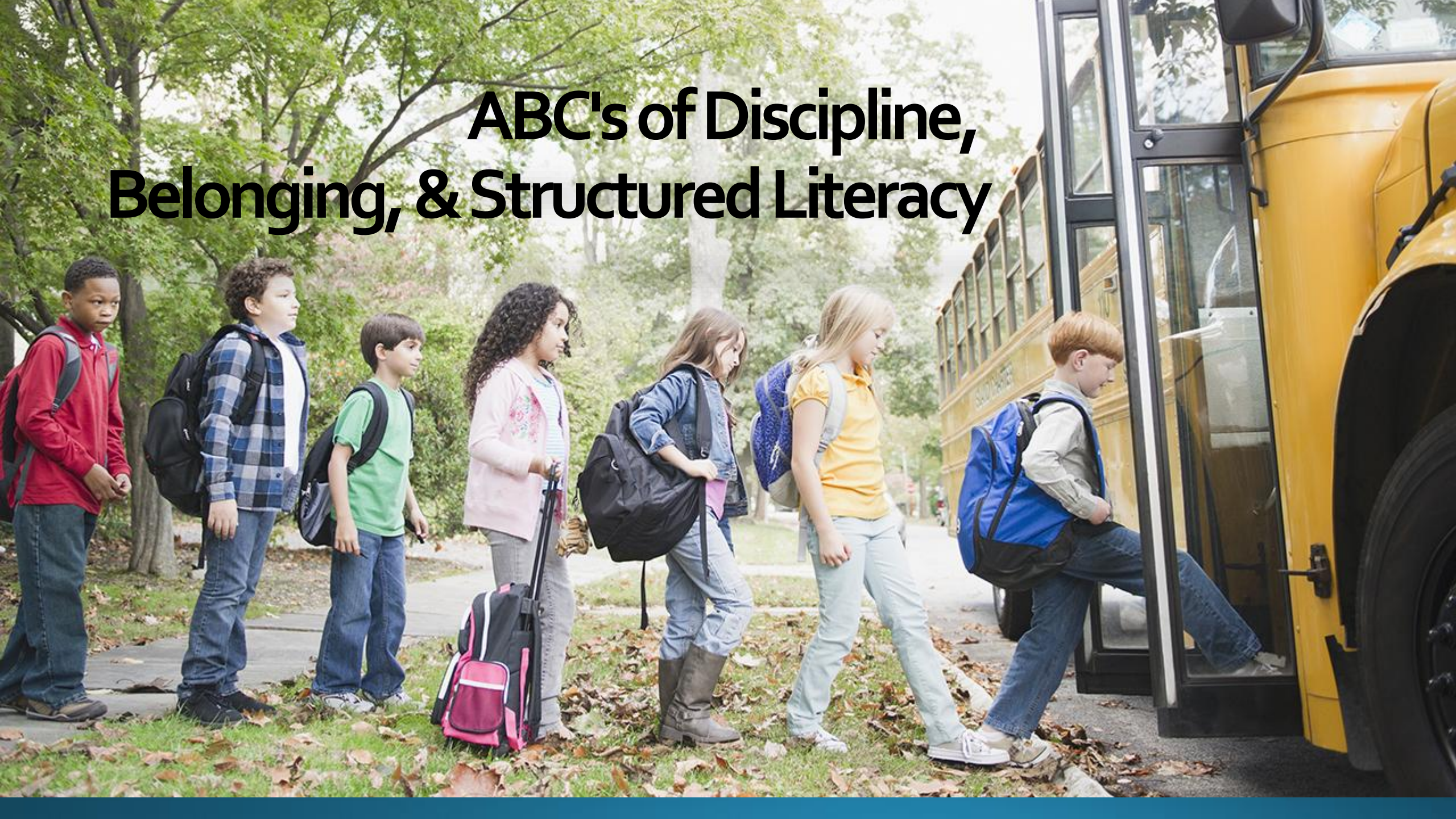# ABC's of Discipline, Belonging, & Structured Literacy
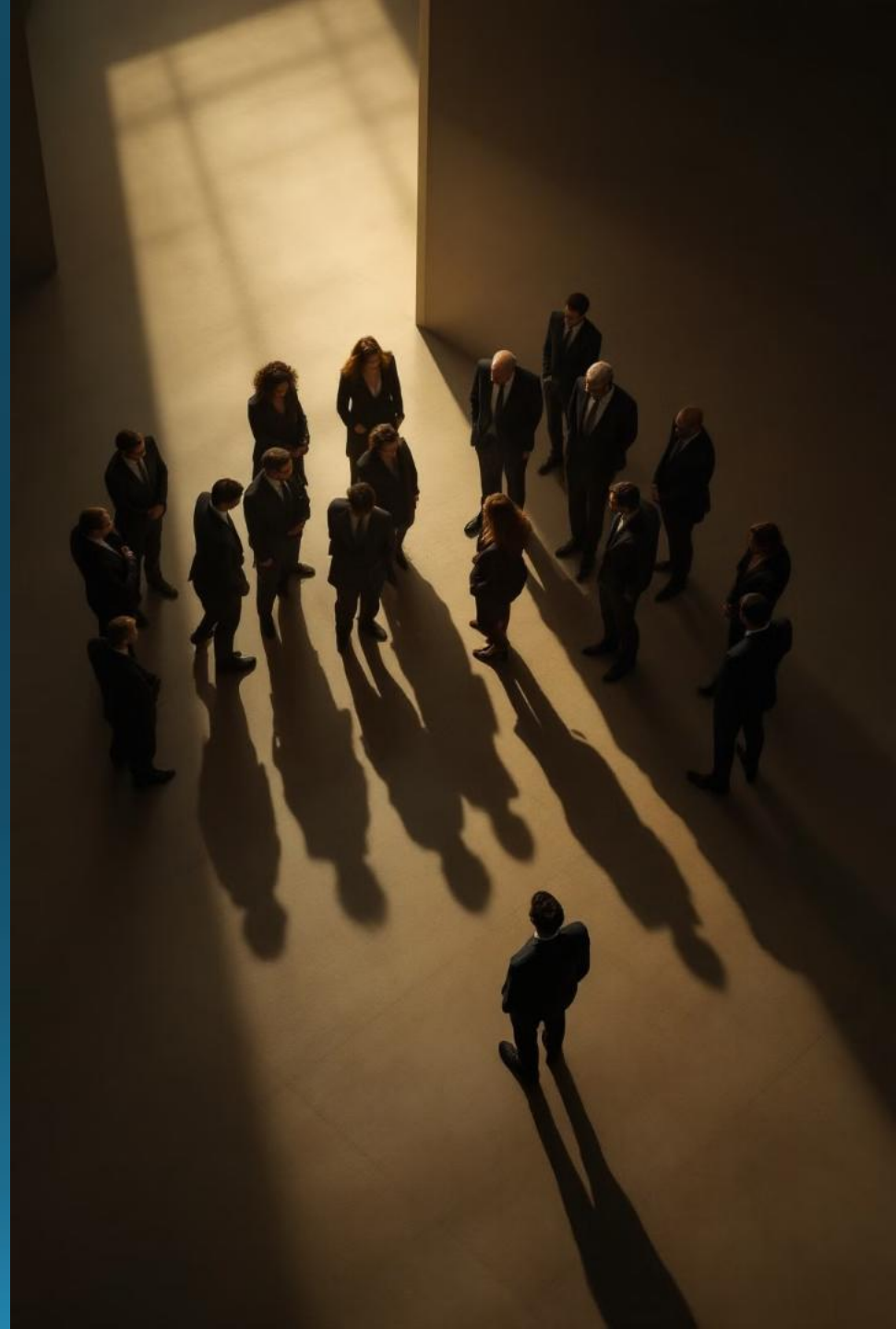
Welcome!

Rachel Arnold, CALT, C-SLDS

International Dyslexia Association-
Rocky Mountain Branch, President

South Central Board of Cooperative
Educational Services, Literacy Coordinator

What is our greatest fear?

Maslow Hierarchy

Do our educational communities engender belonging?

- Words we use
- Implicit bias
- Instructional practices
- Student engagement

Belonging is the basis for all **learning**

Today's Journey

1. **Awareness**: Understanding the School-to-Prison Pipeline
2. **Barriers**: Impact of Learning Differences on Behavior and Belonging
3. **Connection**: Structured Literacy – Where Belonging Builds Agency
4. **Developing**: Implementing Evidence-Based Classroom Practices

Learning Objectives

- Recognize how unmet literacy needs can transform into behavioral challenges and juvenile justice system involvement

- Explore the critical connection between academic success, classroom belonging, and student engagement

- Understand how structured literacy creates pathways for both academic growth and authentic belonging

- Implement evidence-based practices that reduce cognitive load while strengthening student identity

School to Prison Pipeline

1.5M
Students
Are suspended each year in the US.

100K
Expulsions
Occur annually

50%
Of Students
With disabilities are disproportionately suspended.
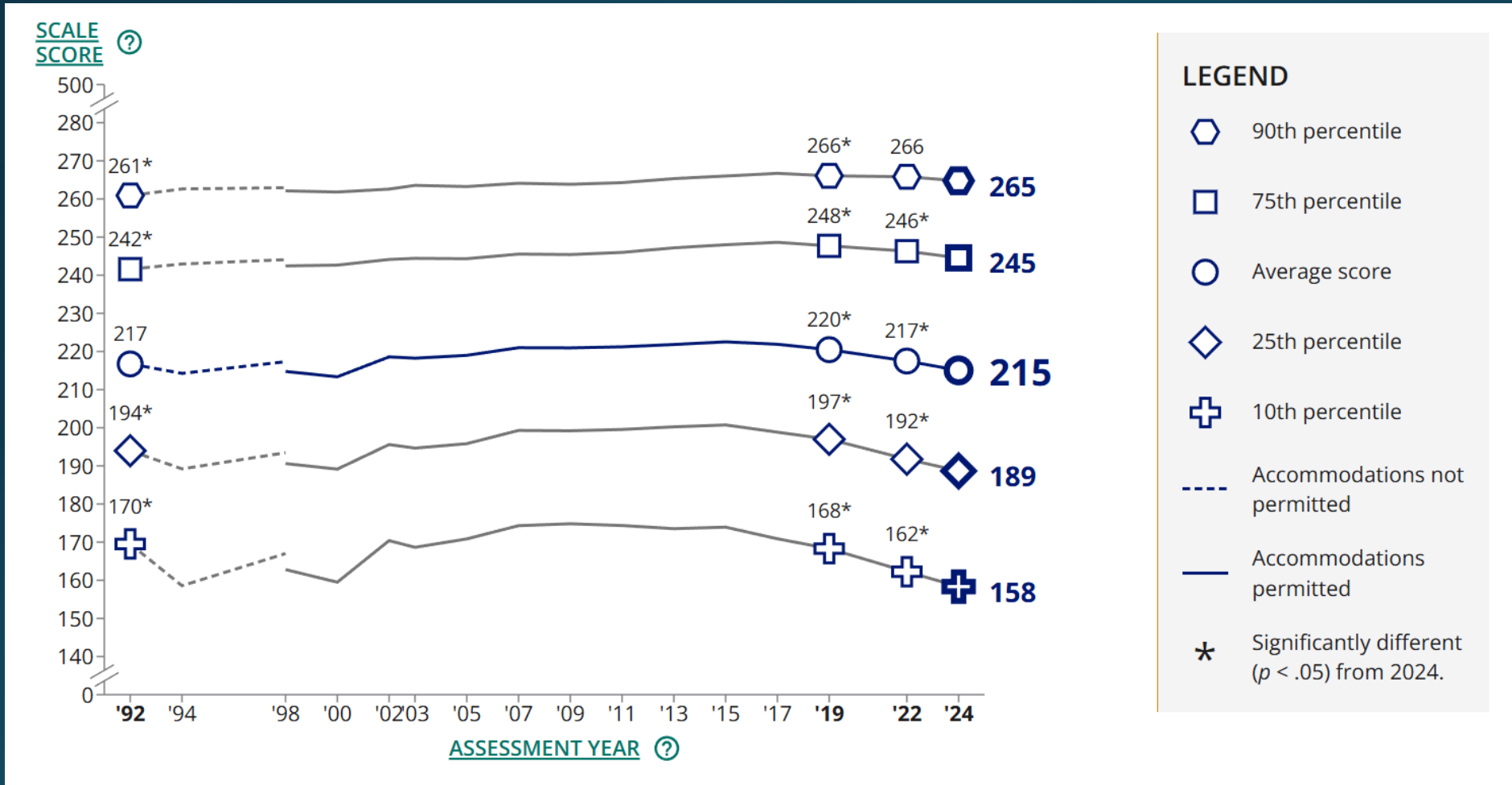
1 in 3
Black Males
Are suspended at least once by the end of high school.

(NCLD, 2022)

National Assessment of Education Progress 2024

31%
4th

30%
8th

"This systematic channeling represents not just an educational crisis but a fundamental human rights issue, as literacy has become essential for full participation in modern society"

(Maryanne Wolf, 2018).

"Marcus"

15 years old high school

Dyslexia with an IEP

Not receiving adequate support

Avoiding class

Truancy rather than learning cause

Verbal altercation with teacher over reading aloud

Resource Officer-escalated

Marcus entered Juvenile Justice System
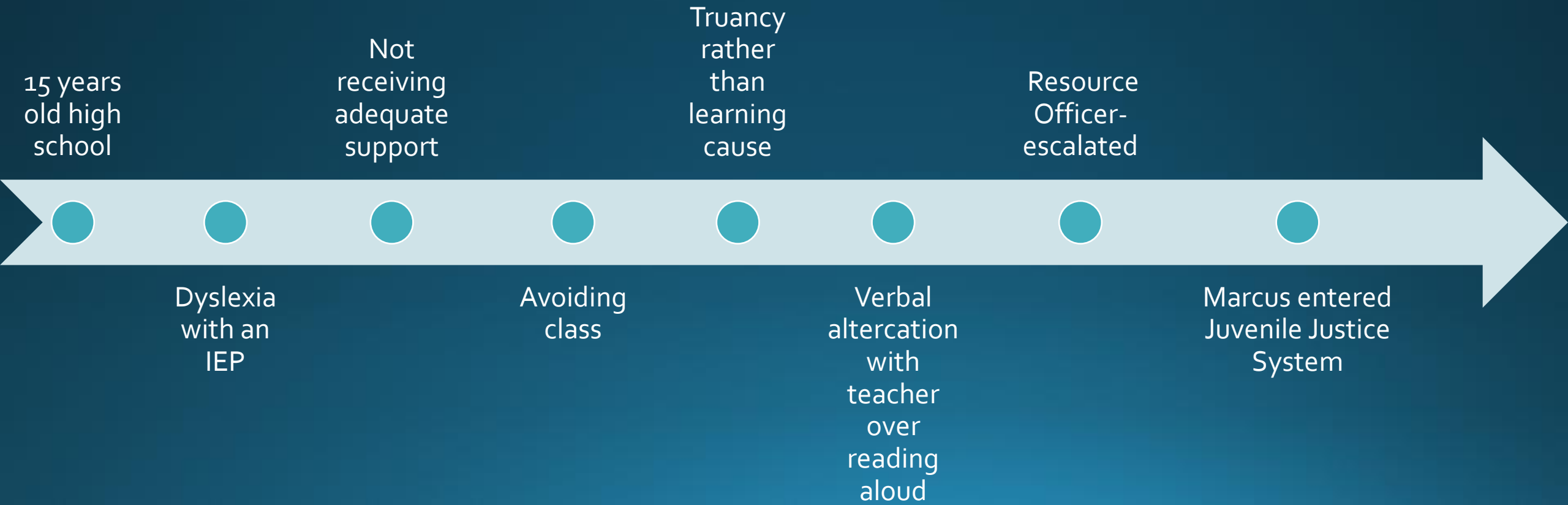
The Scale of the Crisis

- **Literacy and the Justice System**

- 85% of youth in the juvenile justice system are functionally illiterate
- 70% of incarcerated youth return to juvenile facilities after release
- 70% of adult inmates cannot read above a fourth-grade level
- 65-70% of justice-involved youth have diagnosed disabilities

(NCLD, 2023)

"Belonging Gap"

- **School Disconnection**

  40%

- **Disproportionate Impact**

  For students with disabilities

- **School Disengagement & Discipline**

  Disconnected students 3x

Impact of Early Intervention

early interventions are **3 times more effective** at preventing **both academic struggles** and associated **behavioral challenges** compared to delayed intervention.
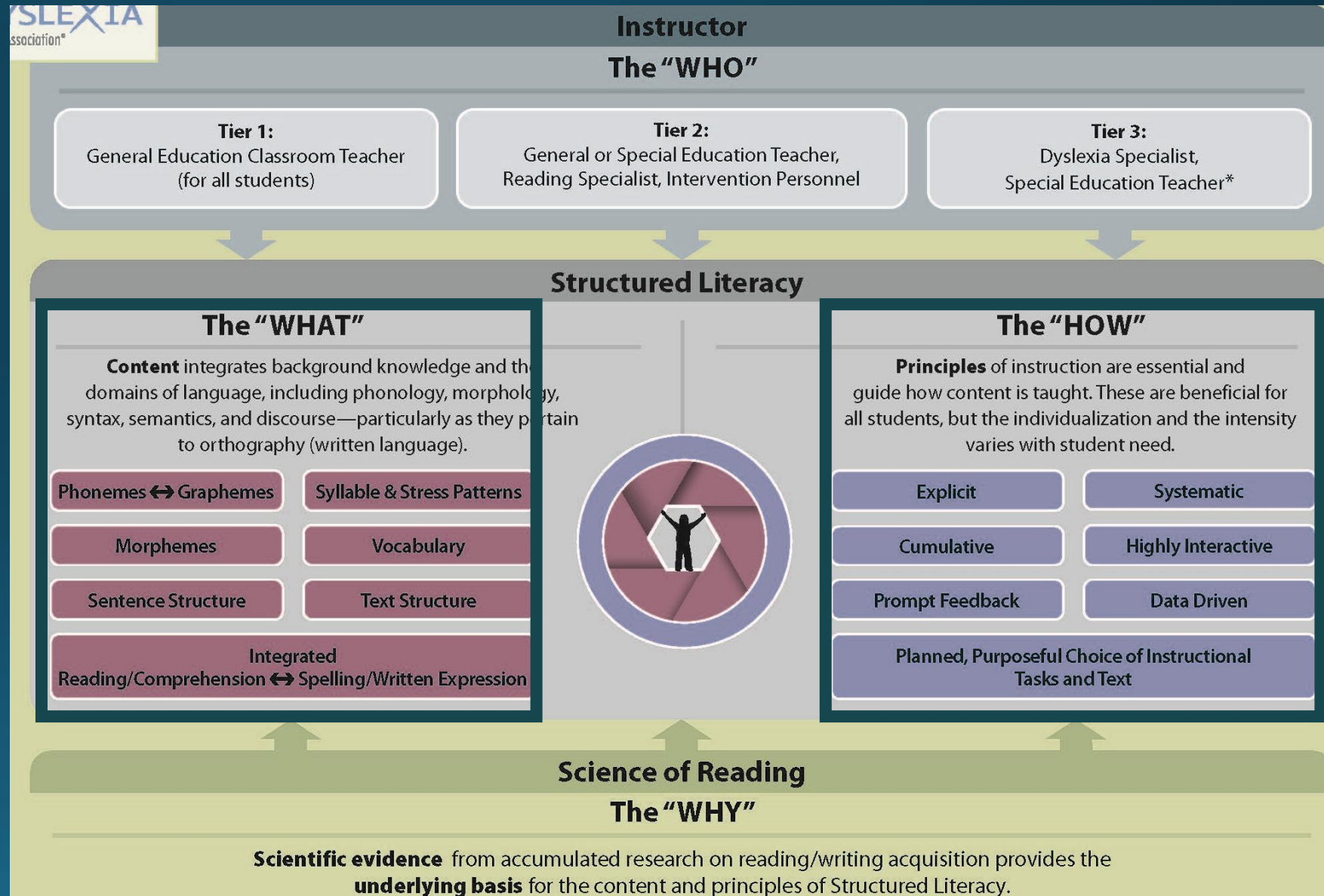
addressing reading difficulties in K-1 significantly reduces **the risk of later academic and disciplinary problems**

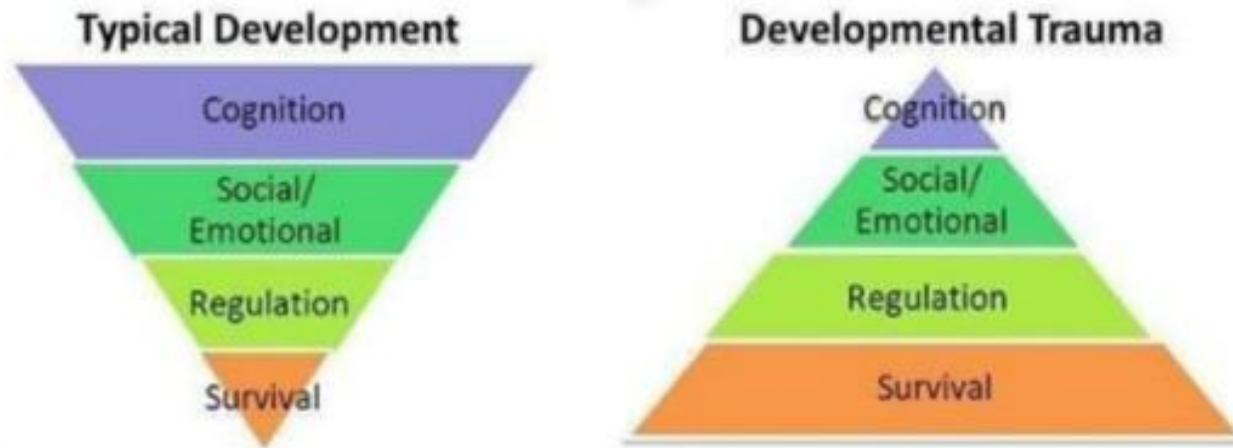Torgesen (2002), (Foorman et al., 1997).

Instruction of Language & Language of Instruction

- The "HOW"
- Principles of Instruction:
- Explicit
- Cumulative
- Prompt Feedback
- Systematic
- Highly Interactive
- Data Driven
- Planned, Purposeful Choice of Instructional Tasks and Text

Instructor
The "WHO"

Tier 1:
General Education Classroom Teacher
(for all students)

Tier 2:
General or Special Education Teacher,
Reading Specialist, Intervention Personnel

Tier 3:
Dyslexia Specialist,
Special Education Teacher*

Structured Literacy

The "WHAT"

Content integrates background knowledge and the domains of language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and discourse—particularly as they pertain to orthography (written language).

Phonemes ↔ Graphemes

Syllable & Stress Patterns

Morphemes

Vocabulary

Sentence Structure

Text Structure

Integrated
Reading/Comprehension ↔ Spelling/Written Expression

The "HOW"

Principles of instruction are essential and guide how content is taught. These are beneficial for all students, but the individualization and the intensity varies with student need.

Explicit

Systematic

Cumulative

Highly Interactive

Prompt Feedback

Data Driven

Planned, Purposeful Choice of Instructional Tasks and Text

Science of Reading
The "WHY"

Scientific evidence from accumulated research on reading/writing acquisition provides the **underlying basis** for the content and principles of Structured Literacy.

"When we see behavior as communication, we begin to understand our students differently."

Barriers: Impact of Learning Differences on Behavior and Belonging

Trauma & Brain Development

Reptilian Brain ●
Limbic System ●
Neocortex ●

Typical Development

Cognition
Social/Emotional
Regulation
Survival

Developmental Trauma

Cognition
Social/Emotional
Regulation
Survival
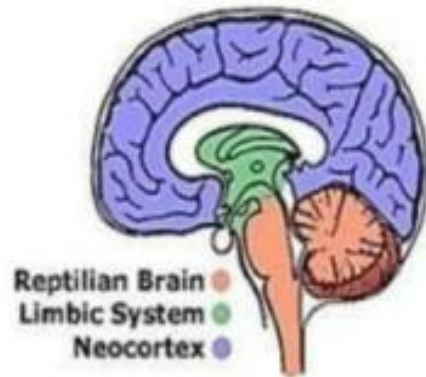
Adapted from Holt & Jordan, Ohio Dept. of Education

Children who experience trauma spend more time and resources preoccupied with survival and regulation, than those who have not.

- 50%

- Childhood Trauma

Literacy Behavior Connection

SPECIFIC BEHAVIORAL PATTERNS EMERGE:

TASK AVOIDANCE DURING READING ACTIVITIES

INCREASED EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO LITERACY DEMANDS

DECREASED WORK COMPLETION RATES

ALTERED PEER INTERACTIONS DURING LITERACY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Research from NCLD (2023) demonstrates that these behaviors are frequently misinterpreted as disciplinary issues rather than indicators of learning needs, leading to inappropriate interventions.

In a nationally representative public opinion poll, 50% of the general public agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that learning disabilities (LD) was a term often used to describe a condition that could really be called...

- "laziness"

- "just as smart as you and me."

(Roper Public Affairs & Corporate Communications, 2010).

Informed Teaching Community

In a 2019 report by **NCLD** and **Understood**

33%
1 in 3 teachers viewed students' learning or attention issues as laziness

17%
of teachers felt very well prepared to teach students with mild to moderate learning disabilities

"labeling phenomenon"

Checking Implicit Bias

Be
Aware

Examine
Expectations

Fair
Treatment

Challenge
Assumptions

Identity plays a crucial role in educational success, particularly for students with learning differences, by shaping *academic resilience* and *self-perception*.

Identity Development and Educational Outcomes

Student Identity Formation

How students view themselves as learners is critical to literacy learning

1

Learning Disabilities and Self-Concept

For students with learning differences, their belief and understanding of their differences influences academic resilience and achievement.

2

(Daley & Rappolt-Schlichtmann, 2018)

Links To Learning

- **Academic Avoidance**
  - students with reading difficulties spent 27% less time in voluntary literacy activities, with 35% less time engaged compared to typically achieving peers

- **Behavior Manifestations**
  - Unable to access grade-level text, these students are 2.5 times more likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors as a coping mechanism (Edwards & Chen, 2023)

- **Discipline Impact**
  - These behaviors lead to significantly higher rates of disciplinary action - 68% of students receiving multiple suspensions show reading difficulties at least two grade levels below their peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023)

The ABC Connection
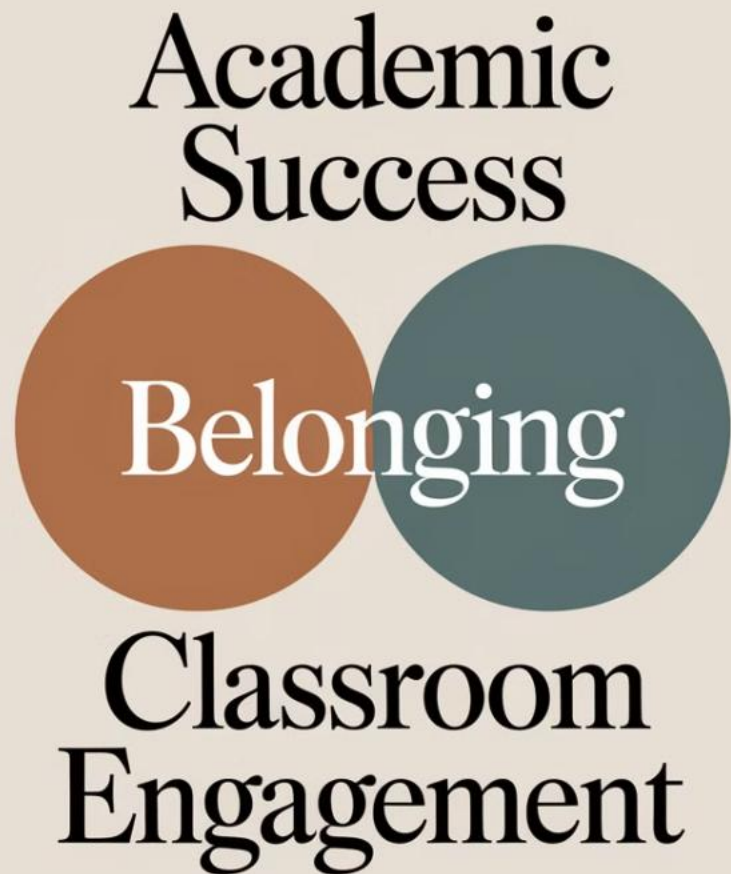
Academic Success

Behavioral issues may be misinterpreted, leading to ineffective interventions.

Belonging

Students may feel welcome but still struggle with core academic challenges

Classroom Engagement

Students may struggle to engage with content that feels disconnected from their experiences

"Structured literacy isn't just about reading - it's about creating pathways to belonging and agency."

Connection: Structured Literacy – Where Belonging Builds Agency

Neurobiological Foundations

☐ Brain's Architecture for Reading

The brain's architecture for reading is not innate but must be explicitly developed through instruction.

☐ Neural Systems Engagement

Reading engages the same neural systems involved in social-emotional processing

Intervention

Traditional academic interventions often fail to address these underlying connections

(Immordino-Yang, 2015)
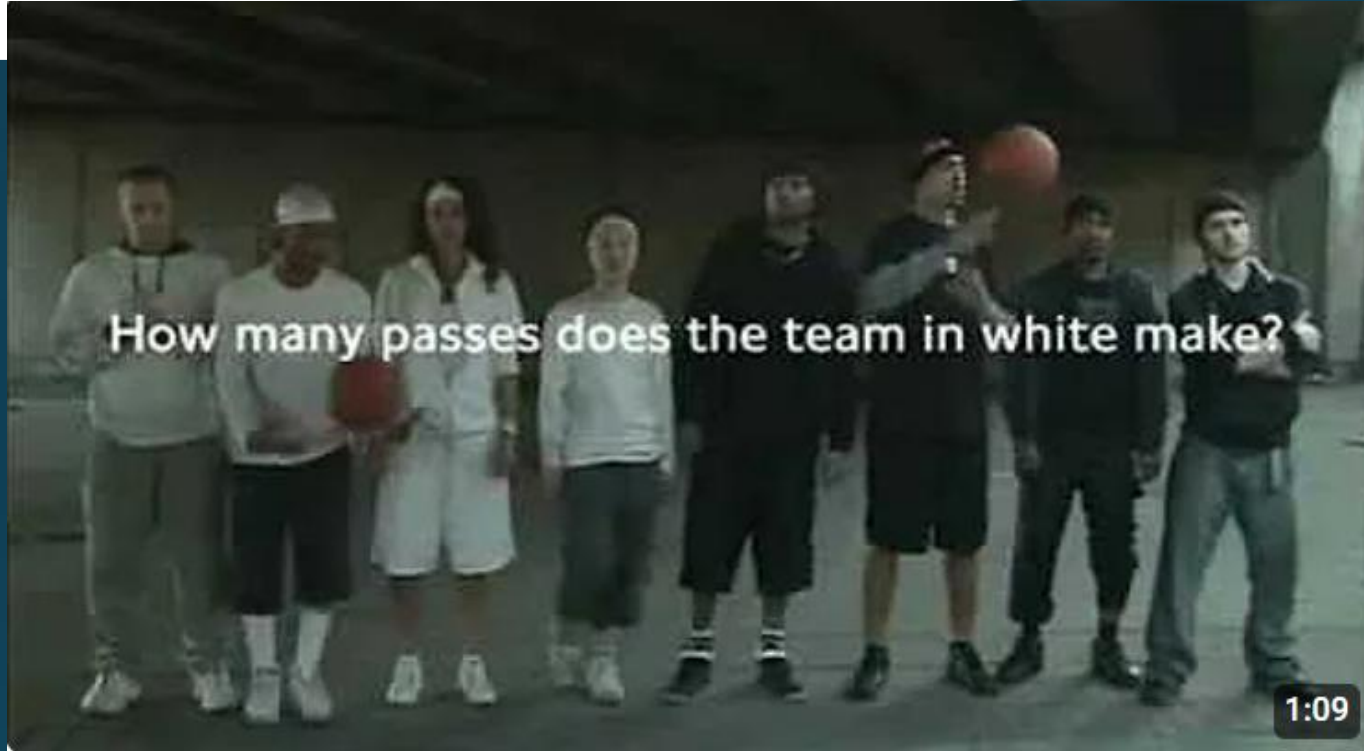
Ball Toss

Focus on the ball and count the number of passes the team in white makes?

Learning & the Brain

When instruction matches how our brains learn through systematic and sequential steps that manage cognitive load

✓Success

✓Confidence

✓Reduced frustration & anxiety

✓Reduced behavior challenges

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

Learning & the Brain

By controlling cognitive demands through explicit instruction
- ✓Create an environment of access for all
  - ✓Universal access point
- ✓Fosters shared learning experiences
  - ✓Strengthening classroom community
  - ✓Reduces disengagement or behavior outbursts

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

Learning & the Brain

Reduce extraneous cognitive load
- ✓Creates predictable routines
- ✓Clear expectations
  - ✓Essential elements to feel secure in environment
    - ✓Allows students to direct energy
      - ✓Learning
      - ✓Rather than anxiety or uncertainty

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

" Teach the **STUFF** and cut **the fluff.** "

—*Dr. Anita Archer*

VOYAGER SOPRIS
LEARNING®
a **cambium** company

Information Processing Model

schemas

Processed and transferred to LTM

Sensory memory

Working memory

Long-term memory

Input → unlimited up to 3 seconds

Attention → ~7 items for 5-20 seconds

Encoding → unlimited indefinately

Retrieval

Rehearsal

Forgotten

Forgotten

gerardfriel.com
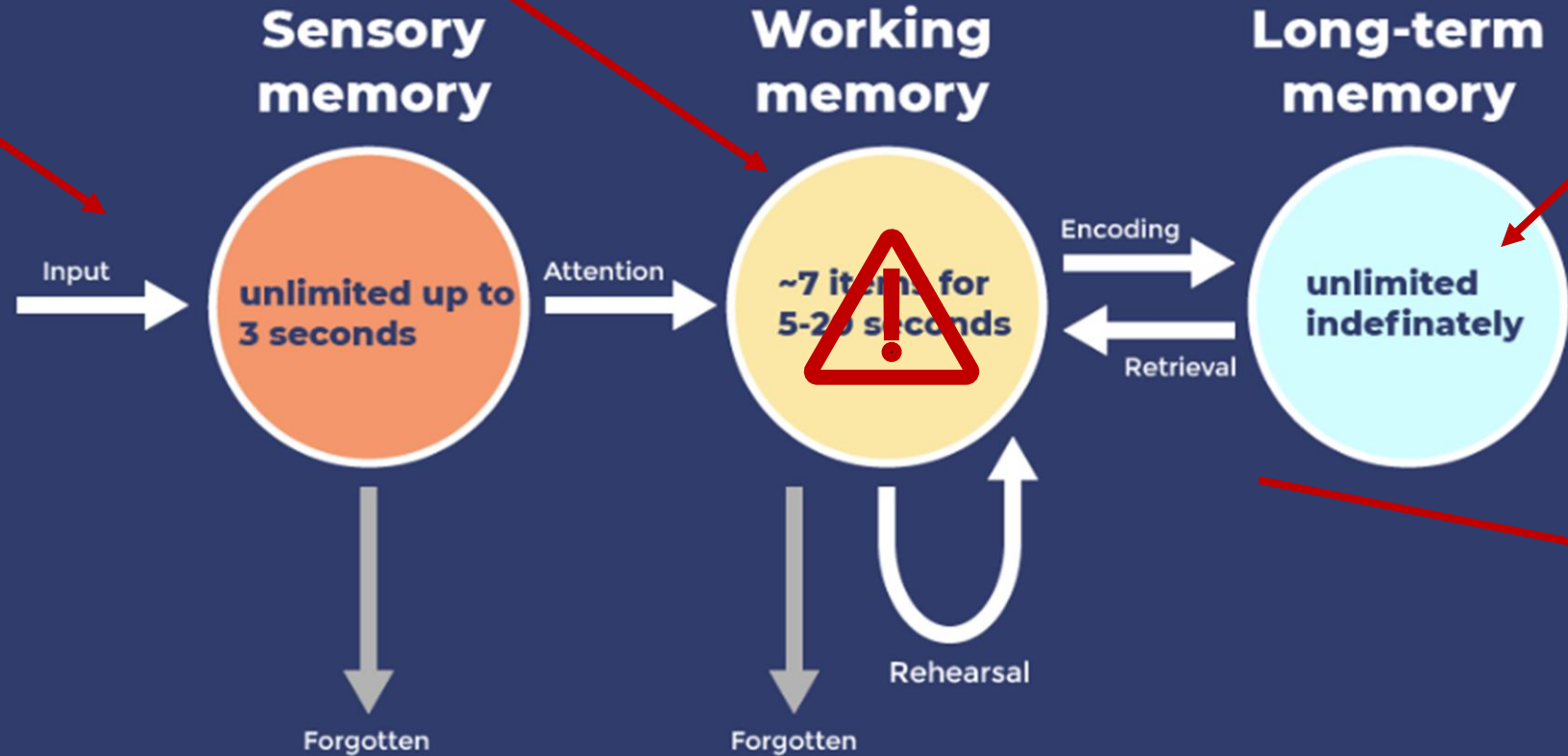
The Learning Process

The Challenge

WM becomes overloaded with too much new information,

Learning breaks down because students cannot process everything at once.

Classroom Implications

Explicit instruction works best for novice learners

Clear guidance reduces unnecessary mental effort

Structured teaching helps information transfer to long-term memory

Effective teaching optimizes the "mental load" on students

Understanding how our brains process information allows teachers to design instruction that works with—rather than against—our cognitive architecture.
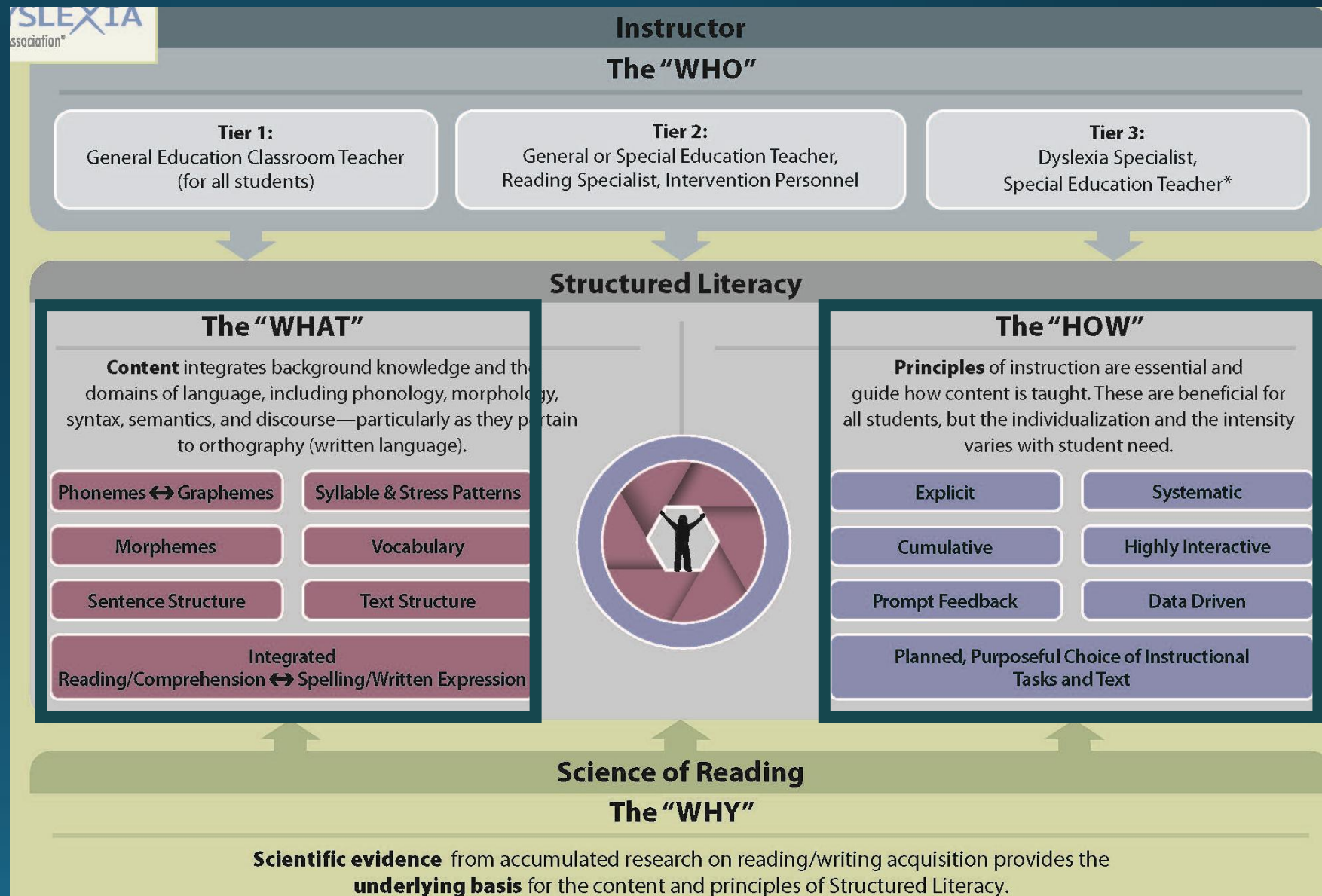
Explicit Instruction and Discovery
Not an either or — but a when

Explicit Instruction	Discovery
Little or no background knowledge *Novices*	A good deal of background knowledge in the domain *Experts*
History of difficulty or failure	History of success

Archer, (2017)

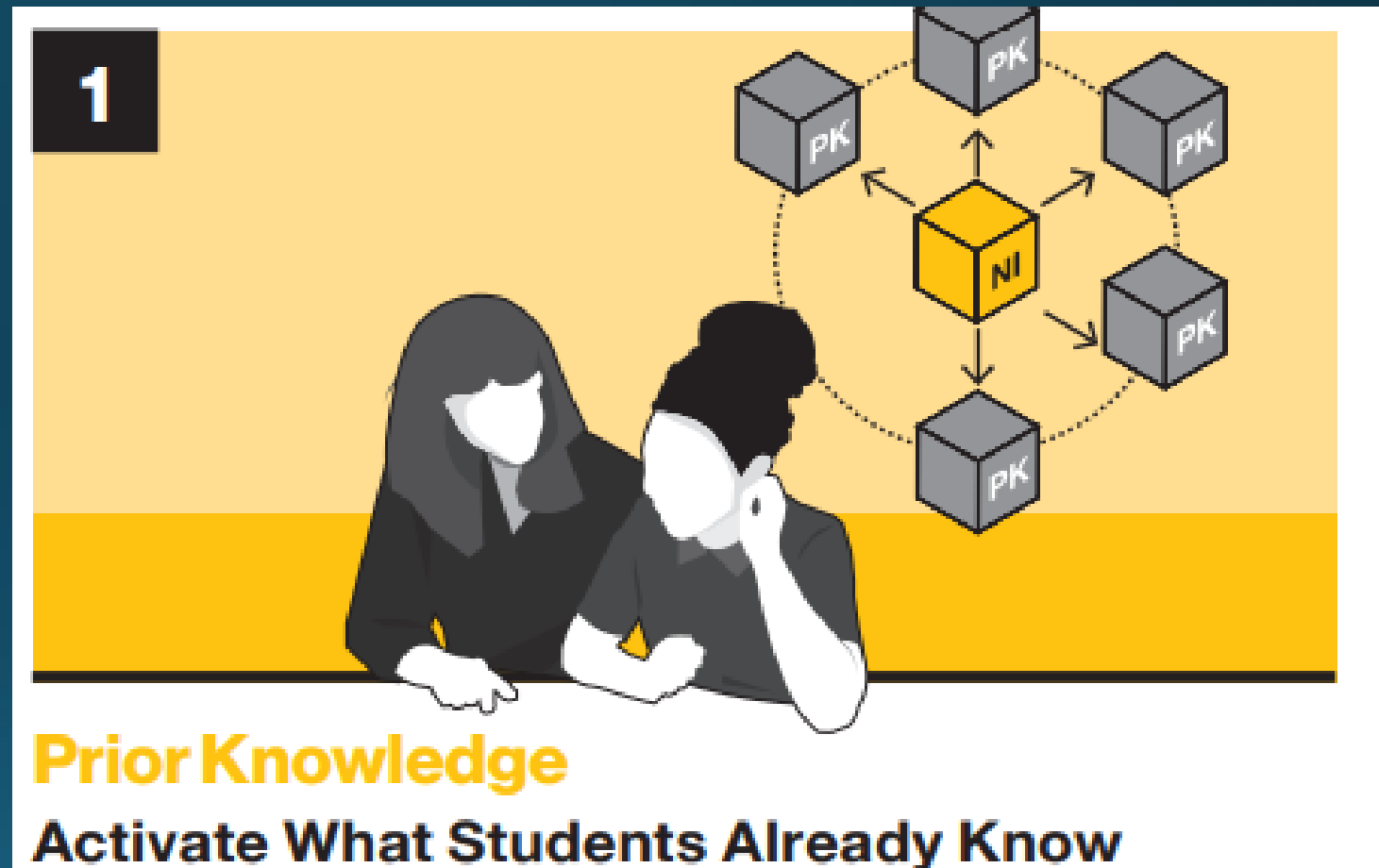# Instruction of Language & Language of Instruction

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- Cumulative
- Prompt Feedback
- Systematic
- Highly Interactive
- Data Driven
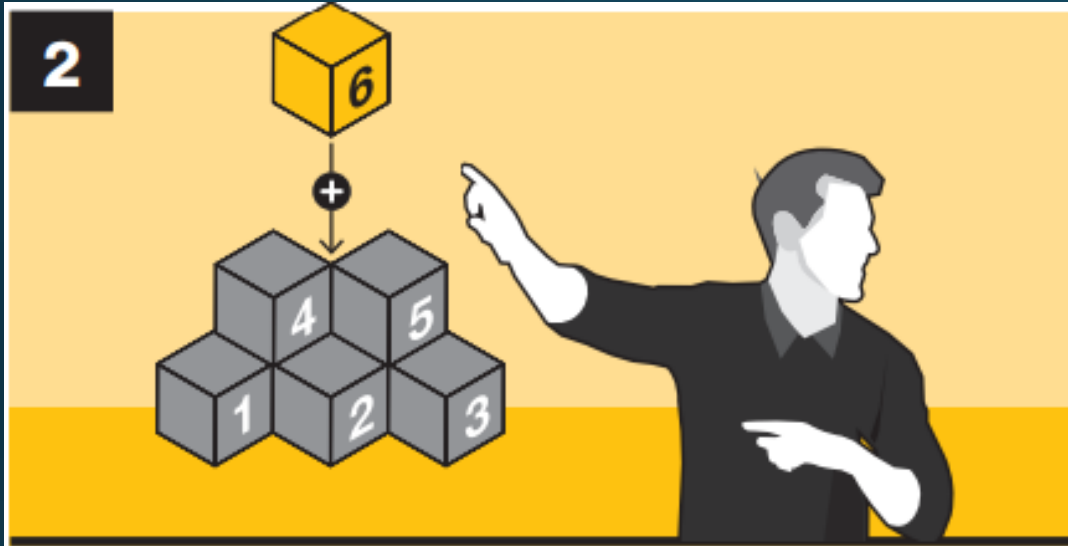- Planned, Purposeful Choice of Instructional Tasks and Text

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Cognitive Load Theory

Cumulative

Builds on previously learned knowledge

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

Cognitive Load Theory

Worked Examples
Guide Students Step By Step With New Skills

Completion Tasks
Increase Independent Problem Solving

Gradual Release
"I do, we do, you do"

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

Cognitive Load Theory

Explicit

Purposeful Planning

The 'Redundancy/Coherency Effect'

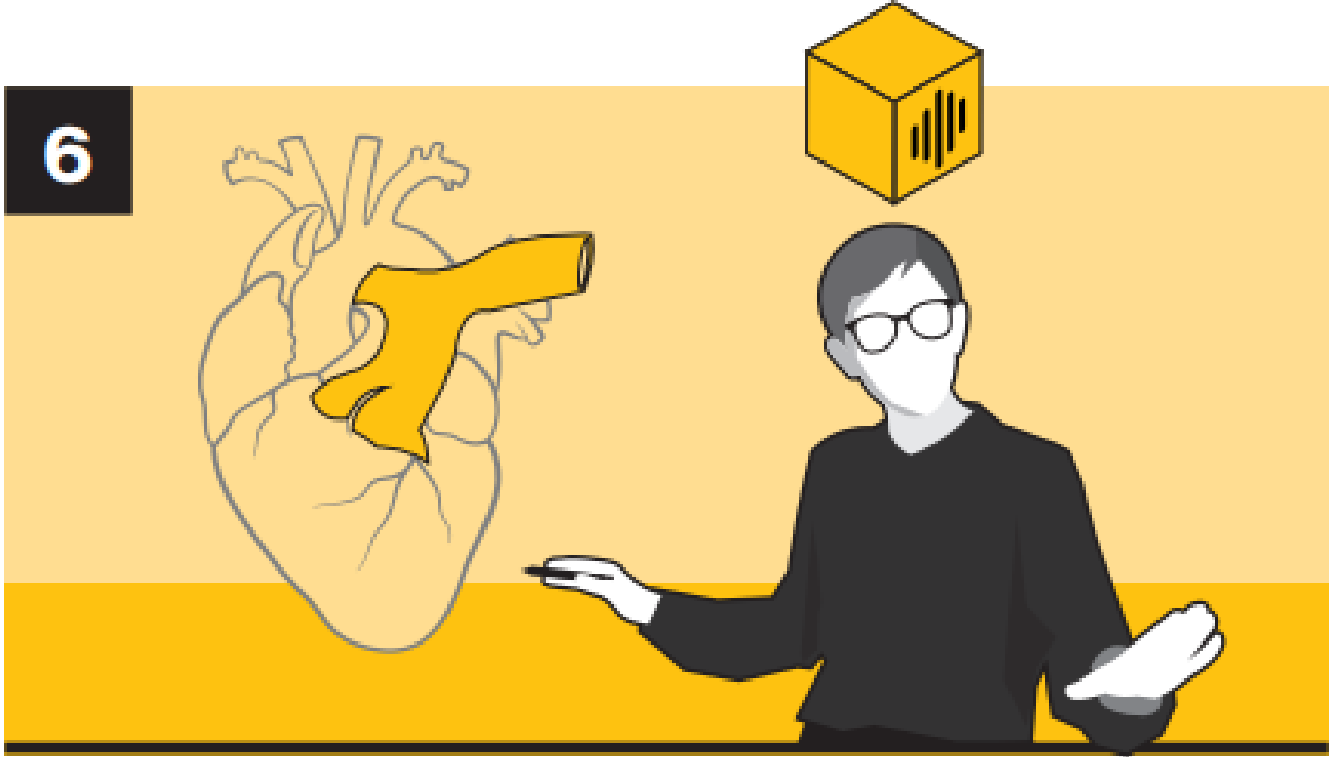It's crucial to eliminate non-essential information: no unnecessary verbiage or visual distractions

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

Cognitive Load Theory

Multimodal

- VAKT

The 'Modality Effect'
Present Information Verbally And Visually

Interactive, yet not distracting

(John Sweller et al., 2017)

The Mindset and Strategies of Effective Educators

- "How can we lessen avoidance motivation in children and adolescents who use it?"

- "How do we teach students in ways they learn best?"

- "What changes should we implement so that students are more receptive to learning?"

Bob Brooks (2016)

"Learning is a social activity, and students are better able to make meaning of what they are learning in community"

Developing: Implementing Evidence-Based Classroom Practices

(Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998).

Supporting All Learners

- **Holistic Approach**

- **Reducing Stigma**
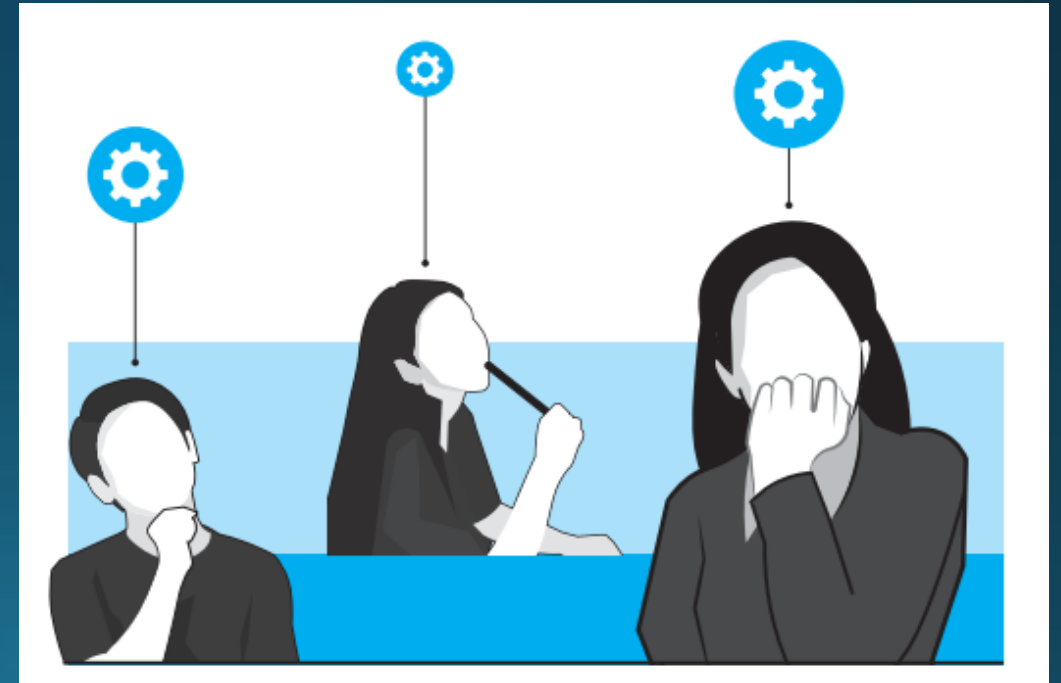
- **Enhancing Belonging**

Cognitive Engagement

"Learning happens when people have to think hard."

Accurate Engagement preventing gaps in knowledge

Questioning Strategies clear evidence of progress
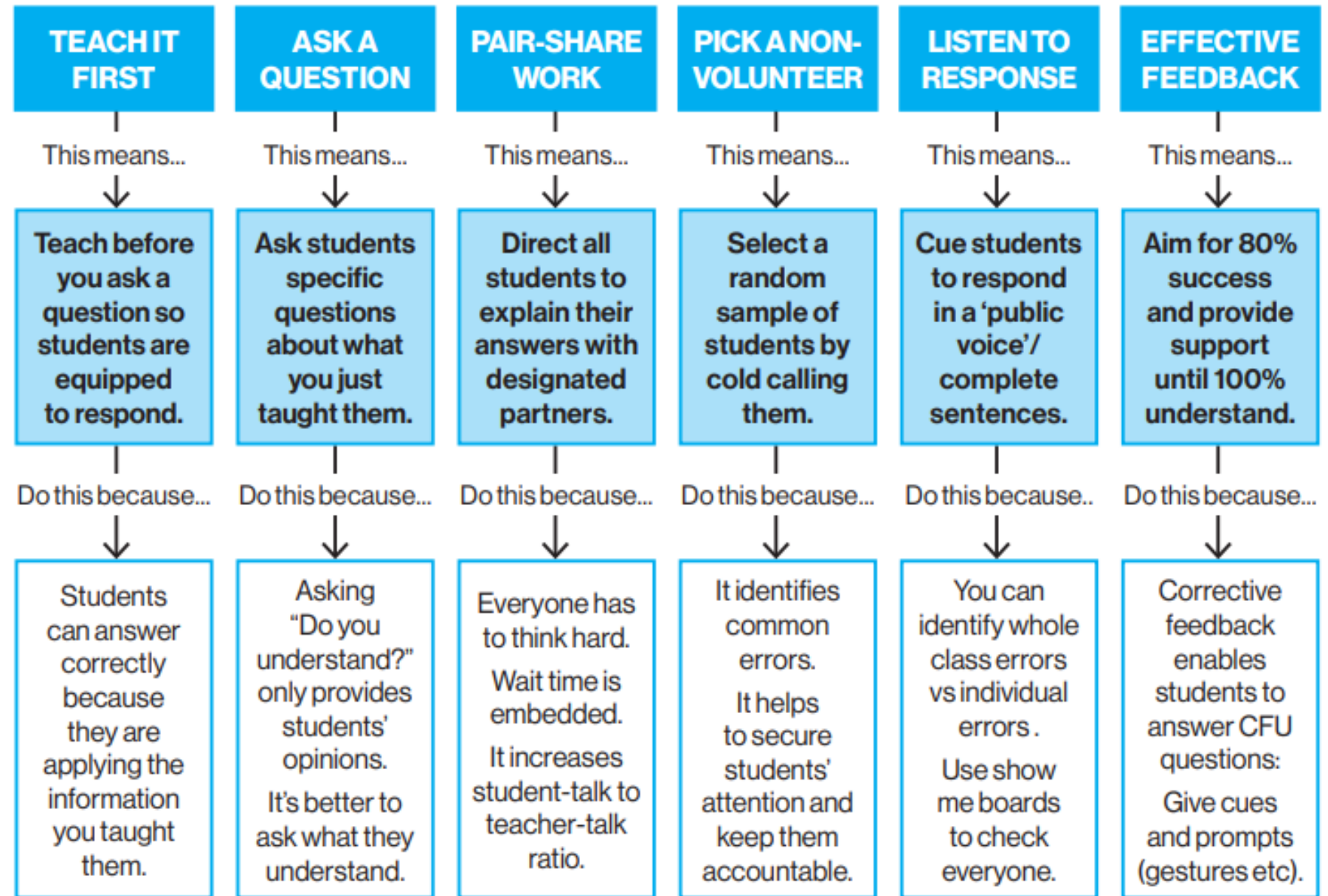
Consistent Feedback

Formative Assessment

(Robert Coe, 2013)

INPUT

RESPOND

FEEDBACK

TEACH IT FIRST	ASK A QUESTION	PAIR-SHARE WORK	PICK A NON-VOLUNTEER	LISTEN TO RESPONSE	EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK
This means…	This means…	This means…	This means…	This means…	This means…
Teach before you ask a question so students are equipped to respond.	Ask students specific questions about what you just taught them.	Direct all students to explain their answers with designated partners.	Select a random sample of students by cold calling them.	Cue students to respond in a 'public voice'/ complete sentences.	Aim for 80% success and provide support until 100% understand.
Do this because…	Do this because…	Do this because…	Do this because…	Do this because..	Do this because…
Students can answer correctly because they are applying the information you taught them.	Asking "Do you understand?" only provides students' opinions. It's better to ask what they understand.	Everyone has to think hard. Wait time is embedded. It increases student-talk to teacher-talk ratio.	It identifies common errors. It helps to secure students' attention and keep them accountable.	You can identify whole class errors vs individual errors . Use show me boards to check everyone.	Corrective feedback enables students to answer CFU questions: Give cues and prompts (gestures etc).

Lesson Shifts for Tomorrow!

|	
"Who remembers?"	• No raising hands to answer.
"Good Job"	• Be specific with feedback. "Excellent thinking, you remembered that the vowel comes before the consonant in an r-controlled word."
"I like how..."	• Use clear directions for routines, not student models.
"This should be easy for you"	• Words matter, frame what we want students to think about.
"This can be hard..."	• Needless judgement of learning.

Every Kid Needs a Champion | Rita Pierson | TED
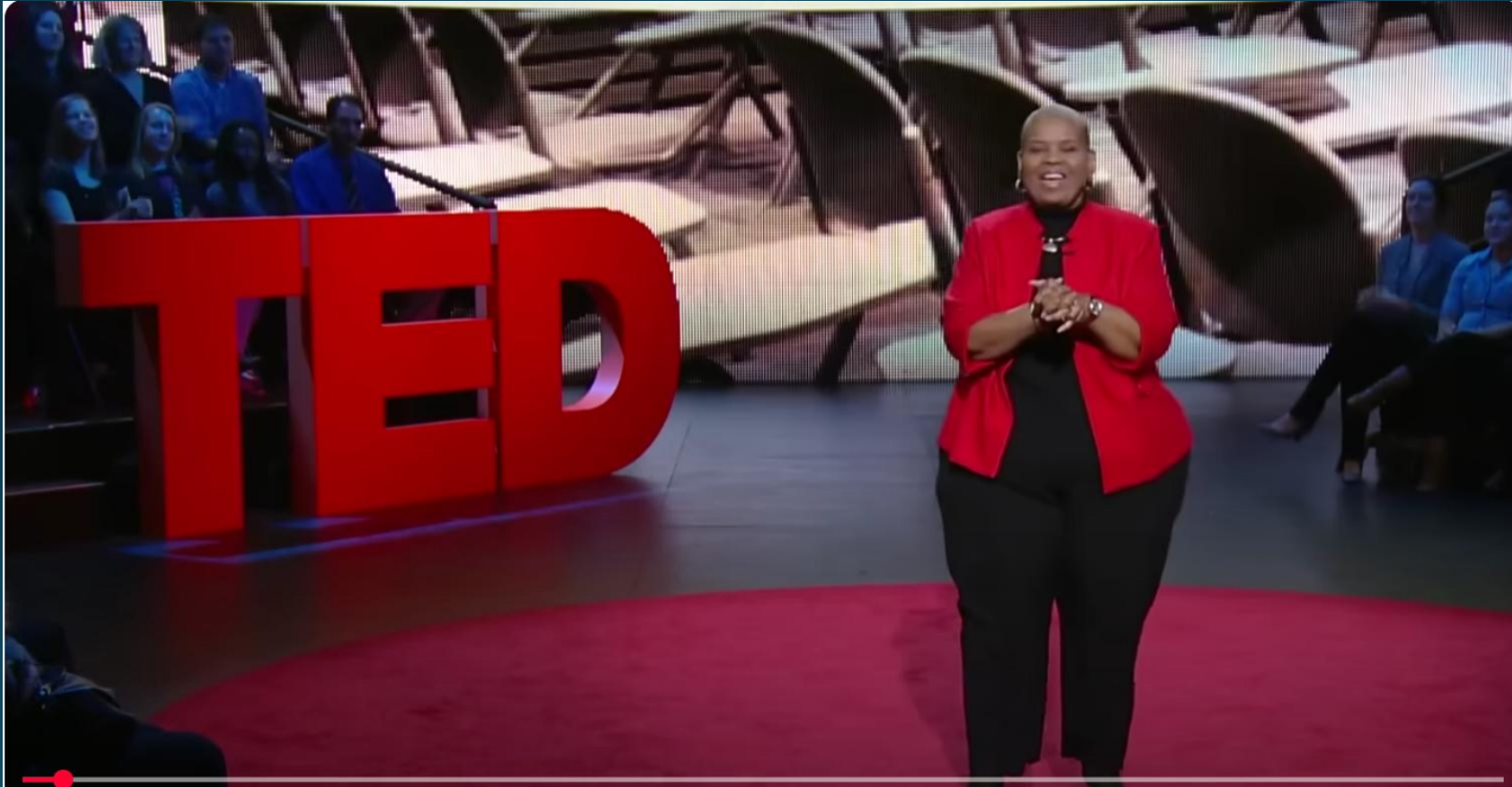
Resources

- Child Mind Institute

- https://childmind.org/article/social-challenges-kids-learning-problems/#:~:text=focused%20in%20school.-,But%20many%20students%20with%20learning%20and%20attention%20disorders%20also%20have,language%20and%20tone%20of%20voice.

- https://belenetwork.org/library_resources/the-bele-framework/

- Classroom Routines

Citations

- Lovett, M. W., Frijters, J. C., Wolf, M., Steinbach, K. A., Sevcik, R. A., & Morris, R. D. (2017). Early intervention for children at risk for reading disabilities: The impact of grade at intervention and individual differences on intervention outcomes. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(7), 889–914. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000181

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- Taylor, K. (2016). A summary of research on youth with disabilities & the juvenile justice system, FY 2006–FY 2016. National Center for Special Education Research. https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pdf/JuvenileJustice.pdf

- https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-gets-in-the-way-of-students-feeling-a-sense-of-belonging-at-school/2024/07

- Morgan PL, Farkas G, Tufis PA, Sperling RA. Are reading and behavior problems risk factors for each other? J Learn Disabil. 2008 Sep-Oct;41(5):417-36. doi: 10.1177/0022219408321123. PMID: 18768774; PMCID: PMC4422059.