

NOT JUST PLAYING CATCH UP: EMPOWERING AGENCY IN REPEAT-YEAR STUDENTS VIA A COMMUNITY-FOCUSED ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMME

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Outline

- Situation of EAP repeaters
- Programme Design: A Community Approach
- Observed Changes & Why The Programme Worked
- Takeaways & Conclusion

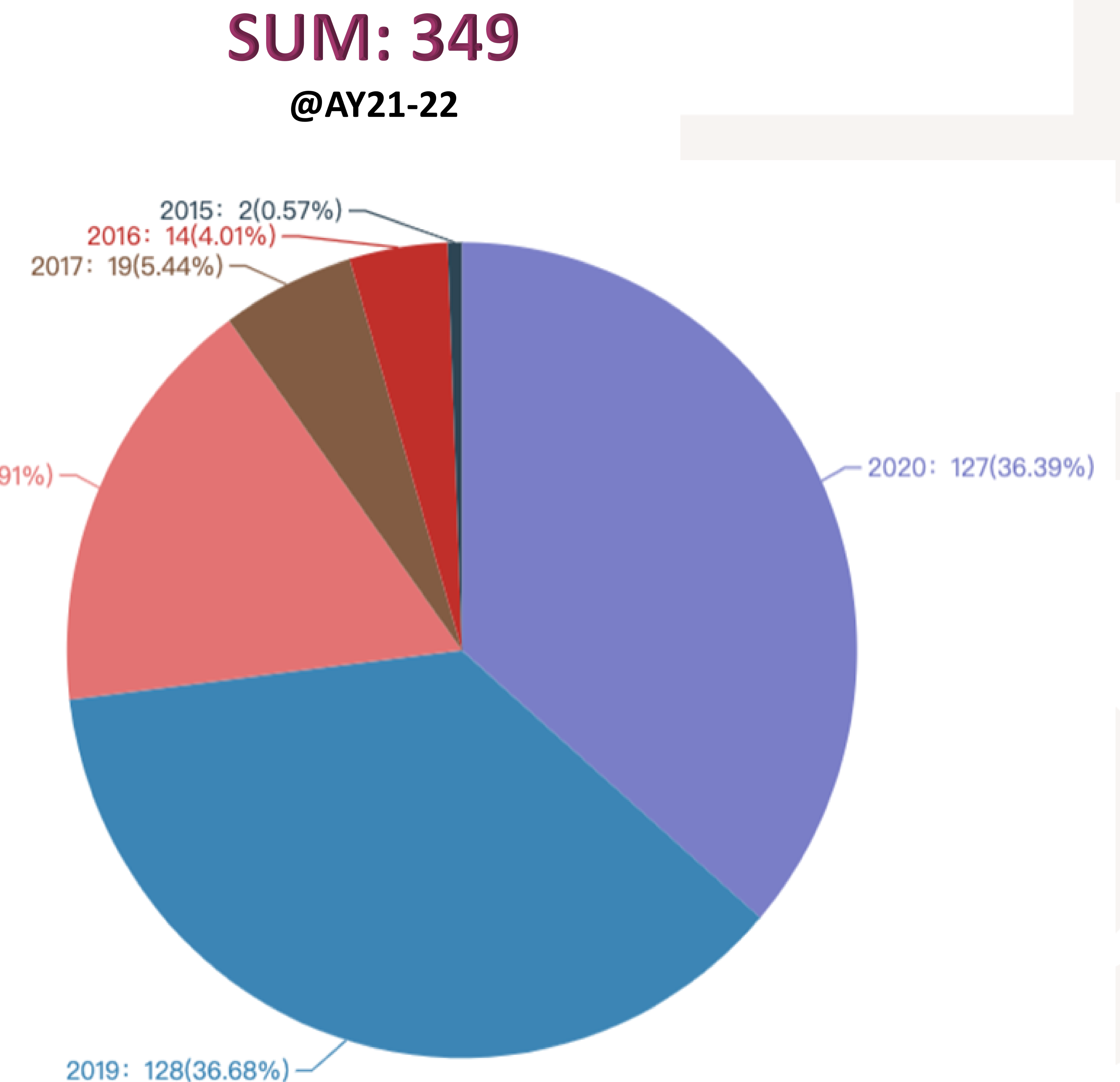


The Challenge – EAP Repeaters' Situation

EAP Repeaters' Struggles

- English language insufficiency
- EAP learning gaps: persistent weakness, e.g., academic writing, fluency
- Psychological pressure: low confidence, fear, frustration
- Social isolation

“I attended 1 EAP class only. In that class, teacher asked me a question. I was nervous, I stood up, lost, couldn't say anything, in the end, I said I don't know. Since then, I never went back, worried they will laugh at me.”



A Community-focused Academic Support Programme

THREE parties involved

1. Student development advisors

- Recruit UG EAP repeaters

2. Academy of Future Education Department

- Recruit and train PG mentors (internship practice)

3. English Language Centre

- EAP professional advisor



A Community-focused Academic Support Programme

Goal: To (re)engage, to empower students to (re)claim control over their EAP learning journey

Duration: Weeks 6-12

Participants:

- 60 *students* → 18 *groups*
 - 18 *PG mentors*
 - 1 *support tutor*
- 18 communities**

Roles:

- *Support Tutor* (Academic guidance)
- *PG Mentors* (Daily accountability)
- *Peers* (Collaborative practice)

Rules:

- Compulsory weekly meetings (large/small)
- Voluntary meetings
- Real-time WeChat monitoring
- Padlet for shared resources and reflection

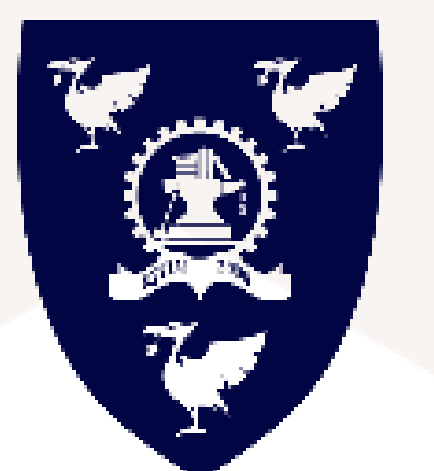
1 Community

=

3 Peers

1 Support Tutor

1 PG Mentor

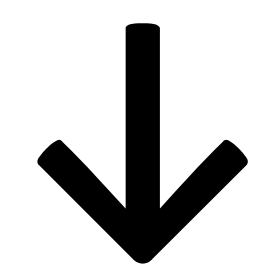


Observed Changes

Agency: students' ability to take ownership of their learning (**capacity**) (Bandura, 2006) and act purposefully (**action**) (Beista et al., 2017).

Before vs After:

Lost, unconfident, isolated



Intentional, confident, connected



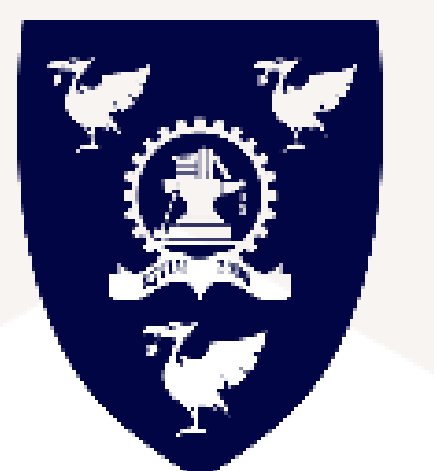
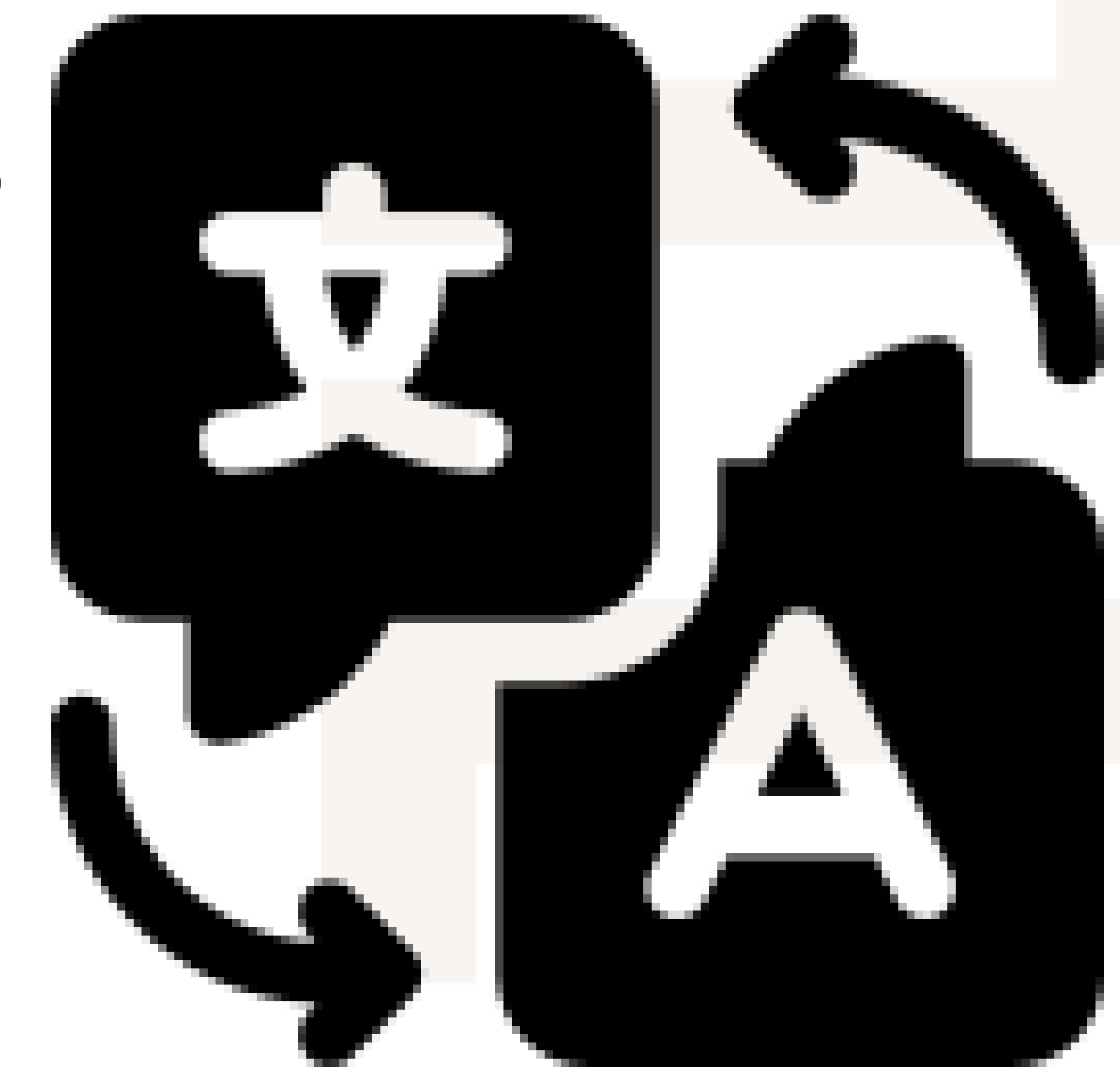
"Before, I guessed in exams. Now I use the full time—because I know how."



Foundational Clarity – 1. L1 Use

- **L1 use:** Mandarin bridged comprehension gaps, allowing students to fully grasp expectations and strategize (Hewson, 2010).

“Using Chinese to instruct is like a process of filling in information gaps. If Cara had used English, I may have felt lost in class. After class, I may not have made efforts to prepare or do homework, because I wouldn’t have understood what need to be done.”

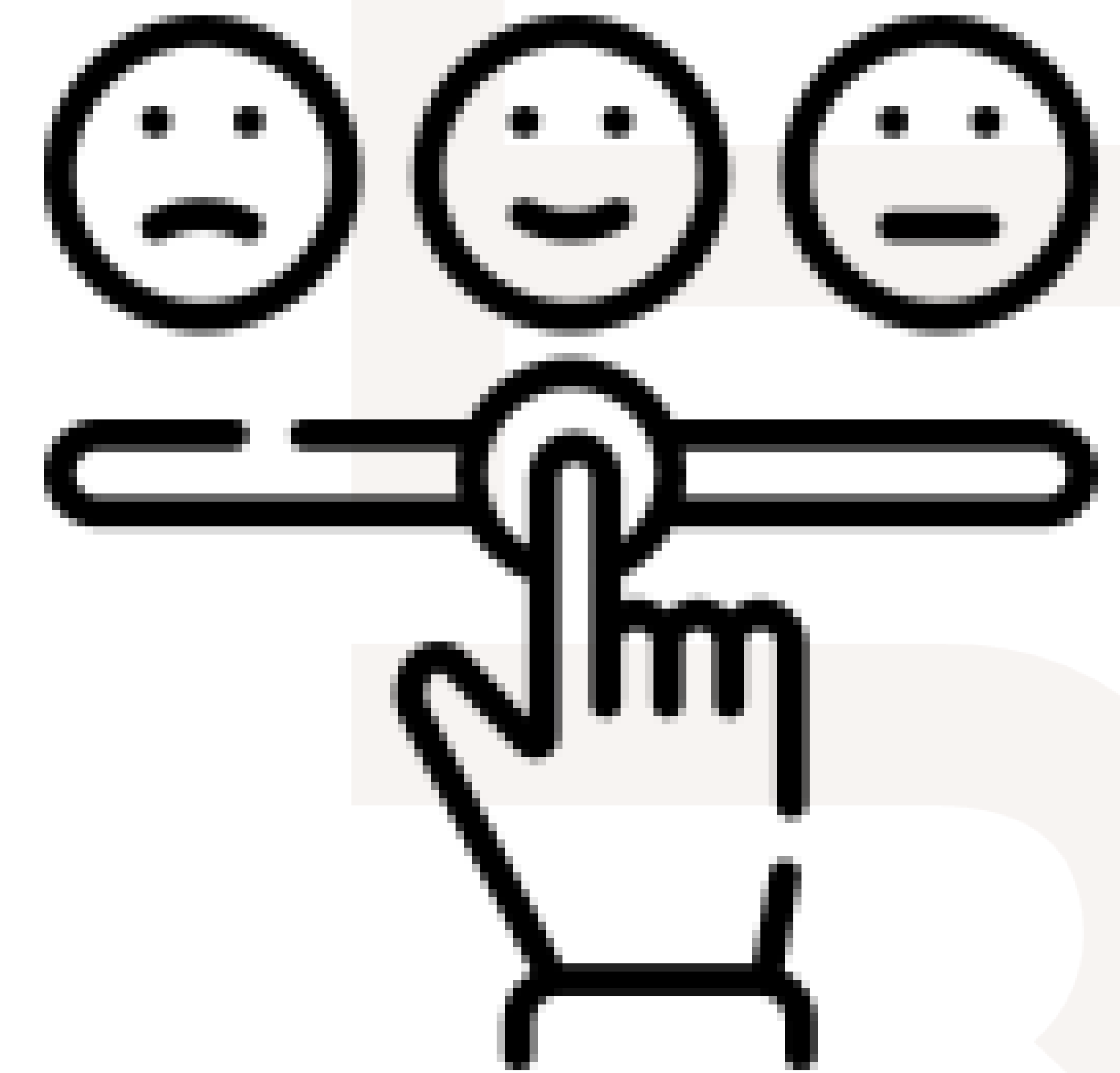


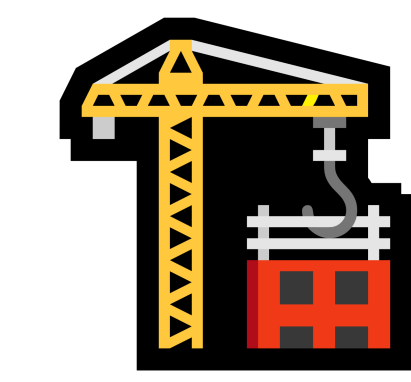
Foundational Clarity – 2. Check-ins

- **Timely check-ins:** Regular check-ins and guidance meetings clarified ongoing confusion, and helped students self-correct and act intentionally (Bandura, 2006).

“Routine meeting provides me with strategies to tackle EAP skills, completing tasks using own ability vs after deep meeting, what to do is different e.g., presentation, I used to do it in my own way, writing script and memorizing vs many points to consider.”

“Routine meeting, though only half an hour to an hour, you will clearly know what you are learning in this period, how to learn, and you have a direction. This program makes EAP concrete: there are things to do, tasks to complete, this pressure drives me to explore solutions.”

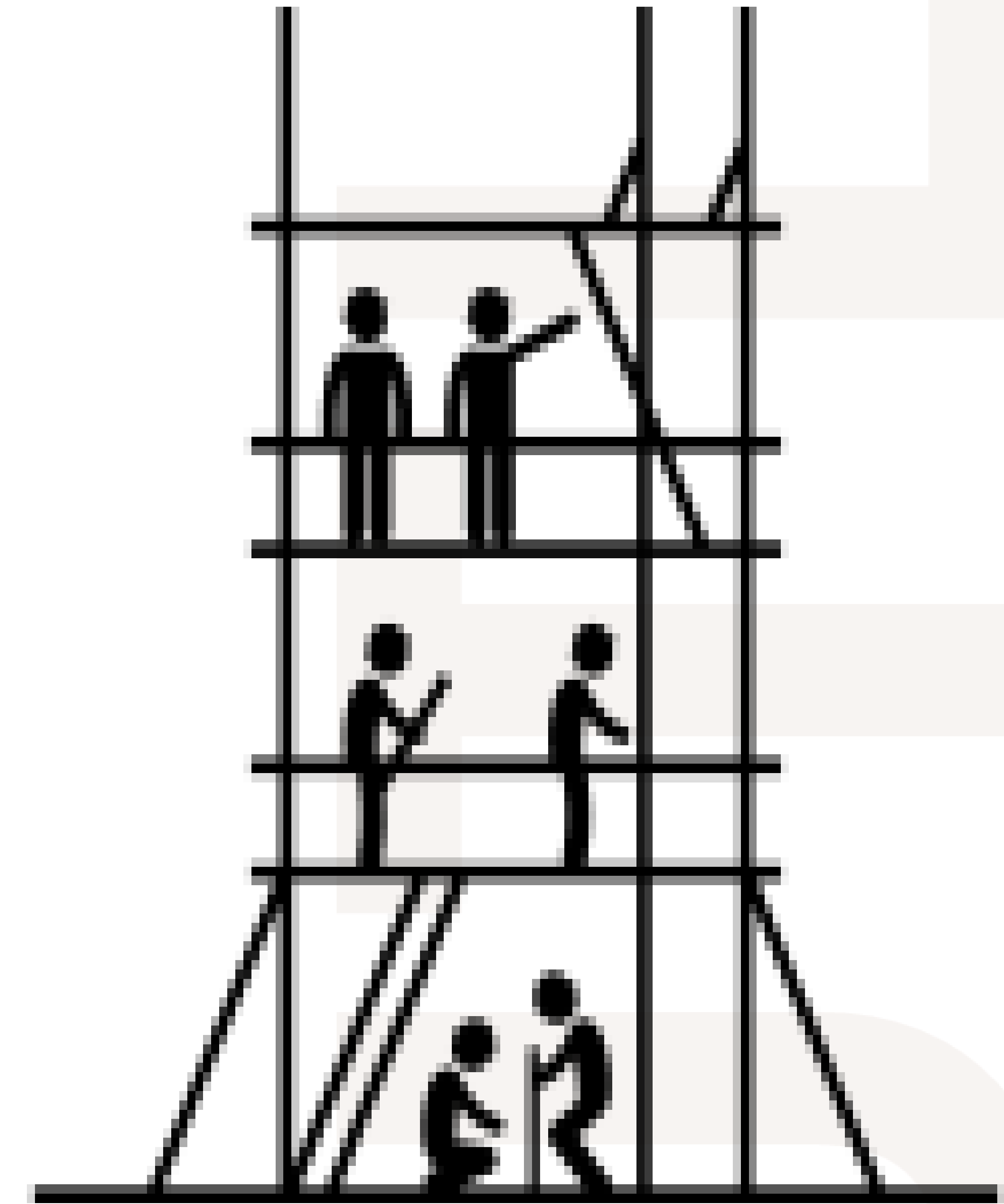


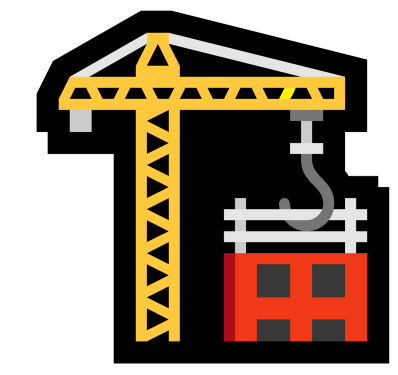


Structured Growth – 3. Scaffolded Tasks

- **Scaffolding:** Bite-sized goals, strategies and tasks created mastery experiences, a key source of self-efficacy (Barab and Squire, 2004).

“To practice speaking, Cara suggested 10-minute listening & reading per day. It’s not difficult to complete. I read a few times, till I can read smoothly. This increased my confidence.”





Structured Growth – 4. Accountability

- **Accountability:** Monitoring mechanism of this programme such as daily Wechat monitoring, weekly check-in meetings, voluntary group practice sessions, made students feel motivated to “not let others down” aligning with agency’s emphasis on purposeful action (Kumpulainen and Lipponen, 2010).

“Because of these routine meetings, I attended more EAP classes. Before this programme, nobody monitored me. I didn’t go to EAP classes, and my EAP tutor did not chase me. In this programme, Cara would monitor my attendance, and would ask me why I didn’t go to EAP class. She also asks me questions related to EAP classes. If I haven’t been to my EAP classes, I wouldn’t know what to say. These meetings will be awkward, so I just go to my EAP class to avoid awkwardness.”

“In a small group, my mentor monitored me more, as a result, I completed more work. Everyday our PG mentor asks how we are getting on with our assignments, and asks us to send him what we have done, for example, listening notes, reading notes, or record a few minutes of our speaking and send to him for feedback. Without this group, I may do less homework, and quality of my work may also be very bad.”

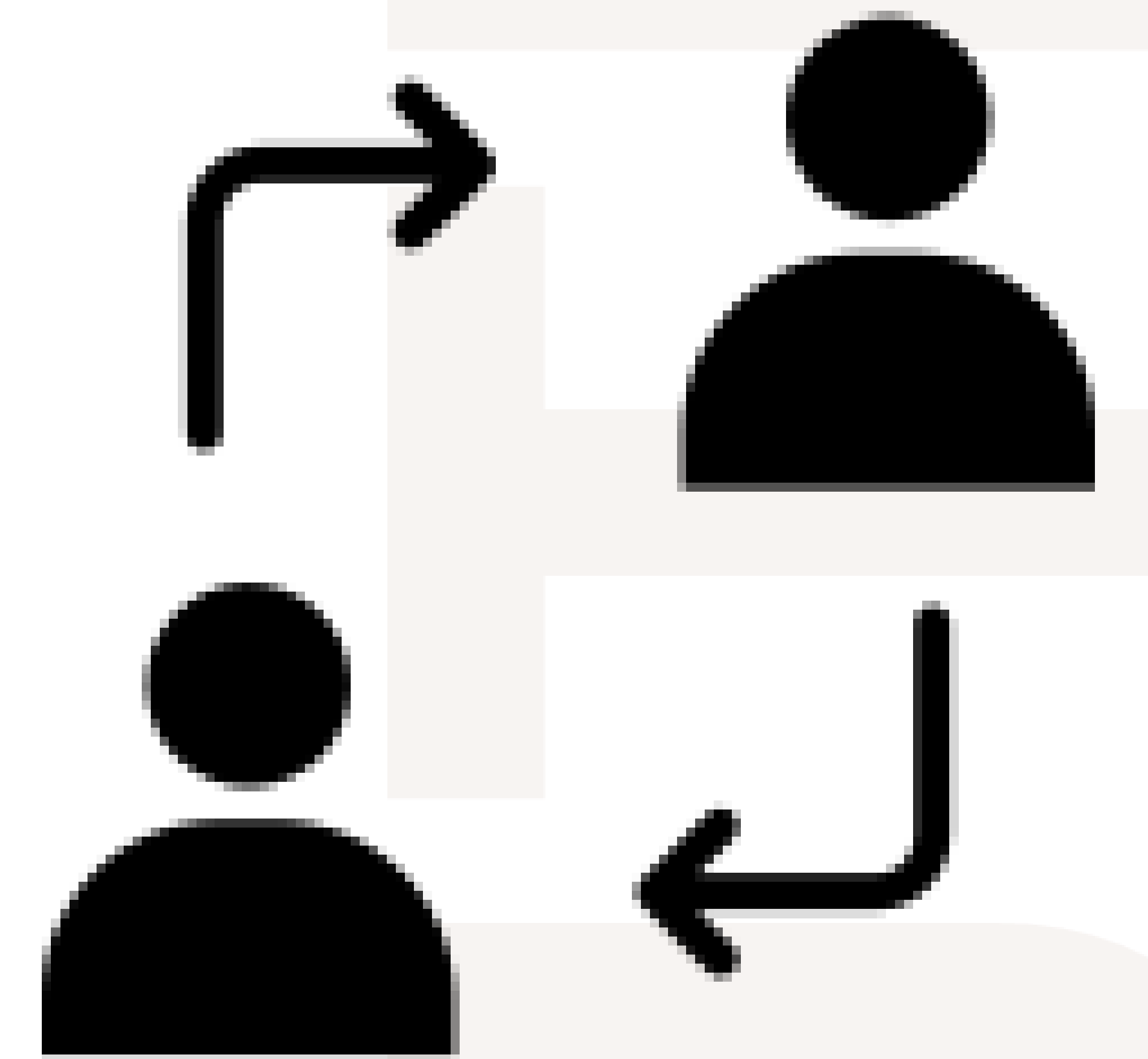


Social Fuel – 5. Peer Influence

- **Peer influence:** Peers motivated one another to act intentionally, and observing peers helped build self-efficacy, a key factor in enhancing agency (Bandura, 2006).

“Two girls in my group completed tasks very efficiently. They inspired me to complete my tasks quickly. During this programme period, I felt a very strong sense of being spurred on.”

“Peers are more important than tutor and PG mentor to me. I learn a lot from peers, for example, when doing speaking practice, I may hear further examples or opinions against me, and I can then improve my thinking, and in the speaking exam, my answer would be more developed.”

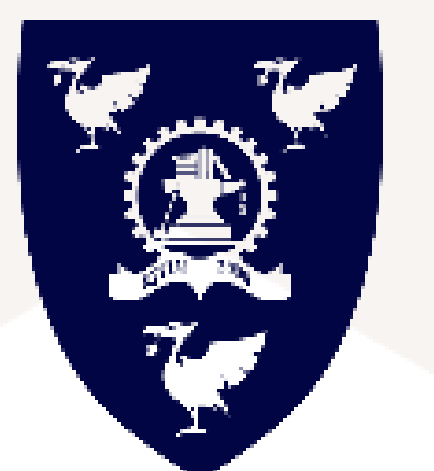


Social Fuel – 6. Peer Relationship

- **Peer relationship:** Familiar peers created a safe space for risk-taking, which empowered students to act without fear of judgement (Noddings, 2016).

“Good atmosphere when you learn with people you know. I know my peers before joining this programme. In EAP class, we don’t know each other. EAP teacher gives us 2 minutes to prepare, and sometimes we don’t know what to say, when teacher asks us to start discussion, we will be stuck, not sure what to say, very embarrassing. Here in this programme, we know each other, and we prepare in advance, not 2 minutes, so we are prepared, and have sth to say, so not embarrassing. Even if we make mistakes, because we are friends, we don’t feel embarrassed.”

“Small group size = feeling relaxed to ask questions while wouldn’t do so in big classes.”



Emotional Catalyst – 7.Care

- **Care:** Care (e.g., being caring, proactive, helpful) fostered emotional safety, with which students felt safe to take risks (e.g., asking questions), a key foundation of agency sense development (Kumpulainen et al., 2013).

“I experienced a period of time not in good state because of mental health issues. I didn’t leave my room, for over 1 week. Cara helped. She asked one peer to send sth. to me. Because of this, I left home. Once I was out, the second time it’s easier to be out, and I attended the weekly meeting in the afternoon. My peers also cared about me, asked what’s going on with me, why I didn’t come to the previous two meetings, I felt actually somebody cared about me and I was not alone sitting there. After the meeting, I had a long chat with Cara. She encouraged me. During the chat, I started to realize the cause of my state, I was afraid of failure, and then didn’t dare to face. Without this chat, I may not have taken the final exam.”

“Any questions, we would ask him (PG mentor), and he responds with much patience. He is very caring. During the period I was not stable, I didn’t do many assignments. He may have noticed the difference, and he asked me what’s going on with me, he cared about me. He also recorded assignments from the meetings with the CS advisor, sent to me, commented which parts may be challenging, helped searching for additional materials, and helped me complete the task together.”



8. Progress

- **Improved marks/readiness for classes and assessments:** Progress led to students' growing belief in their ability to succeed, motivating students to intentionally take further actions.

"I got 8 in writing coursework last year, but this year I got 58."

"I attended two rounds of this programme, because I see improvement."

"I was not able to answer EAP teacher's questions, but Cara suggested a strategy – preview – as a result, I was able to answer more questions in my class."



Takeaways to Build Agency & Conclusion

1. Lower Cognitive Barriers

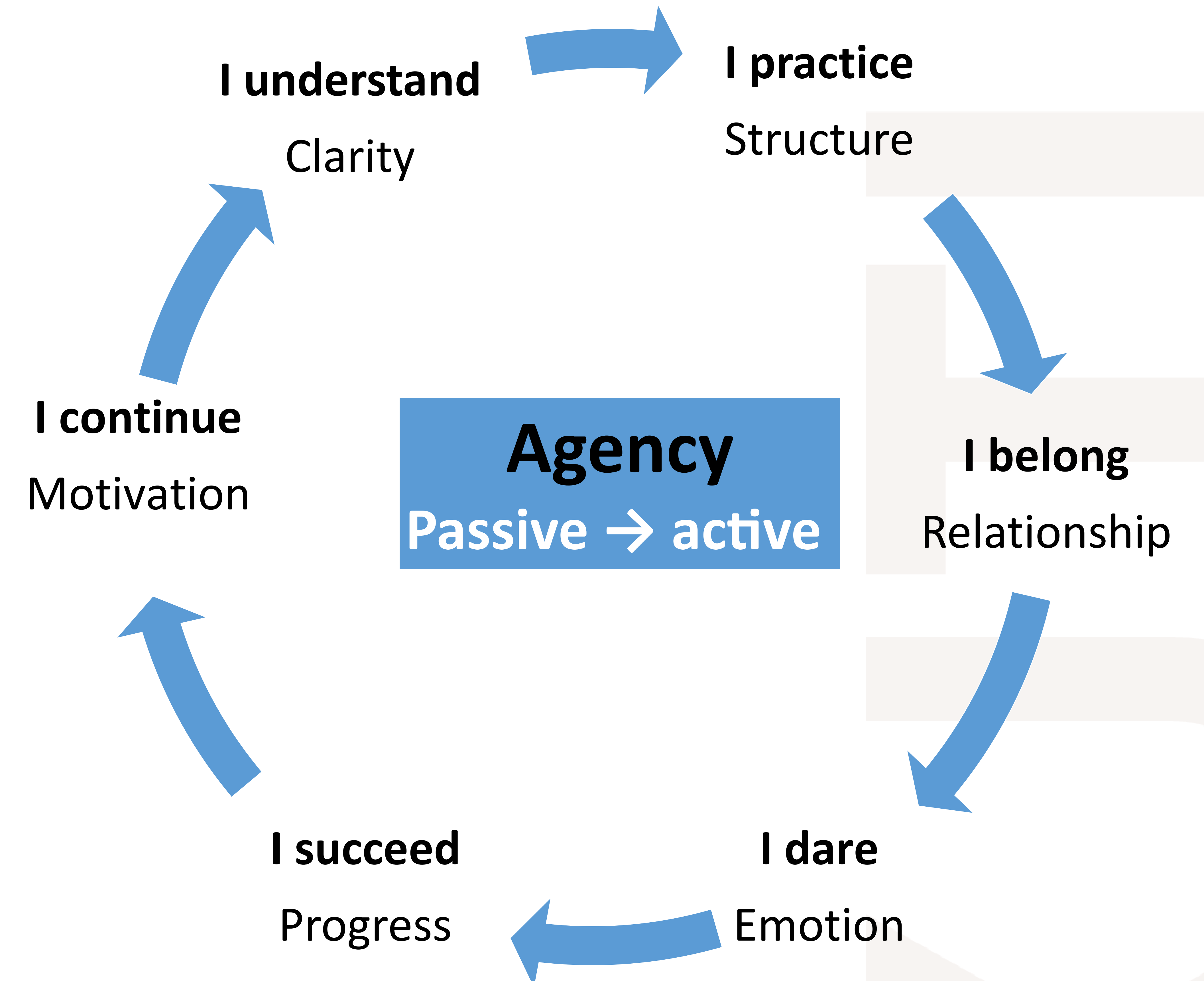
- *Use L1*
- *Scaffolded tasks*
- *Constant check-ins: to keep clarifying confusion*

2. Leverage Social Dynamics

- *Friendly community may make learning less pressed*
- *Constant check-ins: hold students accountable*

3. Foster Emotional Safety

- *Blaming, guilty and shame usually drive them away.*
- *Ask 'How are you really?' before 'What's your answer?'*
- *Constant check-ins: reach out when needed*



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