Insights into the psychology of the language teacher and learner - informing best practices

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Overview

- Introduction
- Your experience – the depth factor
- Psychological landscape
- The learner and
  - Group memberships
  - Emotions
  - Beliefs
  - Self-perceptions
- New directions – Positive Psychology
- Teaching practice– Teacher as Facilitator
- Summary
- Q&A

Conclusion

- Every learner complex psychological being

- Learning happens when psychological entity engaged (value / meaning)

- Relational, only through teacher role as facilitator (act your **age**)

- Yet to be incorporated in teacher education

Your experience

Think of a teacher that at any stage of your life, and for whatever reason, was good for you.

-Why was this teacher good?

-What qualities did they exhibit?

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A teacher that was good for you.

Mentimeter

Slide is not active Activate

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A people-based profession

- Were the qualities you identified related to the methodology, pedagogy or content?

Teaching and learning a second language is a total human experience, not just an oral-aural or cognitive one (Stevick 76)

Different methods do and don't work for different teachers

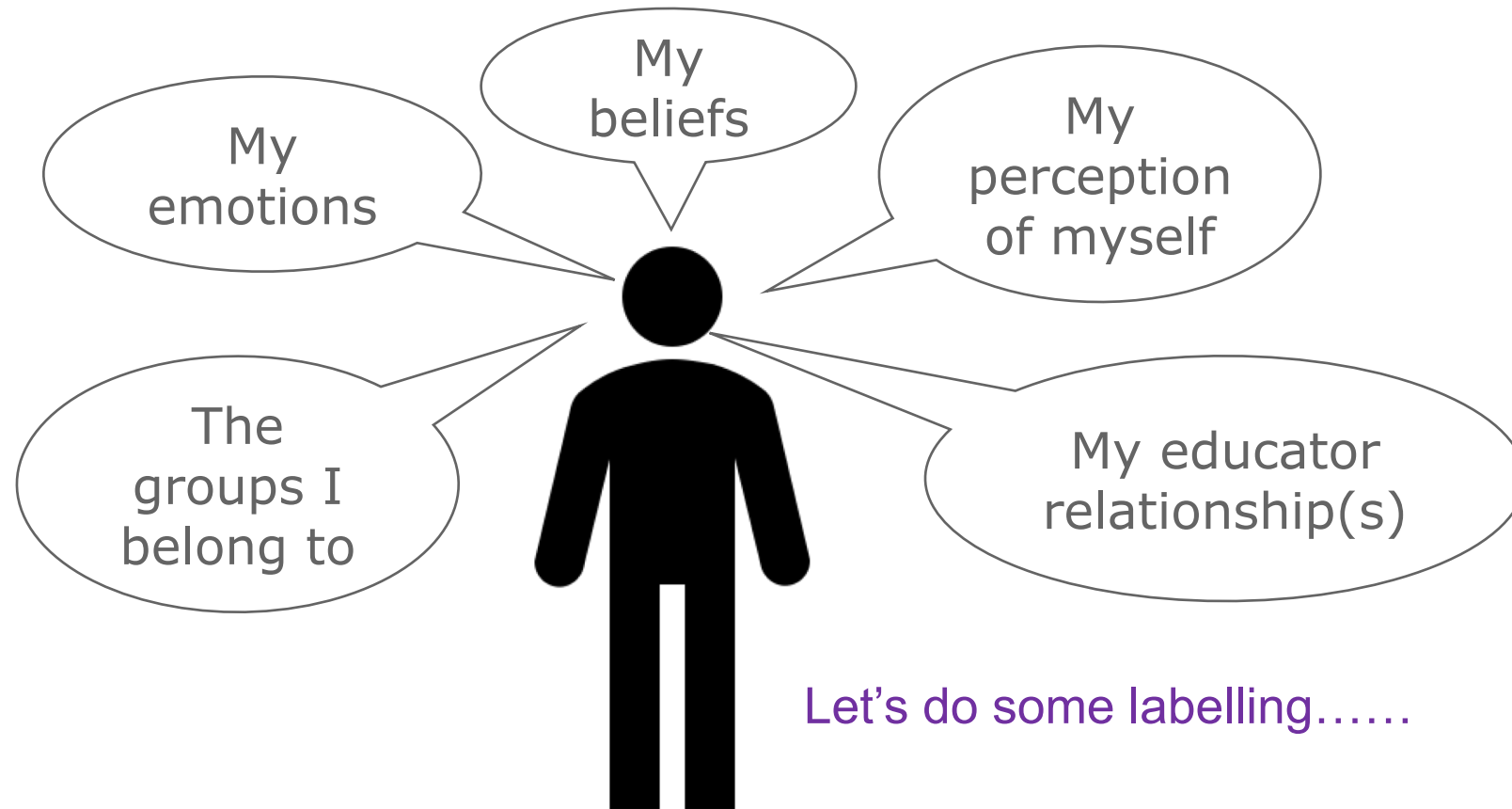Stevick 1976 – Memory, **Meaning** and Method

The depth factor

No one best method – "Success depends less on materials, techniques, and linguistic analyses, and more **on what goes on inside and between people in the classroom**"

Stevick 1980

Only learner knows the experience of learning, whether it is engaging and has meaning. Teachers should facilitate a psychological environment conducive to meaningful experiences that will enable learning.

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Your (learners') psychological make-up

My emotions

My beliefs

My perception of myself

The groups I belong to

My educator relationship(s)

Let's do some labelling……

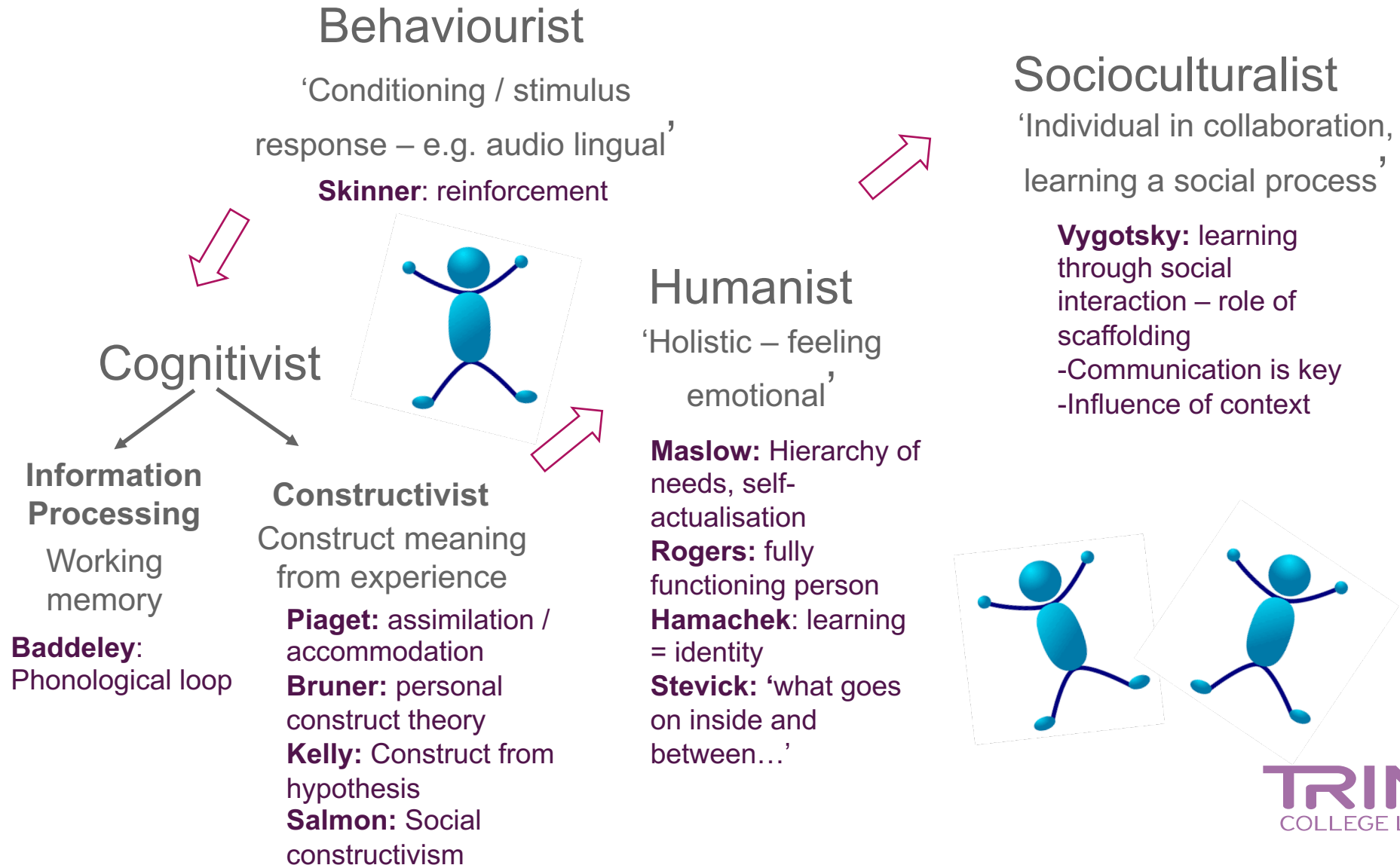*Our learning and teaching practices are strongly influenced by our psychology.*

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The psychology landscape

The educational psychology landscape

Behaviourist

'Conditioning / stimulus

response – e.g. audio lingual'

Skinner: reinforcement

Socioculturalist

'Individual in collaboration,

learning a social process'

Vygotsky: learning through social interaction – role of scaffolding
-Communication is key
-Influence of context

Cognitivist

Humanist

'Holistic – feeling

emotional'

Information Processing

Working memory

Baddeley: Phonological loop

Constructivist

Construct meaning from experience

Piaget: assimilation / accommodation
Bruner: personal construct theory
Kelly: Construct from hypothesis
Salmon: Social constructivism

Maslow: Hierarchy of needs, self-actualisation
Rogers: fully functioning person
Hamachek: learning = identity
Stevick: 'what goes on inside and between…'

The educational psychology landscape

The educational psychology landscape

Behaviourist
'Conditioning / stimulus response – e.g. audio lingual'
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'Individual and context, learning a social process'
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Information Processing
Working memory
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Constructivist
Construct meaning from experience
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Complexity perspective

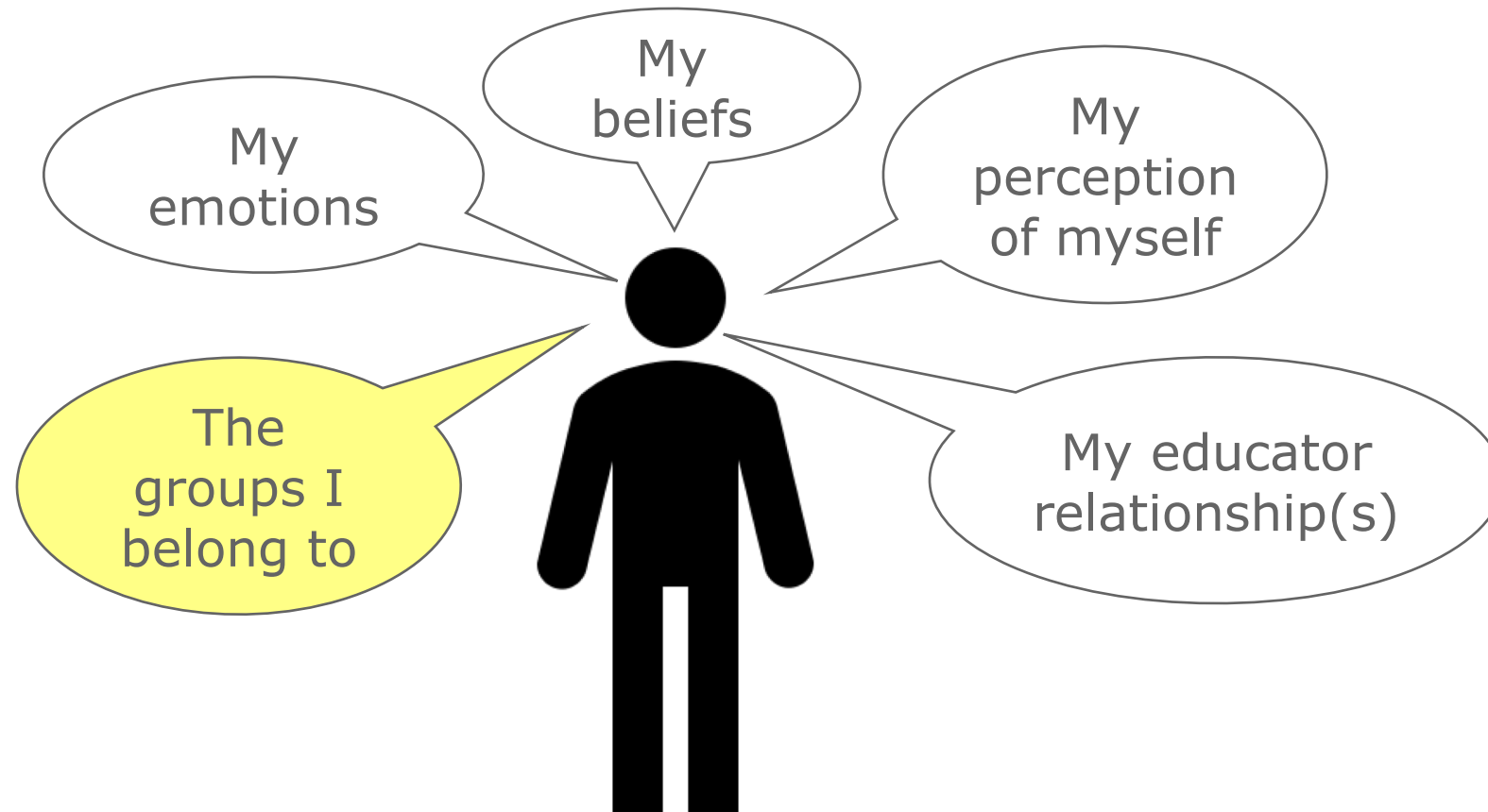'Individual and context, the learner in the environment – highly complex'

Gibson: The person and the context – affordances
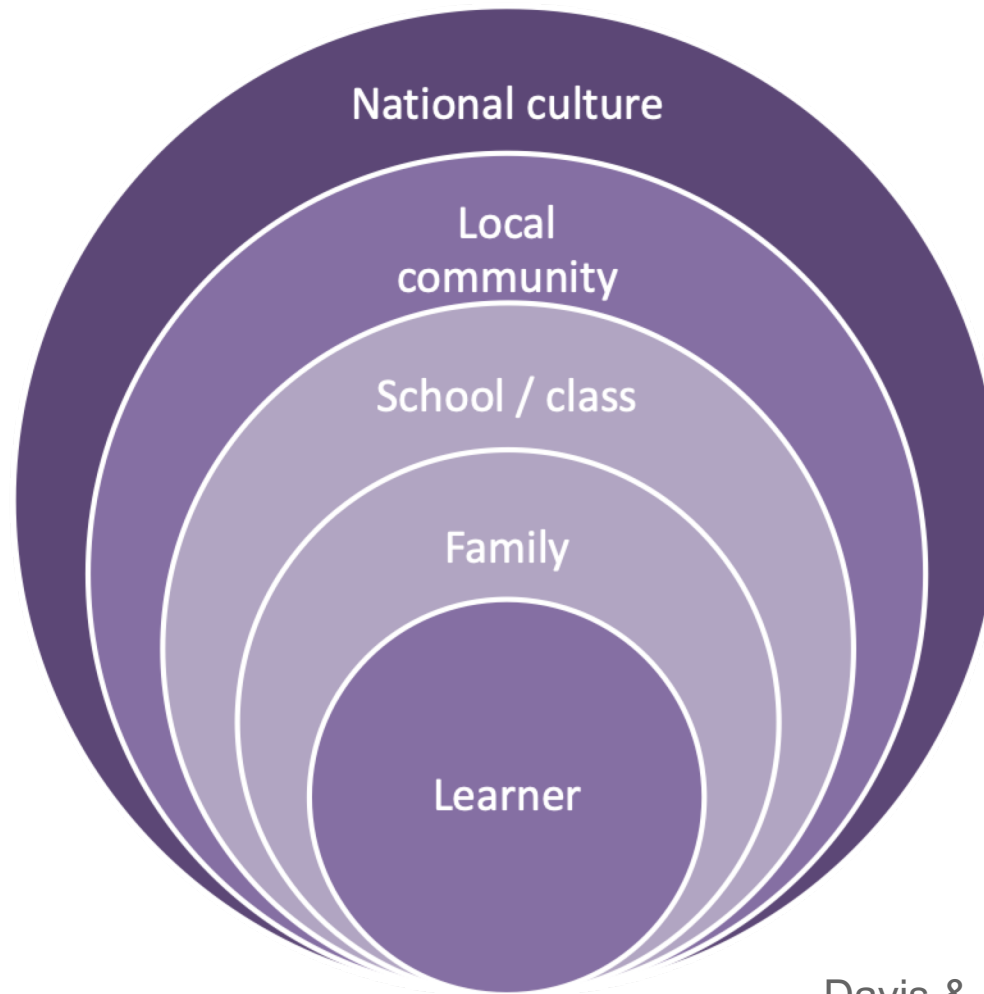**Lier**: interconnections between learner, their perceptions, actions and contexts
-Recognition of complexity, futility of prescriptions
-Complex systems interact and are in flux

So, onto our learners…

Your learners' psychological make-up

Individual contextual systems

National culture

Local community
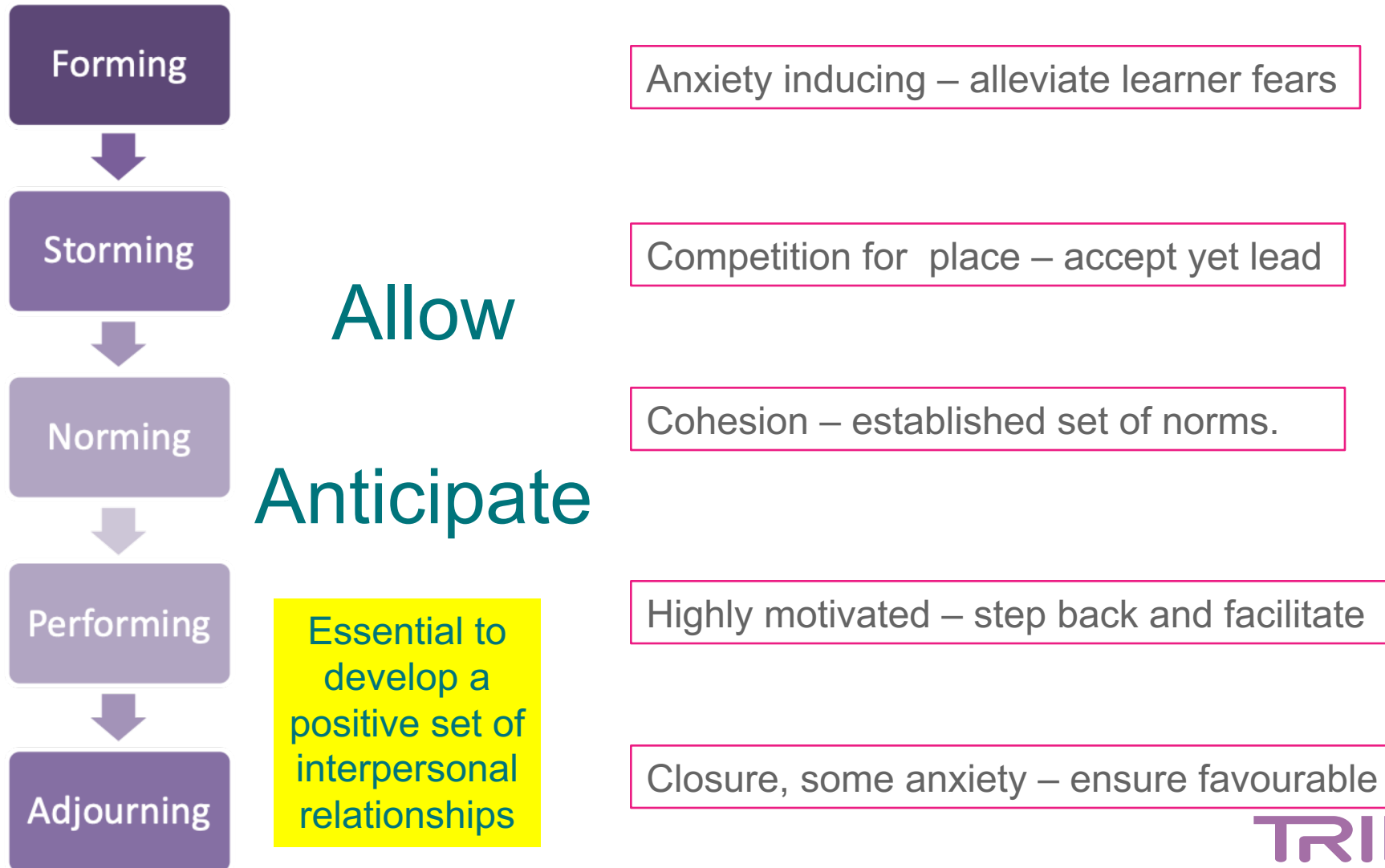
School / class

Family

Learner

- Membership not static
- Experience through lens of groups / cultures to define personal culture
- Group member dissonance

'Every learner has their unique personal set of cultures that they bring with them to the classroom' (Holiday 1994)

As teachers we need to facilitate learner's reconciliation of their membership of the class group with their other groups.
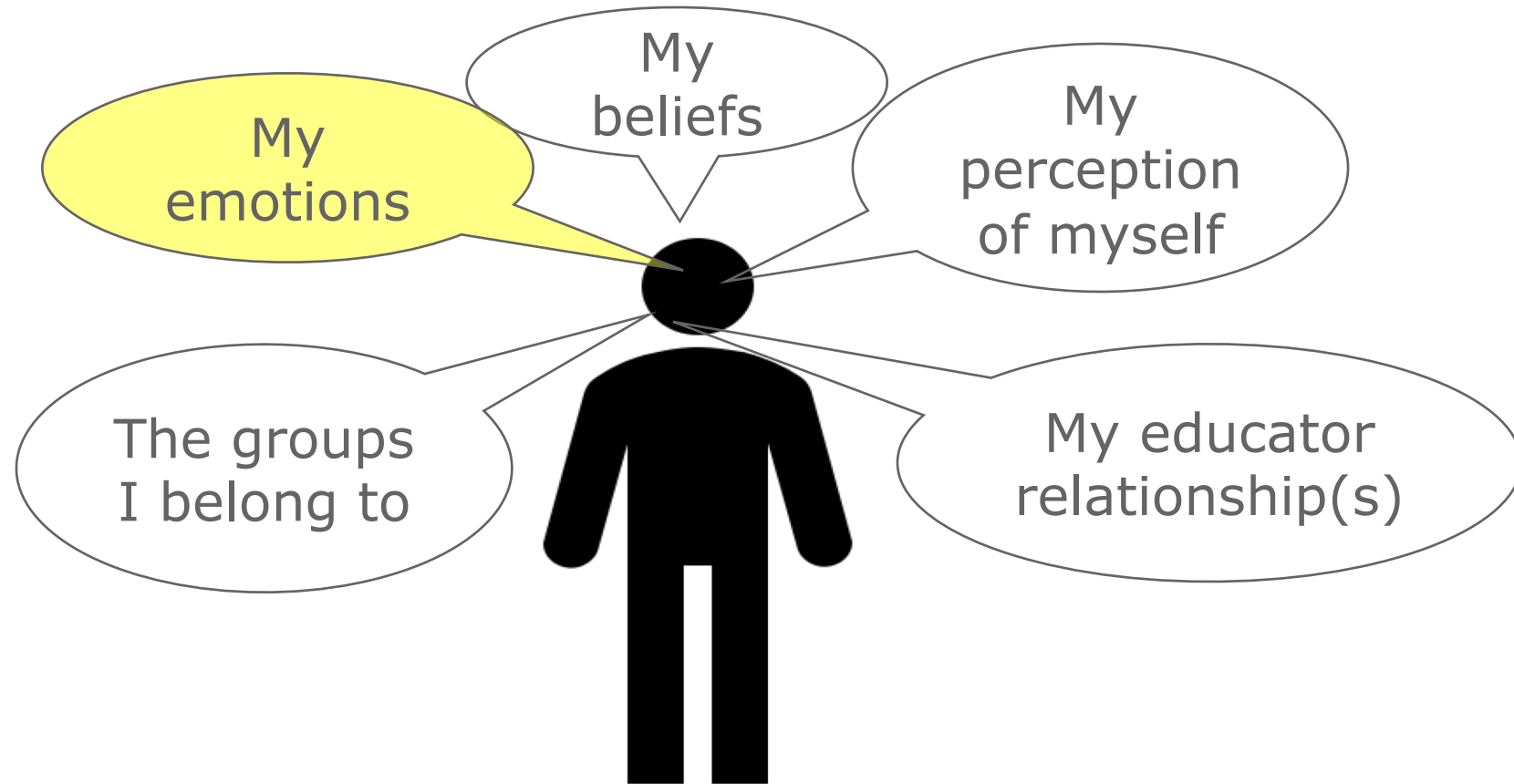
Davis & Sumara 2006

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Group formation process – teacher role

Forming

Storming

Norming

Performing

Adjourning

Allow

Anticipate

Essential to develop a positive set of interpersonal relationships

Anxiety inducing – alleviate learner fears

Competition for place – accept yet lead

Cohesion – established set of norms.

Highly motivated – step back and facilitate

Closure, some anxiety – ensure favourable

Tuckman 1965

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Your learners' psychological make-up

My emotions - Positive psychology

- Negative emotions – inhibit learning (Krashen – affective filter)

- Positive emotions – enhance learning (more creative, resilient to stress, build positive relationships…)

Flow – utterly absorbed in learning (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)

Meaning – greater meaning than self-gratification (Seligman et al 2009)
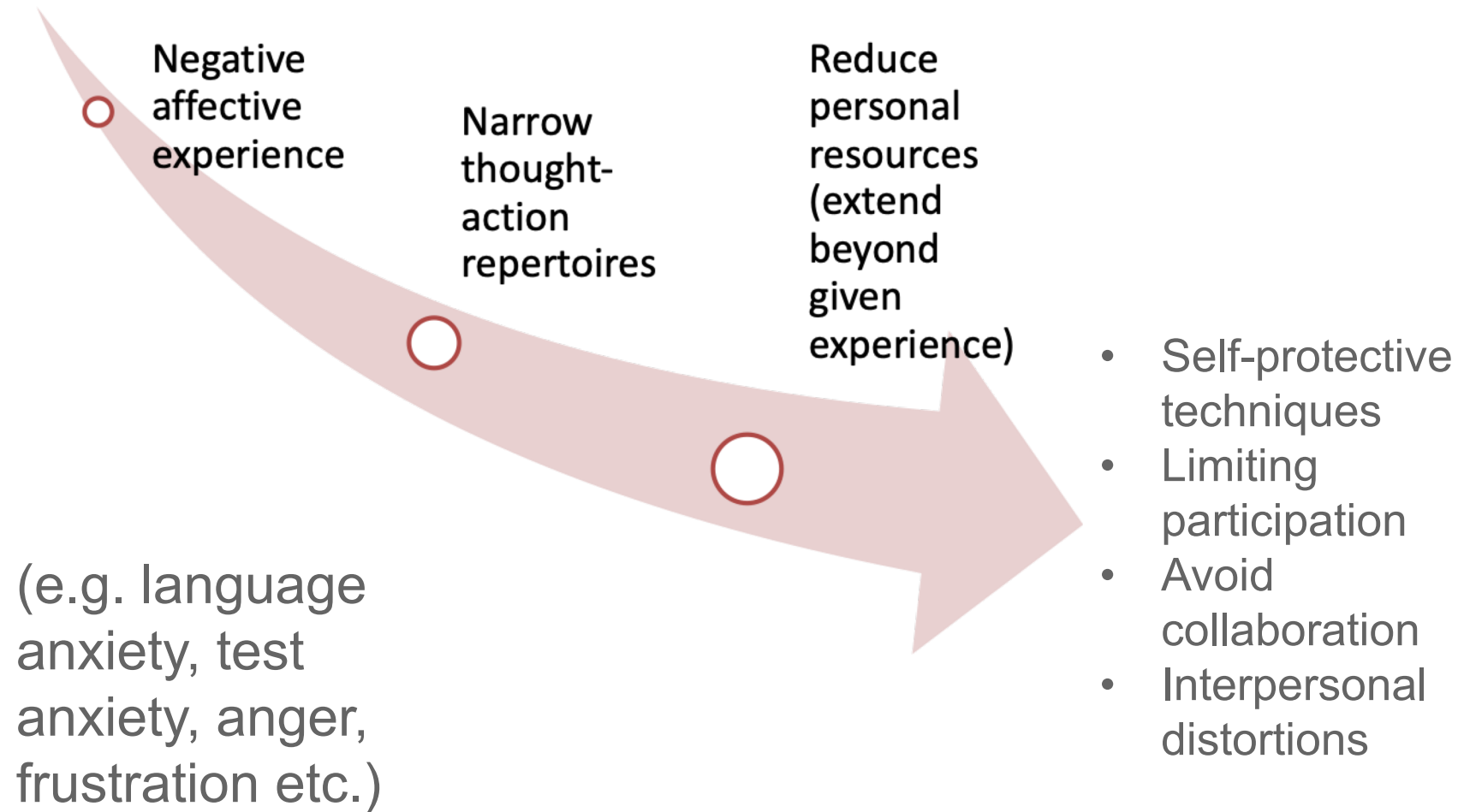
Positive Psychology in SLA
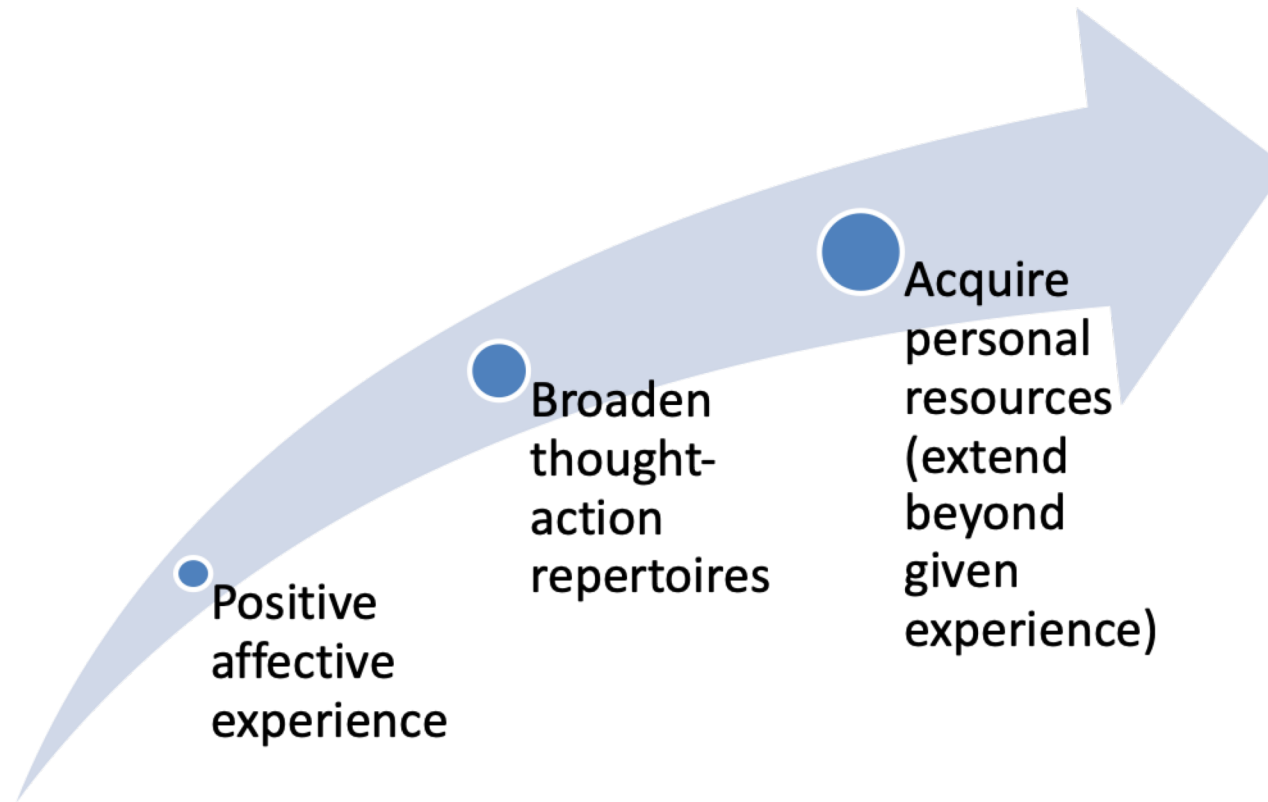
- increase learning potential
- techniques for coping and resiliency
- formation of adaptive spirals (feeling, thinking, acting)
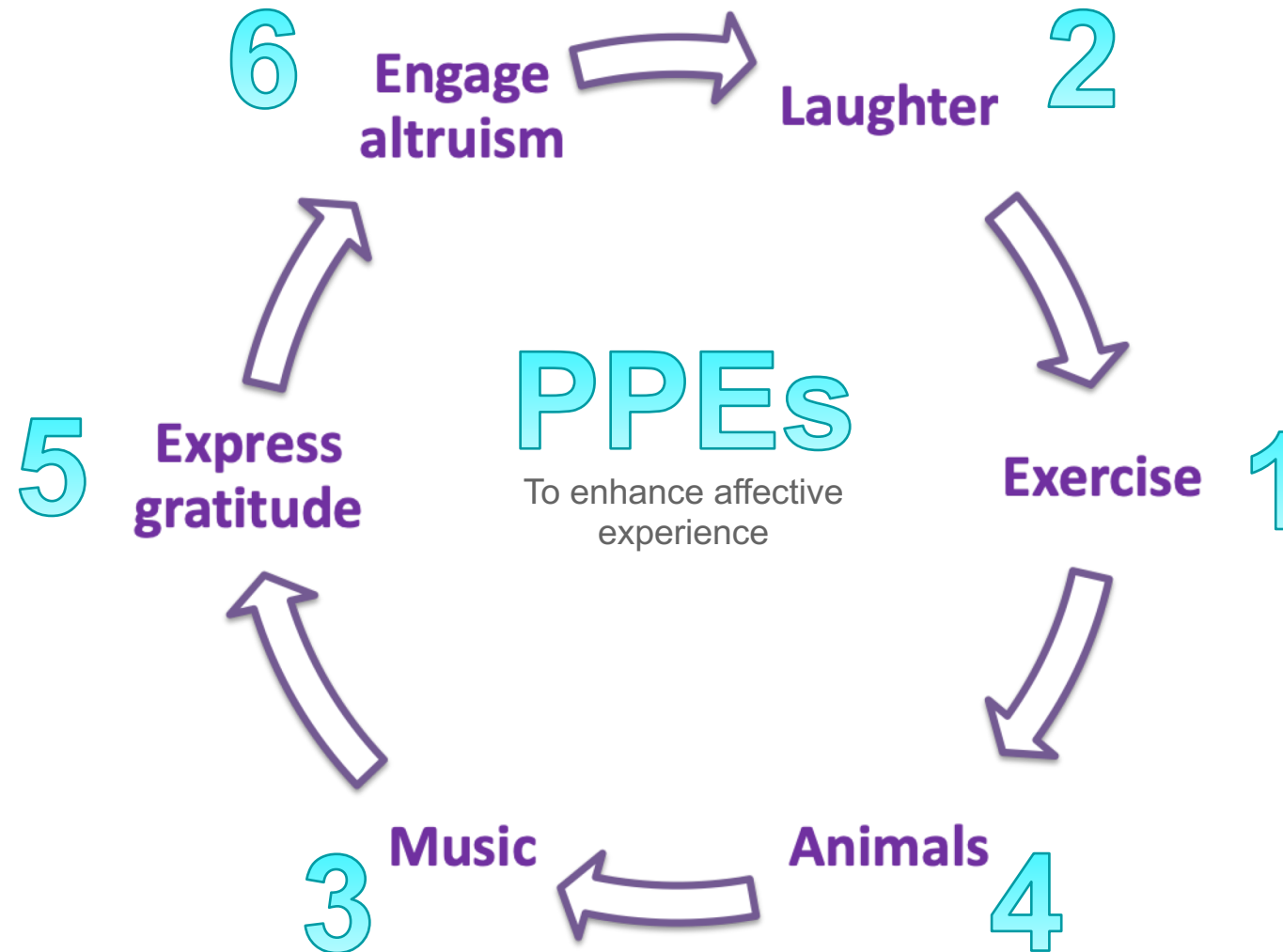
Gregersen et al 2016

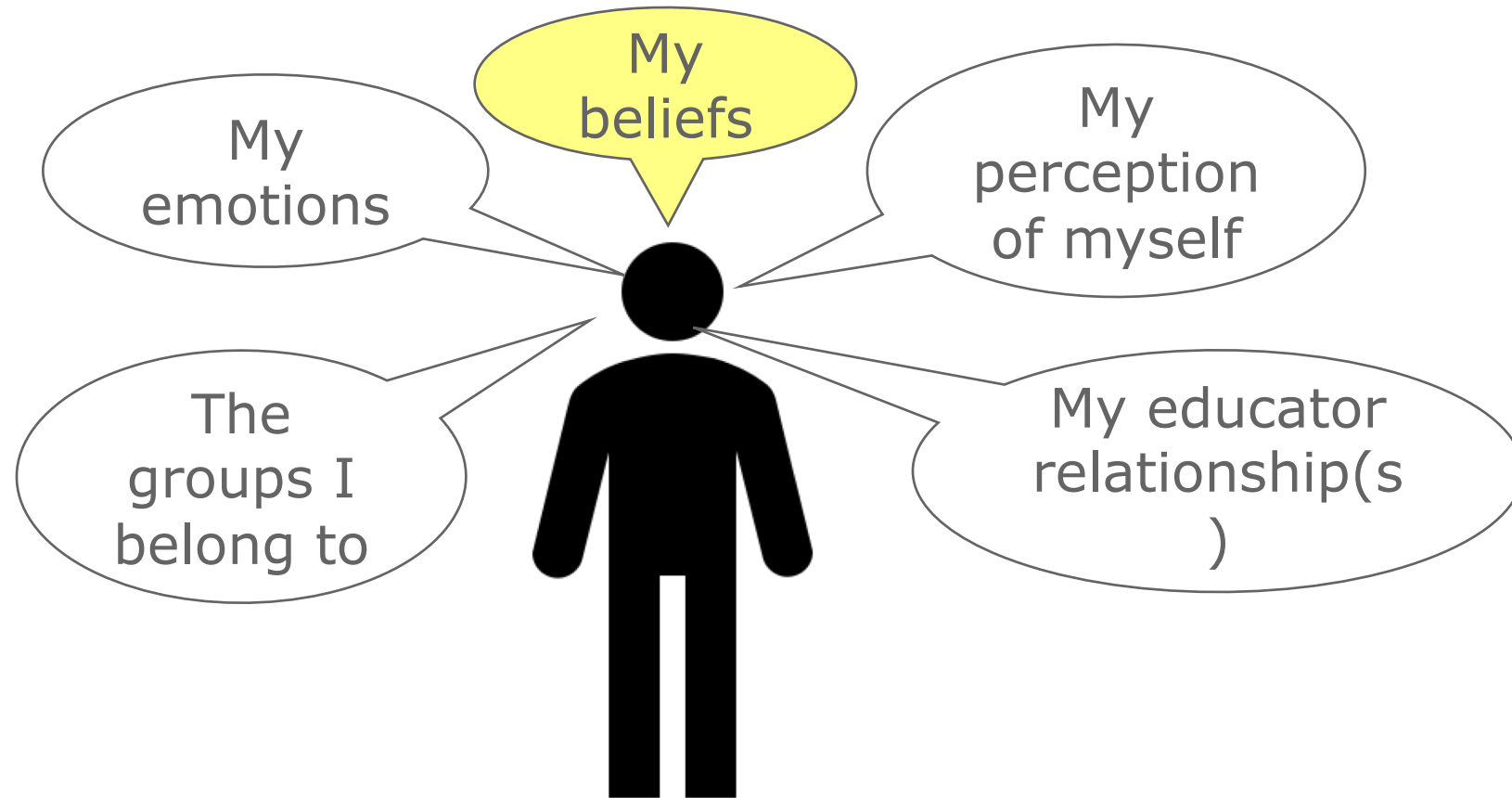Results in the building of **social capital**

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Positive Psychology in SLA

Negative affective experience

Narrow thought-action repertoires

Reduce personal resources (extend beyond given experience)

(e.g. language anxiety, test anxiety, anger, frustration etc.)

- Self-protective techniques
- Limiting participation
- Avoid collaboration
- Interpersonal distortions

Gregersen et al 2016

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Positive Psychology Exercises (PPEs)

Gregersen et al 2017

Activity

Role play with a partner – A and B

A: A B1 level **student** experiencing limited progress

B: English **teacher** running a general English course

A: (student) – Please look away / close your eyes

B: (teacher) – Your objective is to find out why the student is not progressing as much as they would like.

Mentimeter

Student experiencing lmiited susccess - statements:

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Categorising beliefs

	Facilitative	Debilitative
Epistemological		
Implicit (mindset)		
Attributions		

My teacher isn't very good…
I'm bad at learning languages…I'm not as intelligent as others…
I don't know enough grammar, I need more to improve my speaking
My class is too difficult, I need to repeat the lower level
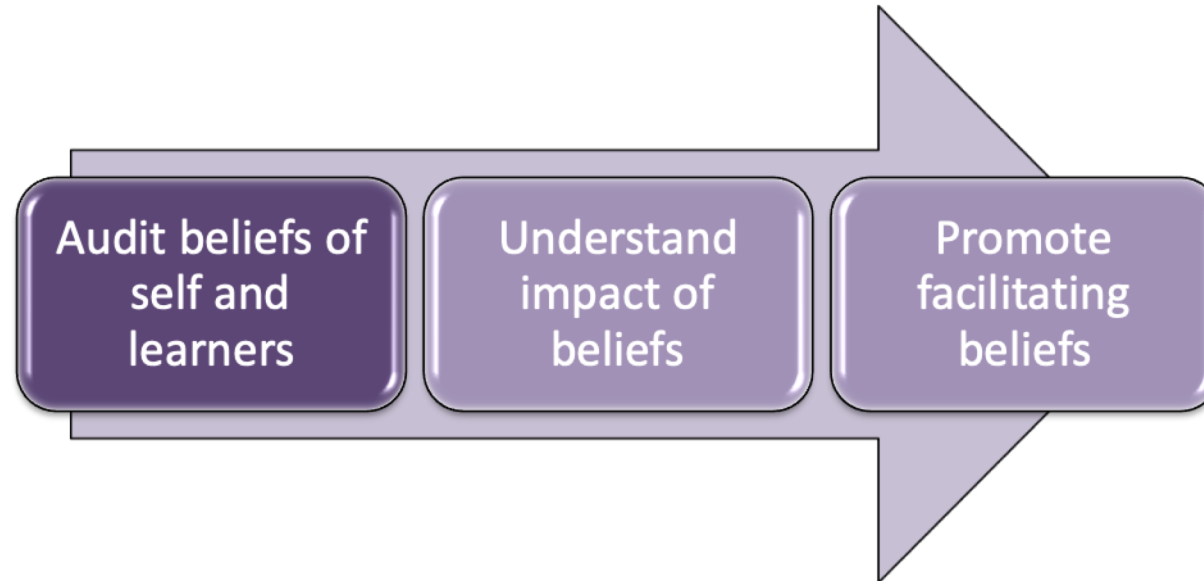*I'm too shy to talk in class*
I only speak when I know I won't make a mistake

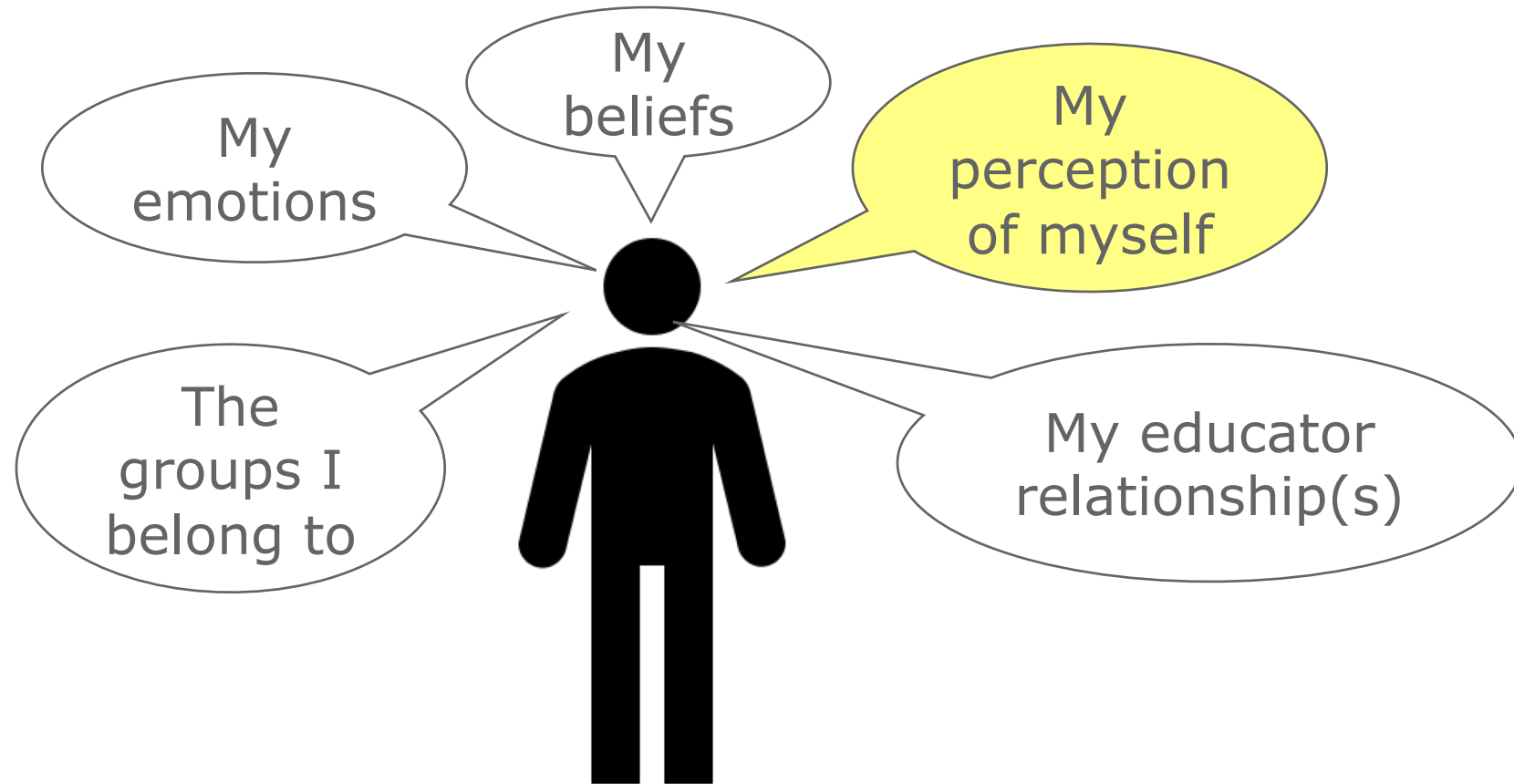Fixed mindset (Entity theory)
Growth mindset (Incremental theory)
Dweck 2006

Belief systems & the facilitating teacher

Audit beliefs of self and learners → Understand impact of beliefs → Promote facilitating beliefs

- Beliefs can change - Peripheral beliefs more pliable
- Teachers influence beliefs (esp. surrounding learning)
- Can generate a culture of beliefs that optimize learning

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Your learners' psychological make-up

Self – key terms

Self efficacy — Evaluation of one's own ability to do something specific successfully

Self-concept — Attitude towards own ability/ competence at a global level

Self-esteem — Overall affective evaluation of self – emotional and holistic

Identity — View of self in relation to specific context or group

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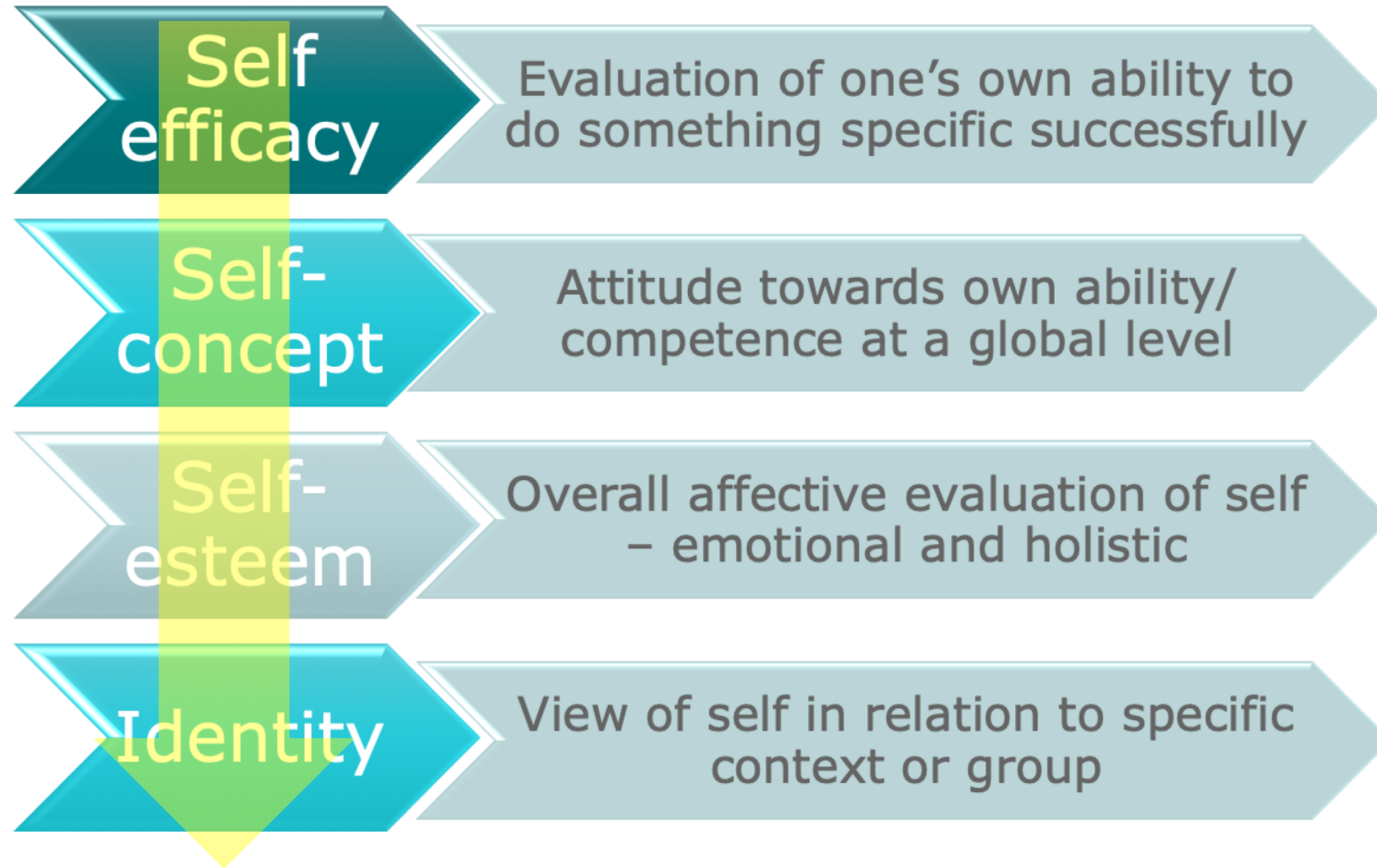
The coherent Self
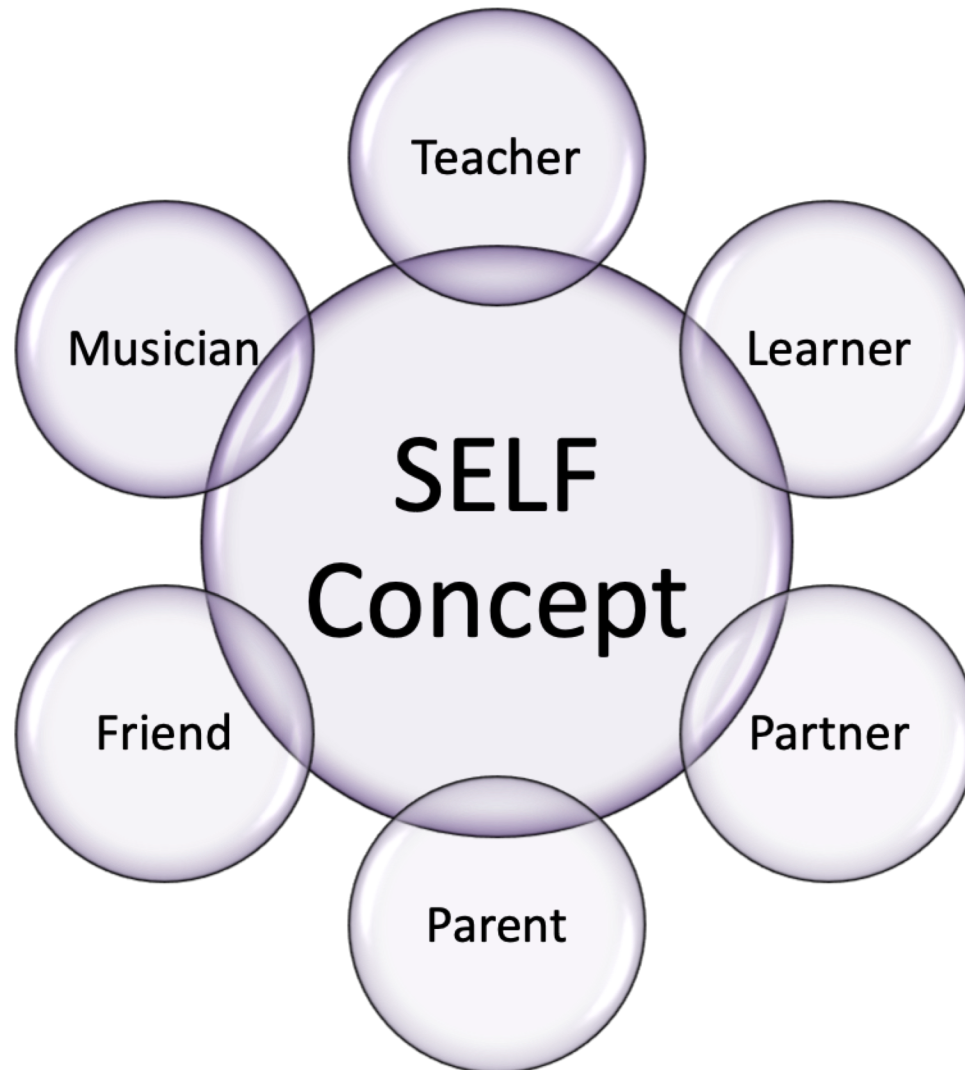
- How do these 'identities' interact?
- Which are in L1 / L2 or blended
- What happens when there is dissonance?

Sense of self as a teacher

Go to **www.menti.com** and use the code **77 22 52**

Who am I as a teacher?

Mentimeter
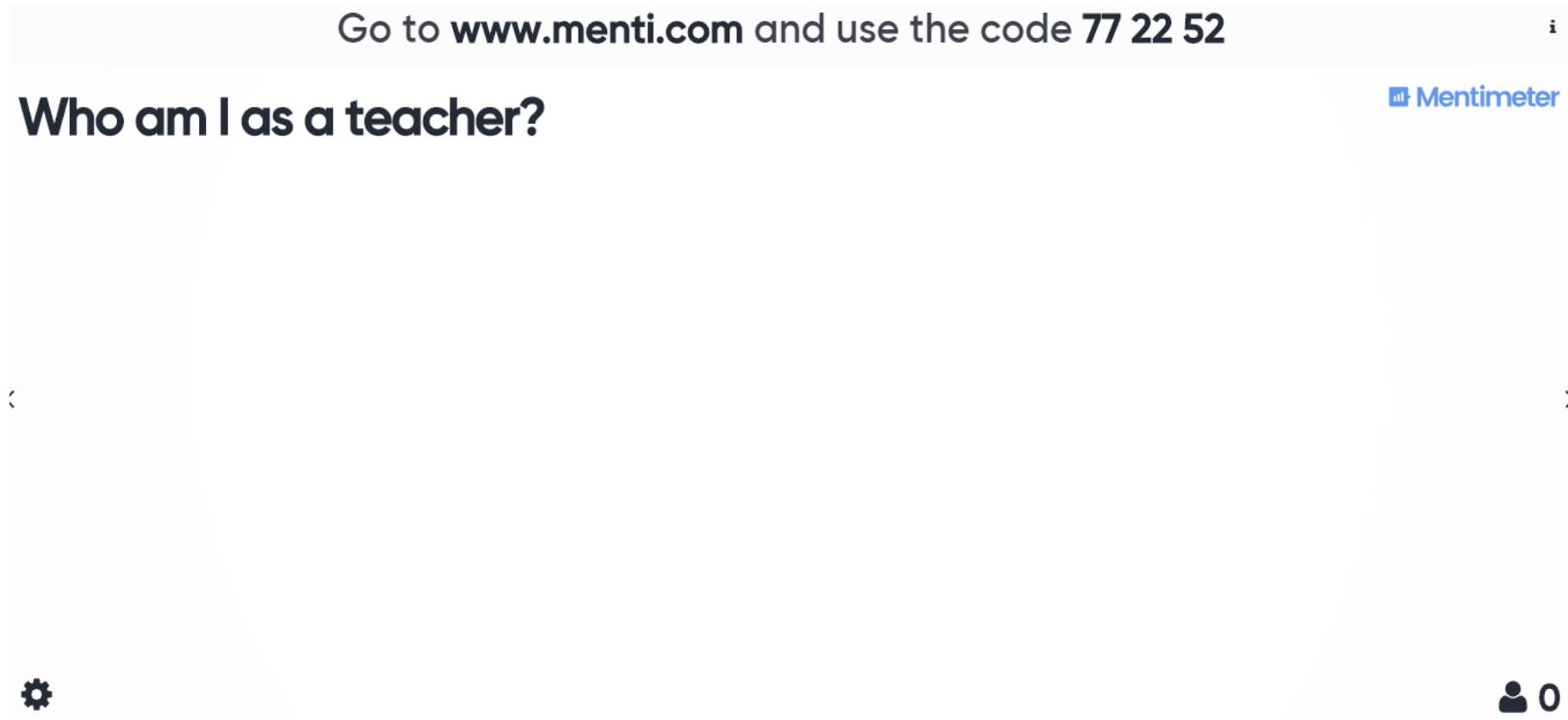
Sense of self as a teacher

Who I am as a teacher	My behaviour

Perception of self influences outlook and behaviour

As facilitators, how can we engage with our learners' self concept?
How can we help learners' raise awareness of their self-concept?

Williams et al 2015

Sense of self as a learner

Who I am as a language learner	My behaviour

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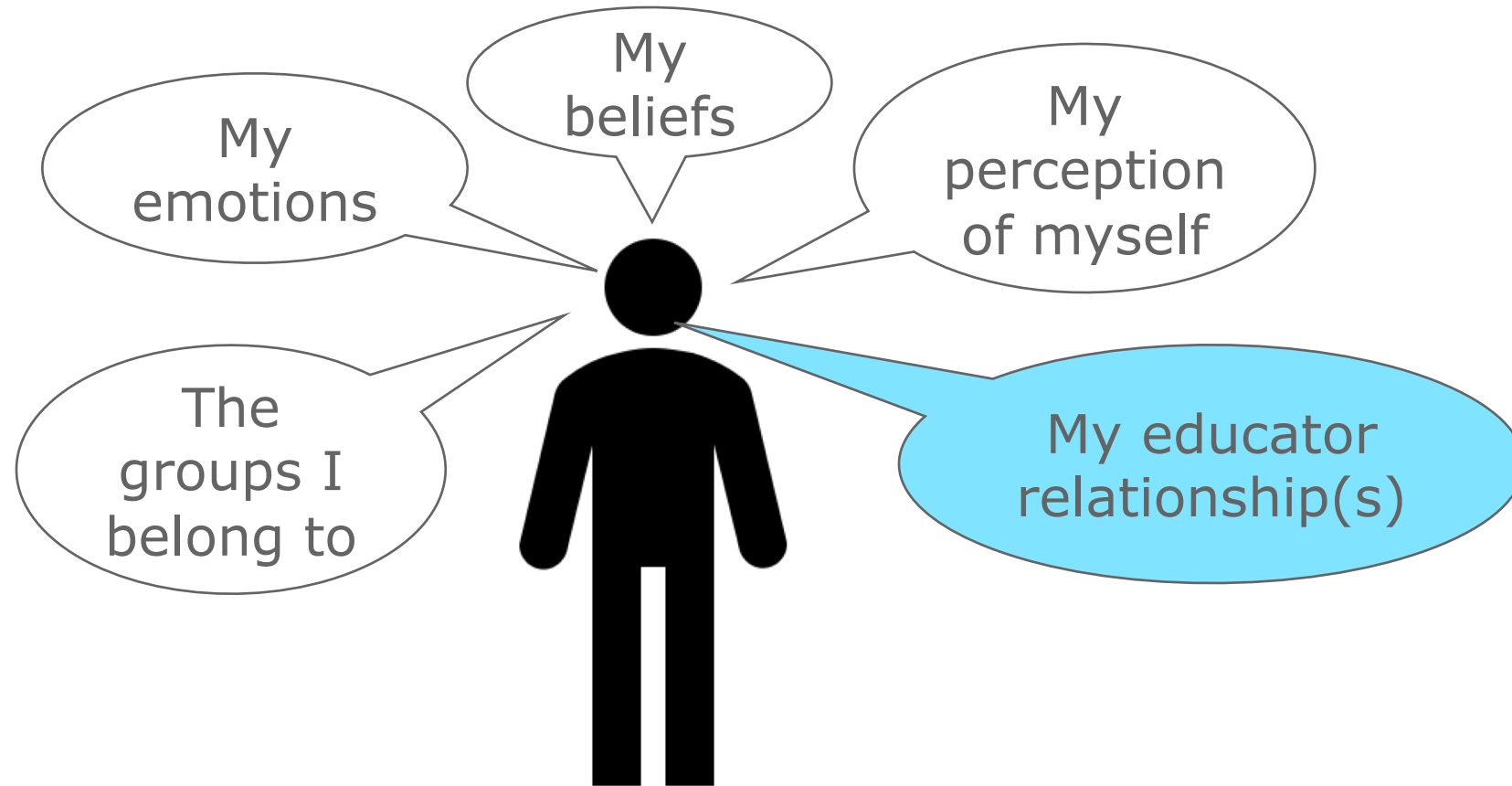COLLEGE LONDON

The Self and Positive Psychological Capital: HERO

Positive **O**rganisational **B**ehaviour [Luthans 2002]

What met scientific inclusion criteria:

Roger's facilitation of learning

Genuineness

Acceptance

Empathy
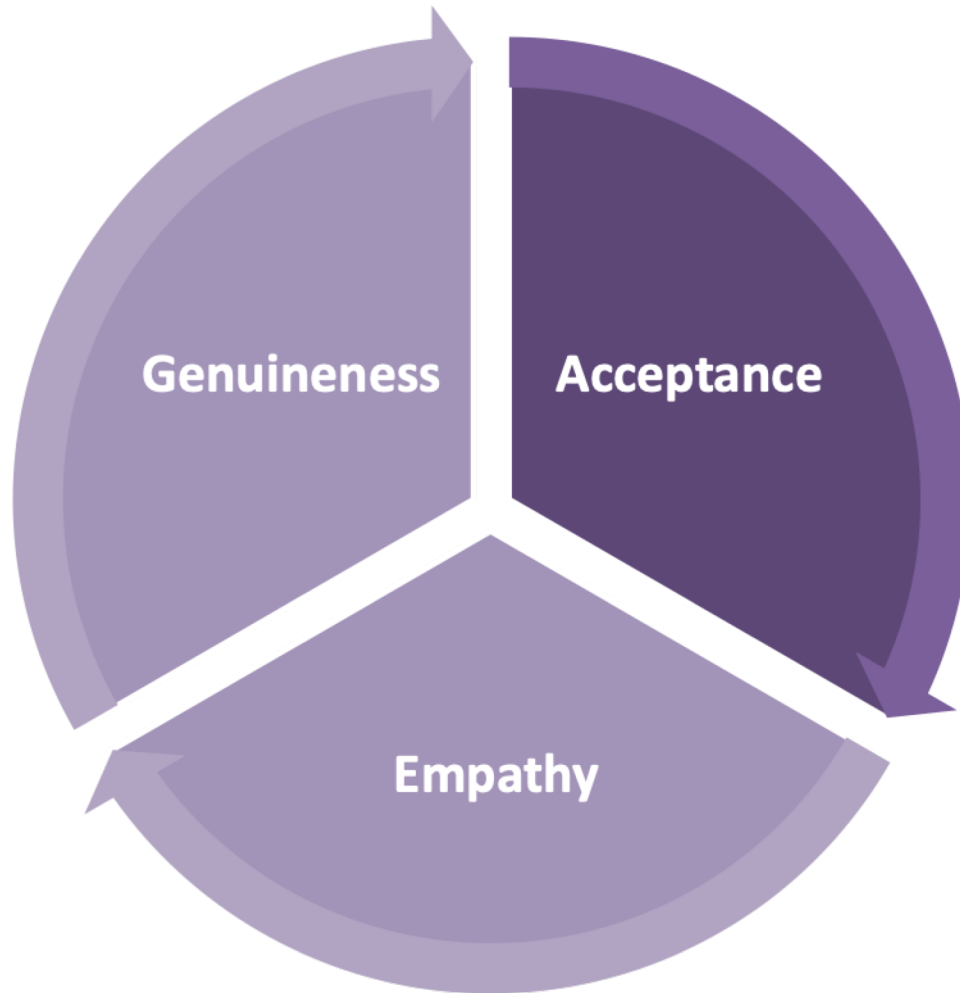
1: Define each quality
2:How do these qualities manifest in your practice?
3:How are these developed in teacher training?

Rogers 2002

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The listening teacher facilitator

As a teacher – how would you describe your listening skills?

'The better you listen, the better they speak'

| Monitor what you do when listening | Be attentive – no judgement | Let speaker get to what matters |

'Listen someone into being'

New Directions – Positive Psychology

Questions from psychology

What do learners attribute success / failure to?

What do learners believe about their ability?

How competent do learners feel they are?

How do learners compare themselves to others?

How motivated are learners to interact in the task?

What emotions does using the language elicit?

What mood are learners in when learning or assessed?
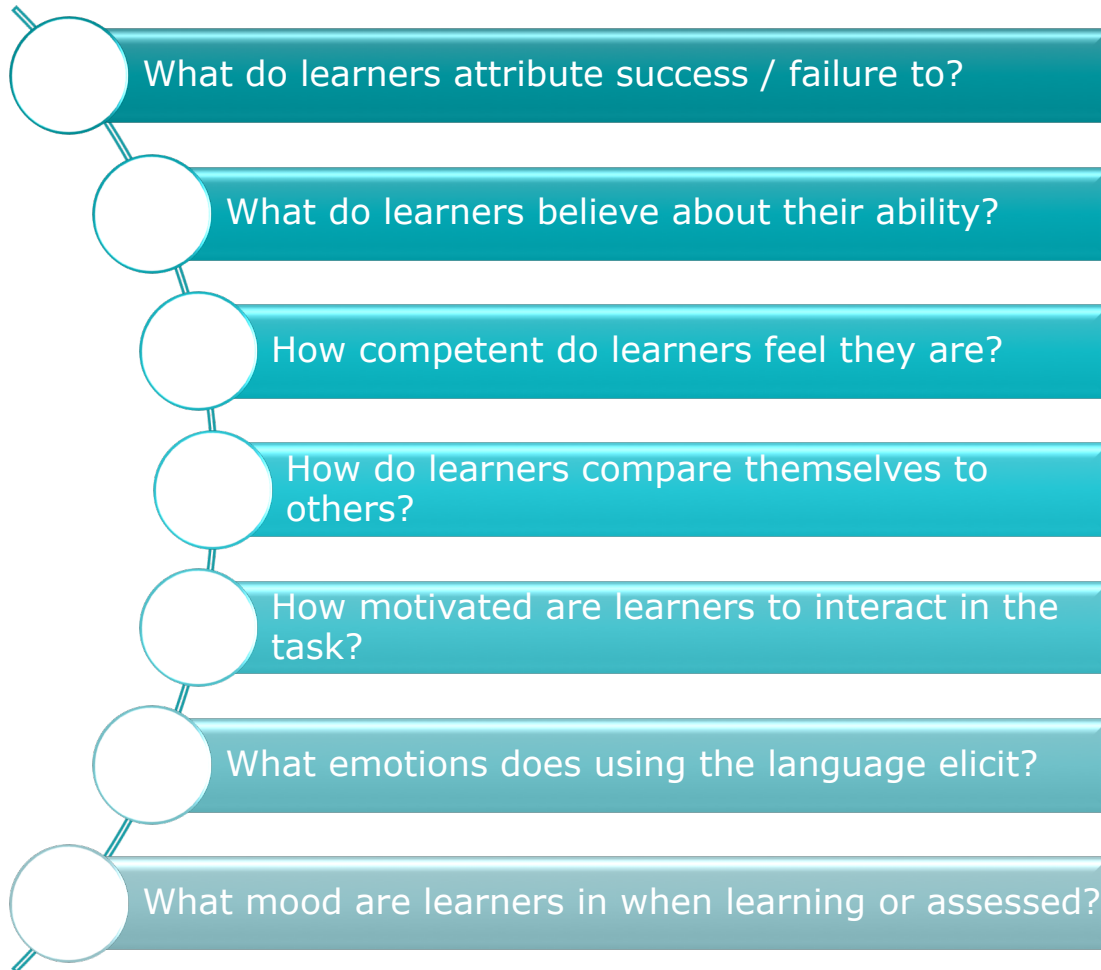
How do your learners describe their learning / assessment experience?

Practices frequently alienate and intimidate learners, leading to high levels of anxiety, and as a direct result, diminished performances.

A shift in educational psychology....

Williams et al 2015

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Positive psychology in language assessment

What is positive psychology?

"... the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that include the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life.   Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000

"... Positive psychology has an added dimension of practice and application that can further inform both the teacher and learner development sides of SLA.

McIntyre et al 2016

Insights into positive psychology
PERMA model (Seligman 2011) applied to assessment

Learners actively engaged in meaningful tasks –
a co-constructed discourse relating to the individual

Tasks require authentic interaction with interlocutor building a communicative relationship

Setting at ease and personalisation together with genuine interest in learner lead to a positive affective experience – scope for formative feedback

Tasks reflect real-world use and give genuine meaning and relevance to life of candidate

Outcomes accurate reflection of learners achievement in a linguistic performance – including formative feedback

ENGAGEMENT
Finding flow

RELATIONSHIPS
Authentic connections

POSITIVE EMOTIONS
Feeling good

MEANING
Purposeful existence

ACHIEVEMENT
A sense of accomplishment

PERMA model - Seligman 2011

Insights into positive psychology (PERMA 2011)
PERMA model applied to assessment

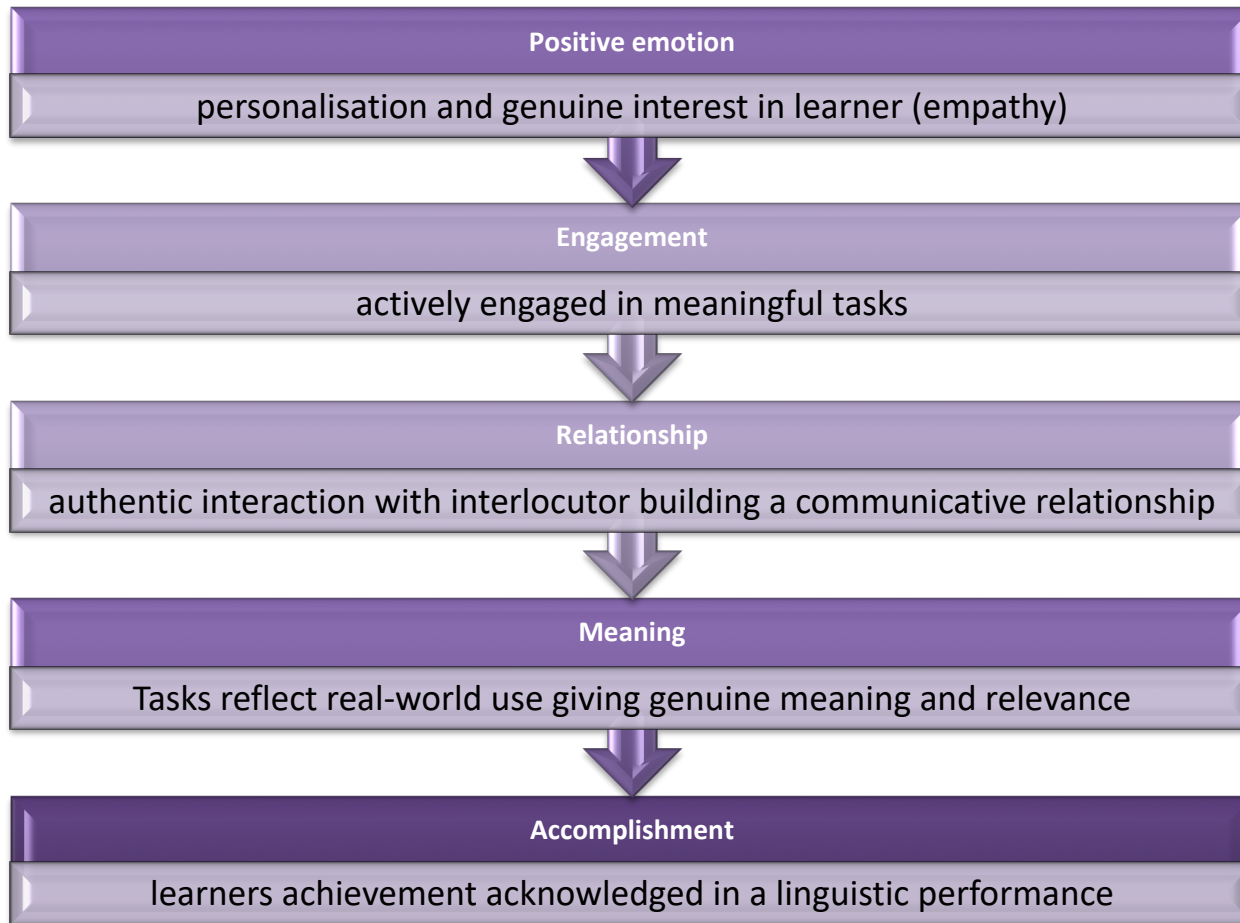|	Given topic to give monologic performance	Select personal topic for dialogic discussion
Positive emotion personalisation and genuine interest in learner (empathy)		
Engagement actively engaged in meaningful tasks		
Relationship authentic interaction with interlocutor building a communicative relationship		
Meaning Tasks reflect real-world use giving genuine meaning and relevance		
Accomplishment learners achievement acknowledged in a linguistic performance		

Insights into positive psychology (PERMA 2011)
PERMA model applied to assessment

	Given topic to give monologic performance	Select personal topic for dialogic discussion
Positive emotion — personalisation and genuine interest in learner (empathy)	✖ / ?	✔
Engagement — actively engaged in meaningful tasks	✖ / ?	✔
Relationship — authentic interaction with interlocutor building a communicative relationship	✖ / ?	✔
Meaning — Tasks reflect real-world use giving genuine meaning and relevance	✖ / ?	✔
Accomplishment — learners achievement acknowledged in a linguistic performance	✔	✔

Underlying ethos places **test-taker at the heart** of the test - the entire 'psychological' self

Personalisation aids candidate performance = learner agency

Authenticity of task (cognitive validity) generates meaning and value

Bias for best – setting at ease and seeking what candidate can do

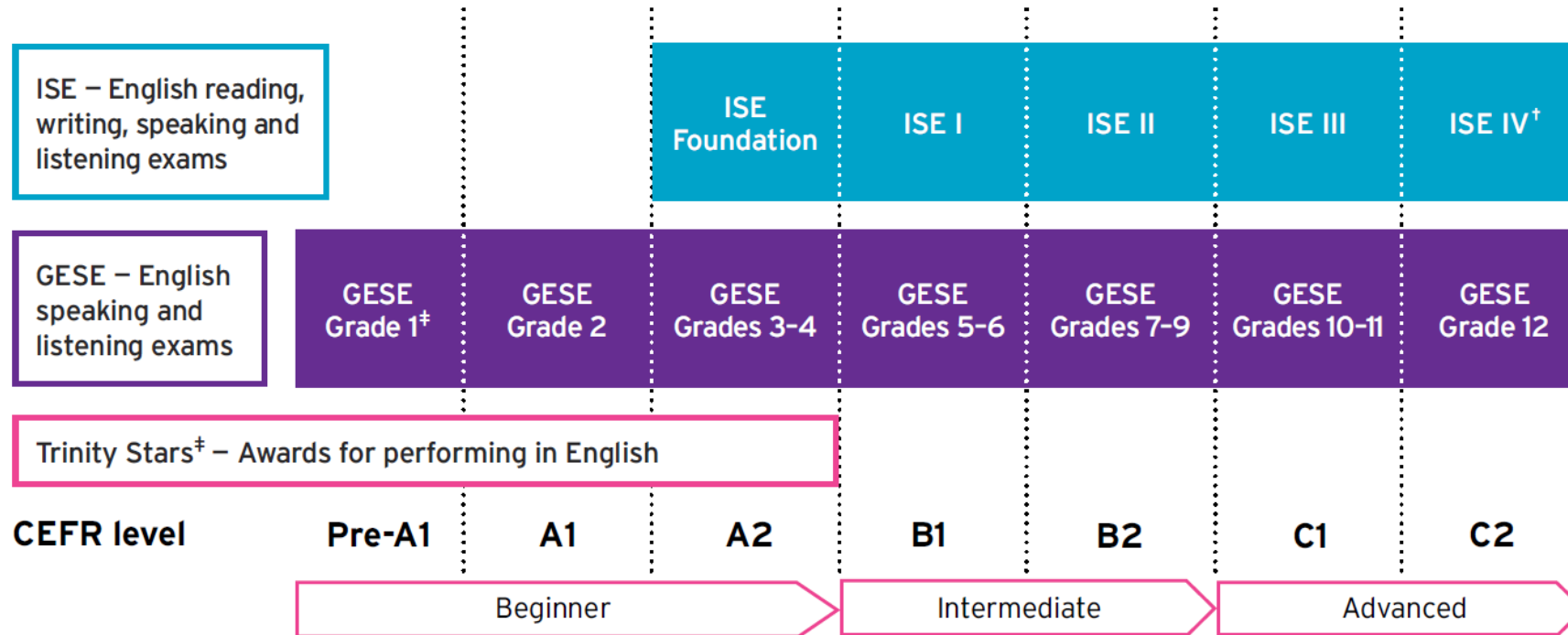Learner **beliefs** around testing can be adapted to enhance performance / aligned to ethos

Testing a **positive affective experience** as relational and co-constructed (ownership)

Stakeholders should seek **positive washback** – tests that teach the whole learner

Best assessment practices embrace learner well being

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An exam for every learner

Personalisation in every task

ISE – English reading, writing, speaking and listening exams			ISE Foundation	ISE I	ISE II	ISE III	ISE IV†
GESE – English speaking and listening exams	GESE Grade 1‡	GESE Grade 2	GESE Grades 3–4	GESE Grades 5–6	GESE Grades 7–9	GESE Grades 10–11	GESE Grade 12
Trinity Stars‡ – Awards for performing in English							
CEFR level	**Pre-A1**	**A1**	**A2**	**B1**	**B2**	**C1**	**C2**

Beginner → Intermediate → Advanced

†ISE IV (C2) has a different format | ‡Not mapped to the CEFR | CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference

CEFR = Common European Framework of reference

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Summary

Move towards centrality of test-taker	Awareness of learner as psychological entity	Contemporary psychology models inform practice	Practices to engage psychological individual	Learner: fulfills potential in performance

Not about a feel-good 'happiology' – rather authentic engagement with the test-taker as a psychological individual to facilitate the best possible performance in a task or test item.

Models available to audit practices– are they fit for purpose?

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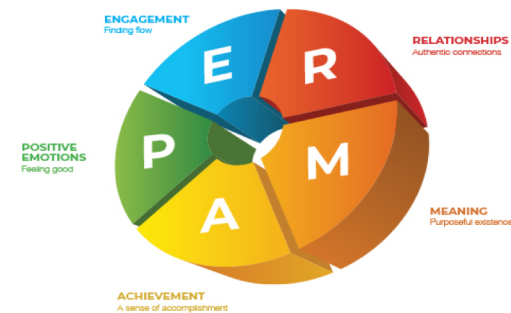
Principles for best practice - facilitation

Group-centred and learner-centred

Learner's life beyond classroom is central

Open pathways of communication

Promote a belief in the potential to improve

Encourage self-regulation / control over learning

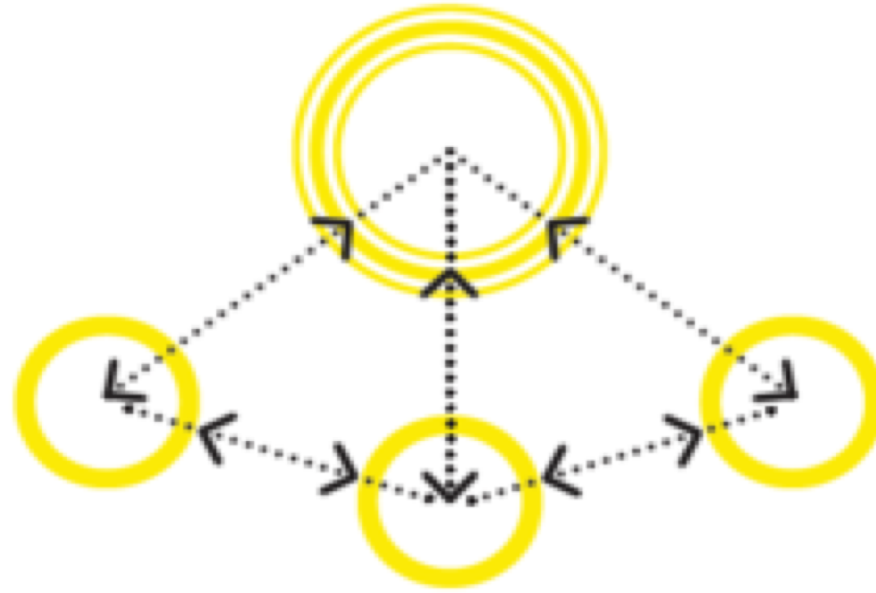Promote positive emotions and reduce anxiety

Plan with motivation in mind – positive attitude

Ask to serve as possible role model

Williams et al 2015

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Conclusion

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Review

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- Your experience – the depth factor
- Psychological landscape
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- New directions – Positive Psychology
- Teaching practice– Teacher as Facilitator
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Selected references

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