And the Children Shall Lead Us: A Guide to Interest-Based Learning

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Who am I?

Dr. Matt Zakreski – you can call me ”Dr. Matt” (Born and Raised in NJ)

I’m a clinical psychologist, professional speaker, and neurodivergence advocate

I’m known as someone who can bridge neuroscience and clinical practice to make skills accessible for you and your loved ones

Goals for Today

Define	Connect	Practice
Define what Interest-Based Learning is	Connect why Interest-Based Learning is effective for educating kids, but especially neurodivergent kids	Practice how to alter teaching practices towards Interest-Based Learning

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING?

WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN?


I need THREE volunteers

Interest-Based Learning

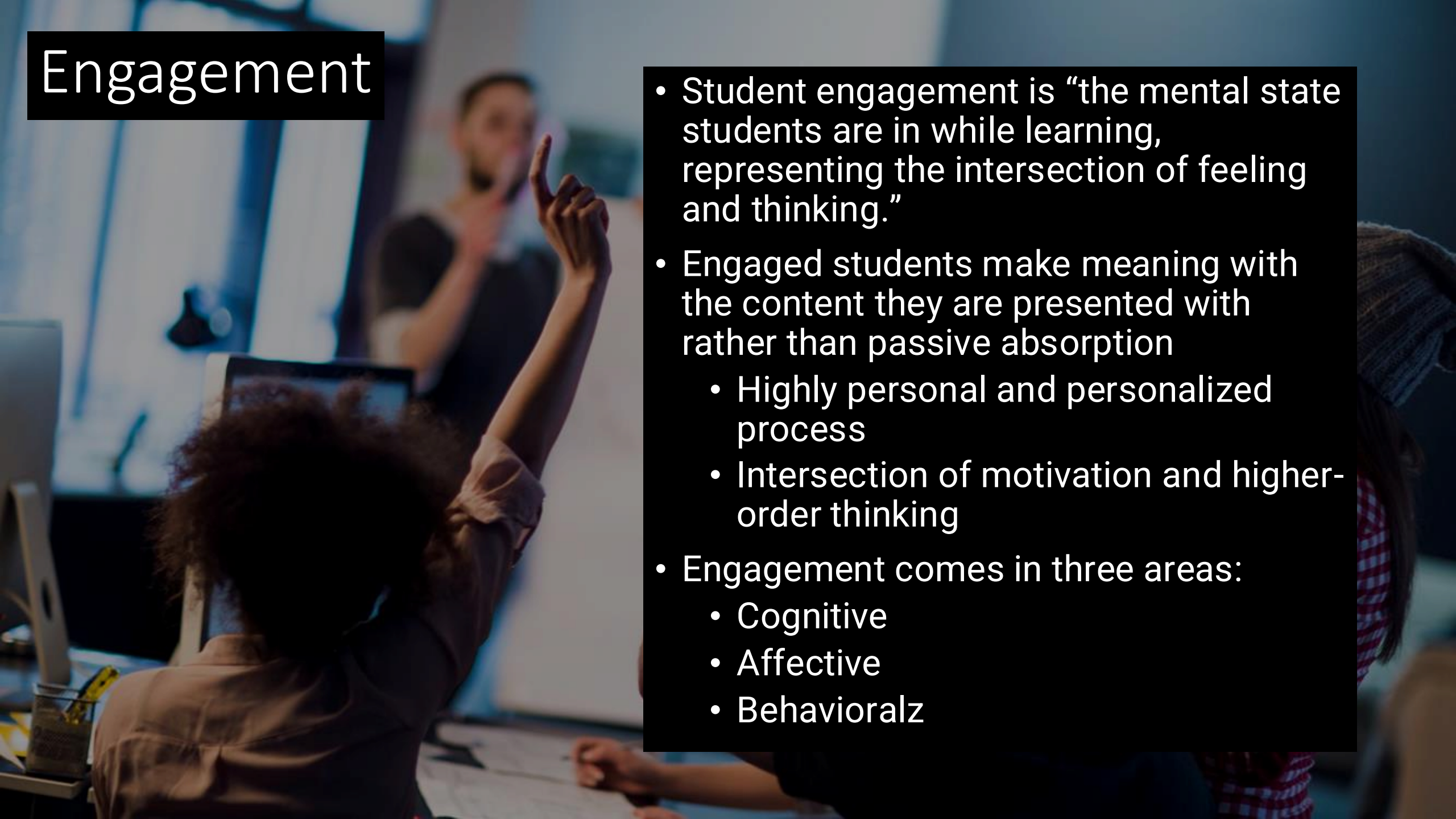
Interest-based learning (IBL) occurs when students identify their interests and use those interests to drive and lead learning experiences.

The purpose of designing learning experiences around interests is to encourage an intrinsic motivation to learn and inspire a passion for learning.

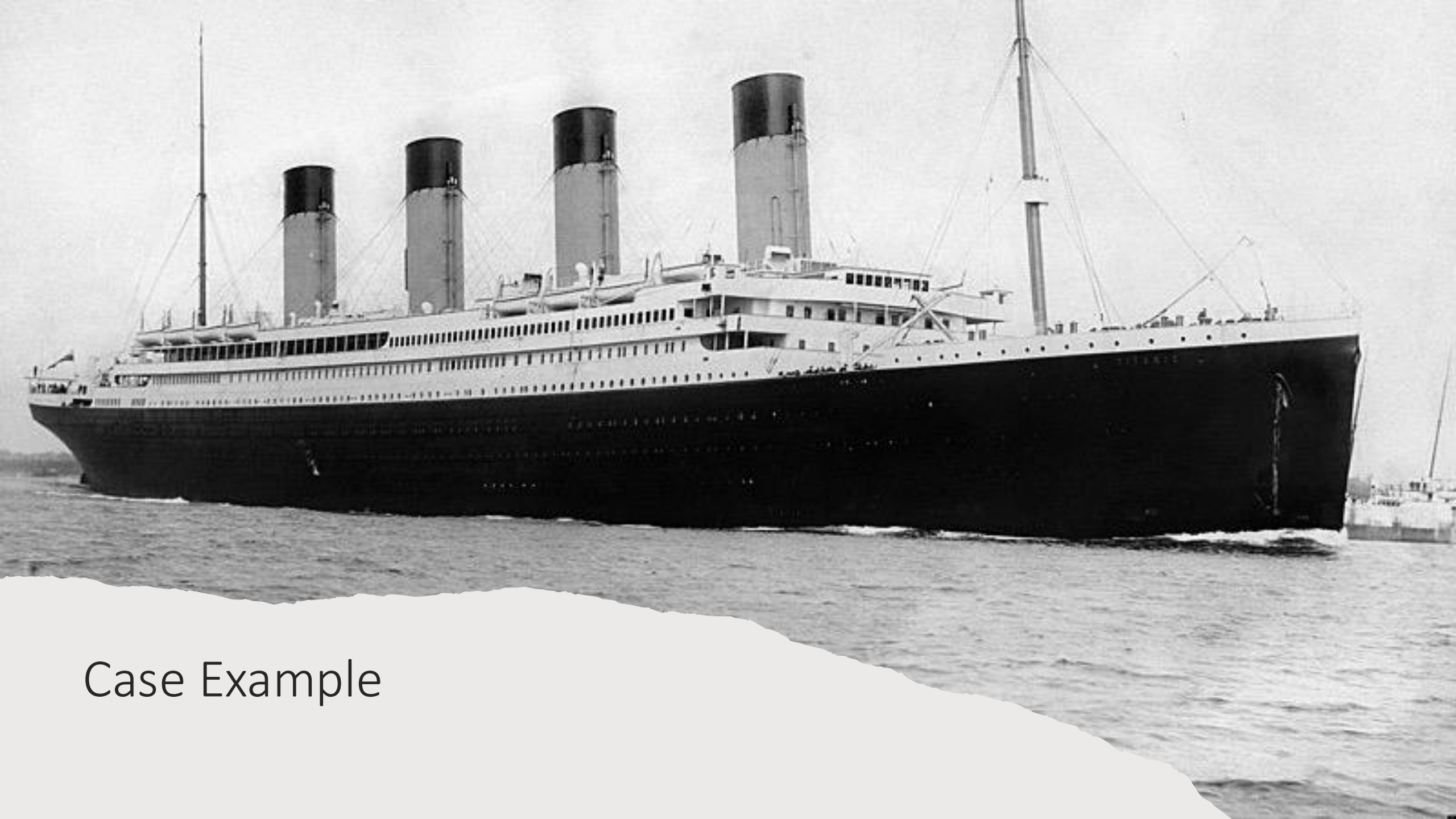
IBL channels the inherent eagerness of kids to learn about things they like into a guided cycle of asking questions and finding answers.

IBL is a process for expanding inquiry and discovery to increase engagement in learning, which ideally generalizes to other subjects

Engagement



- Student engagement is “the mental state students are in while learning, representing the intersection of feeling and thinking.”
- Engaged students make meaning with the content they are presented with rather than passive absorption
  - Highly personal and personalized process
  - Intersection of motivation and higher-order thinking
- Engagement comes in three areas:
  - Cognitive
  - Affective
  - Behavioralz



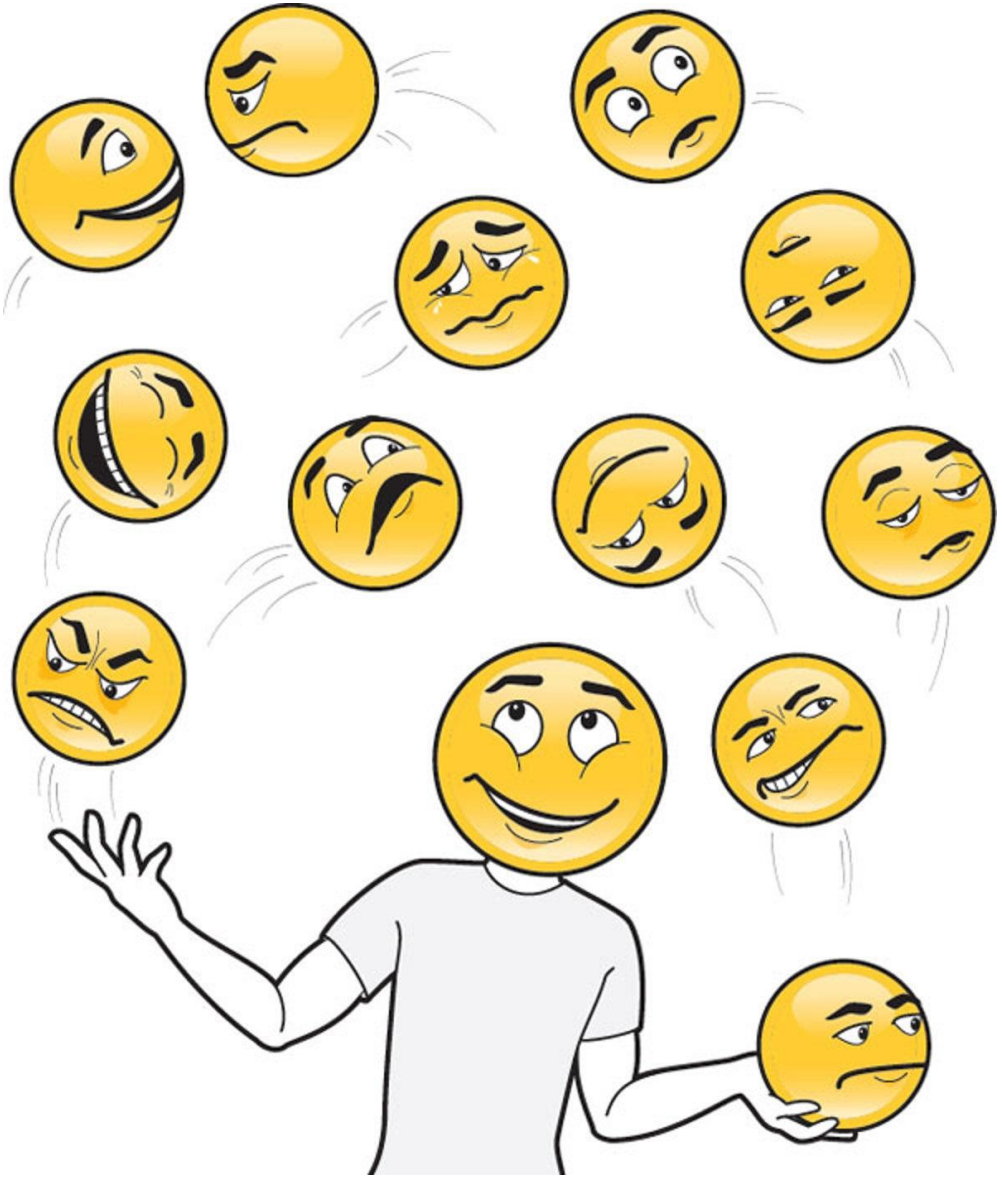
Case Example

Cognitve Engagement

- **Cognitive:** the extent to which students are attending to and spending mental effort on the learning tasks encountered
- What cognitive engagement looks like
  - Being curious, wanting to understand
  - Psychological and intellectual investment in learning
  - Using strategies that lead to deep learning
  - Personal transformation of information

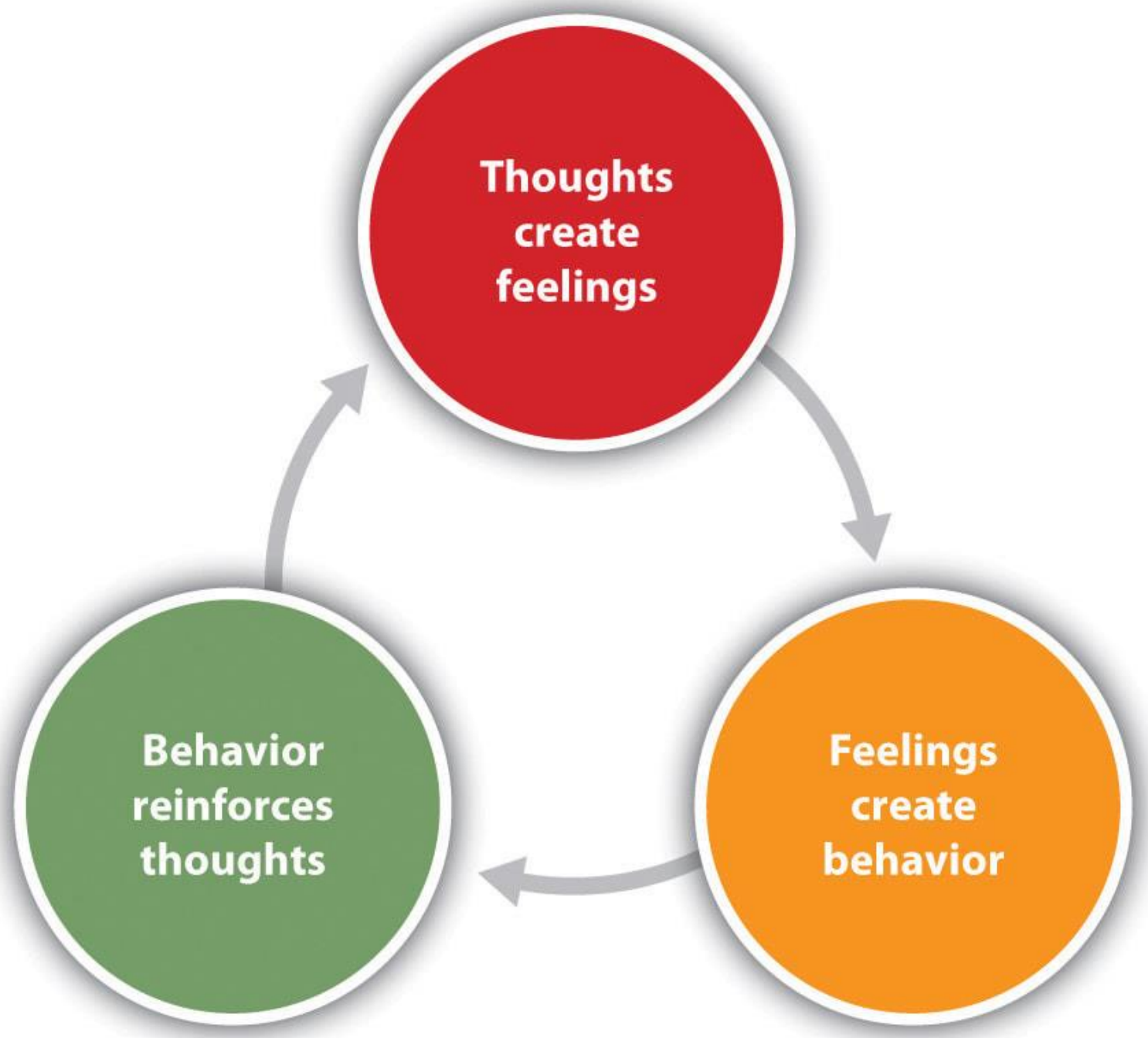
Affective Engagement

- **Affective:** the level of students' investment in, and their emotional reactions to, the learning tasks
- What engagement looks like
  - Students care about their learning
  - Interest, enthusiasm, and excitement about what they are doing
  - Motivated and challenged by new things – productive struggle
  - Willing to participate in the learning process in multiple ways



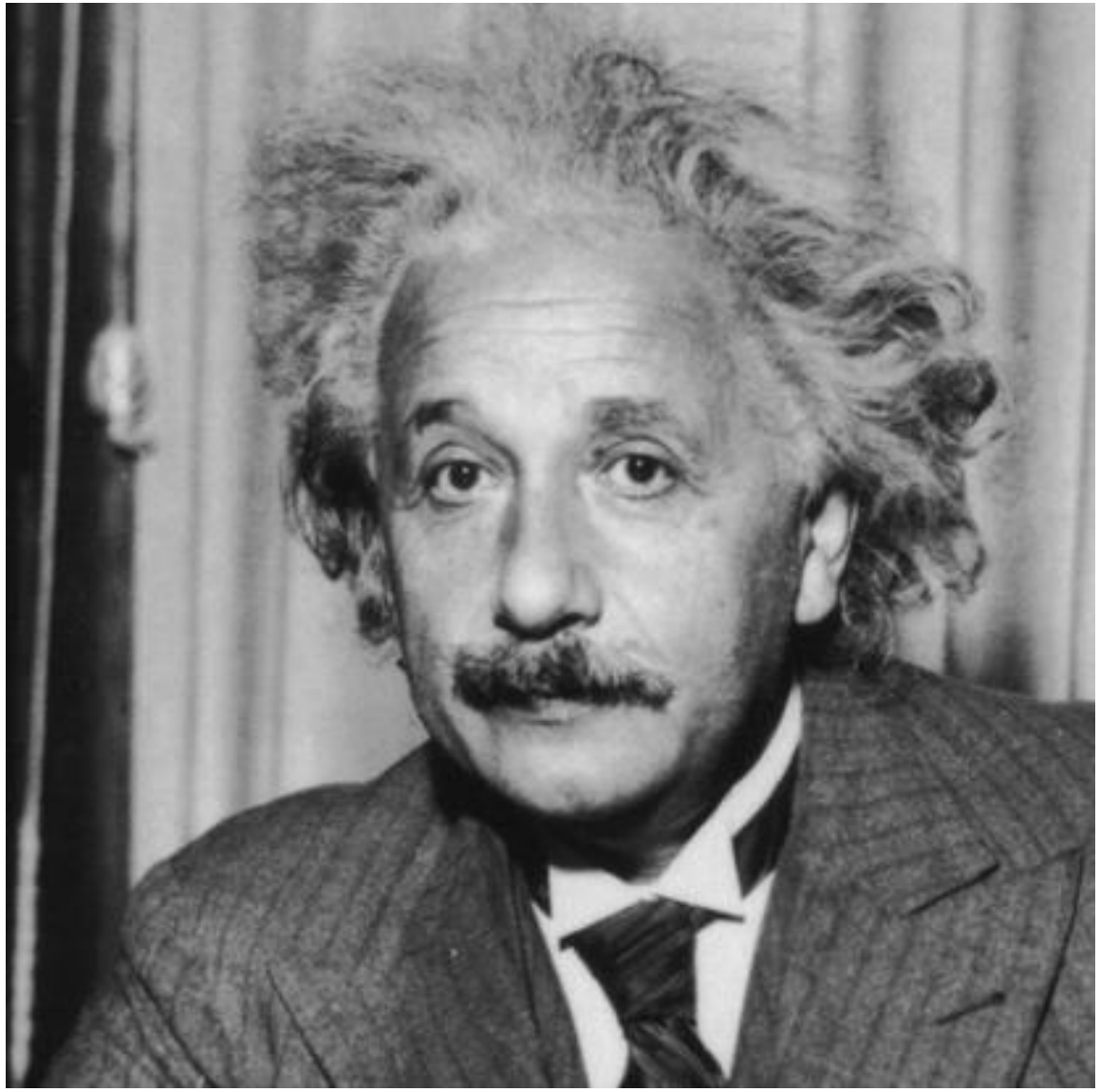
Behavioral Engagement

- **Behavioral:** the extent to which students are making active responses to the learning tasks presented
- What engagement looks like
  - Asking or answering questions
  - Going to class
  - Paying and sustaining attention
  - More behavioral regulation

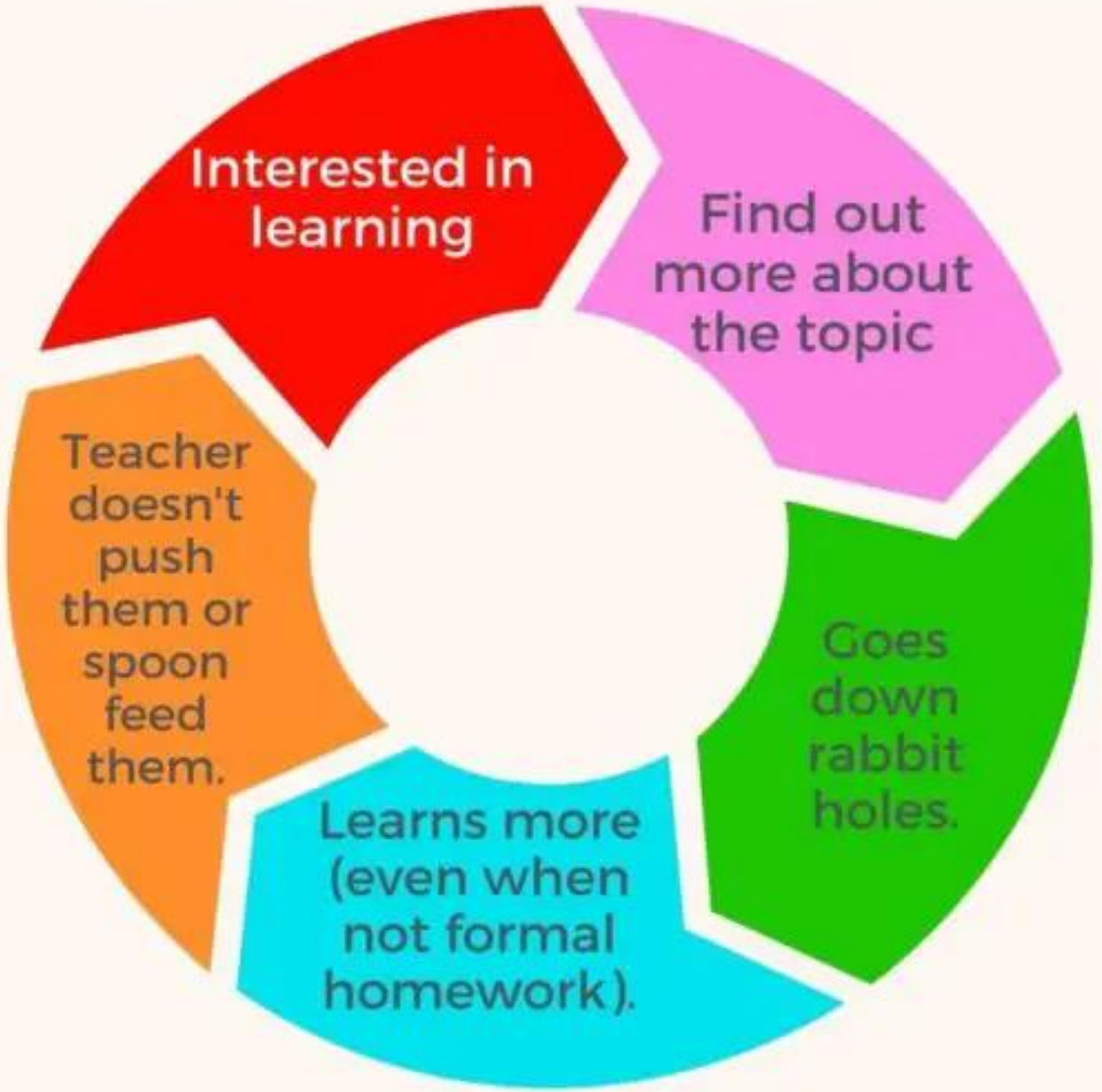

Thoughts create feelings
Feelings create behavior
Behavior reinforces thoughts

Learning as we go

- Interests are intrinsic
- As we engage more, we *naturally* learn more
- Assumes competence and ability – what does regular education look like?
- To level up, you must build skills
  - Social and emotional
  - Research
  - Learning
  - Demonstration
  - Communication
  - Executive Functioning
- Einstein and physics vs. math



LIFELONG LEARNING, INTEREST-BASED LEARNING & HOMESCHOOLERS



The loop keeps going and the child learns a lot.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (Carol Tomlinson) is the gold standard of how to adapt classrooms to the educational needs of gifted and 2E learners

DI is a student-centered, interest-driven approach to adapting curricula (we teach the students we HAVE, not the students we WANT to have)

In DI, the teacher anticipates the differences in students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles

DI creates different learning paths so that students can learn as much as they can as deeply as they can, without

- undue anxiety because the assignments are too taxing
- boredom because they are not challenging enough.

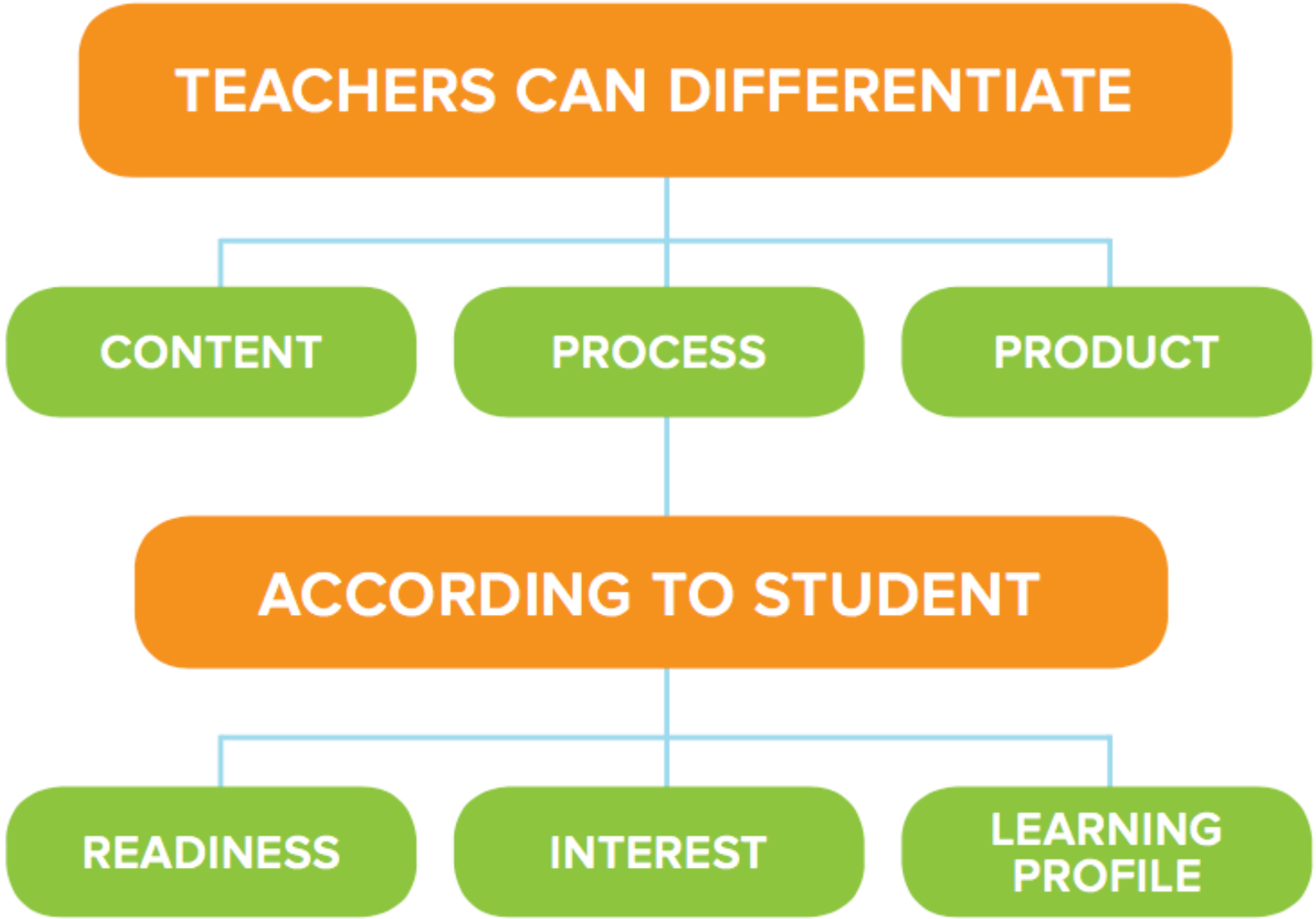


FIGURE 1: DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION GRAPHIC ORGANIZER (TOMLINSON & IMBEAU, 2010)

Pop Quiz Time!

25 Question Chapter Test

Five-page paper

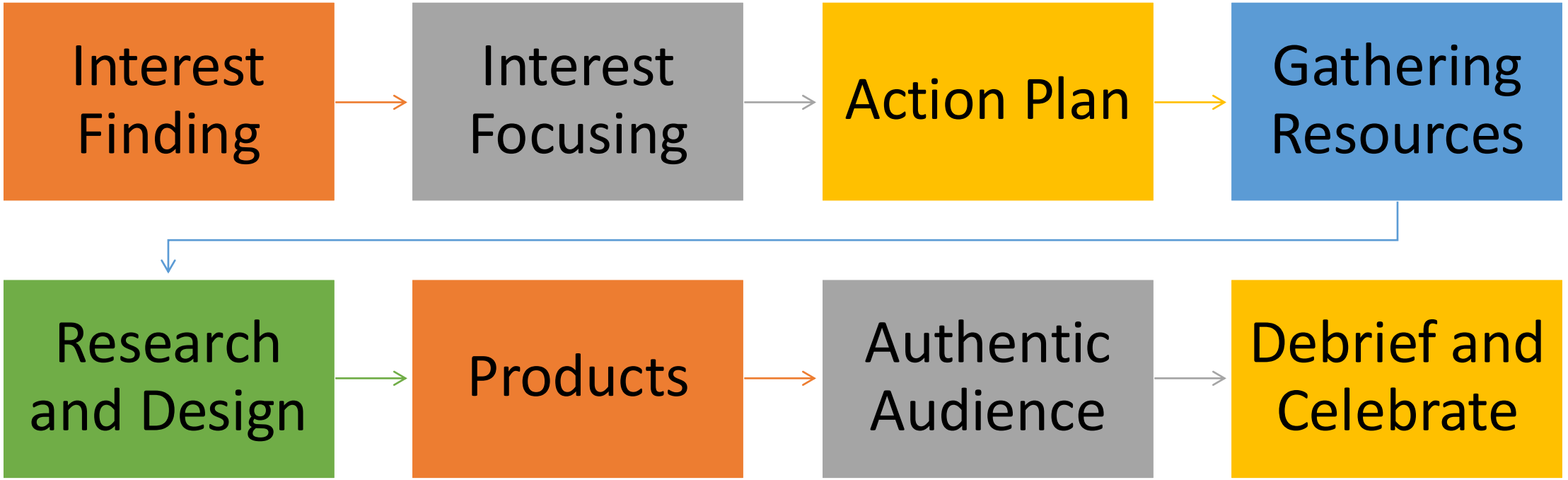
10-minute Presentation

The Power of Choice

- It’s not Teachers vs. Students – we are co-creating learning
- Offering choice shows students that you are actively engaged in teaching and that you’re aware WHO you are teaching
- Remove choice and you breed passivity or even defiance.
- Openness to compromise offers students scaffolded opportunities to
  - Practice decision-making
  - Explore their academic identity
  - Manage expectations and consequences
  - Connect their learning to interests and passions

brendantheraven, superawesomevectors

The Eight Steps of IBL



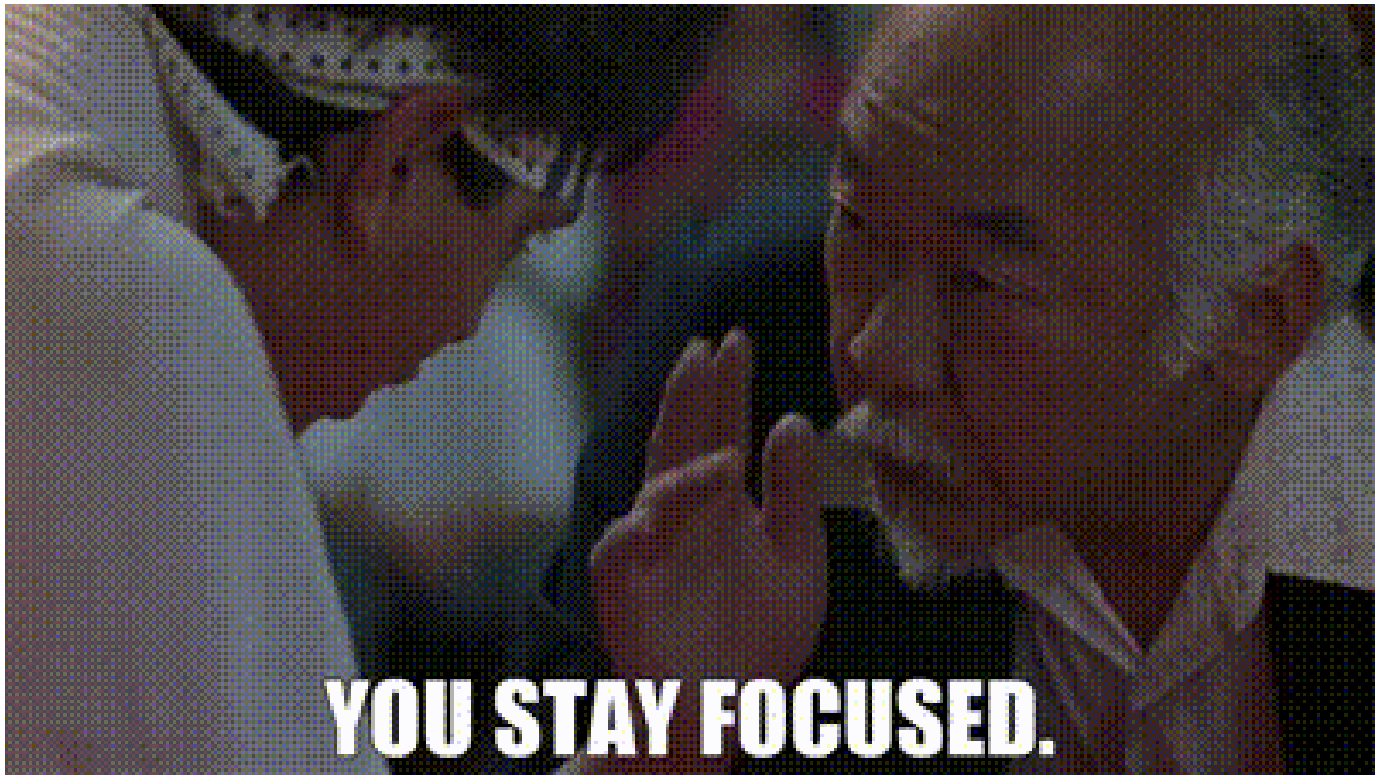
Step One: Interest Finding

- Once students have been introduced to the concept of IBL, it is time to identify their interest areas.
- Creating safety and vulnerability in the classroom
  - Modeling openness
- There are NO BAD IDEAS

- Surveys
- Peer Feedback
- Strengths

Step Two: Interest Focusing

- Conference with each student to explore how an interest area can be transformed into a workable inquiry question.
- Inquiry Question: Tend to be too big
- This process involves the use of:
  - Webbing
  - Exemplars
  - Whole-class guided practice
  - Another round of individual conferences with students



Step Three: Action Plan

- Completed collaboratively by the students and teacher
- The action plan includes:
  - Places for students to track their goals
  - Timelines
  - Available resources
  - Evidence that will be used to document growth.
- Teachers will also keep a record of project timelines, tasks, and standards addressed. (share with parents)

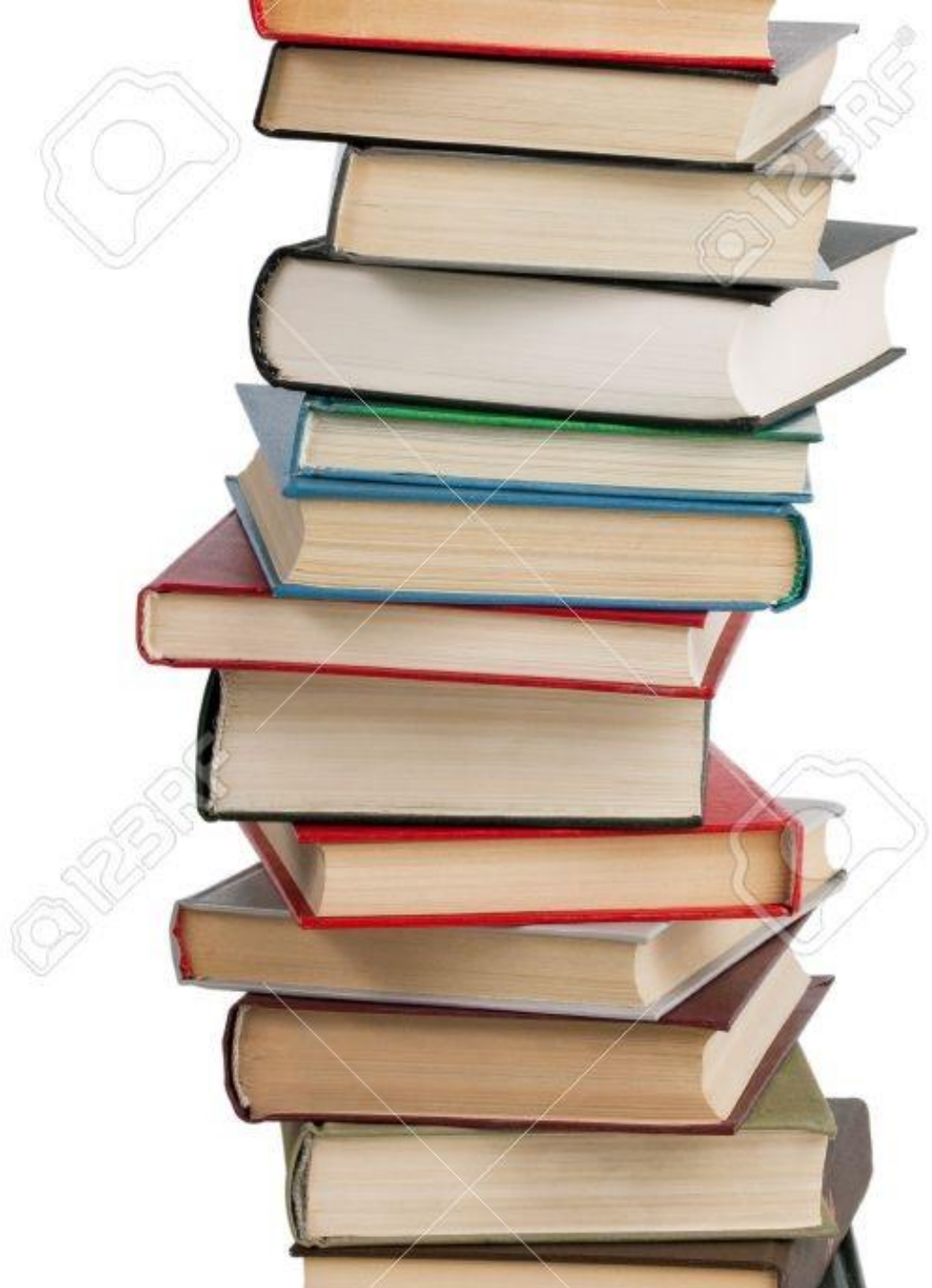
Action Plan

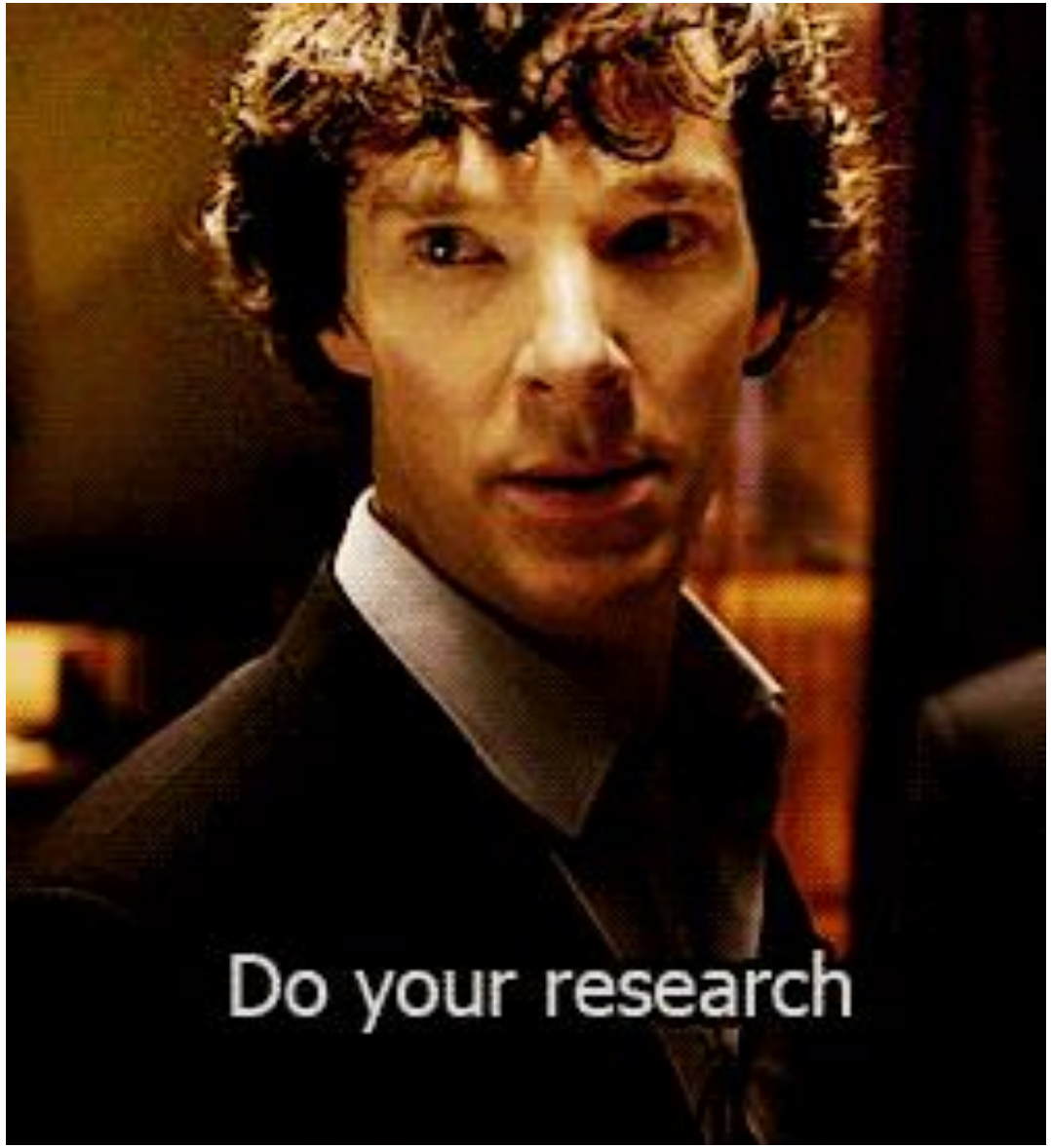
Objectives	**Tasks** *(what you need to do to achieve your objectives)*	**Success Criteria** *(How you can identify your success)*	**Time Frame** *(by when you need to achieve the tasks)*	**Resources** *(What Resources you need for each task)*

Prepared By:

Step Four: Gathering Resources

- The teacher guides the student in locating and validating credible primary and secondary sources to support their research.
- More Knowledgeable Others (MKO)
- Community Resources
- Documentaries, books, articles, interviews, etc.
- What are NOT credible resources?





Step Five: Research and Design

- The longest part of the process
- Three types:
  - Informational
  - Experimental
  - Tinkering

Step Six: Products

- Final products can be ANYTHING, depending on the question:
  - as simple as a one-pager
  - as complex as an iMovie
  - Creating and performing a scientific experiment.
- What all IBL products share is that they are **authentic** and **useful** to the problem being researched.

Step Seven: Authentic Audience

- Students present their research to an authentic audience.
  - Emotional Regulation
  - Social Skills
  - Presentation Skills
- Presenting their work motivates students and empowers them to identify as problem solvers whose work has value in the community.

Step Eight: Debrief and Celebrate

- Debriefing is a reflective technique used to gauge how successful, useful, and/or beneficial a learning journey was
- Helps to determine what could have been better for key constituents.
- It solidifies learning and takes it the "next step."
- Debriefing can be organized around three categories of questions:
  - What Happened?
  - So what?
  - Now what?

Then….

Why is having fun important?

Play is the work of childhood

People learn faster through fun activities

Reinforces learning and exploration

Gives us the dopamine

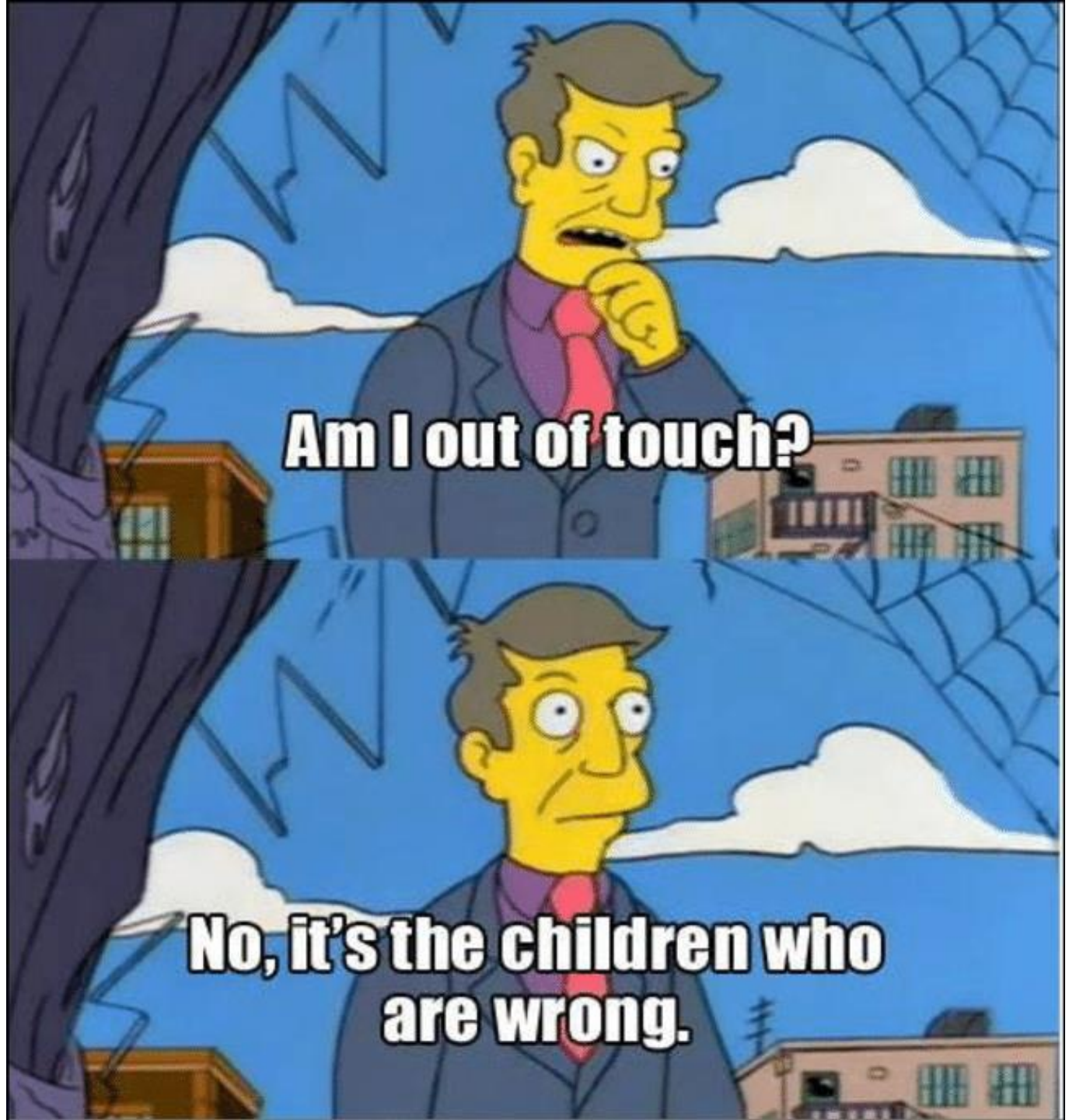
But Wait…

Life isn’t fair!

Life isn’t always about getting what you want!

I didn’t have these things and I turned out fine!

But Wait…

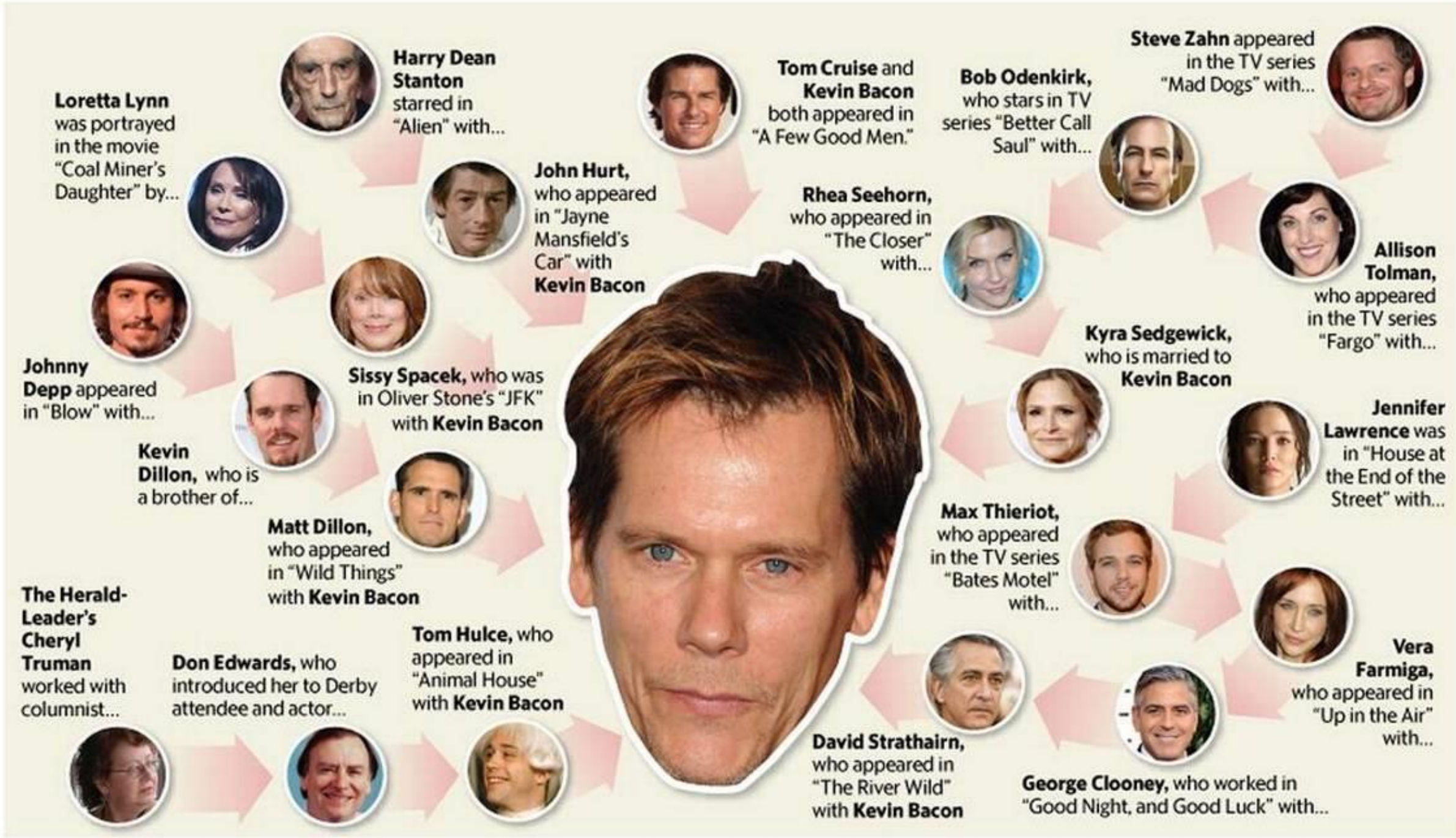

Am I out of touch?
No, it's the children who are wrong.

We Can Connect Anything to Anything

What Do You *Want* to Talk About?

What Do You <u>Need</u> to Learn About?

How Do You **Like** To Produce Your Work?



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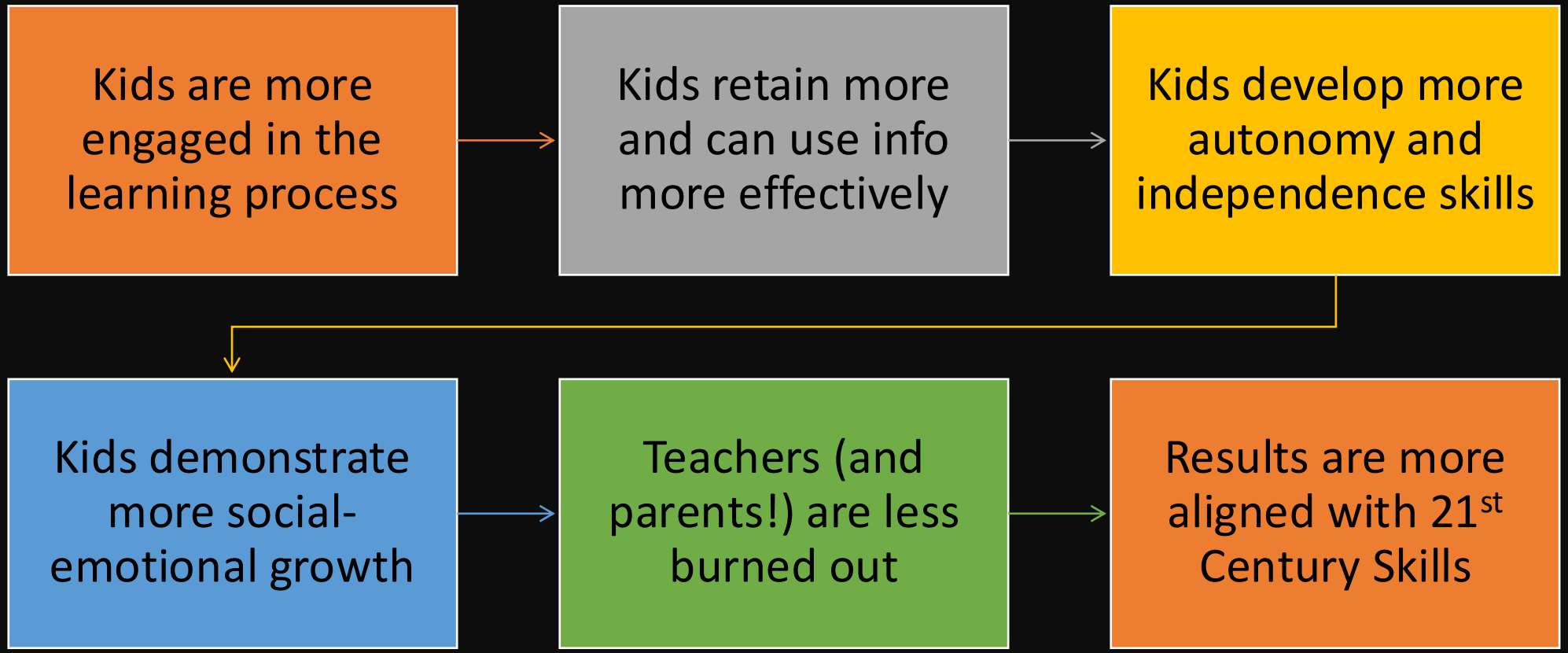
IBL Outcomes



Our kids will show us the way… if we let them

IBL is a research-based educational strategy that leverages intrinsic motivation and interest to engage learners

We can connect anything to anything - Content can be taught along the way

Resiliency grows more naturally through intrinsic motivation

Instruction can be differentiated along readiness, interest, delivery, and content

IBL naturally involves a social-emotional growth component

21st Century Skills generalize and prepare us for a changing world

Questions?

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Give feedback to Dr. Matt

Scan this QR code

Or go to

https://talk.ac/drmattzakreski

and enter this code when prompted

INTERESTBASED

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Additional Resources

- https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/a-blueprint-for-interest-based-learning
- https://ischoolconnect.com/blog/types-of-research-designs-and-how-they-can-help/
- https://www.connectionsacademy.com/support/resources/article/how-do-interest-based-learning-activities-support-learning/
- https://www.experientiallearningdepot.com/experiential-learning-blog/interest-led-learning-it-all-starts-with-a-question
- https://howdoihomeschool.com/interest-based-learning-benefits-theory/
- https://www.edutopia.org/topic/interest-based-learning/
- https://ecpcprofessionaldevelopment.dec-sped.org/interest-based-child-learning-practice-guide/
- https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/2023/01/23/facilitating-and-assessing-student-engagement-classroom
- https://www.edutopia.org/article/importance-student-choice-across-all-grade-levels/
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