When lighting the way for literacy, educational systems frequently focus on the mechanics of reading and writing. Yet, for students who have traditionally fallen behind, the primary barriers usually run deeper than phonics, structure, or skills. They are fundamentally psychological. Before a student can master a complex text, they must first believe they possess the capability to do so.

This presentation explores the powerful intersection of two psychological frameworks to solve the modern crisis of literacy disengagement: Albert Bandura's concept of Self-Efficacy and Carol Ryff's dimension of Environmental Mastery.

While Ryff opens the door to the world of the students and their place within it, Bandura focuses on the internal drives and beliefs of what a student can actually achieve in the room that they are in. This connection of environmental mastery to master experiences asks the question of 'Do the students know that they can succeed in your classroom?"

In this session, we will bridge the gap between psychological theory and daily classroom practice. Drawing on practical, field-tested application in high school settings, most notably in specialised re-engagement programs targeting the students who find school the hardest, whether it be for behavioural, academic, or social reasons. This presentation will deconstruct how to engineer targeted "micro-mastery experiences" within literacy instruction and how we can reignite that joy in students when they learn something new. We will explore how these specific moments of success in the classroom act as the spark that eventually builds a student's internal belief of their own identity as a reader, a writer, and a student.

By understanding how to systematically build the belief before requesting the outcome, we can sustainably light the way for our most vulnerable learners.