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# Towards effective adult literacy programs

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# Motivation

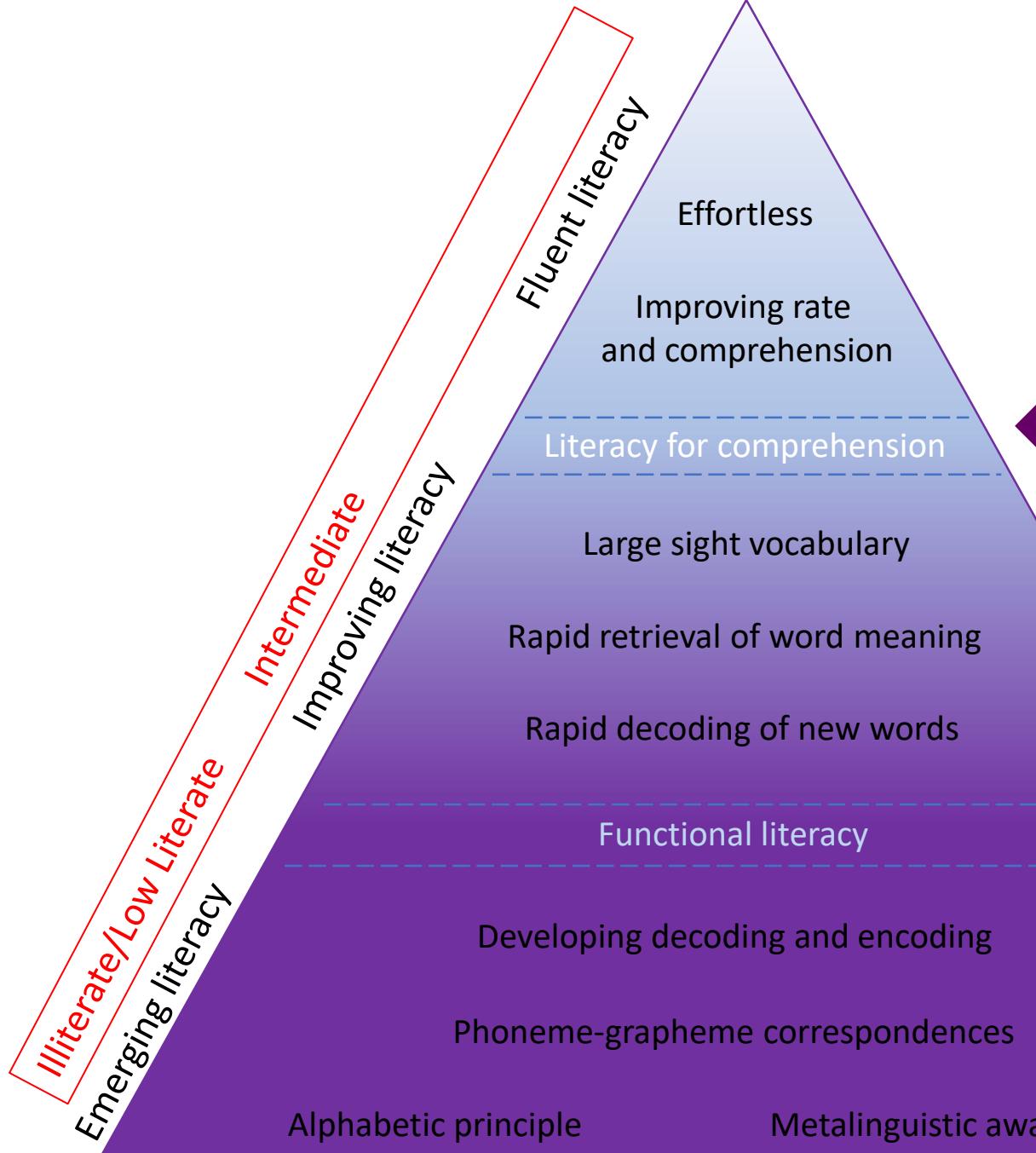
- Despite many individual and societal benefits of Adult Literacy, limited investments in Adult Literacy Programs (ALP);
- Even more limited information on *what works* to improve adults' literacy outcomes;
- Two tasks to improve information to better design ALP:
  - Science of Adult Literacy
  - Stocktaking of ALP

# Science of Adult Literacy

# Science of Adult Literacy: Key Principles

- Learning to read is really hard:
  - Takes a great deal of mental effort over an extended period of time – even for children;
  - ALP should be sufficiently long and provide adequate intensity of instruction
- Literacy is acquired along a continuum, with three very broad stages

# The building blocks of literacy

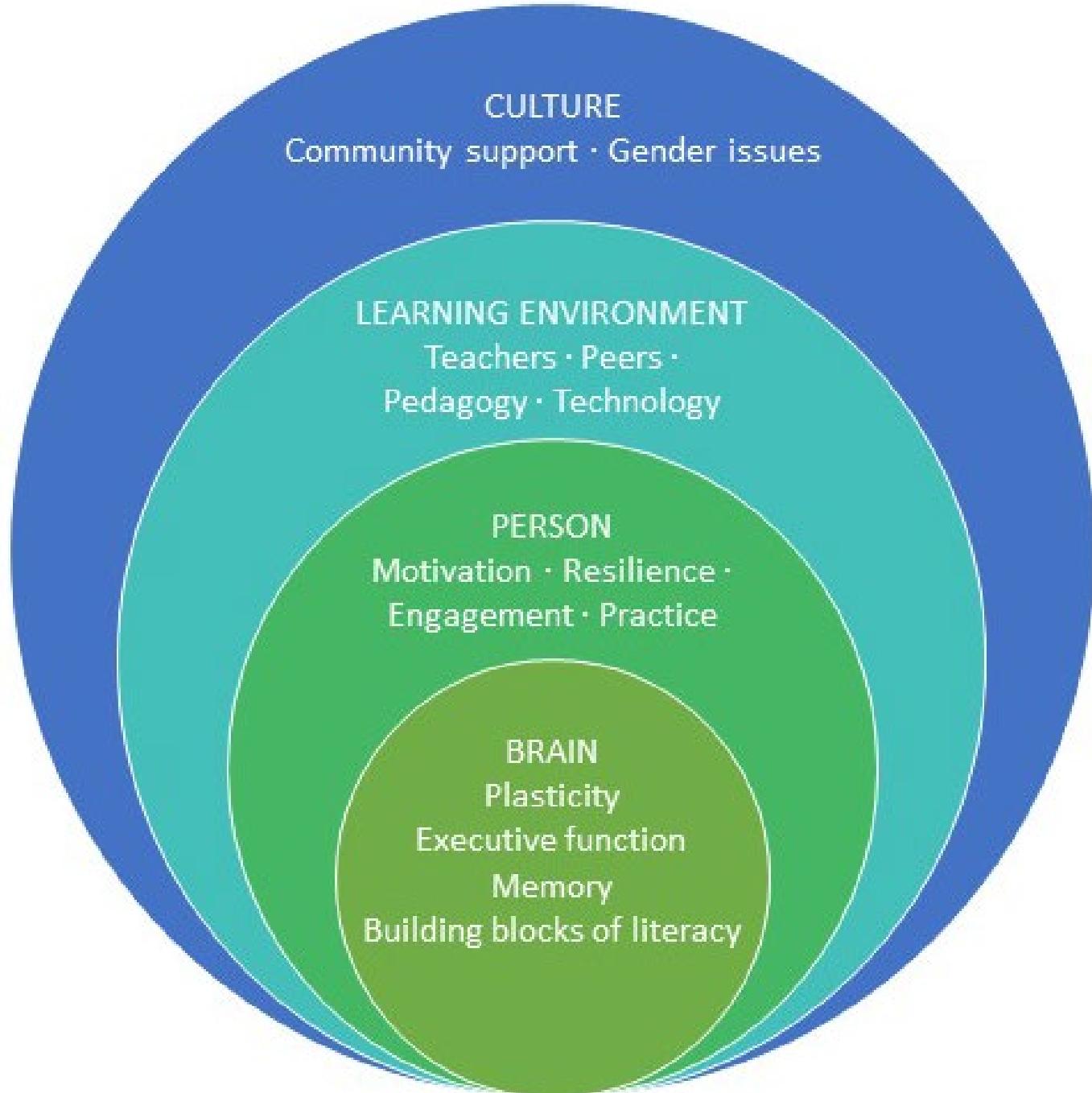


Reading that is accurate and rapid enough to support comprehension. In English this is ~90-100 words per minute (Armbruster et al., 2001).

Able to read and write a short sentence about one's own life (Unesco, 1978).

The continuum of literacy development, moving from Emerging, through Improving to Fluent literacy.

# Science of Adult Literacy: Challenges & Implications for program design



# Science of Adult Literacy: In a nutshell

Three key principles for effective ALP:

- *Sequencing* along the building blocks of literacy;
- *Suitability*: programs are designed to suit the brain and life of the adult learner;
- *Quality of instruction*, which, just as in any level of education is a key ingredient of learning.

# Stocktaking of Adult Literacy Interventions

# Stocktaking of ALP

- Review of adult literacy interventions to identify key design features of successful interventions
- Confirms the principles of AL in Science paper: more successful programs follow some or all principles of *suitability, sequencing and instruction*
- Variation in results depending on design features and program objectives

## Programs that targeted emerging literacy skills had positive significant impact

		Baseline Ability of Participants			
		Illiterate	Illiterate/Low Literate	Low Literate	Low Literate/Intermediate
Program Objective	Emerging Literacy skills	- Project ABC -CELL-ED -Call Me Educated		-Theory -based CAI -ML-CHAMP	
	Literacy skills	-NEUROALFA -Misión Robinson	-Phonological-Awareness and Rapid-Reading Training -TA+ -GAIN -Incentives to Improve Attendance	-READY -Text Comprehension Strategies -Structured Decoding -Instructional Approaches on Reading Outcomes -Sam and Pat -Learning Strategies -CAI in Prison	-Two methods of Reading -Autoskill

- The relatively high success rate of programs targeting emerging literacy skills may, in part, stem from the fact that those programs **target the baseline ability** of their participants;
- The majority of programs aiming beyond emerging literacy in the DD don't account for learners' baseline abilities and/or don't build the necessary foundations (e.g., materials/approach for the wrong skill level is part of this)

# Questions we explored but need further answers

- How should **ICT** be incorporated into ALPs?
  - Some studies were CAI but not all showed positive impact
- Can incentives or wraparound services **increase take-up and reduce dropout?**
  - We do not have detailed information on the profile of those who drop-out. There are no clear patterns for those who drop-out and no clear correlations between location, duration of program, age and dropping-out;
- What is the best way to manage the tradeoff between sufficient dosage and intervention fatigue / dropout?
  - No information available
- Is impact of ALPs **heterogeneous** across participant characteristics such as age, gender or context?
  - There is no statistically significant difference between these in those studies that looked into them OR no info in the rest of the studies
- Are the observed positive impacts of some programs **sustained over time?**
  - This is only measured in a couple of studies, with mixed results

# Conclusions

- Science review tells us that adults can learn new complex skills like literacy if ***suitability, sequencing and instruction*** is done right
- Stocktaking highlights that most effective programs aim to improve **emerging literacy skills**;
- **Further research** is needed to answer key questions for effective design