

It started with a KISS...  
...but where are your  
students now?

Lucy Blakemore  
Intesa Insights & Consulting



[englishaustralia.com.au](http://englishaustralia.com.au)

Celebrating **40 years** of quality and innovation in ELICOS



It started with a question...

What impact does learning English have, in the long term?





# Qualitative research: small sample, deep discussion



- 11 x 1-hour interviews via Zoom



- Semi-structured interview guide
  - Present life, past experience learning English, future plans



- Studied English in Australia around 10+ years ago



- Pre-interview: photos of best/worst moments from study experience



- Post-interview notes / quotes shared with interviewee for feedback



To understand impacts, we need to know what happened before, during and after the 'visible' learning experience

What were you doing in your home country before?

What was it like?  
What were the good and bad moments?

Who were the important people for you?

What wasn't part of the plan?

Why study English? Why Australia?

What did you want to achieve? Did you get there?

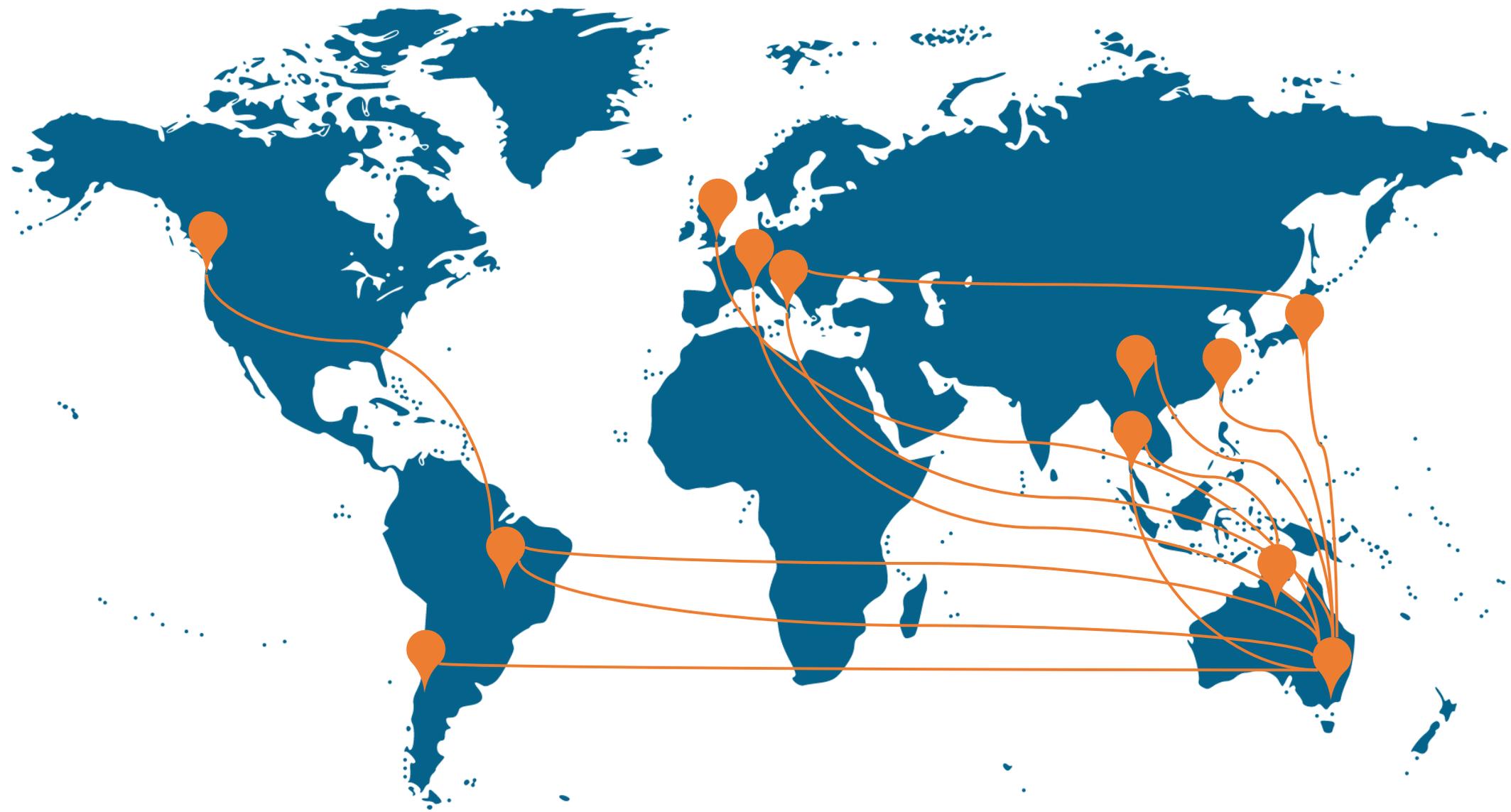


What happened after your English course?

What are you doing now?

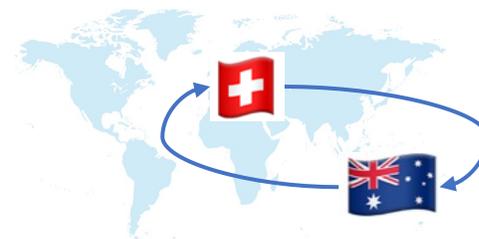
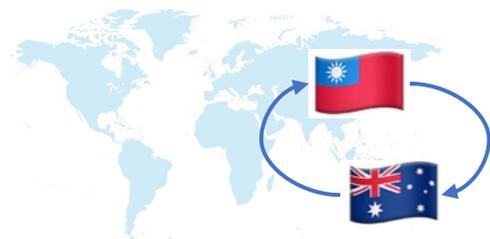
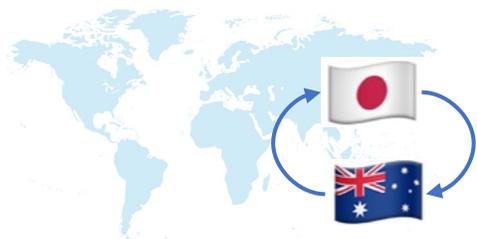


5 continents, 11 countries, and countless stories...

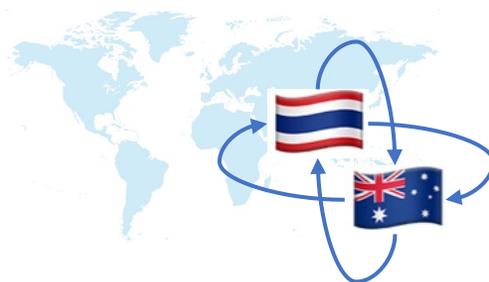
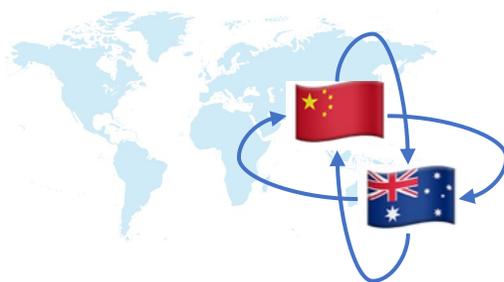




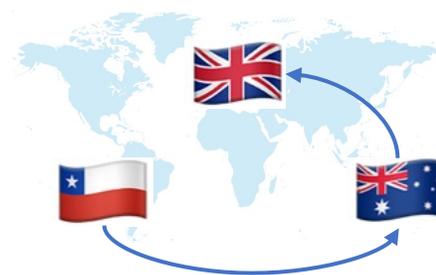
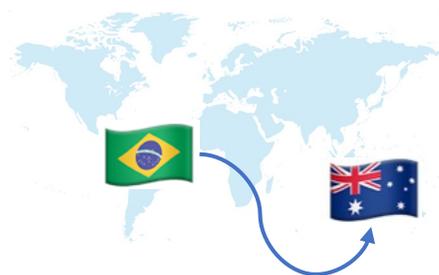
Some journeys were (relatively) simple...



Some looped back and forth several times...



...and some took unexpected turns!





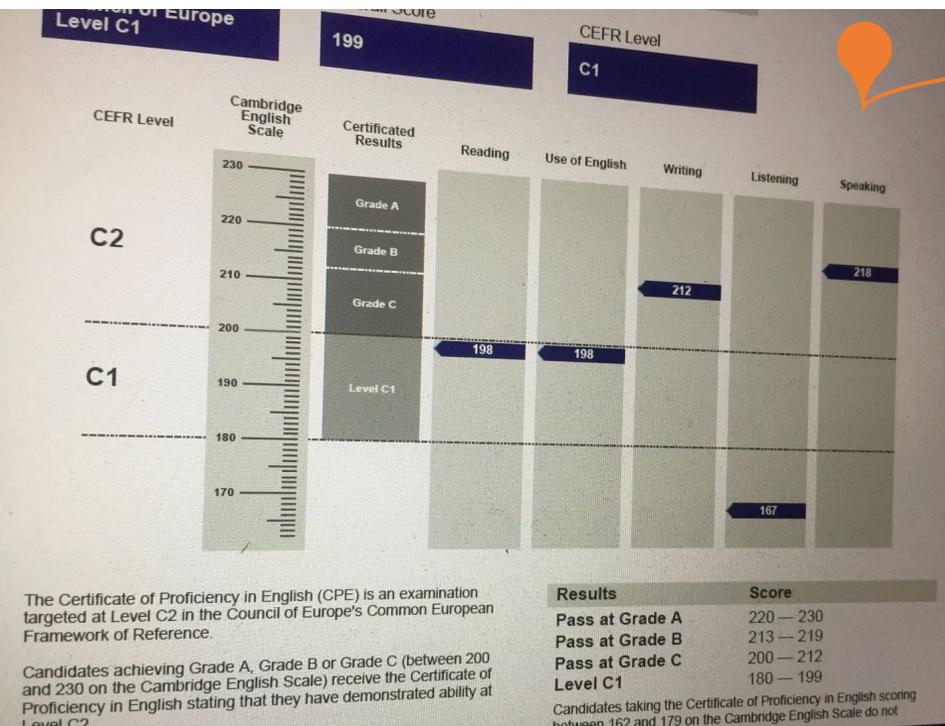
If a man listens to a KISS album in Rio...



...what are the chances of him becoming a licensed street artist in Melbourne (briefly)?



# If a Swiss banker takes 4 months' paid leave to study overseas...



...what are the chances of her becoming an English teacher and staying for 3 years?



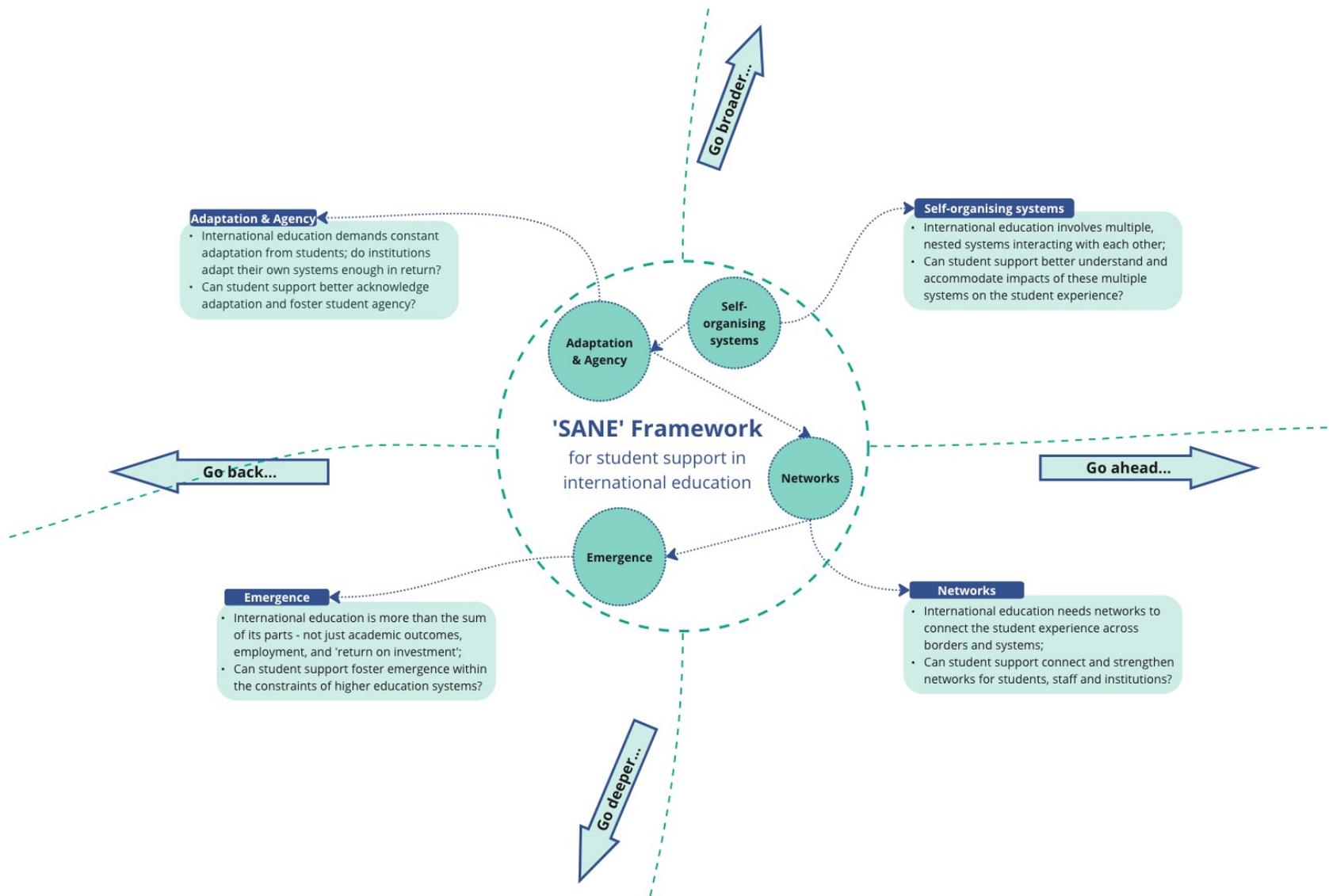
If a woman leaves home at 19 to try a different life...



...what are the chances of her running her own business in Sydney 23 years later?



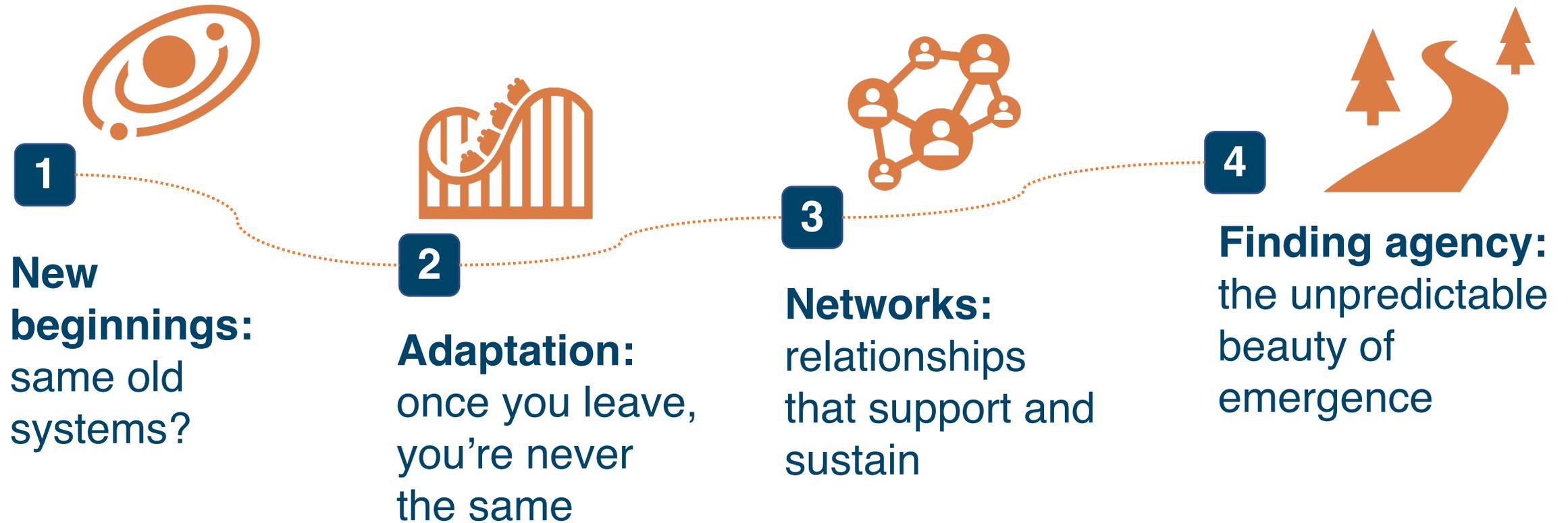
# Using complexity theory as a framework for analysis





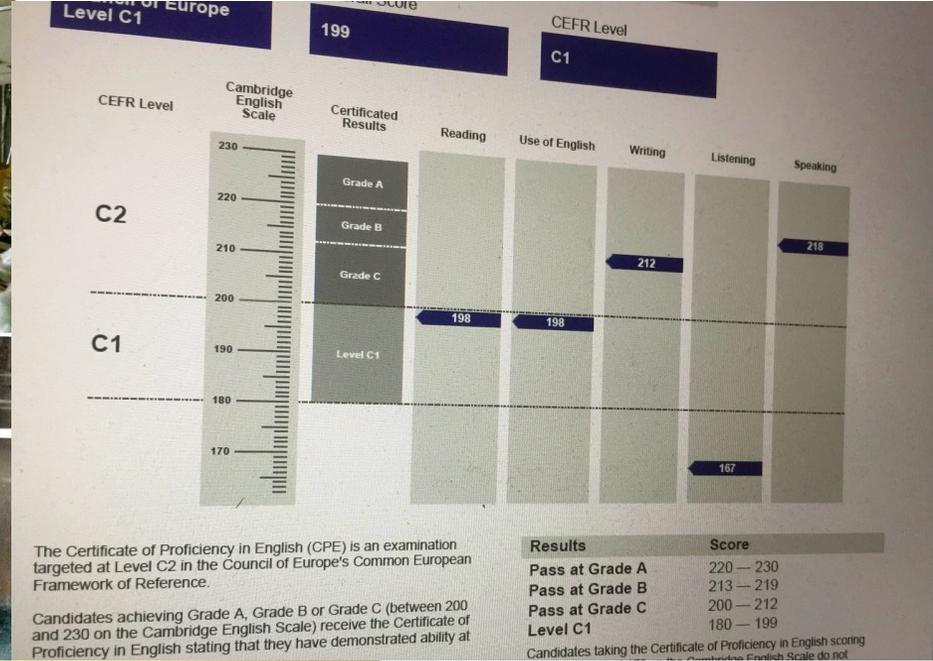
Where are they now?

More importantly, how did they get there?





# New beginnings: same old systems?





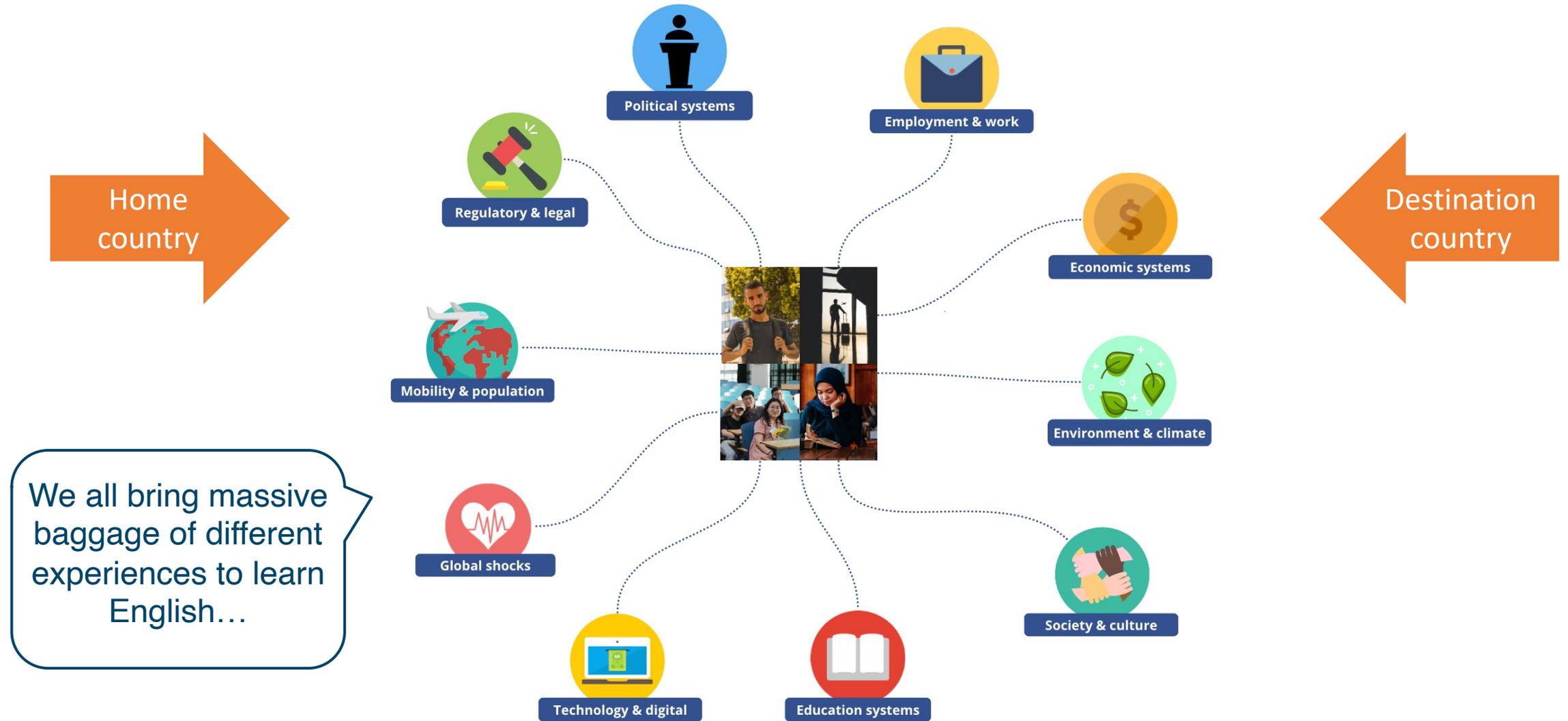
Complex systems are **dynamic, self-organising, evolving networks** that operate **without central control**.

These systems include something as small as an ant colony, as diverse as a rainforest, as complicated as the human brain, as unpredictable as the weather, as dispersed as a city, or as large as the cosmos itself.

(Hansen, 2014)



# Student experiences are entangled in many systems





# Systems can offer reasons to leave or to choose destinations



- Lack of opportunities (life/ work)
- Career limitations
- Difficult family situations
- Lack of safety/ quality of life
- Something 'missing'



- New life experiences
- Improving career prospects
- Improving language skills
- Self-discovery

I was missing out on opportunities to become a HR manager in Brazil, because I didn't have any English...

Everybody said, to find yourself, you have to go to India. But I think I found myself in Australia!



# New systems can sometimes be a pleasant surprise...



- Surprise at the lack of security in a high street bank
- Safety – walking alone at night
- New ways of learning
- Sense of equality and opportunity

People look at you in Australia as equal. The quality of life is good.

# ...but often create tensions and challenges

- Visas and bureaucracy
- Work and employment
- Educational norms

I had one week to submit my new visa application. My life depends on one person's decision – the immigration officer. If he doesn't like what I gave him, I have to go back.





# Systems: where do teachers and institutions come in?

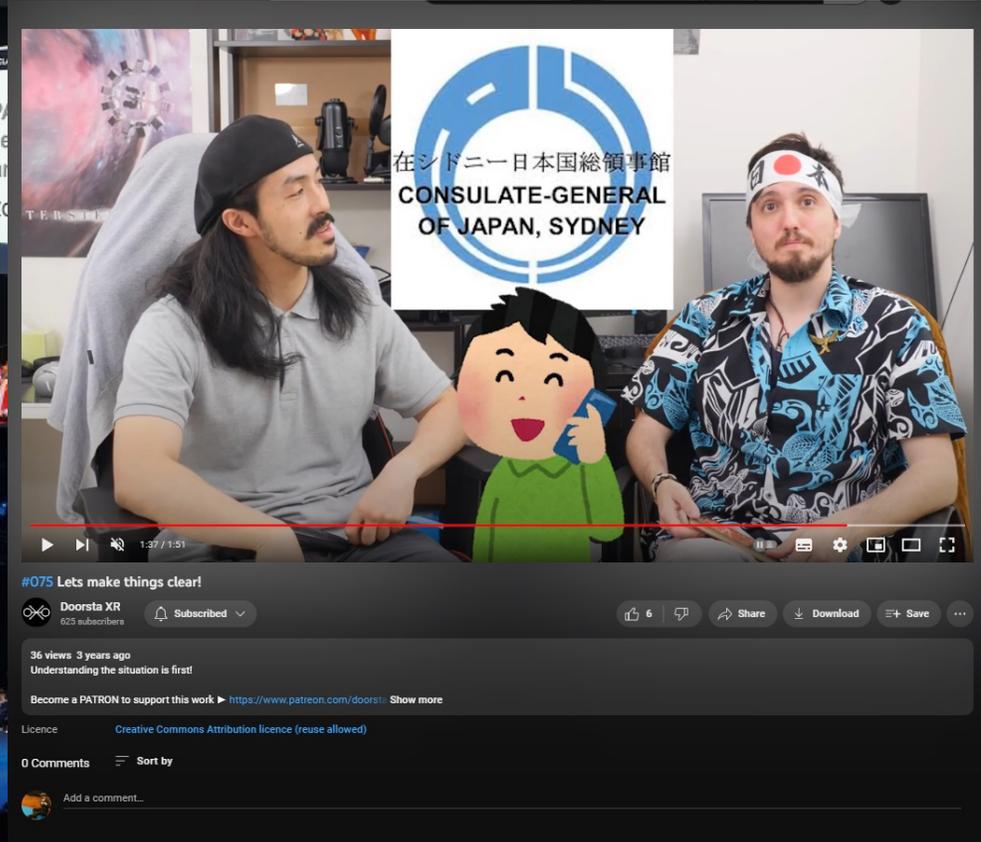
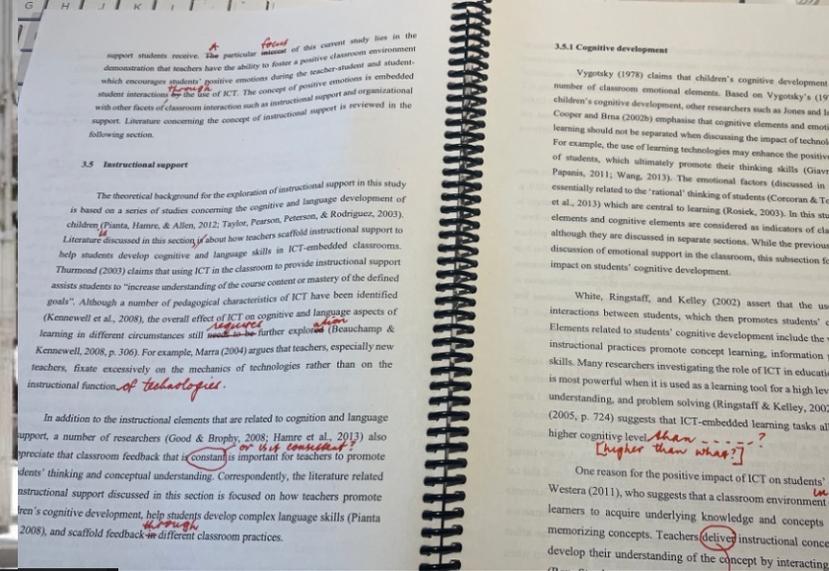
It was very scary – I didn't know what it means to figure out all those different things like a visa, a different home, how I'm going to earn money, how I'm going to stay in touch with my friends and family...

It was her [my teacher] who **noticed**. I was very lonely as well, and I really needed those people at school. She was super **supportive**. Listening to my concerns, she was **way more than an English teacher**. It was just very nice to **have her on my side**.





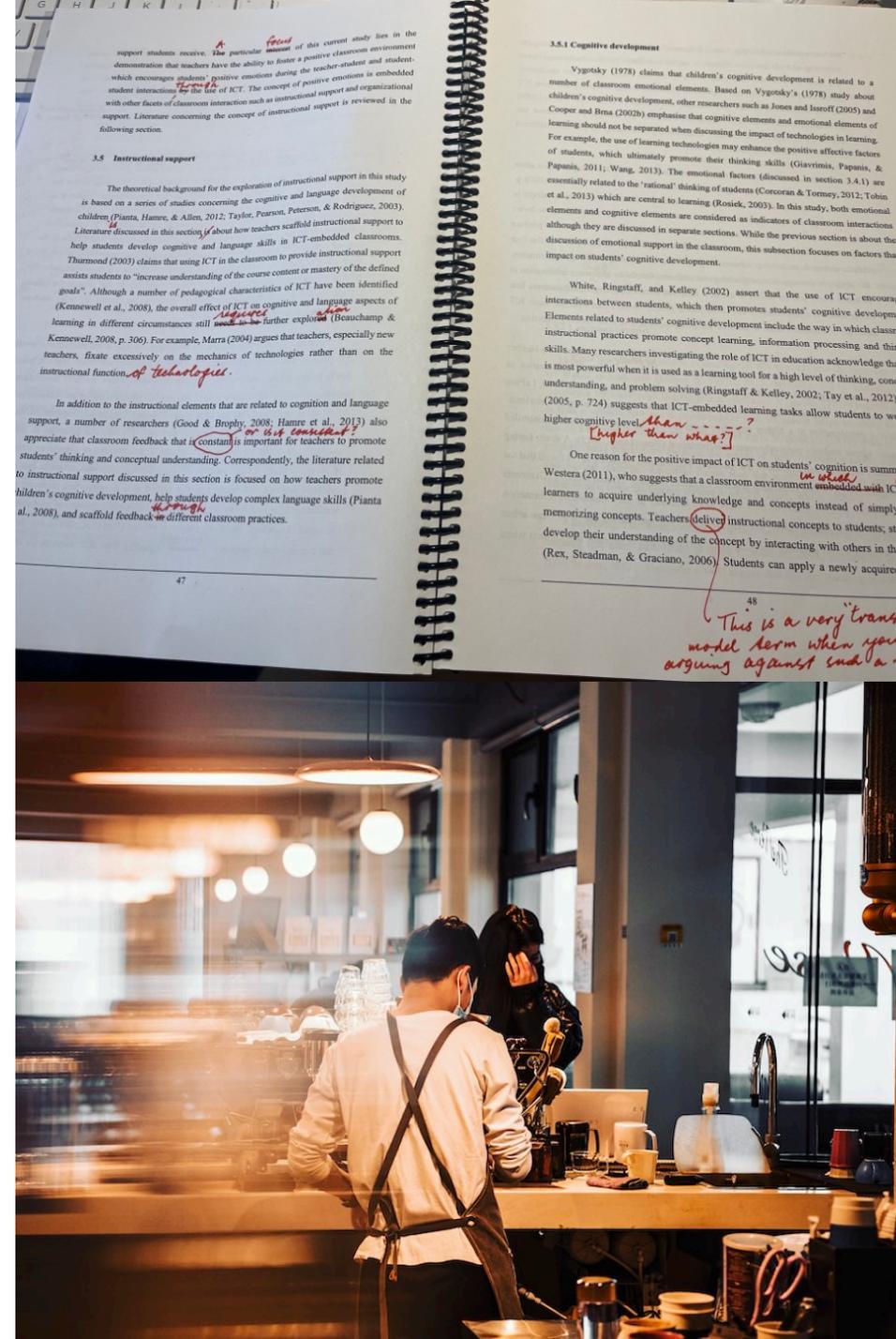
Adaptation:  
once you leave, you're  
never the same.



# Adaptation comes in many (difficult) forms

I was an outstanding student in China, with a first-class scholarship, top of the class. Suddenly I realised, oh, **I'm nothing, I'm stupid**, I can't even write a sentence...

I'm scared to order something because they're like 'Huh? Pardon?' and I think, **did I say something wrong?** So I lost like 6 kilos in two months...



# Adaptation as a 'brain refresh'?

It's good to know different people, different cultures. And to **refresh your mind**, you know?

Every time I went to the class my brain was breaking!

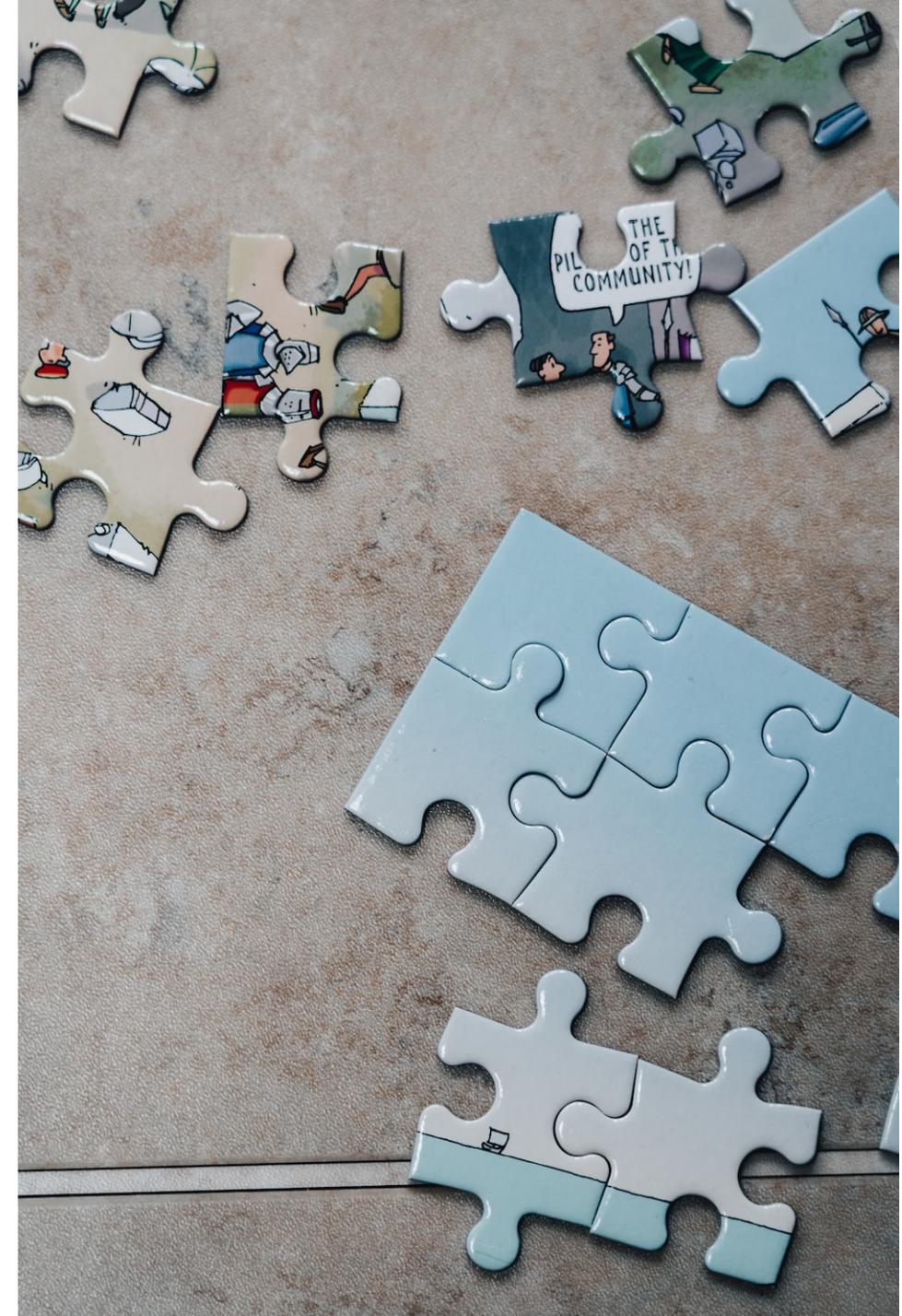
Every day is different. **I felt really fresh**, and I fell in love with this model and this class.



## Heading home, and re-adaptation – or not...

I had to change [cities] when I came back from Sydney.  
**Everything felt so small!** I couldn't handle it anymore.

You realise **you've changed;**  
**they've changed.**  
I wanted to go home [Australia].  
**You feel lost.** You don't belong  
THERE anymore, and you don't  
belong HERE.

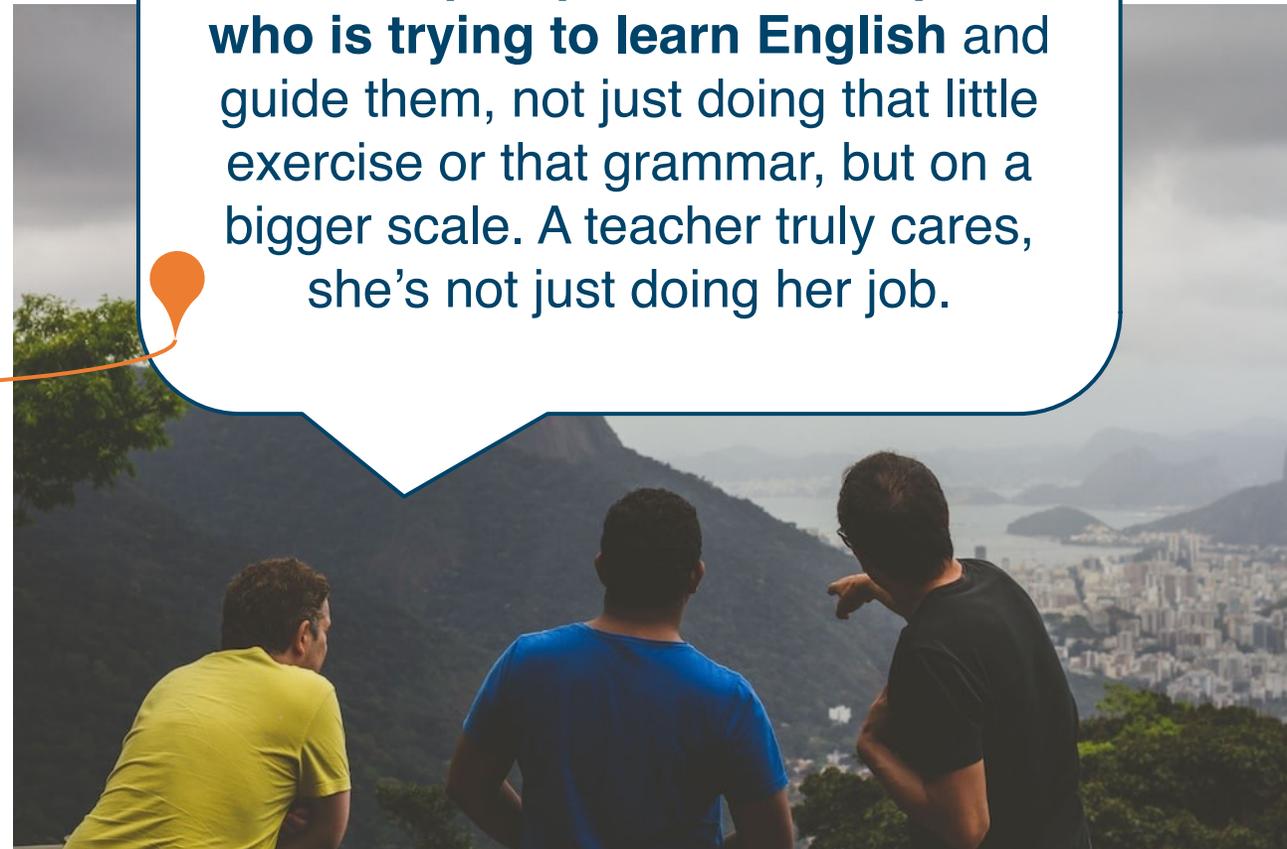




## Adaptation: where do teachers and institutions come in?

I was thrown in the deep end when I came to Australia. I knew nothing. I had just turned 19, and it was that **shock** of being in a country that's multicultural, studying in the city, **cultures I had never been in contact with before**

A good teacher is humble. To be able to **take the perspective of the person who is trying to learn English** and guide them, not just doing that little exercise or that grammar, but on a bigger scale. A teacher truly cares, she's not just doing her job.





Networks:  
relationships that support  
and sustain



# Feeling the loss of familiar networks

I have **no one to call**, it's like 4am in Brazil, then I start to wonder what am I doing here, **so far away from home**. It was the first time I started getting scared, like I didn't do the right thing.

In the beginning I **struggled to make connections** and it was awkward because I was the oldest one. I **didn't feel I belonged**.





...and the difference a connection can make

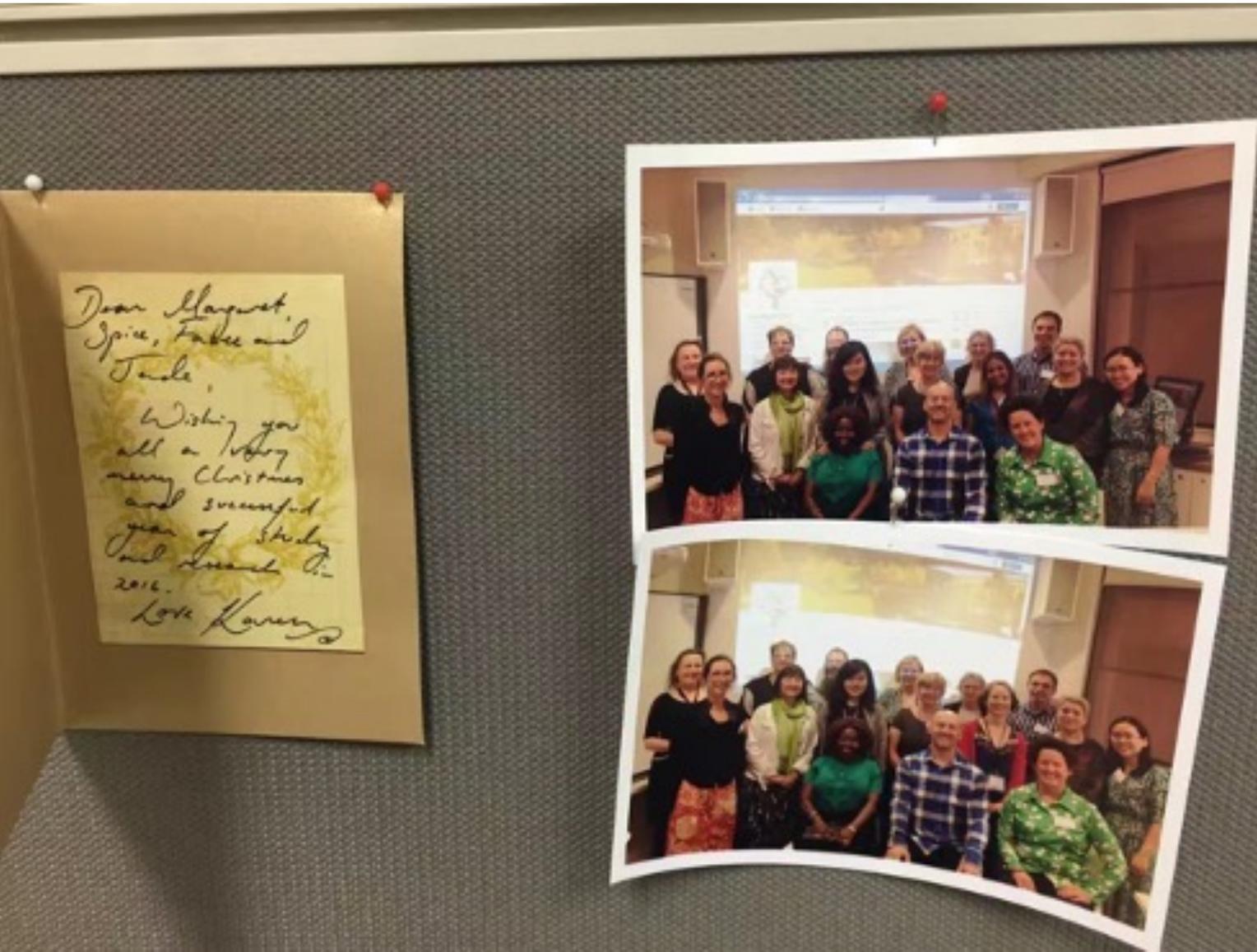
I practiced with M because he was nervous to stand in front of people. So I said to him, '**Look at my face. I will be supportive.**' And he looked at me during the presentation.

It wasn't the things that we learn inside the classroom. These **human interactions outside the classroom**, this was the most important thing for me.





# The realisation that you're not alone



Dear Margaret,  
Spice, Faber and  
Tunde,  
Wishing you  
all a happy  
merry Christmas  
and successful  
year of study  
and research in  
2016.  
Love Kareem

I realised that **they were also struggling** in many different ways, it wasn't just me feeling the challenges, **loneliness, uncertainties, shame, stress**, and many more feelings.



# If you can communicate, you can connect



It's interesting how when you live with somebody, even from another nationality, **you get a little bit from him if you're elastic enough**, and he gets a little bit from me.

I used to share a room with an Iranian guy. English was not our first language, and we could communicate to each other. We could **translate feelings** to each other.



# Networks: where do teachers & institutions come in?

My first experiences were horrible, horrible, horrible. I used to cry a lot. I left my friends, my family. I left my girlfriend.

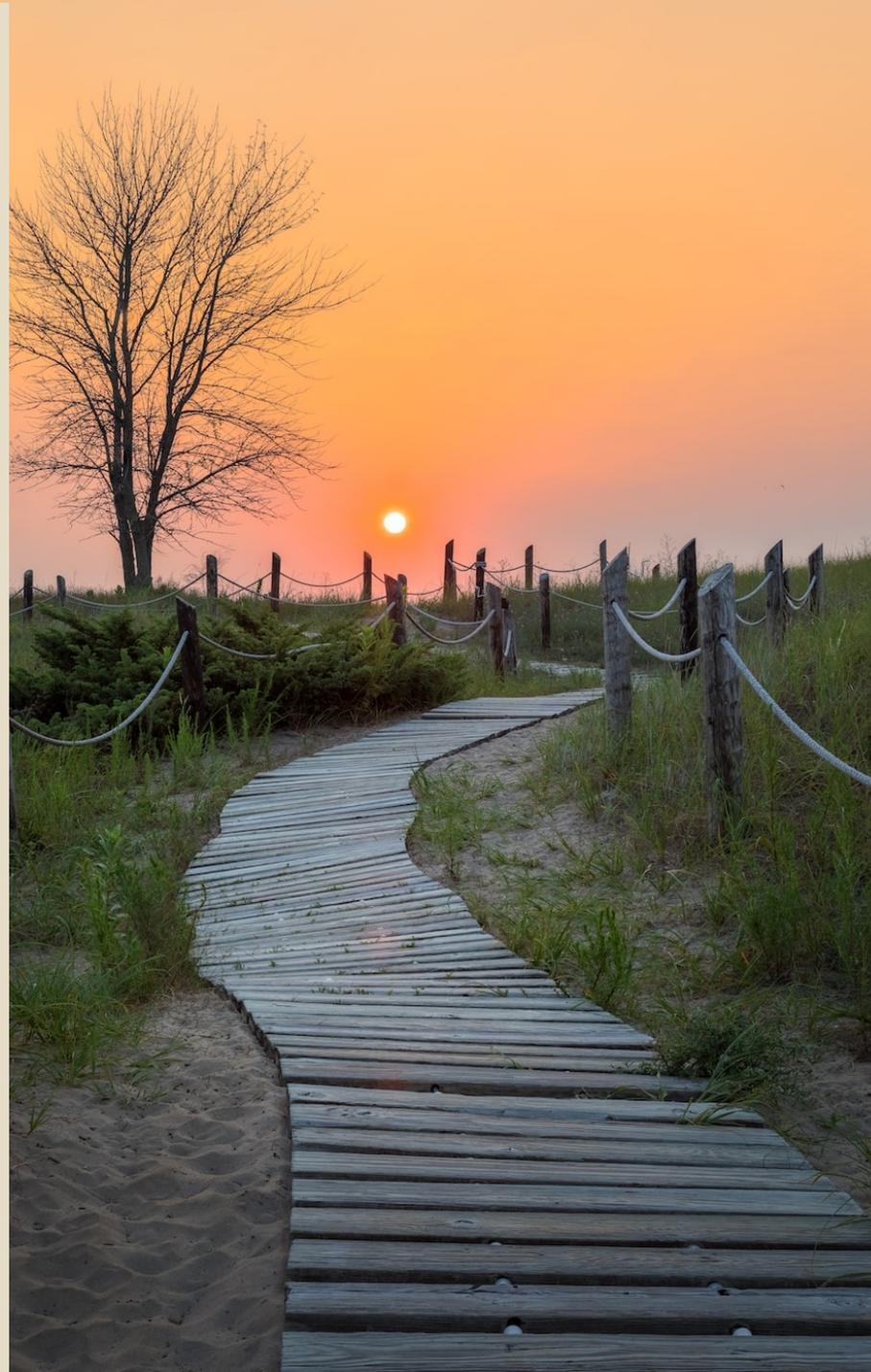
What the f— am I doing here? Everybody's talking in English. I cannot understand a thing.

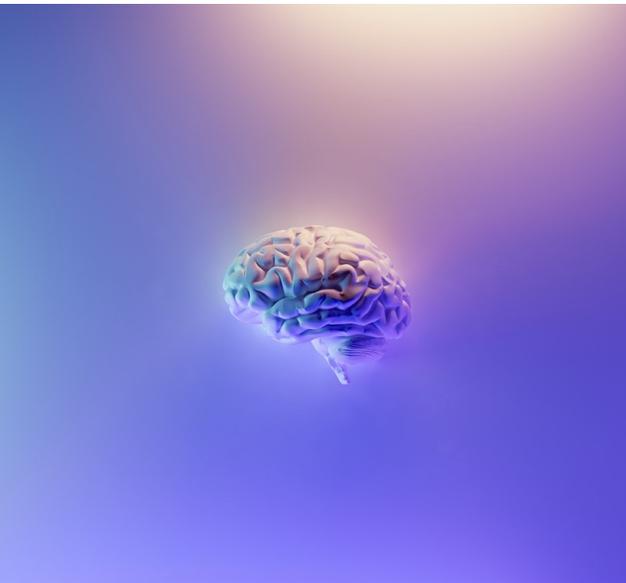
She gave me support, just like, 'Anything you need, you can talk to me'. It was very touching for me; it was one of the most important things during the English course.





Finding agency:  
the unpredictable beauty  
of emergence





## Agency.

As an actor (human), being able to shape and make meaning from and through your environment.

(Schatzki, 2001)

## Agency can be lost (or taken away)...

You **lose who you are**, completely. You **feel so stupid** for not being able to speak. I felt so dumb, all the time.

The teacher said, 'What's your name?' I said, 'My name is Karina'.  
He said, 'No, your name is not 'Karrina', your name is 'Karina' (*anglicised*) from now.



...but agency also emerges in new ways

I was actually **taking that decision for the first time in my life on my own**. I quit my job, and I did all those things.

I realised having a different perspective, and English barriers, **adds a lot of value** to our work because we're always trying to find a way that people can understand.

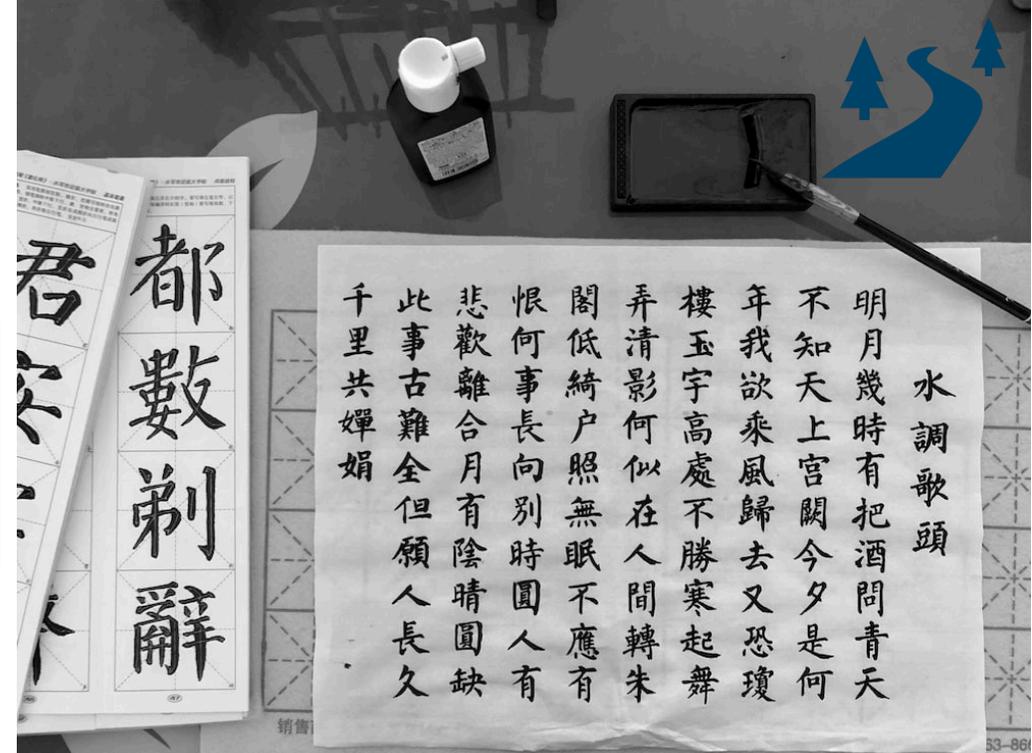


# Learning to learn – and to teach!

I have unlocked the power to learn... I'm learning Japanese, and writing those beautiful shapes, and I don't have fear of it. I feel like I can do it.

I remember watching their classes, applying their exercises and methodologies in my English classes when I came back to Brazil

Sometimes I'm the teacher now – I understand that they [Ukrainian refugees] are learning much more when I show them, much more than just talking.

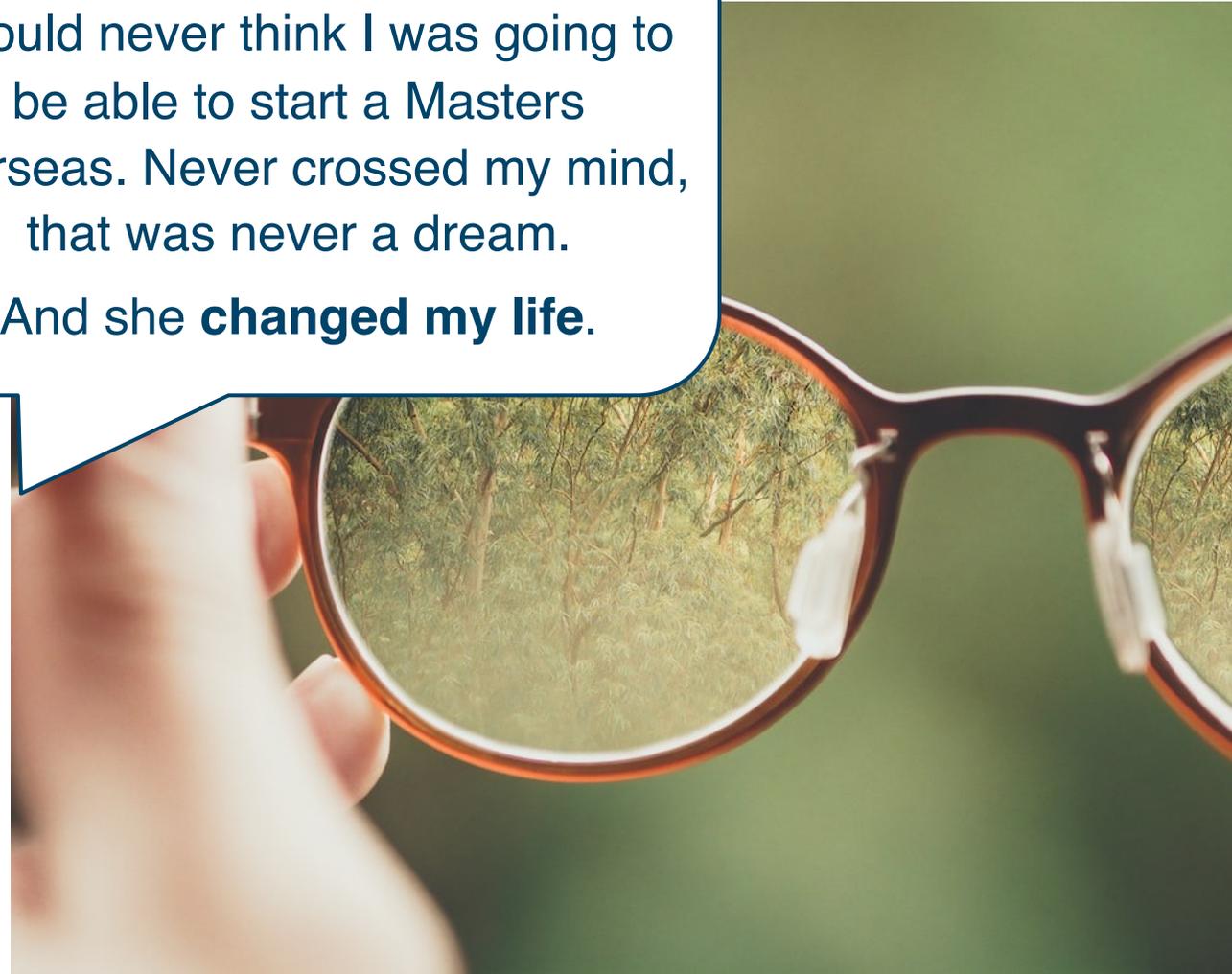


# Finding agency: impact of teachers & institutions

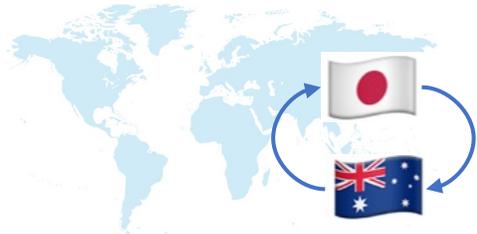


I thought, if I go overseas, all my life problems would disappear. But then when I got here, I learned that you move countries, but the problems follow you...

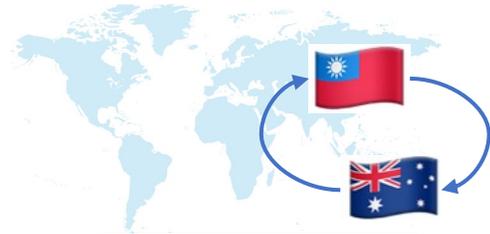
She **saw the potential in me** [...].  
I would never think I was going to be able to start a Masters overseas. Never crossed my mind, that was never a dream.  
And she **changed my life**.



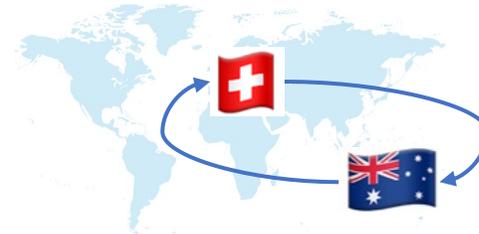
# The unpredictable beauty of emergence



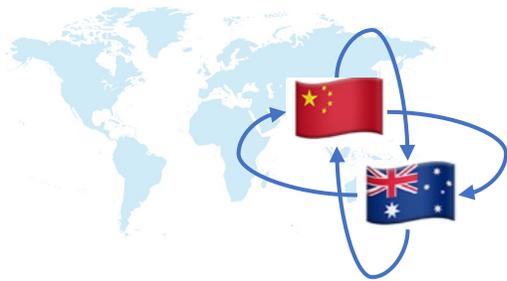
IT Engineer



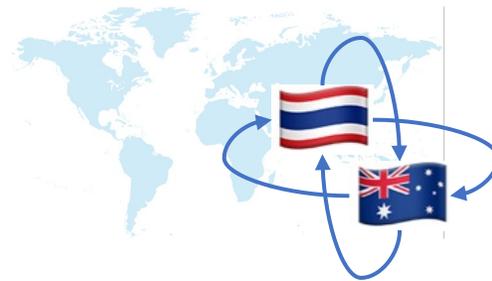
Finance Ops



Social Worker



Academia



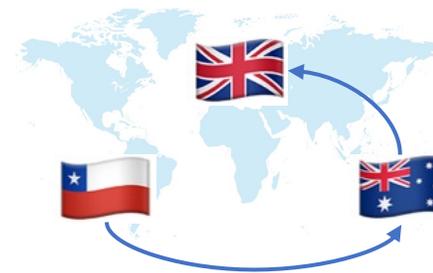
Retail/ sales



Programmer



Occupational Therapy & HR



Hospitality



Logistics

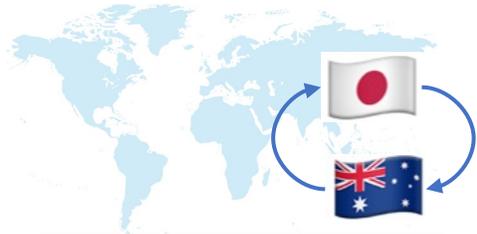
# Emerging professional identities

It totally changed my life. I never thought I would come this far. My colleagues were 70% expats and 30% Thai and everyone studied internationally. But I **can be at the same position** as them.

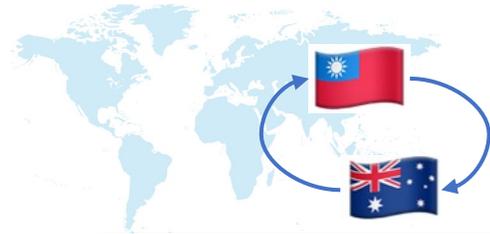
In Melbourne, it came to the surface, this feeling of being an artist, to **know myself as an artist**. I remember sending a message saying, Hey mom, I'm an artist. I don't want to be an architect.



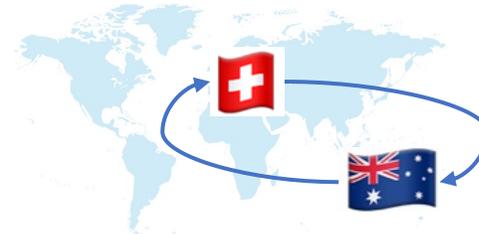
# The unpredictable beauty of emergence – echoes and ripples of impact



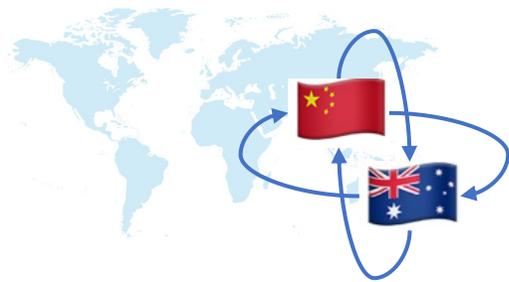
Friends & learning



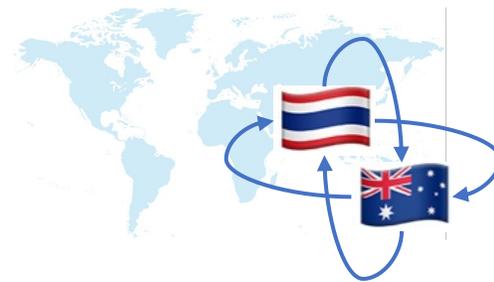
Children & lifestyle



Career, family, country



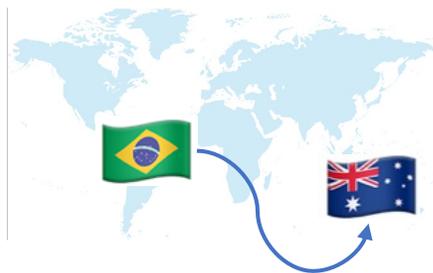
Research interests



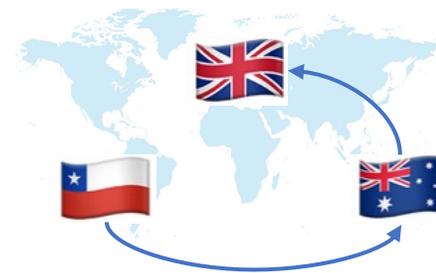
Confidence



Global network



Life opportunities



Travel & adventure



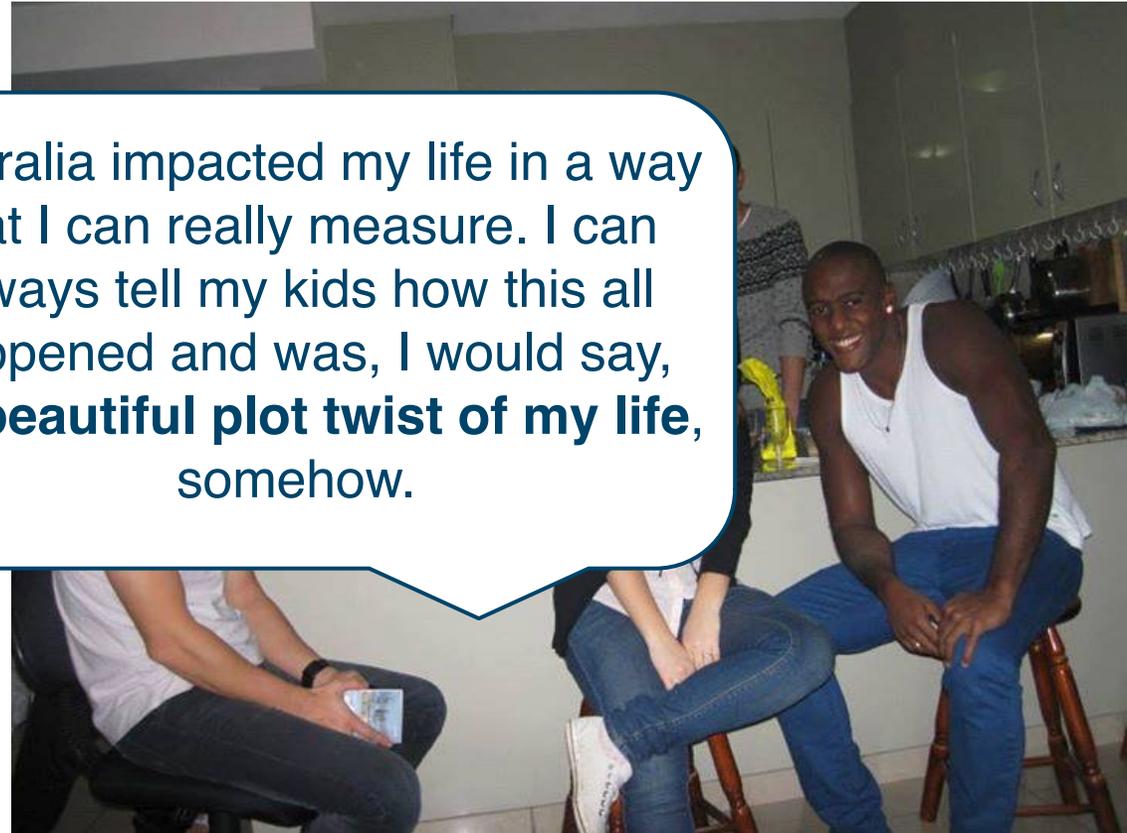
Quality of life

# Changing perspectives and 'beautiful plot twists'



I became more **grateful** for what my parents have achieved and enabled me and my sister to have. My view of Switzerland has improved. I really started to **value those small things** that I wasn't even aware of before living abroad.

Australia impacted my life in a way that I can really measure. I can always tell my kids how this all happened and was, I would say, the **beautiful plot twist of my life**, somehow.



## Ongoing impacts – the next generation?

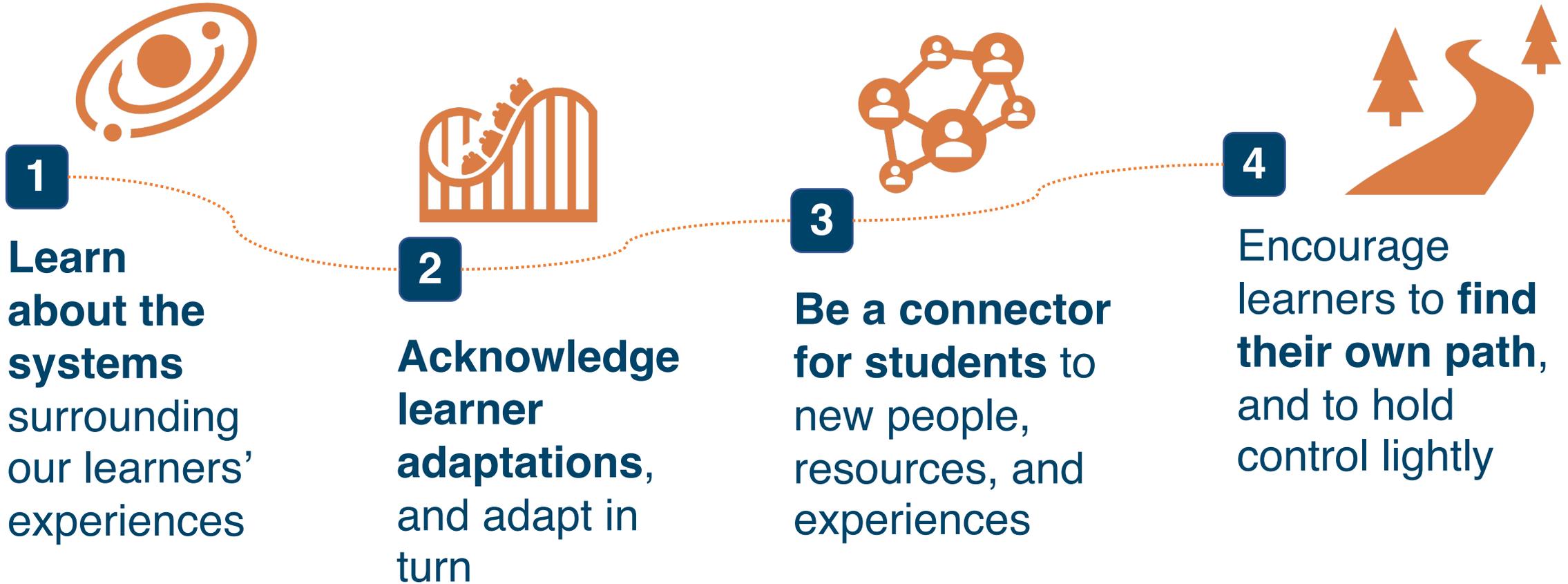
I brought my nephew to Canada... my plan was to brainwash him, so he wants to live in another place. Now he's dying to live abroad and explore the world!

I want to influence my friends, my family, my kids [to travel]. I think the Australian experience was really helpful.





# What advice would I give to my younger self?





What would you like to tell your teachers?

They are just **brilliant people**. I would really love to not only thank them, but also to tell them **how important that was**. Having someone at school especially, a place where you go every day, **who listens to you** and to your concerns. They don't need to have the solution, but only to have those quality moments of listening and just **supporting you**.  
**That means so much.**

What would you like to tell your teachers?

It may be just another student for you, but this student will carry you forever because it's a huge impact you guys have on our lives.

**I carry her in my heart, and I always will.**



It started with a KISS... but  
where are your students now?

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Hear more about these  
stories and insights on  
student experience 😊



Lucy Blakemore  
Research & Insights Consulting

[lucy@lucyblakemore.com](mailto:lucy@lucyblakemore.com)  
+61 421 880825