferred nicknames or new or shortened names, and the pronouns chosen by the individual represent a personal sense of self, choice, control, and ownership.
- Honoring this sense of identity and choice promotes dignity, respect, and positive group culture. When students have a story to associate with a classmate’s name it will help them make a stronger connection and better remember the name. In this blog post Jen explores her favorite “**Name Meanings**” activity used for this purpose. Even in classroom settings and workplaces where group members already know each other’s names this activity helps them learn more about each other and can lead to a discussion around the essential group norm of honoring each other by pronouncing names correctly, using them appropriately and acknowledging and supporting preferences.
- [Why Names Are Important and How to Honor Them](#). Related article from Angela Ward on [#Antiracist Teaching Practices](#)

## **Team Tally for Community Building, Context Setting, Review, and Formative Assessment**

This group questionnaire works beautifully for engaging groups in online or in-person teaching and group building. It can serve as a community and rapport building strategy. An academic review or reflection and data gathering activity. It involves friendly competition between teams of participants to create a cumulative score based on their group’s commonalities. This activity helps them learn more about each other engages them in healthy competition and is very self-directed – they can choose how they interpret the questions and the points

Variations of this activity can be used to reflect or spark peer teaching and dialogue on specific themes or academic, training and course content. In our sessions many of the questions used are about teaching, learning and specific facilitation and teaching strategies. See Jen’s my recent blog post:

<https://blog.experientialtools.com/2020/02/25/the-activity-i-always-have-in-my-bag-of-tricks-team-tally/> or page 135 in *Inspired Educator, Inspired Learner* book. Contact [Jen@experientialtools.com](mailto:Jen@experientialtools.com) for templates you can use to adapt in your own classrooms.

## **The Power of Metaphor in Reflection: Miniature Metaphors, Postcards, Found Objects for Reflection**

*Metaphoric images or objects are a powerful way to initiate reflective individual and group dialogue and storytelling and help learners process their thoughts or experiences and emotionally connect to content. Often people find it easier to share when they can attach their thoughts to an object or image and will share more deeply when they have a visual symbol to represent their ideas and feelings. We find that when metaphoric objects and image activities are used in reflection and storytelling there is increased This approach encourages student directed conversation and interpretation of the learning experience - increasing participant control and ownership of their learning. Read more about the power of metaphor [this blog post](#).*

## Ideas for using Images, Postcards, or Objects in Reflection

- Invite individuals to choose a card/object that represents a personal strength. You might have participants journal about their choice, write a commitment on the back of their card for later, take one as a memento, or send them later as a reminder of an experience or goal.
- Invite individuals to choose one that represents their role in the group or in an activity.
- **For consensus building**, invite the group as a whole to choose one that represents the story of what they achieved together.
- **For group norms discussions**: Choose objects or cards that represent the ideal behaviors or characteristics of the group.
- **Three Cards or Miniature Metaphors to Tell a Story**: As a closing activity/or halfway through the school year as a goal/vision setting/norms reflection activity, have the group pick three cards or objects to tell a story of where they were as a classroom group at the beginning of the year, where they went and where they hope to go next.
- **For reflecting on strengths and celebrating group members**, invite participants to choose a card or object that represents a strength that they individually bring to the group or their practice. Instead of telling the group why they chose it, their peers are invited to guess, which gives an opportunity for participants to give and receive positive feedback and appreciations. Read more about this activity in [this blog post](#).

## Music in the Classroom

Music is a powerful way to build classroom community! *Resource*: Consider using a Google Form to collect students' ["walk up" song](#) and then playing the songs during down time before class or during work time. You can also have students guess who chose what song at the end of the year once they've gotten to know their classmates better. A powerful getting-to-know-you activity that involves music includes getting students to pick 5 songs that represent them and to explain how elements of that song (lyrics, tone, etc.) capture their personality. This activity can also be adapted to get students to tell students the story of their lives or to tell the story of a character's life from literature they are reading in class.

## Active Review and Formative Assessment Games

*In both sessions Jen shares her favorite active formative assessment and review activities adapted to online Play Dough Pictionary and Charades Race are engaging active review strategies for in-person or online teaching. Jen has adapted these favorites to online using Zoom breakout groups – by sending a designated student the vocabulary words in chat, or using the main room as the staging area and having participants come in to get the word and head back to their team. The new features on Zoom and other platforms are making this easier and easier for online. In person you can spread teams across a space in a variety of ways.*

## Play dough Pictionary and Charades Race article from the Inspired Educator Blog

<https://blog.experientialtools.com/2021/03/26/play-doh-pictionary-and-charades-race-online/>

## Postcard Reminder

As a closing activity Jen asks group members to think of a commitment to themselves, a goal, lesson learned, or idea they want to be reminded of that came out of our workshop. I then invited them to write this in a note to themselves and forward it to me to affix to the postcard, which she will send as a future reminder.

Please email Jen at [jen@experientialtools.com](mailto:jen@experientialtools.com) for more information or questions. Check out her upcoming online and In-Person workshops Inspiration and Support Sessions. Sign up for the [Experiential Tools Newsletter](#) to receive articles on group facilitation and teaching. Follow Jen on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#).