

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

*A professional learning series presented by David Kilpatrick, Ph.D.*

## Module 2 Session 4

*Sponsored by the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and created in collaboration with  
Specific Learning Disability Specialists Jill Marshall and Veronica Fiedler*



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

## **Module 2: Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners still Struggle**

*Session 4: Three-Cuing Systems Approach to Reading*

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

## Objective:

Through engagement in this series of 13 on-demand webinars, participants will understand the current research, implications, and the essential elements necessary for assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.



**ASSESS**

**PREVENT**

**OVERCOME**

# Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

## Webinar Series Modules

**Module 1:** Reading Research and the Research to Practice Gap

**Module 2: Current Approaches: Why Many Learners Still Struggle**

**Module 3:** The Simple View Of Reading

**Module 4:** Word-Level Reading

**Module 5:** Reading Comprehension

**Module 6:** Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

**Module 7:** Assessing Phonics Skills

**Module 8:** Assessing Word Identification and Reading Fluency

**Module 9:** Assessing Reading Comprehension and Related Skills

**Module 10:** Effective Approaches for Preventing Reading Difficulties

**Module 11:** Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties

**Module 12:** Case Examples of Reading Disabilities

**Module 13:** Specific Learning Disability Identification

# Module 2 Overview

## *Module 2:*

### *Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners Still Struggle*

2.1 A Very Brief History of Reading Instruction

2.2 Why Current Reading Instruction Doesn't Work for Many

2.3 Visual Memory Theory of Reading

**2.4 Three-Cueing System Theory of Reading**

2.5 Phonics- Strengths and Limitations

# Learning Intentions



## **Module 2 Session 4: Three-Cueing System Theory of Reading**

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Describe the popular Three-Cueing Systems Model of Reading
- ✓ Understand why it does not help close the gap with weak readers

# The Three-Cueing Systems Approach to Reading

- This has been the dominant approach to reading for the last three decades
- Currently foundational for
  - Whole language
  - Balanced literacy
  - The literacy-based approach
  - Reading Recovery
  - Guided Reading
  - Leveled Literacy Intervention

# The Three-Cueing Systems Approach to Reading

- This theory of reading was developed in the 1960s and the developers called it the Psycholinguistic Guessing Game
- Combined with the classic Sentence Method of Reading from the late 1800s, this became the whole language movement of the 1980s to today (now called balanced literacy)
- It has resisted any modifications despite thousands of scientific studies conducted since then
- Extensive evidence indicates the three-cueing approach is not an effective approach. It is continuously affirmed as valid despite extensive evidence to the contrary



# The Three-Cueing Systems Approach to Reading

- There is no evidence that it helps weaker readers catch up and stay caught up, but there is evidence it does not
  - It is thoroughly “research based” in that it appears in dozens of studies, most commonly as the “control group” condition
  - It has weaker results than any other approach under study



# The Three-Cueing Systems Approach to Reading

## **CONTEXTUAL**

- Skilled readers recognize most of the words they read. Context is not required to recognize familiar words.
- Skilled readers can read LISTS of words quickly and accurately – no context required
- Poor readers know fewer words so they rely on context.
  - Heavy reliance on context is a poor-reader skill, not skilled-reader skill

## **LINGUISTIC/GRAMMATICAL/SYNTACTIC**

- Grammatical/Syntactic skills are virtually uncorrelated with word reading.

## **GRAPHO-PHONIC**

- Skilled readers effectively sound out unfamiliar words via phonic decoding and set for variability
- Poor readers are weak in phonic decoding and have to rely on guessing from context to compensate
  - Relying on contextual cues more than phonic cues is a poor-reader approach, not a skilled reader approach

# The Three-Cueing Systems Approach to Reading

- Researchers believe the three-cueing approach inadvertently trains all readers to use approaches that come naturally to weak readers while being inconsistent with the approaches naturally used by skilled readers
  - Students who are not weak readers bypass these approaches and become skilled readers
    - They become skilled readers in spite of the three-cueing instruction, not because of it
  - Weak readers use approaches that come naturally to them with no way to overcome their weak reading skills

# The Infamous E-Mail

- There is a bogus e-mail floating around the internet which claims we only need to notice the first and last letter of a word in order to identify it. It assumes that we don't pay attention to every letter of every word we read.
- That information is false. But the e-mail is a demonstration of CONTEXTUAL FACILITATION, which is a type of TOP-DOWN PROCESSING, but tells us nothing about normal word recognition.
- By the way, people can't figure out many of these scrambled words when they are out of context

# Summary: Module 2 Session 4

- ✓ The Three-Cueing Systems approach to reading has permeated our reading instruction for the last three decades
- ✓ It reflects a theory of reading that seemed promising in the 1960s, but hundreds of studies show that it does not accurately reflect how skilled reading works
- ✓ Despite this, it is continuously affirmed as being a true and accurate representation of how reading develops; it is not!
- ✓ Studies on its effectiveness consistently show that it tends to have weak long-term results with struggling readers
  - ✓ There is no evidence that it closes the gap between skilled and struggling readers





## **Reflect and Connect:**

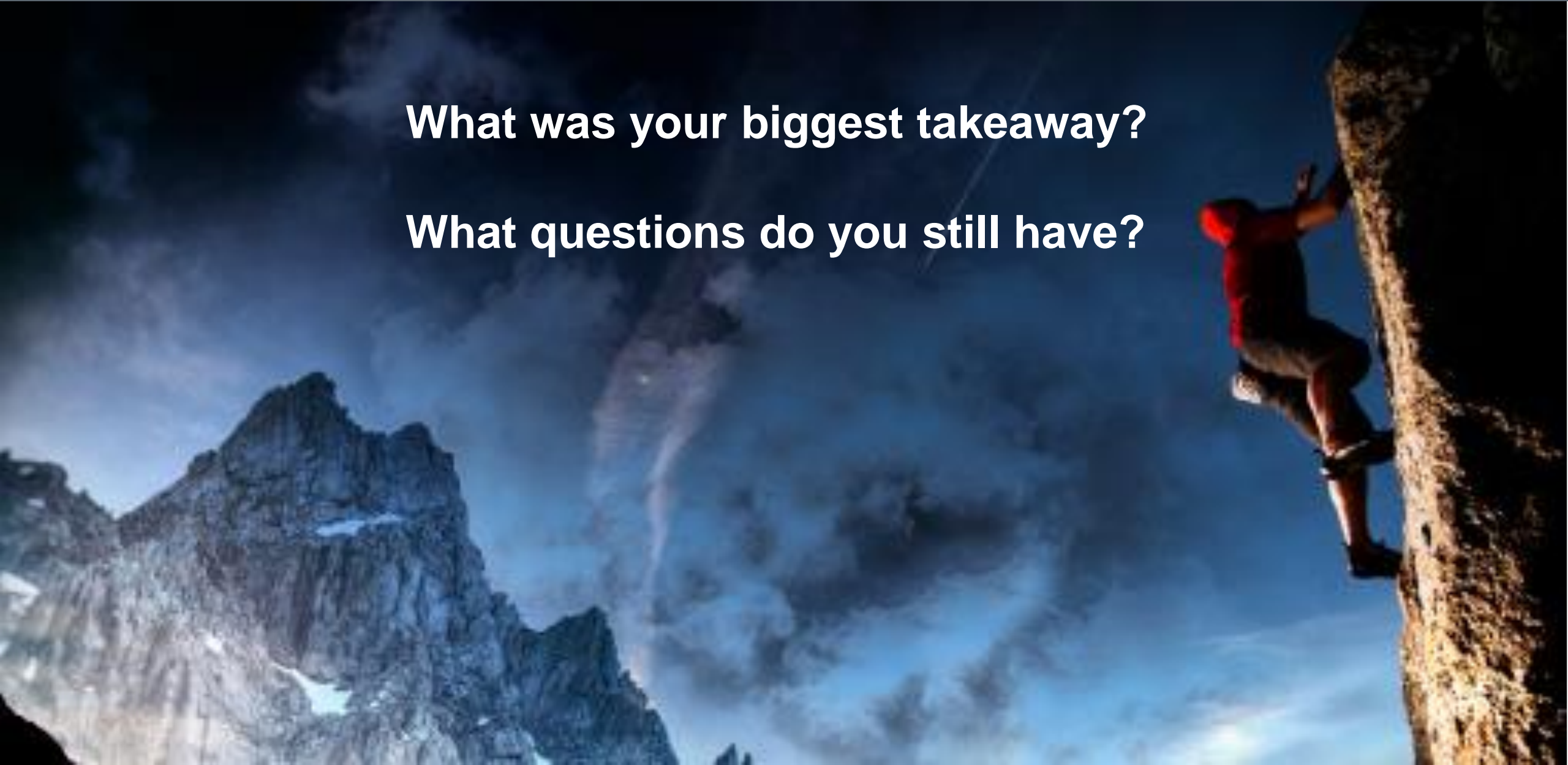
If you had to confront a colleague who insists on using the Three-Cueing Systems approach to reading , how would you explain to them why it is ineffective?



# Wrap Up

**What was your biggest takeaway?**

**What questions do you still have?**



# Up Next

## **Module 2.5** **Phonics- Strengths and** **Limitations**







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**Please visit the CDE Specific Learning Disability Website for more information:**

**<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLD>**