

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH GROUP  
increasing opportunities-to-learn for all // dedicated to the science of learning // informing research, practice, and policy

# LANGUAGE DIVERSITY & LITERACY DEVELOPMENT: LEADING ADVANCED LITERACY INSTRUCTION TO FOSTER ELLS' ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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# Today's Agenda

- 9.00 a.m. Review: Unpacking a prototypical ELL reader
- 9.15 a.m. Welcome to ELA USA: Insights into standard practices
  - Activity: Our Instructional Practices
- 10.00 a.m. From standard to exemplary practice
  - Key instructional shifts
- 10:30 a.m. From standard to exemplary practice
  - A spotlight on Academic Language
- 11.45 am. Lunch
- 12.30 p.m. Moving Towards Instructional Improvement at Your Site: Key take-aways for AL instruction
- 1.45 p.m. The instructional core: Selecting programs and interventions
- 2.30 p.m. Next Steps

# THE INSTITUTE

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# Institute Objectives and Goals

1

- to revisit current knowledge about ELLs' literacy development and literacy needs during the middle school years

2

- to revisit the separable skills that comprise advanced literacy, with emphasis on the language of schooling and print and how these manifest across content areas

3

- to learn high-impact instructional strategies that promote and integrate formal and informal instruction to build oral and written language

4

- to analyze key literacy data at the classroom- and school-level to surface patterns and trends in order to strengthen the instructional core

5

- to focus on leading effective literacy instruction (objectives 1-4) at the school-level, supporting teachers to improve their instruction

# Guiding Principles

Struggling  
readers are not  
struggling thinkers

The aim of literacy instruction  
is to give students access to  
high-level ideas and content

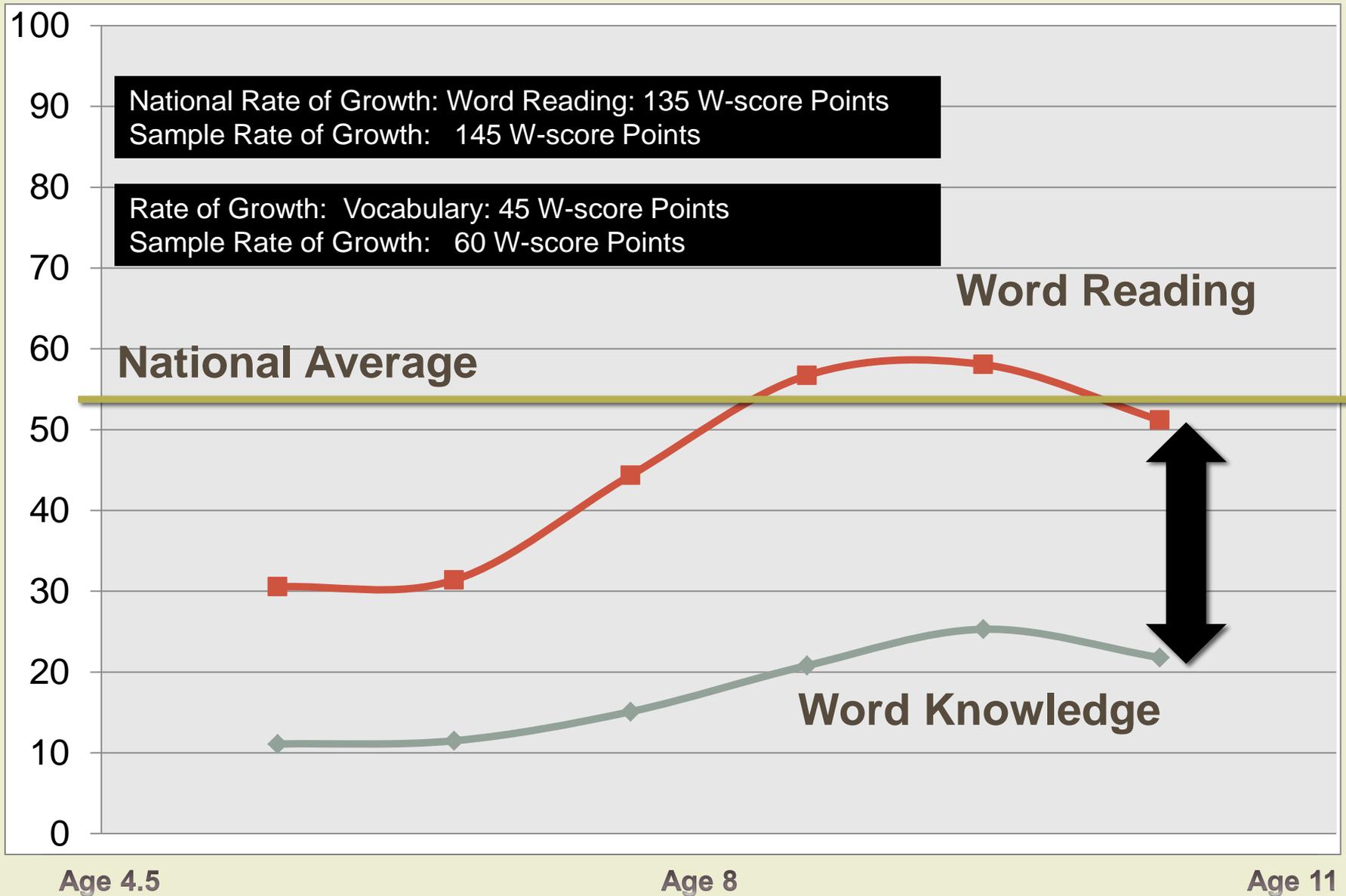
There are multiple potential sources of  
students' literacy breakdowns, related to  
the learner, text, and the learning context



# REVIEW: UNPACKING A PROTOTYPICAL ELL READER PROFILE

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# The Gap Between Word Reading & Word Knowledge



# Key Finding

Students' English reading comprehension performance is about 3 grade levels below the national average

- At 5<sup>th</sup> grade it was at the 2nd grade level

Without more targeted instruction, our ELLs and formerly-ELLs don't just "catch up"



# Shifting Current Instructional Models to Match ELLs' Learning Needs

From...

- Code-based skills: gateway for comprehension
- Reading instruction: K-3 enterprise
- ELL supports: end at reclassification
- ELL services: focused on social language

To...

- Code-based skills: necessary but not sufficient
- Reading instruction: K-12 enterprise
- ELL supports: on-going
- ELL services: scaffolding academic success

# What Our ELLs Need...

Access to grade-level content

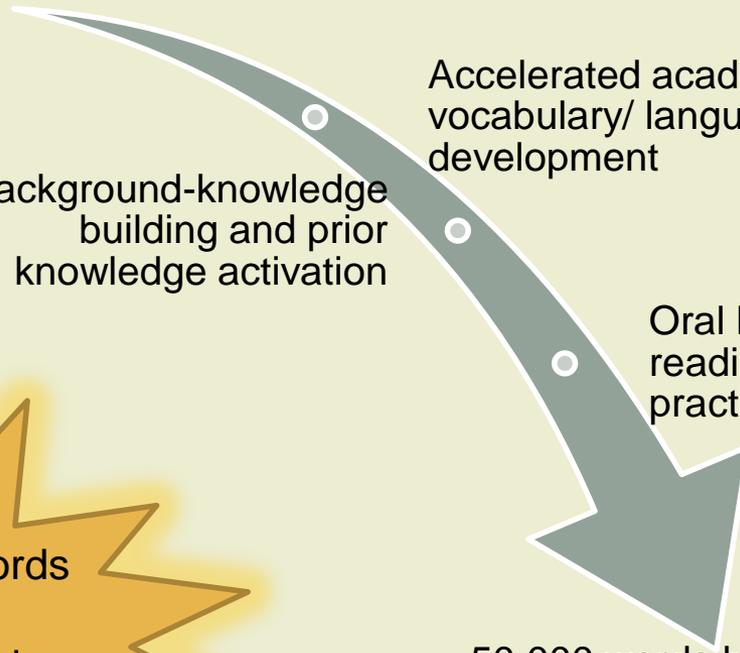
Accelerated academic vocabulary/ language development

Background-knowledge building and prior knowledge activation

Oral language, reading & writing practice

2,000-3,000 words per year  
6 to 8 words a day, on average

50,000 words by the end of high school!



# WELCOME TO ELA: INSIGHTS INTO STANDARD INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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# ELA: What are our standard practices?

See Module 4, p.4



What is the standard allocation of time for each literacy activity at your site? Work with your team to create a pie graph that demonstrates how time is likely allocated by the ELA teachers at your school site.

# Classrooms as a Setting for Development

Children and youth spend 15,000-20,000 hours of their lives in classrooms



The classroom is an especially important setting for development

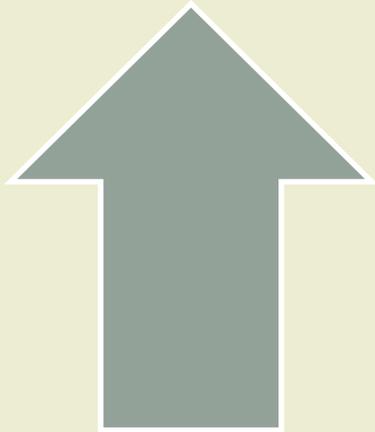


What is standard instructional practice?

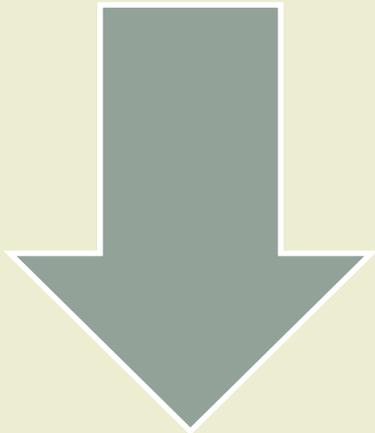
# What Does instruction looks like?

(standard practice)

- So much to do (with little time & support)



Pushing  
through the  
content



Focus on deep  
language and  
content  
learning

# Study Design

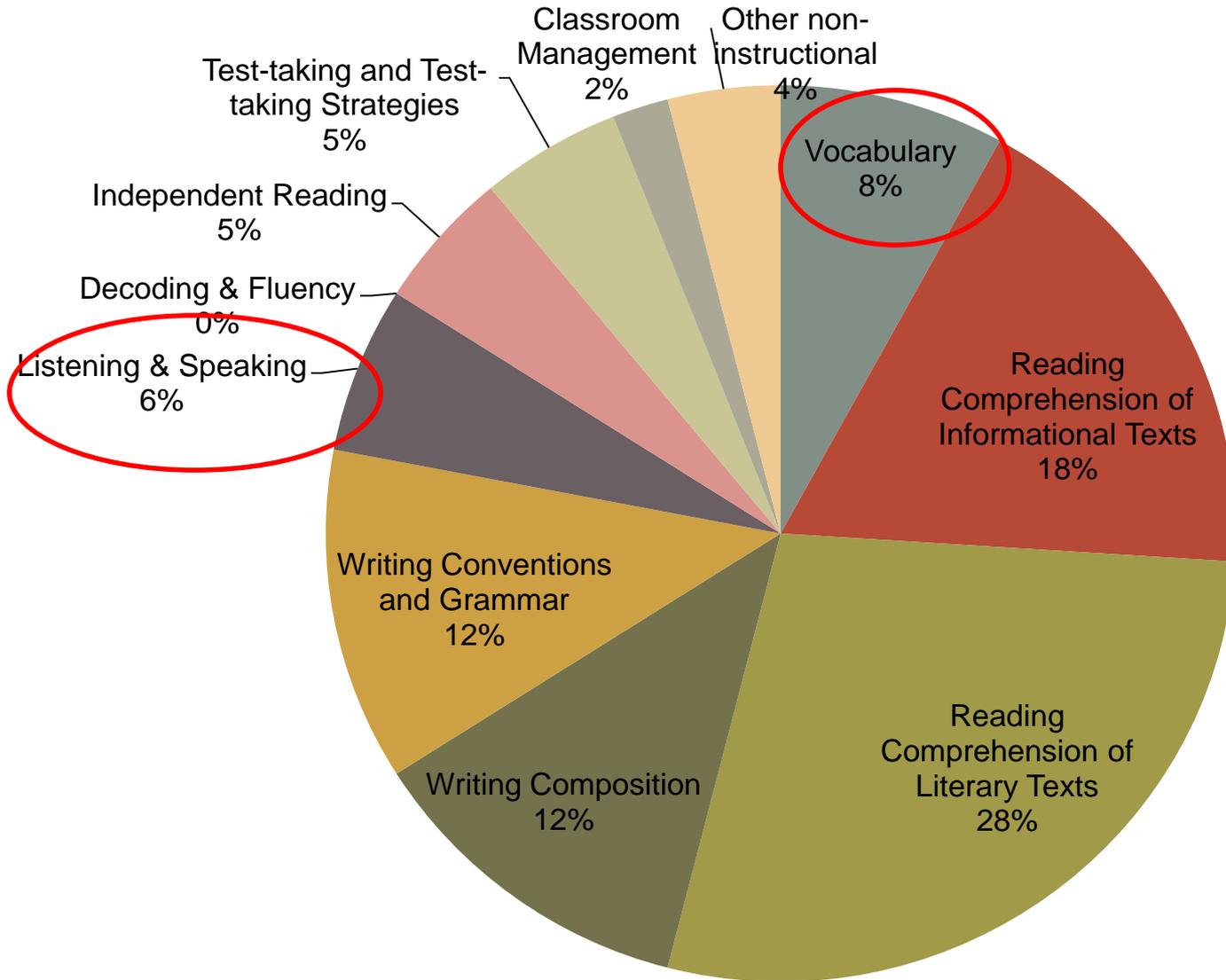
26 ELA control classrooms (part of experimental research study)

6 observations for each teacher – 45 min (trained observers)

curricular content

vocabulary taught

# Standard Practice



# Vocabulary:

Is frequent word learning standard practice?

	<b>Total # of words</b>	<b>Per class AVG</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	1094	
<b>AVG</b>	42.07	7.01
<b>Max</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Min</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Range</b>	59	9.8

Many words were taught each day, however theories of word learning suggest that this is not sufficient to support vocabulary learning.

# What does it mean to know a word?

## 5 Levels of Word Knowledge:

Rich, decontextualized knowledge of a word's meaning, its relationship to other words, metaphorical use

Enough knowledge to understand but not enough to recall and use appropriately

Narrow-context bound knowledge

General sense

No knowledge

Label  
vs.  
Concept

# Types of Words

English Language Arts	Academic Word List	General Service List	Rare (not from other 3 categories)
antagonist	quality	fact	condensation
acrostic	prediction	opinion	tomboy
stanza	resolve	recommend	petite
comma	conflict	sentence	hatchet
setting	optional	outsider	kinesthetic
external conflict	debatable	repeat	embed
couplet	coherent	interest	biodegradable

# Academic Words are Abstract Concepts

Challenge	Affect	Community	Located	Anticipate
Focus	Culture	Discrimination	Major	Constantly
Incentive	Contribute	Distinctions	Period	Contribute
Motivate	Establish	Evidence	Puzzle	Convince
Communicate	Ethnic/ethnicity	Gender	Site	Effect
Identity / Identify	Residents	Options	According to	Expanse
Incidents	Welfare	Regulations	Average	Generate
Legally	Ancient	Research	Expert	Inspire
Method	Complex	Respond	Foundation	Image
Policy	Integrated	Topic	Media	Releasing
Research	Located	Collapse	Nearly	Region
Require	Major	Conduct	Percent	Survive
Survey	Period	Contribute	Survey	Issue
Affect	Puzzle	Crucial	Awareness/aware	Research
Culture	Site	Research	Civil	Social
		Resource	Documentary	Survive
		Seeking	Image	Vision
		Establish	Inspire	

# Standard Practice: Vocabulary

- How often was each type of word taught?

	ELA	AWL	GSL	Rare
<b>% of total words taught</b>	32%	13%	18%	43%
<b>Avg # of words per teacher</b>	13.58	5.5	7.38	18
Max	30	15	21	48
Min	0	0	2	4
Range	30	15	19	44

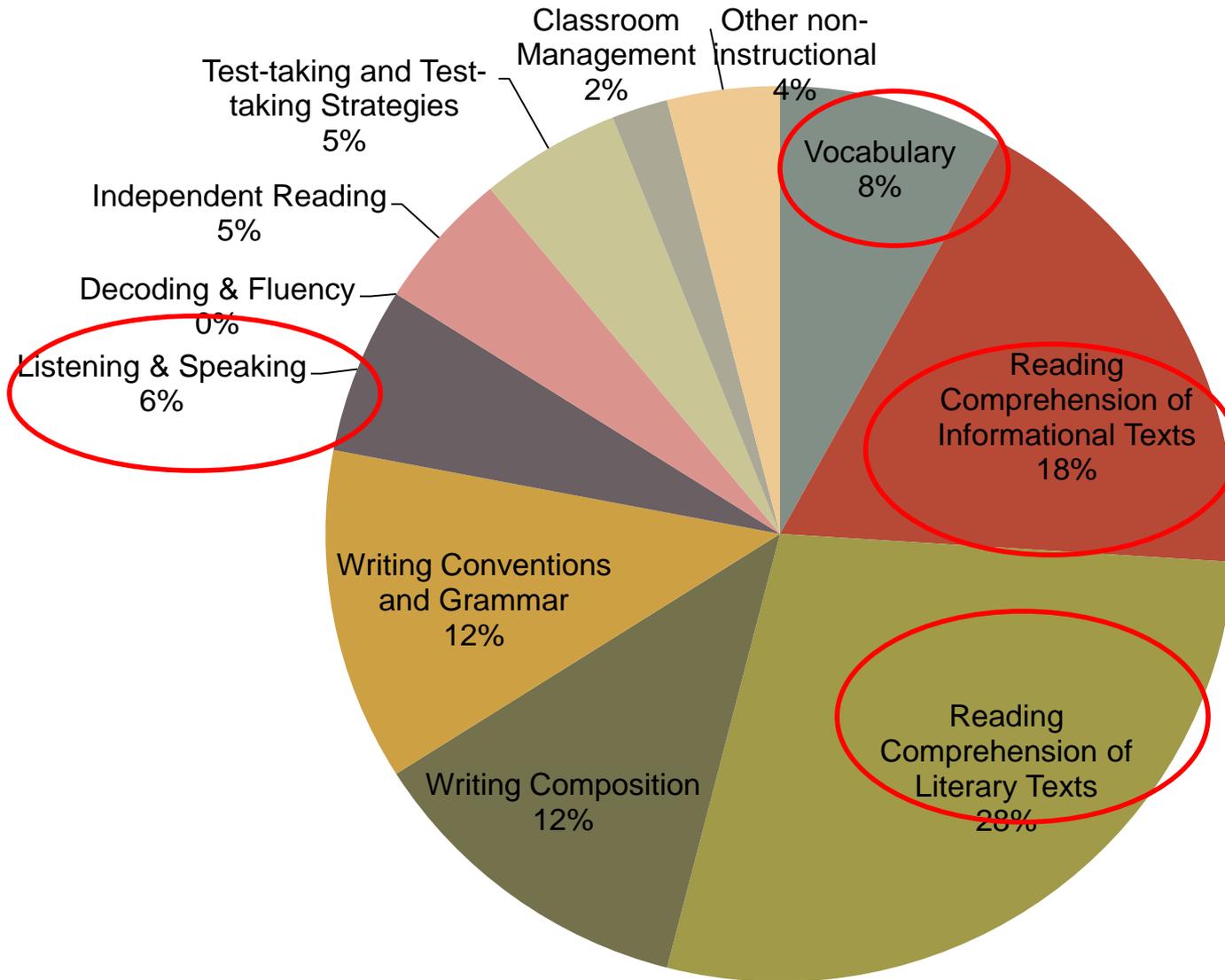
# Standard Practice: Vocabulary

- How deep was the instruction?

	ELA	AWL	GSL	Rare
% of words repeated	16%	9%	13%	7%
4 or more exposures	25%	16%	20%	18%

*Word knowledge is incremental -- readers need to have many exposures to a word in different contexts before they “know” it (Nagy & Scott, 2000)*

# Standard Practice



# Standard Practice: Reading

Most reading instruction focuses on literary text (28% of class time)

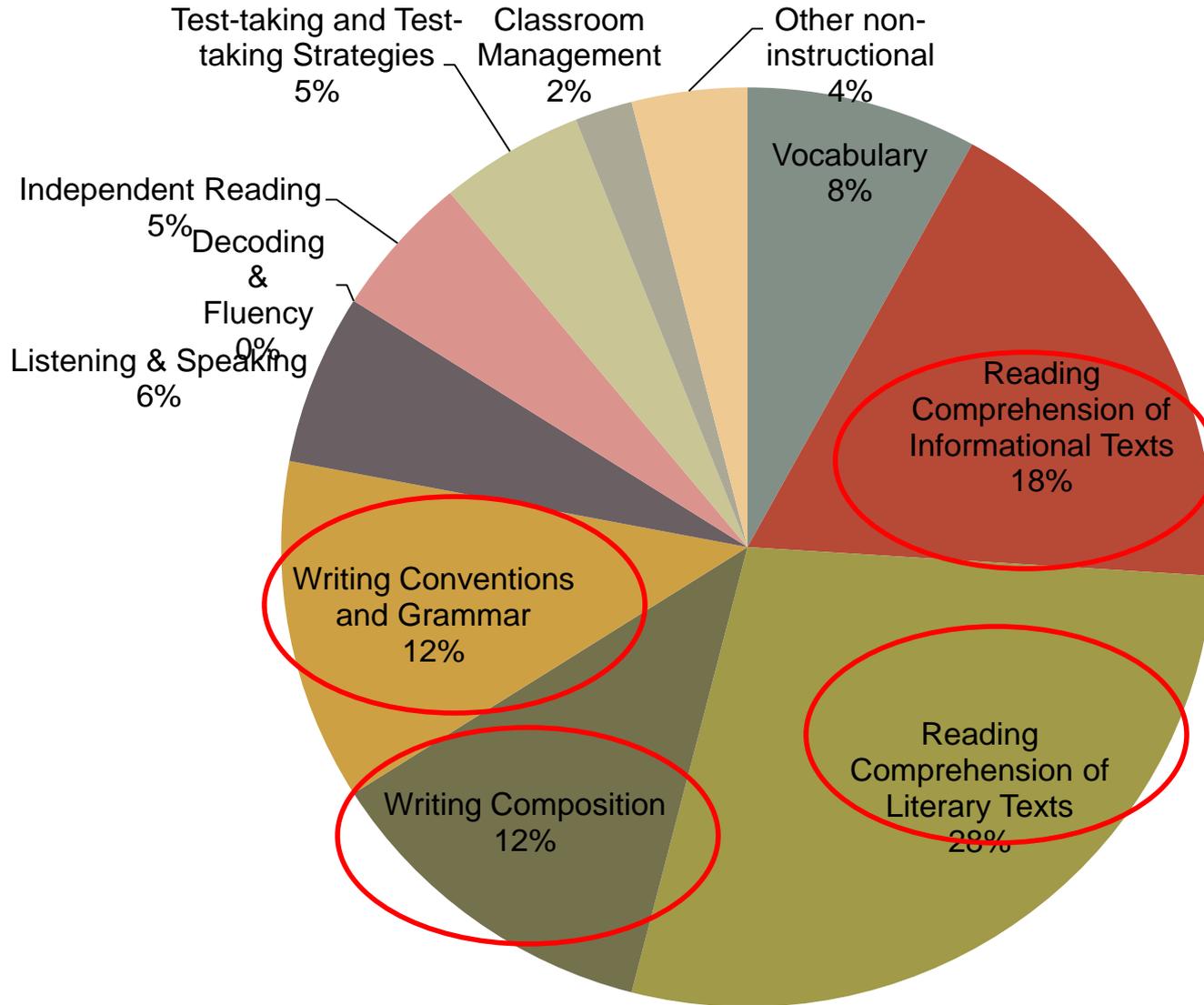
- Short stories (72%), poetry (16%), other (12%; Greek myths, folktales, plays)

Less class time on informational text (18%)

- *Articles* (65%)
- *Functional Documents or Worksheets* (> 30%)
- *Applications or test-like short passages & corresponding questions*

*Academic vocabulary is often encountered in expository texts...but only rarely in narrative texts and everyday conversation (Kieffer & Lesaux, 2010).*

# Standard Practice



# Standard Practice: Writing

## Time on task evenly split

- Conventions & Grammar (12%)
- Composition (12%)

## Composition class work

- Predominantly *very* short blocks of time (60% of writing <15 mins)
- Few examples of extended pieces written over a number of class periods (18% of writing comp)
- Mostly focused on writing fiction or
  - personal reflections (almost 60%)
- Little time spent working on how to craft a paragraph
  - (15% of time)

# FROM STANDARD TO EXEMPLARY PRACTICE

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Key Shifts

# Shifting Instruction

**Go for depth**

**Get them talking**

## **Vocabulary**

choose academic words and teach them deeply

## **Texts**

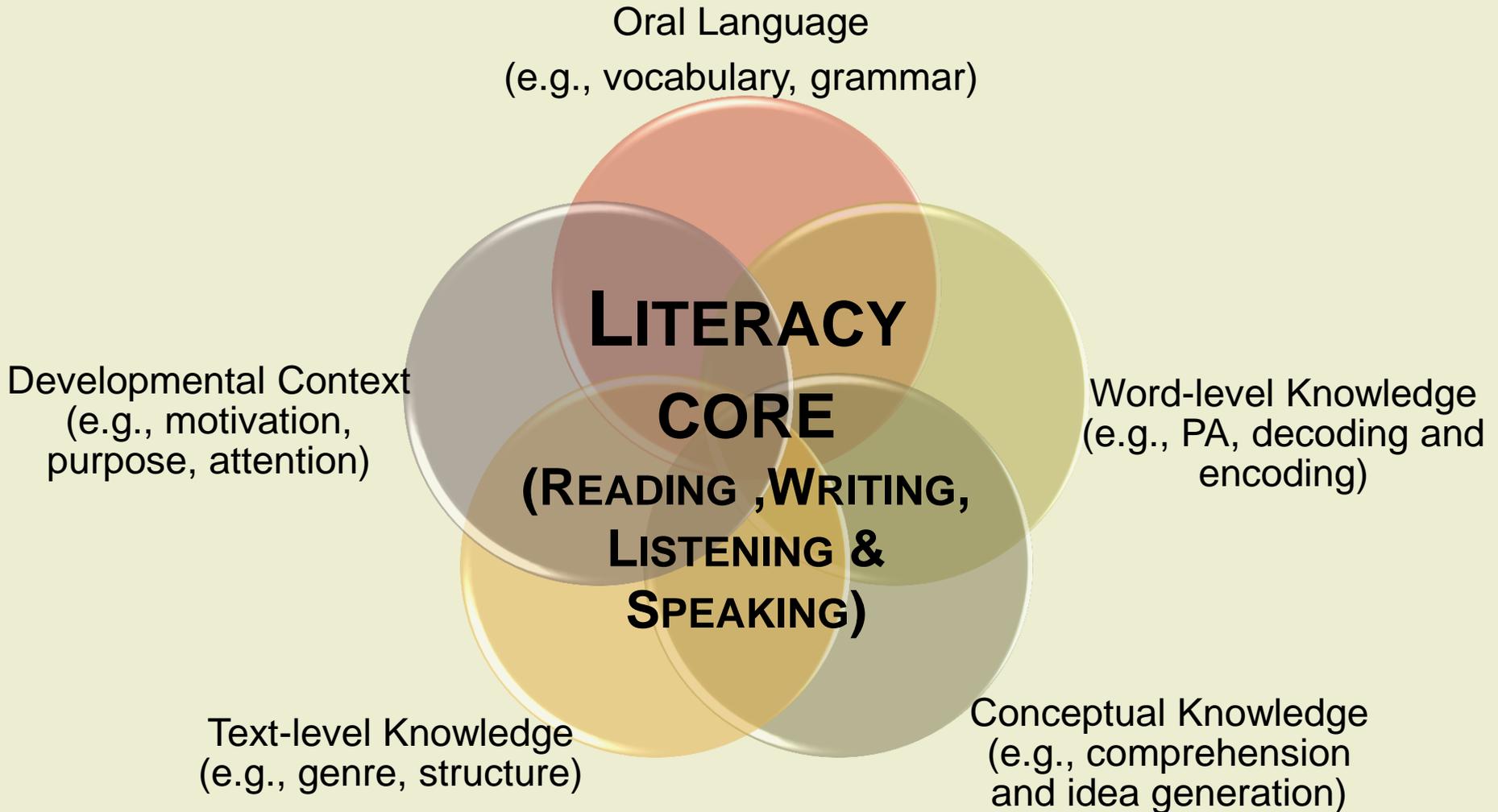
put more emphasis on informational texts to build vocabulary and practice with these texts

## **Writing**

spend extended time on composition, especially expository writing

**Take on big ideas**

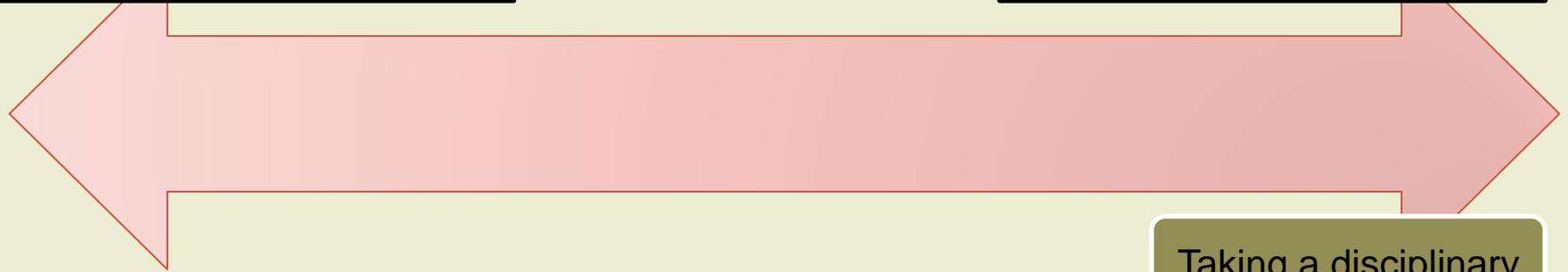
# Conceptualizing Literacy Instruction



# An Instructional Continuum

**Isolated**

**Integrated**



Conjugating verbs

Finding the main idea

Reading texts on  
grade-level topics

Taking a disciplinary  
stance

Integrating multiple  
sources of  
information

Talking about texts

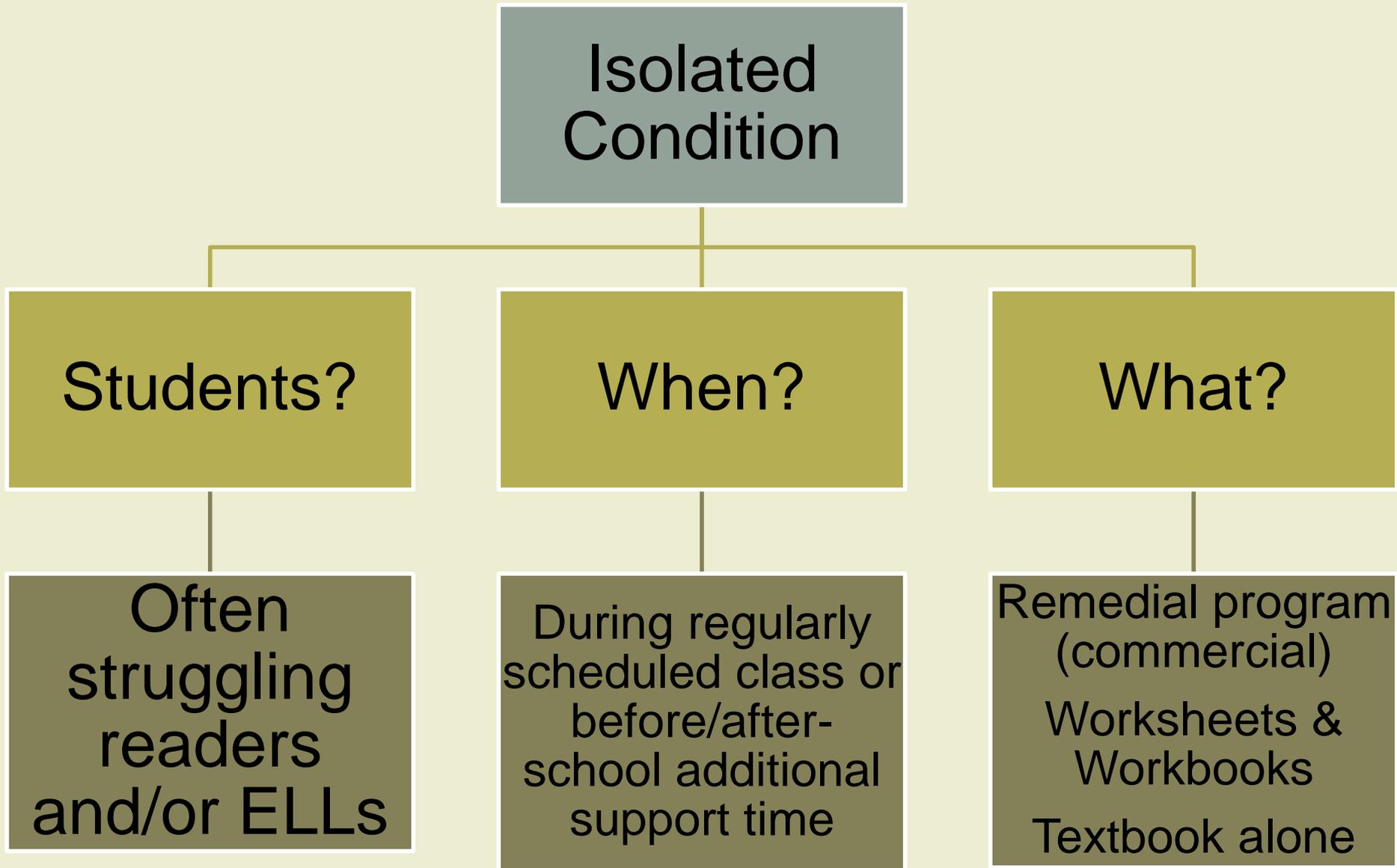
Evaluating the quality  
of information

Summarizing

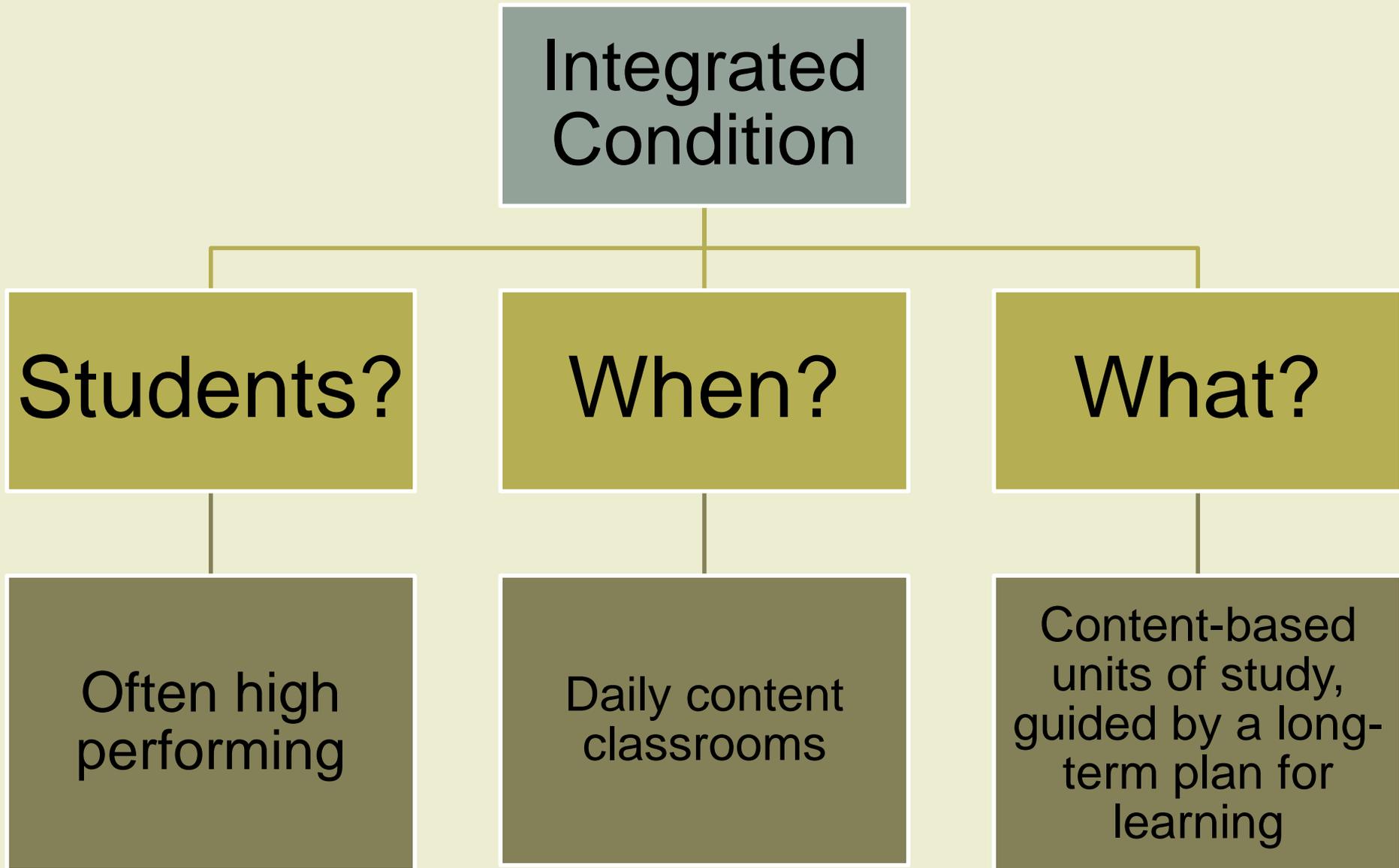
Writing on topics

Explaining  
information to a  
diverse audience

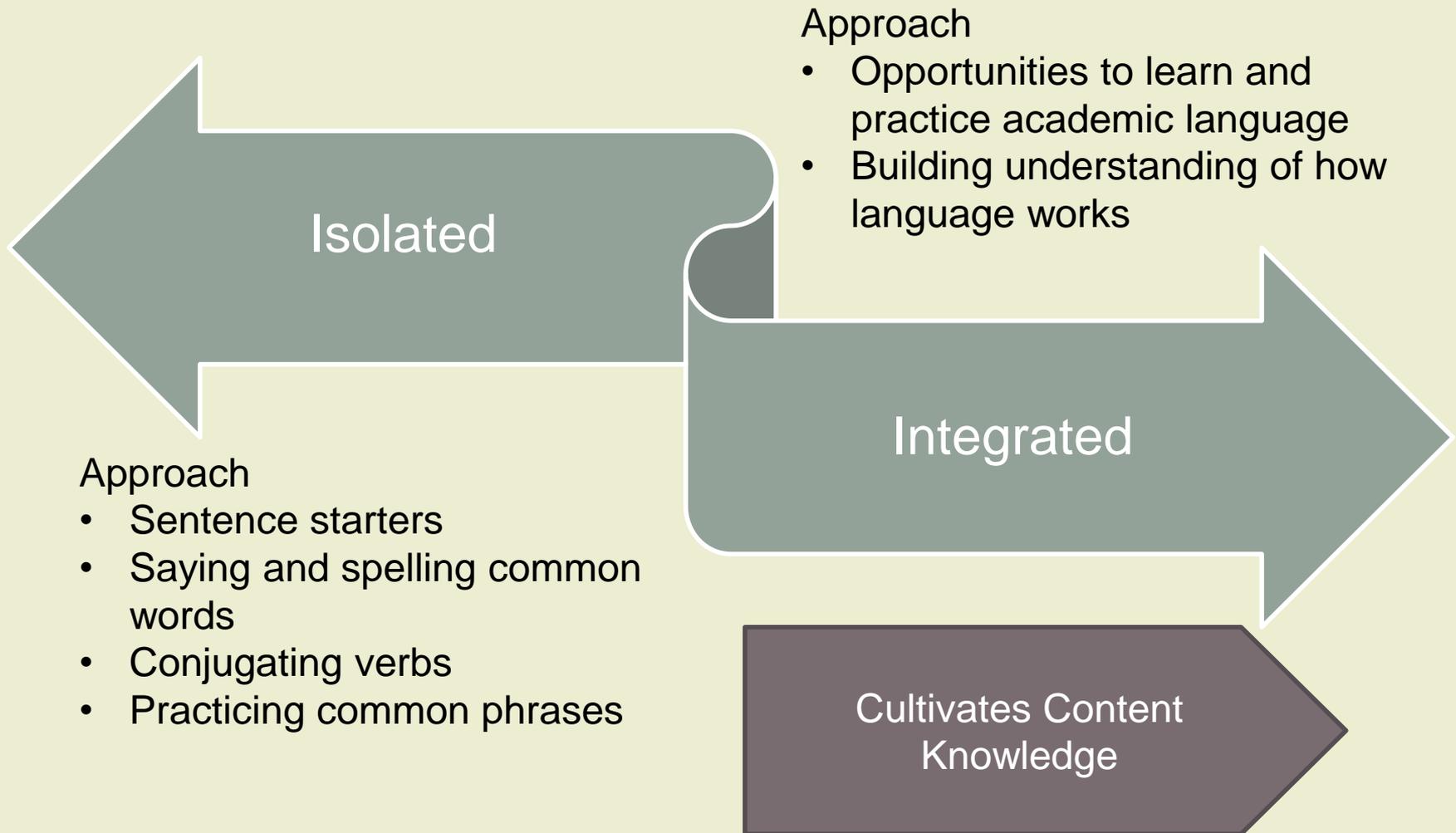
# Middle School Literacy Context



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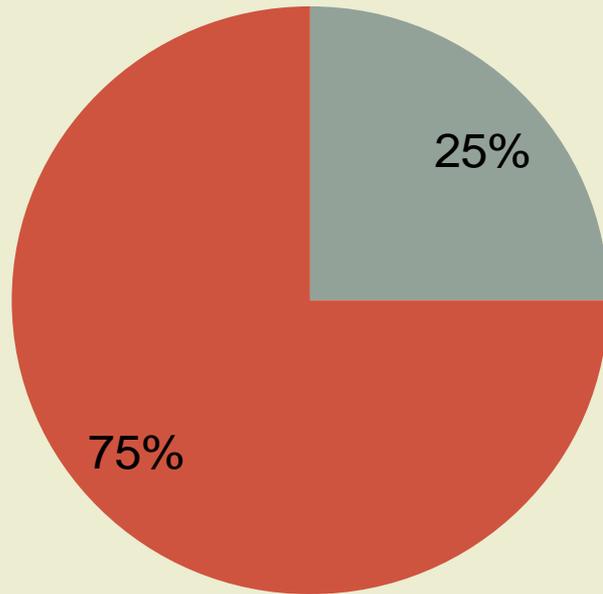
# ESL Instruction



# Time Spent in Each Part of the Continuum

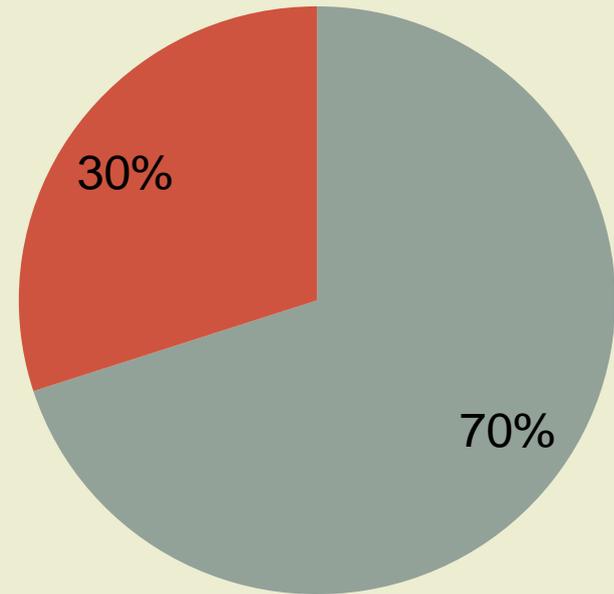
Ideal Scenario – an Approximation

■ Isolated ■ Integrated



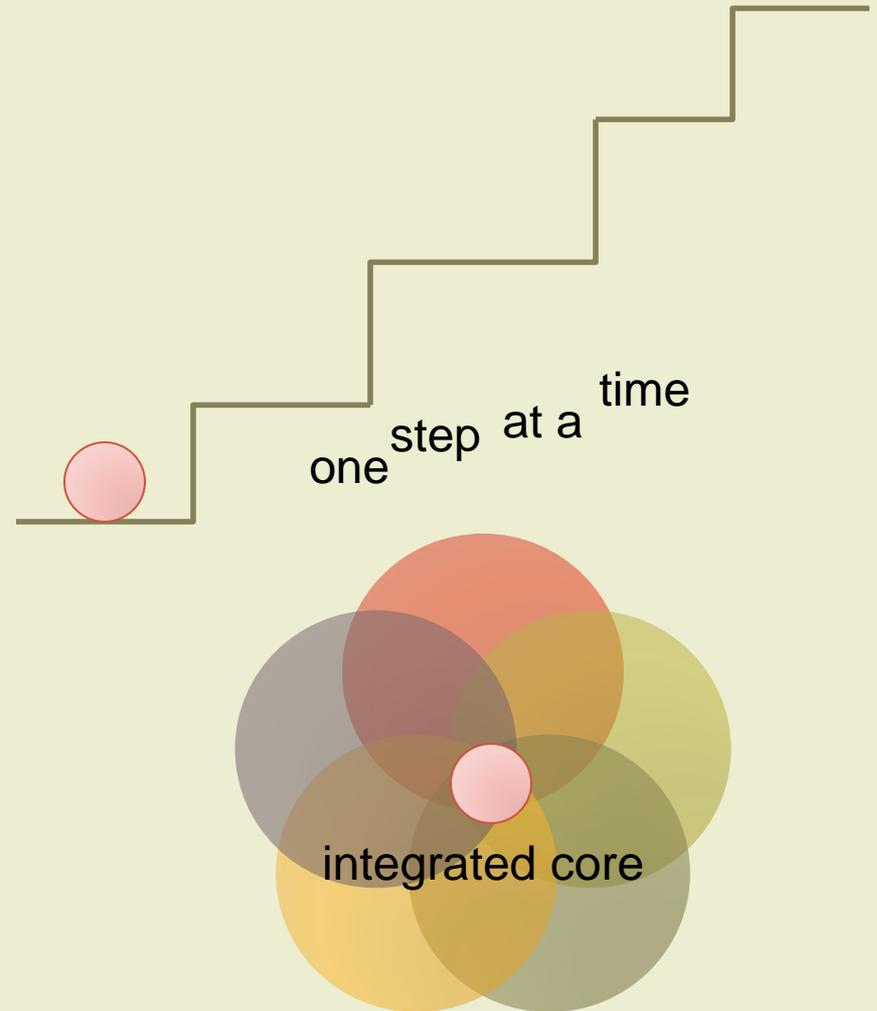
Common Scenario – An Approximation

■ Isolated ■ Integrated



# The Literacy Core: Common Pitfalls

- Conceptualizing literacy skill development as a lock-step process
- Conceptualizing literacy skills as needing to be worked on in isolation

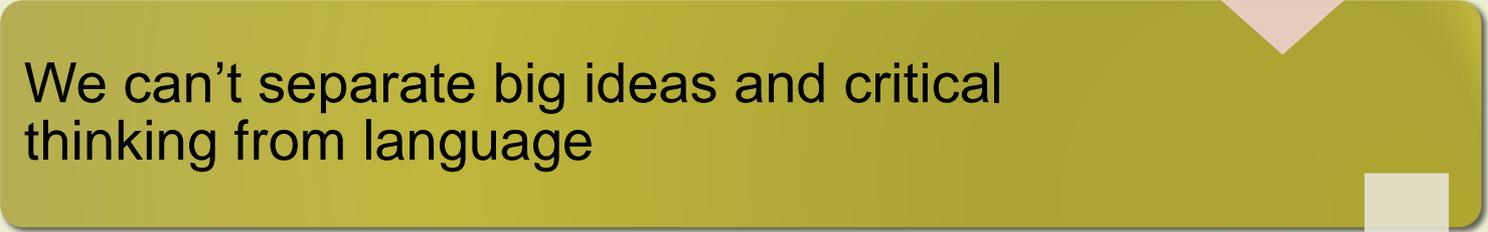


# Re-defining Traditional Instruction to Match Today's Students

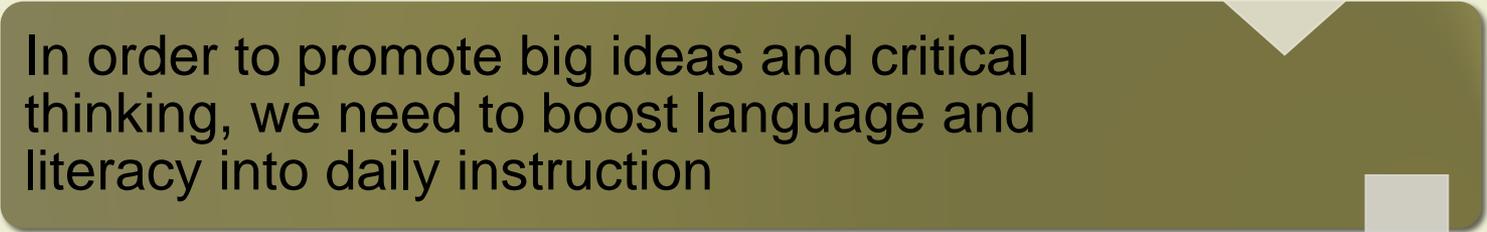
Curriculum is mediated with language, largely through teacher talk and text



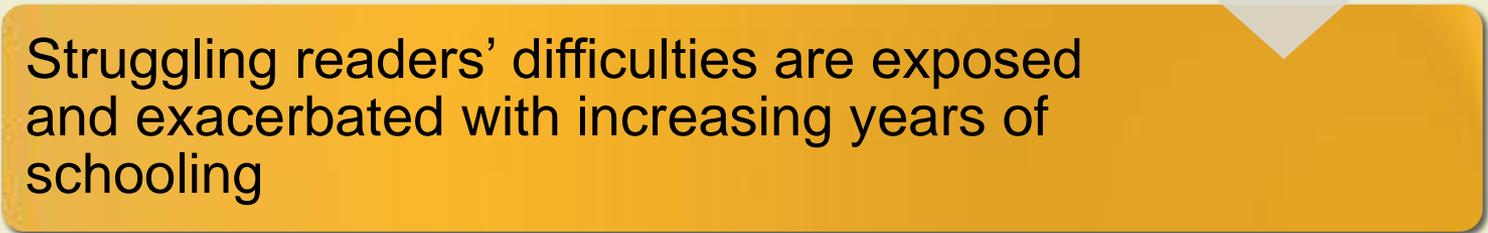
We can't separate big ideas and critical thinking from language



In order to promote big ideas and critical thinking, we need to boost language and literacy into daily instruction



Struggling readers' difficulties are exposed and exacerbated with increasing years of schooling



# EXEMPLARY PRACTICE

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Academic Language

# What is Academic Language?

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Think: With your school team generate a short definition of academic language.

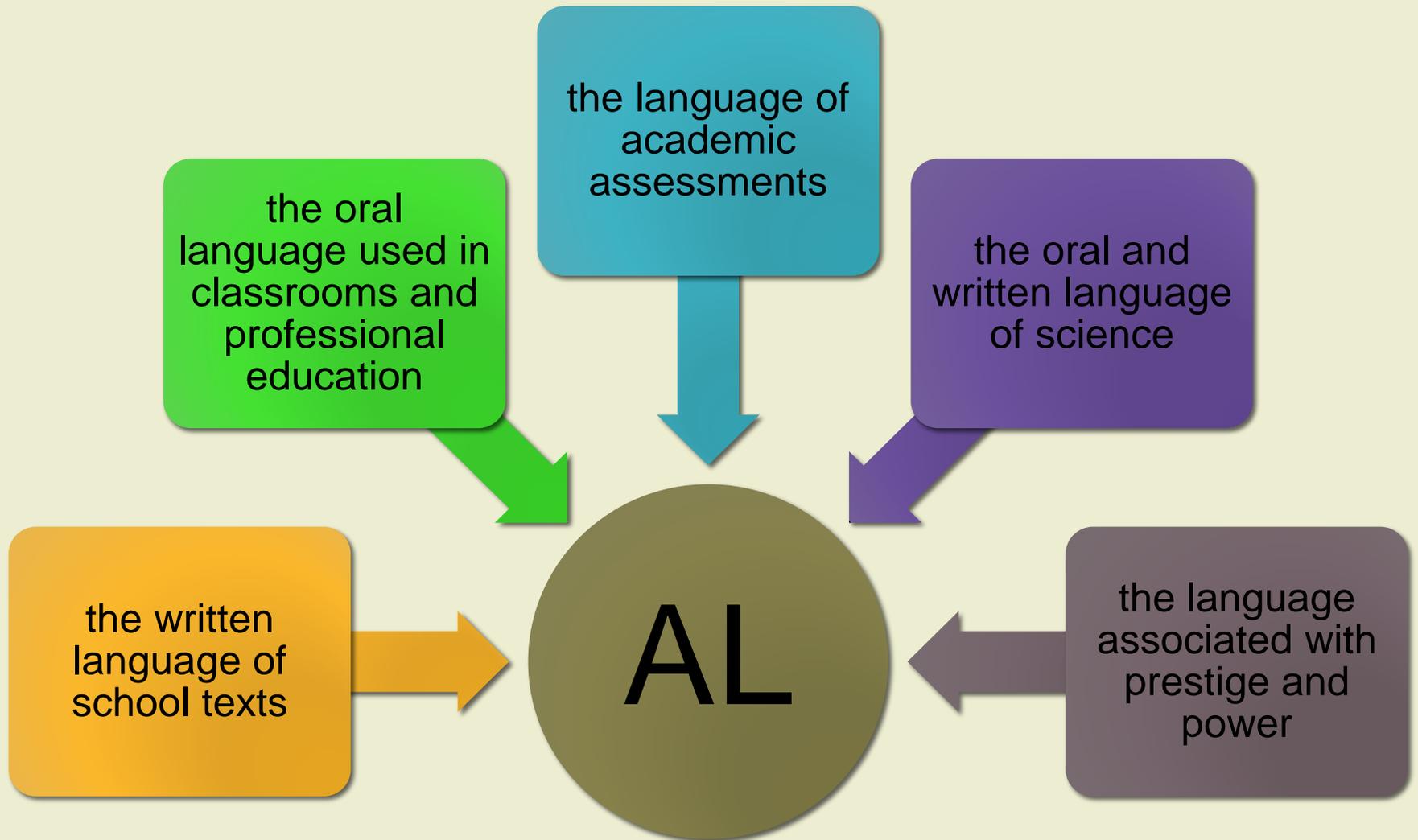
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Write: Now, write your short definition on chart paper.

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Revise: Now, after reading the definition provided by other school teams, use a **DIFFERENT COLOR** marker to add to or revise your statement.

# What is Academic Language (AL)?



# Academic Language

```
graph TD; A[Academic Language] --> B[Disciplinary Academic Language]; A --> C[Cross-Disciplinary Academic Language]; B --> D[Language referring to disciplinary content, processes, or ways of thinking (e.g., photosynthesis, titrate)]; B --> E[Language that is applied in unique ways in the disciplines (e.g., 'solve' in math versus history)];
```

## **Disciplinary Academic Language**

language, language structures and ways of organizing speech and writing unique to the disciplines.

## **Cross-Disciplinary Academic Language**

language, language structures and ways of organizing speech and writing found in all academic contexts

Language referring to disciplinary content, processes, or ways of thinking  
(e.g., photosynthesis, titrate)

Language that is applied in unique ways in the disciplines  
(e.g., 'solve' in math versus history)

# LUNCH

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# AL INSTRUCTION

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Vocabulary and Beyond

# What is goal of attending to the AL features in complex texts?

**Not simply to teach language,** but to support readers in accessing the information that complex texts contain.

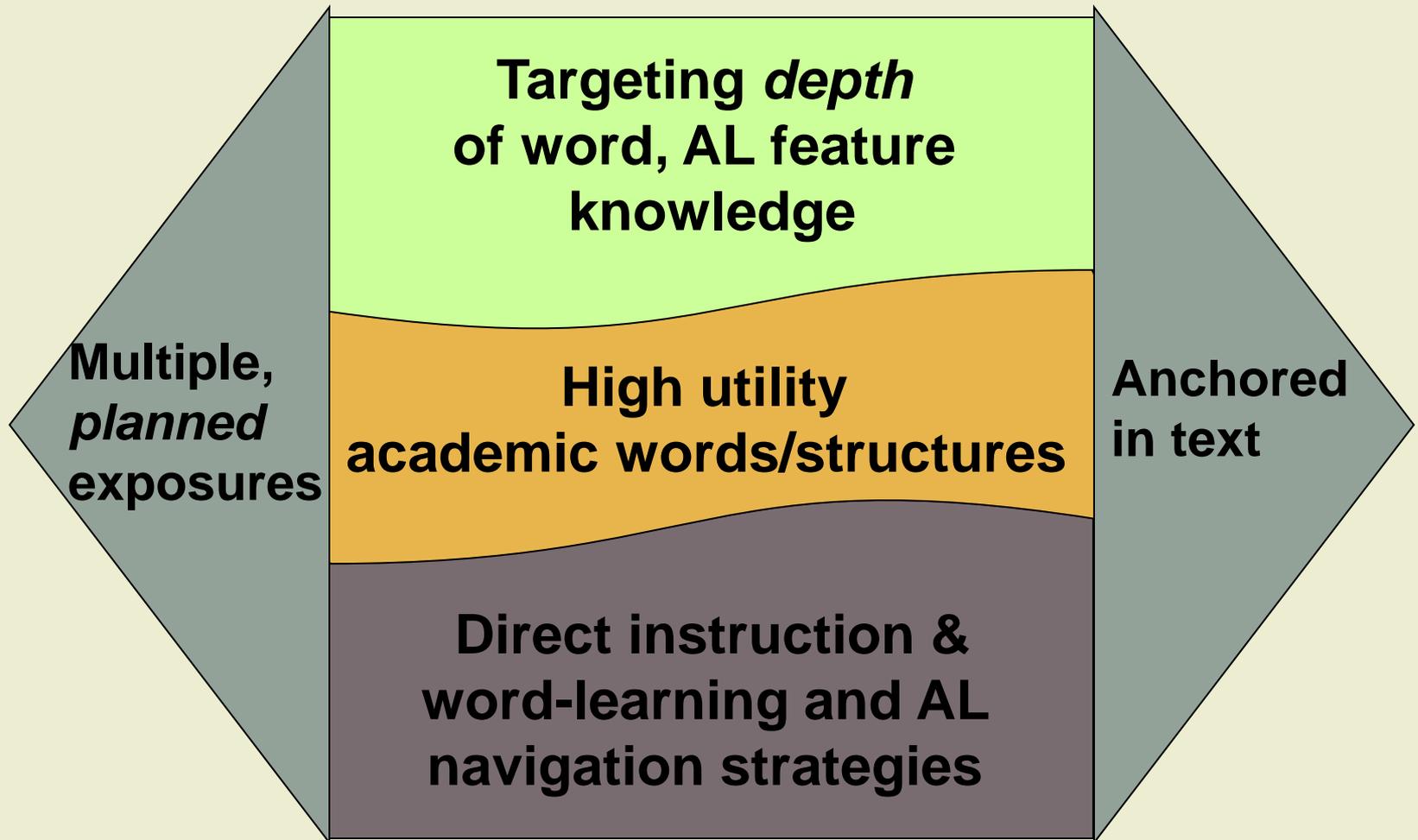


To make explicit the ways that members of the academic community make use of language to communicate content concisely and precisely.



To scaffold students exposure to complex language, which they can appropriate to express their own thinking more concisely and precisely.

# So how do we teach AL to promote literacy skills?



# Key Elements of AL Teaching

1.

- Begin with engaging text that present complex ideas using AL
- Select topics and questions that don't have easy answers

2.

- Provide multiple opportunities for students to be exposed to and to use AL
- Student collaboration: contemplating, talking, and playing(with a purpose and a structure)

3.

- Promoting continued AL learning
- Word/structure consciousness, morphological manipulations, recognition of learned text structures

4.

- Use writing, debating, and discussing as tools for reinforcing language development and knowledge acquisition

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# Key Elements of AL Teaching

## 1. Begin with engaging text that present complex ideas using AL

- Select topics and questions that don't have easy answers

Platform for  
Discussing Big  
Concepts:

- segregation
- Educational equity

Target AL:

*Lexicon:* discrimination, distinctions, evidence  
*Syntax:* embedded structures; finite clauses  
*Author's stance*



# Why begin with text?



Source	Academic words per 1,000
<i>Newspapers</i>	68.3
<i>Books written for Adults</i>	52.7
<i>Children's books</i>	30.9
<i>Conversation between two adults who are college-educated</i>	17.3

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# Multiple, meaningful opportunities to be exposed to and to use AL

**Talking**



Example: Mock interview; Negotiating participant chains

**Playing**



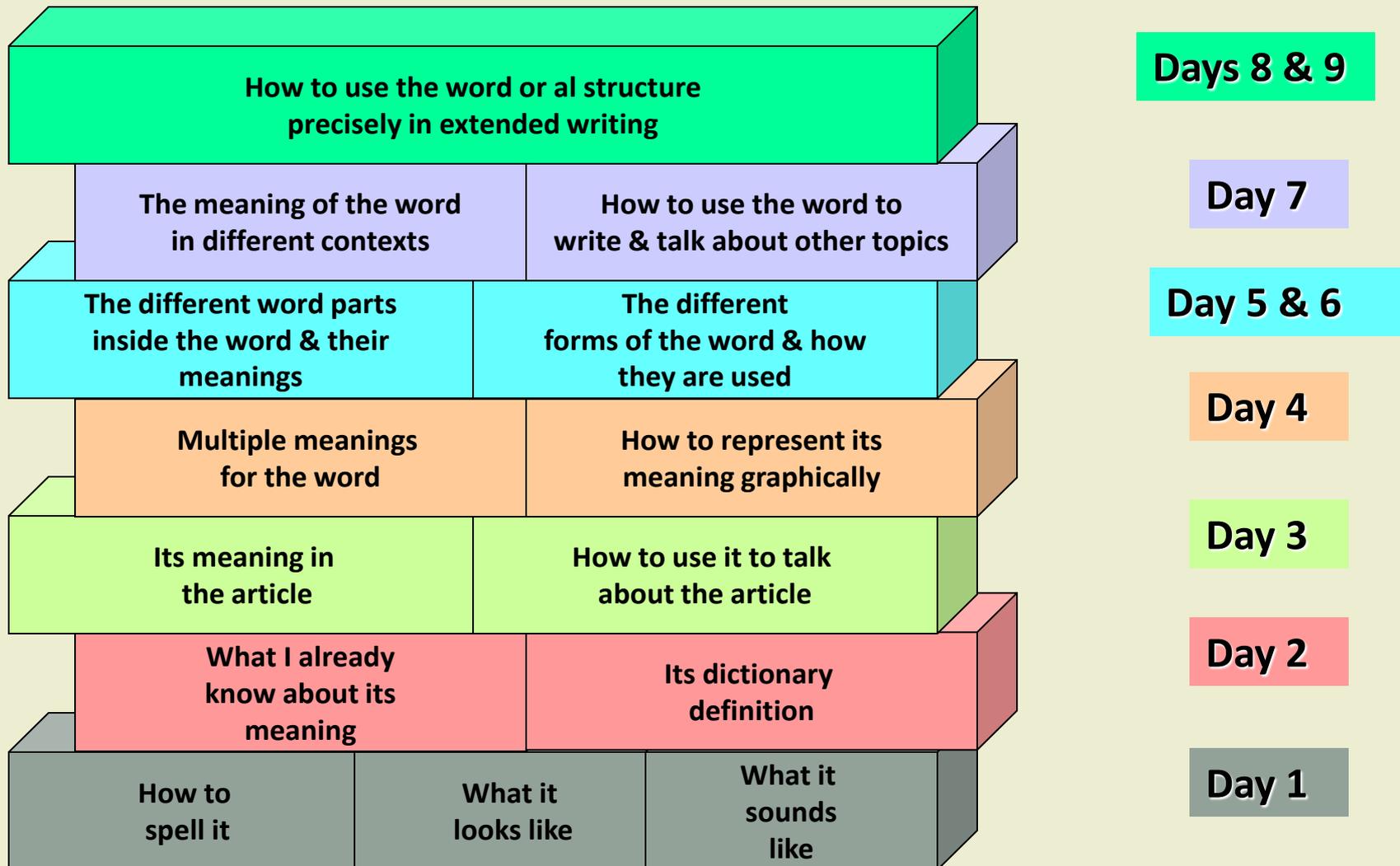
Example: Pictionary

Example: *Caption It;* *Discussing author's stance*

**Contemplating**



# An Example: Building up knowledge of a word, piece by piece



# Key Elements of AL Teaching

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# Example: Promoting Word-Learning (morphology)

- The underlying structure of words as combinations of meaningful units



- Students use morphological knowledge when they break words down into roots and affixes
  - Equips students to be better word learners.
  - Improves students' flexible and accurate writing.
- Often challenging for English learners and struggling readers

# Key Elements of AL Teaching

1.

- Begin with engaging text that present complex ideas using AL
- Select topics and questions that don't have easy answers

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3.

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# Writing, Discussing, & Debating: Back to the Big Ideas

- Thoughtful language production (e.g., writing, discussing debating) demonstrates and consolidates:
  - Vocabulary/AL knowledge
  - conceptual knowledge
- Plus, vocabulary instruction and writing instruction, together, can improve overall writing quality



# Summary: Building Academic Language



1. Start with a meaty text (high utility academic words + big ideas)



2. Targeting depth of word knowledge and awareness of AL features through multiple, planned opportunities to discuss the words and concepts

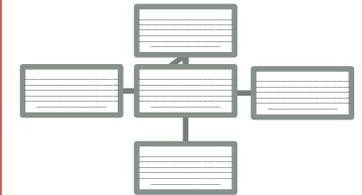
discrimination

3. Promoting continued AL learning by teaching strategies that can be applied recursively when encountering new texts.

**Writing Prompt Question:**  
Write a letter to the school board arguing for or against single-gender classrooms in all the middle schools in your area. Provide three reasons that support your argument.

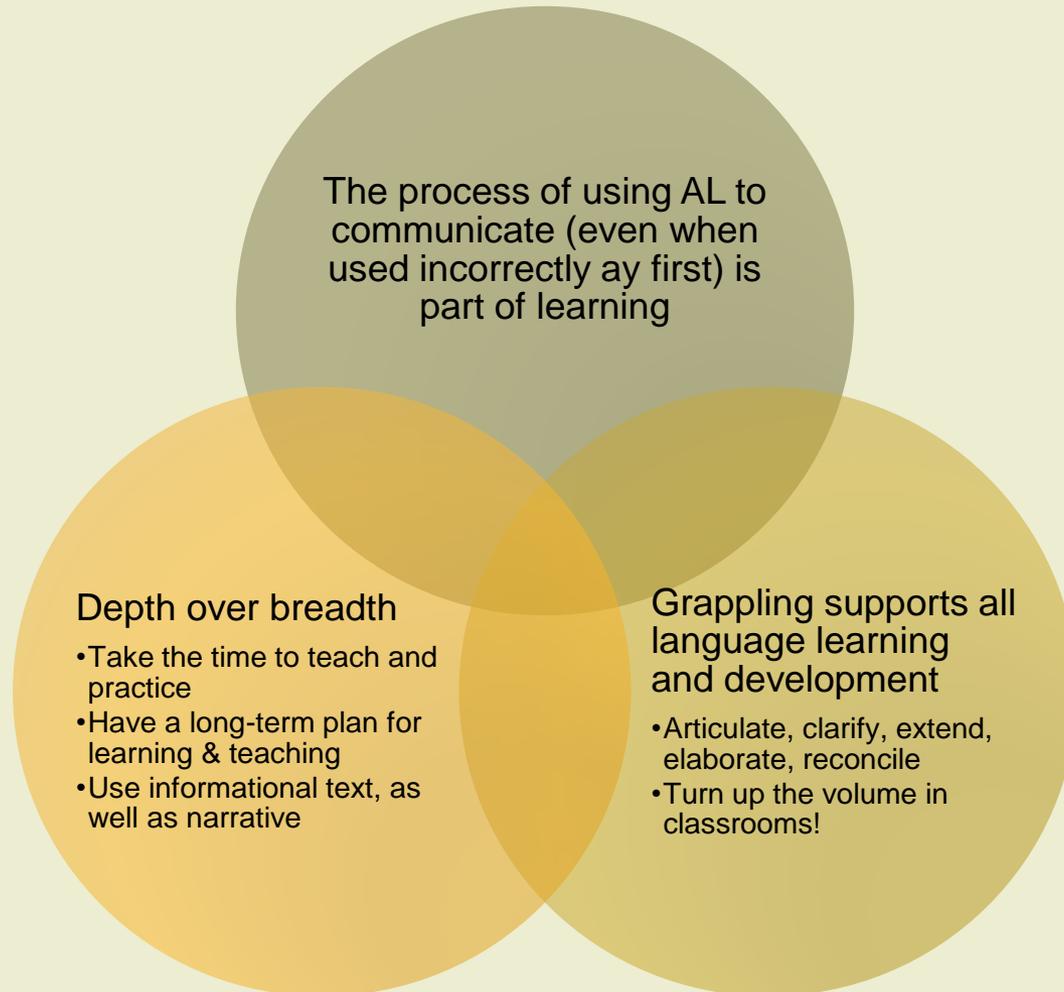
Discuss this question with your partner. Be sure to use the target words!

Plan your writing



4. reinforcing language development and critical thinking through writing, debating, and continued reading

# What We're Learning: Process Over Mastery



# Multiple Approaches, Similar Goals (cont.)

- Activity:
- Step 1: First, select a program at use in your school that lists the development of vocabulary as an explicit instructional goal (this may be Codex, or Expeditionary Learning)
- Step 2: Work to populate the table with your group. You may use internet resources or first hand knowledge of the curricula.
- Step 3: After completing the chart, discuss with your team:
  - What aspects of AL learning does this program appear to support best?
  - What aspects of AL learning do not appear to be taught as part of this program?

# Multiple Approaches, Similar Goals, cont.

How  
does  
your  
program  
build  
AL?

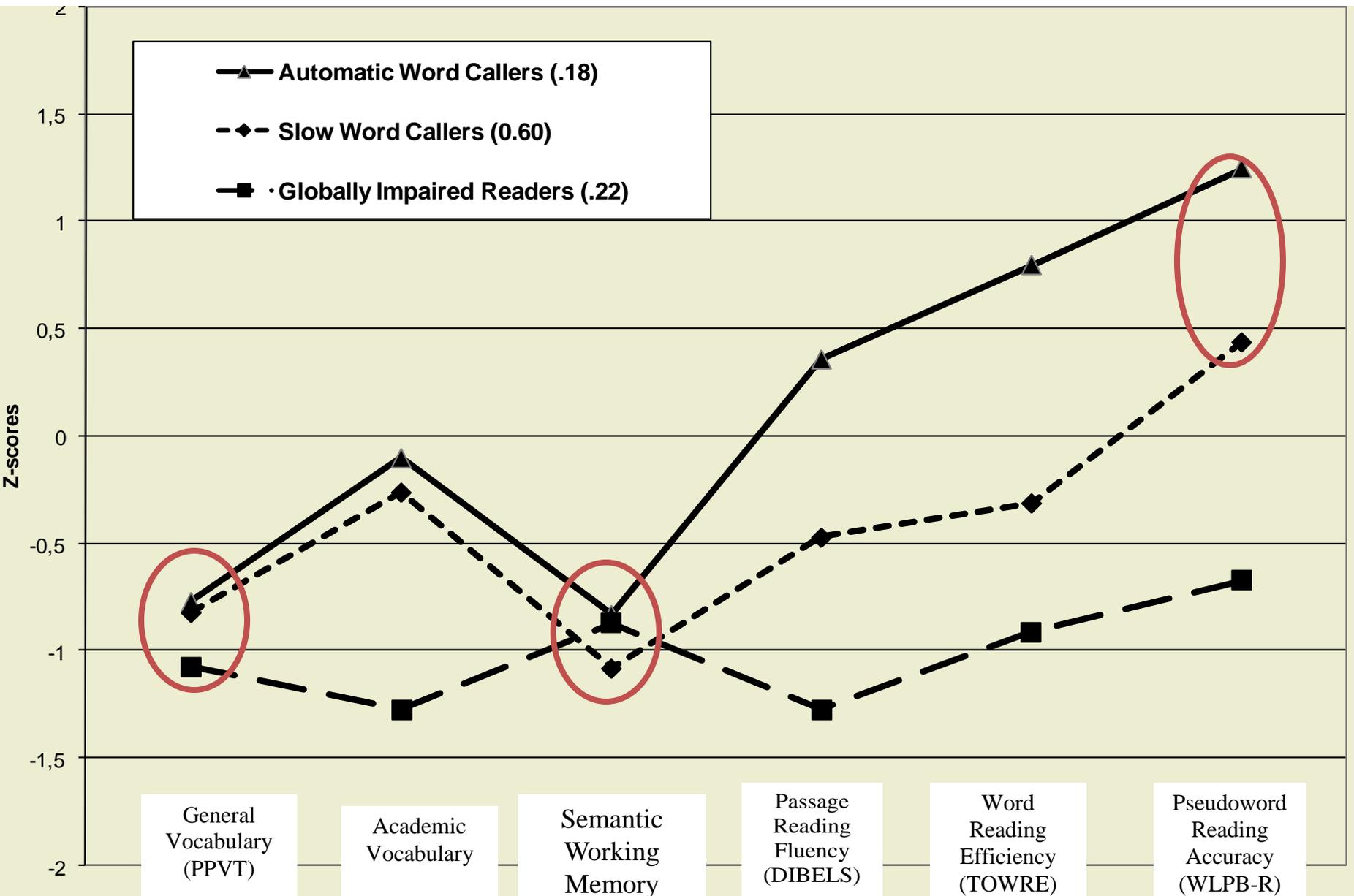
- We will use the blueprint to analyze the key features of your current curriculum

# SERVING STRUGGLING READERS IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Selecting programs and interventions

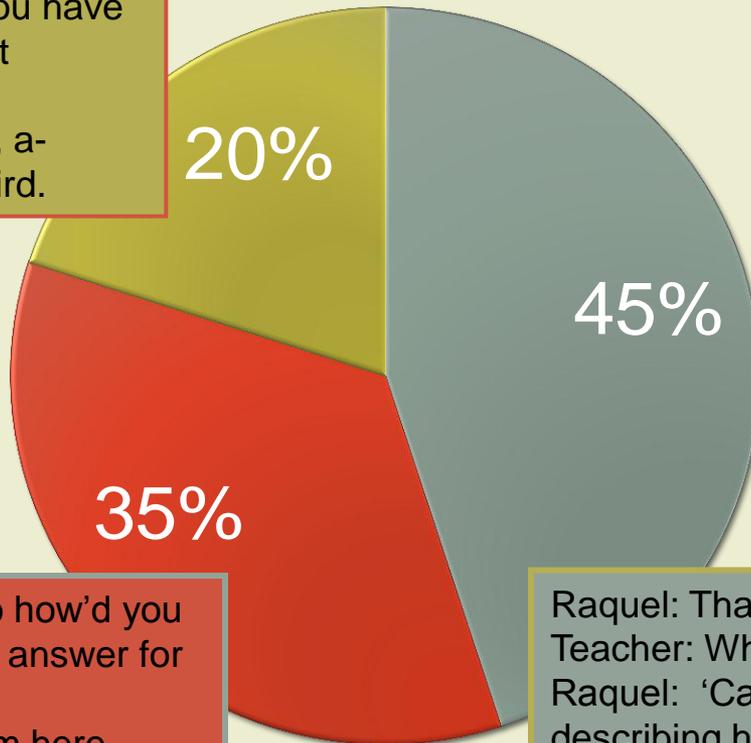
# SKILL PROFILES OF STRUGGLING ADOLESCENT READERS



# Behind the Scores:

Students' explanations for how they selected their answer

**How do the students' understandings of a text's message compare to the content of the passage?**



Answer choice based on:

- correct interpretation of the text
- something other than the text's meaning
- misinterpretation of the text

Teacher: Do you have any idea what it means?

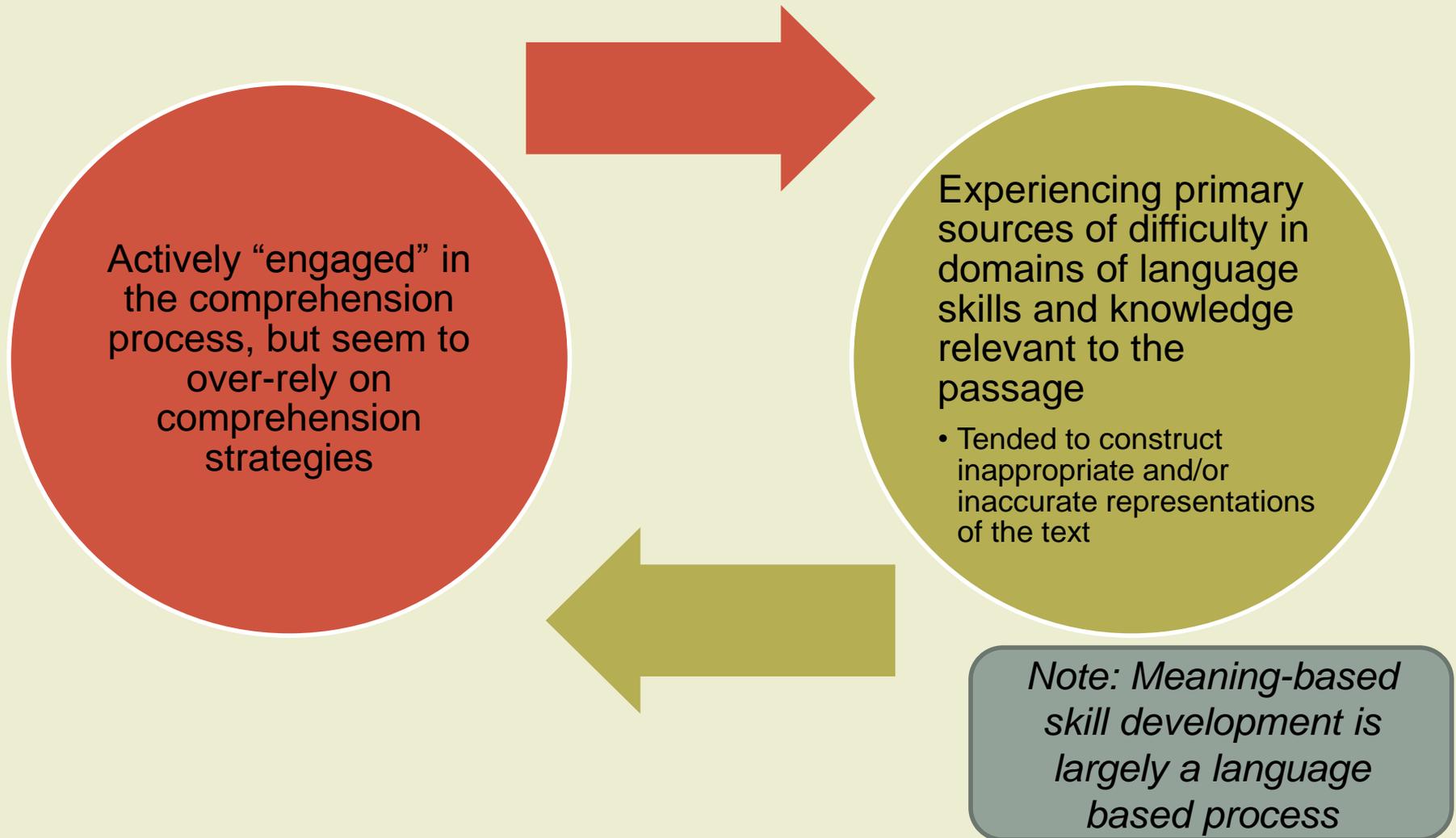
Raquel: A bird, a- some type of bird.

Teacher: So how'd you choose your answer for number 5?

Raquel: From here [points to her answer choice for number 4].

Raquel: That one was easy.  
Teacher: What made it easy?  
Raquel: 'Cause it's des- it's describing how they get their food.

# Many Struggling Readers are...



# Struggling Readers in the MS

Needs are often more extensive than can be addressed by providing one class daily in reading instruction, delivered solely by the reading or language arts teacher

Significantly altering the curricula throughout the school day

Efforts that engage all content teachers in a unified approach to improving word and world knowledge are likely required

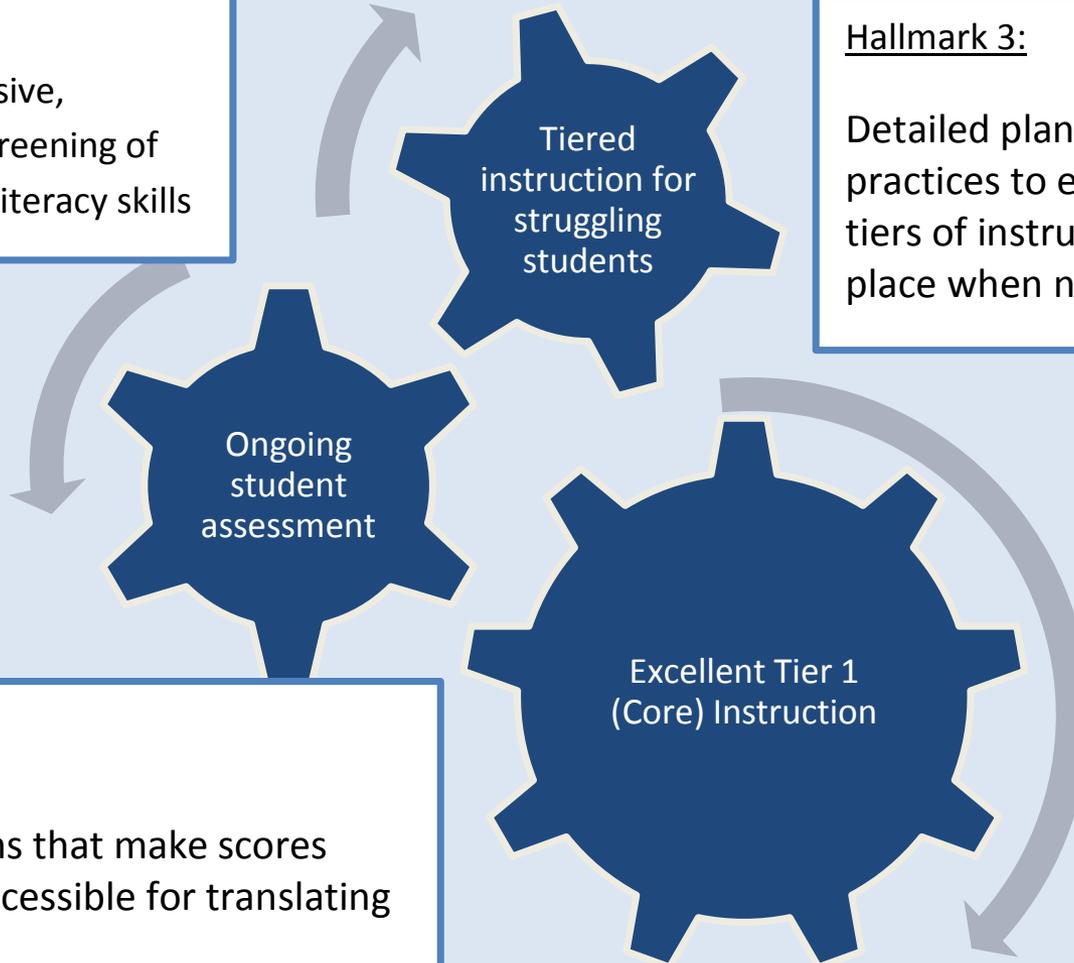
More extensive, ongoing interventions are required for those who struggle

Interventions that are more individualized and responsive to students' needs and less standardized/procedural

# Planning for Prevention and Promotion

## Hallmark 1:

Comprehensive, continual screening of developing literacy skills



## Hallmark 3:

Detailed plans and specialized practices to ensure additional tiers of instruction are in place when needed

## Hallmark 2:

Data systems that make scores clear and accessible for translating to practice

# Serving Struggling Readers: Common Pitfalls

Grouping by demographic indicator (e.g., ESL) or broad reading level (e.g., state test result)



Providing supports with inadequate frequency that are disconnected from other learning occurring in the classroom or from other supports the student is receiving (ESL and literacy intervention).

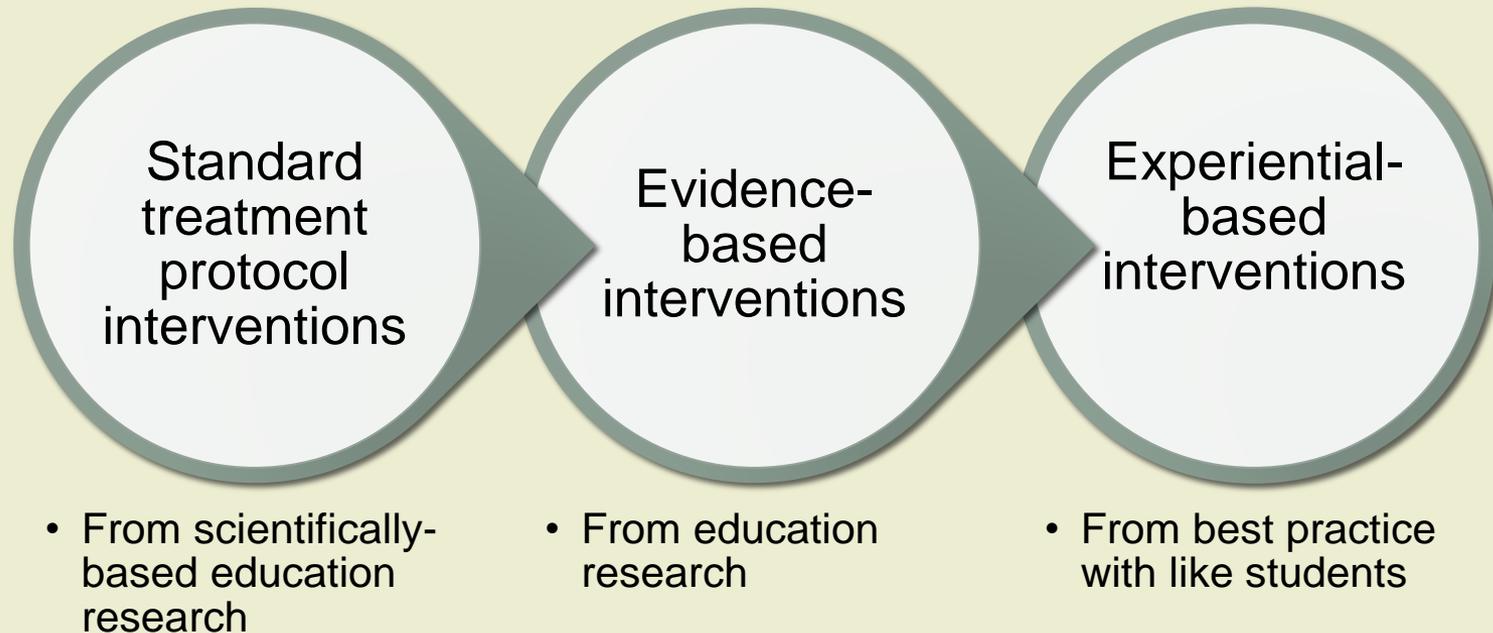


Attempting to teach item types from standardized tests (e.g., main idea) rather than identifying and supporting weak underlying foundational skills and competencies



Investing in test prep assessments and programs, when these do not focus on underlying instructional needs, and are calibrated to a shifting target

# What Types of Interventions?



# Problem-Solving Methodology



1. Define problem
2. Brainstorm solutions
3. Choose intervention with greatest potential for student success
4. Monitor intervention outcome
  - Adjust!

# Planning Intervention for Struggling Readers: Key Considerations



How are at-risk students identified for intervention?



How do we match students to the intervention provided?



What is the nature of the intervention?



Who is the educator implementing the intervention?



How is 'response' to intervention defined?



What happens to non-responders?

# Intervention for Struggling Readers: Design Principles of Quality Interventions

## **Duration & Frequency:**

9-12 weeks, 3-4 times per week,  
30-60 minutes per session

## **Session Characteristics**

- More opportunities to respond & provide immediate corrective feedback
- Mastery of content before moving on
- More time allocated towards difficult activities
- Fewer transitions
- Special relationship with instructor
- Setting goals and self-monitoring

# Potential Confounders to High-Quality Implementation

Low-quality interventions

- not scientific, research-based

Lack of fidelity of implementation

- checklists, outside monitoring

Insufficient implementation process

- time, frequency, duration, knowledgeable teachers

Inconsistent professional development

- Staff transition in/out of schools, training opportunities

# Discussion Question

What are the characteristics of interventions that meaningfully impact student outcomes at our site?

- which areas of literacy?
- what conditions?
- which adults?
- what measures of literacy

NEXT SESSION

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# Instructional Improvement: Meetings 3-7

## Blueprint

