

‘Practitioners not Students’

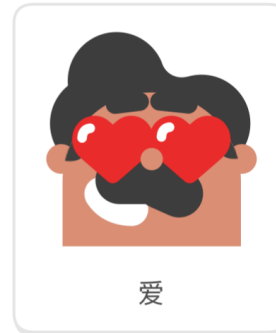
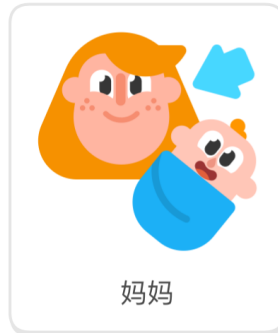
BILC Conference 2021

Lt Col Matthew Sharp
& Wg Cdr Elizabeth Seymour



A brief thought on perspectives...

Which of these is "English"?



© Duolingo

CHECK

Known value of language proficiency

- Mastery of the inter-related skills is important for our organisation.
- Language capability delivers flexibility across various defence contexts (operational, intelligence, engagement activities) – it provides an ‘adaptive edge’.
- In some cases, language is the job in itself e.g. specialist linguist or interpreter.
- In many more cases, language proficiency sits alongside other professional skills as an enabler.
- It takes time to develop language skills *ab initio* and it is very challenging to be certain what language capability may be required in the future.
- Most of us are closely involved in building ‘human capital’ and we value the teacher/student relationship.
- Students leave language training establishments and go on to use their skills as practitioners **but what happens then?**

The original 'remote' training environment?

Perhaps one that existed long before COVID; how we go about maintaining language skills of our personnel.

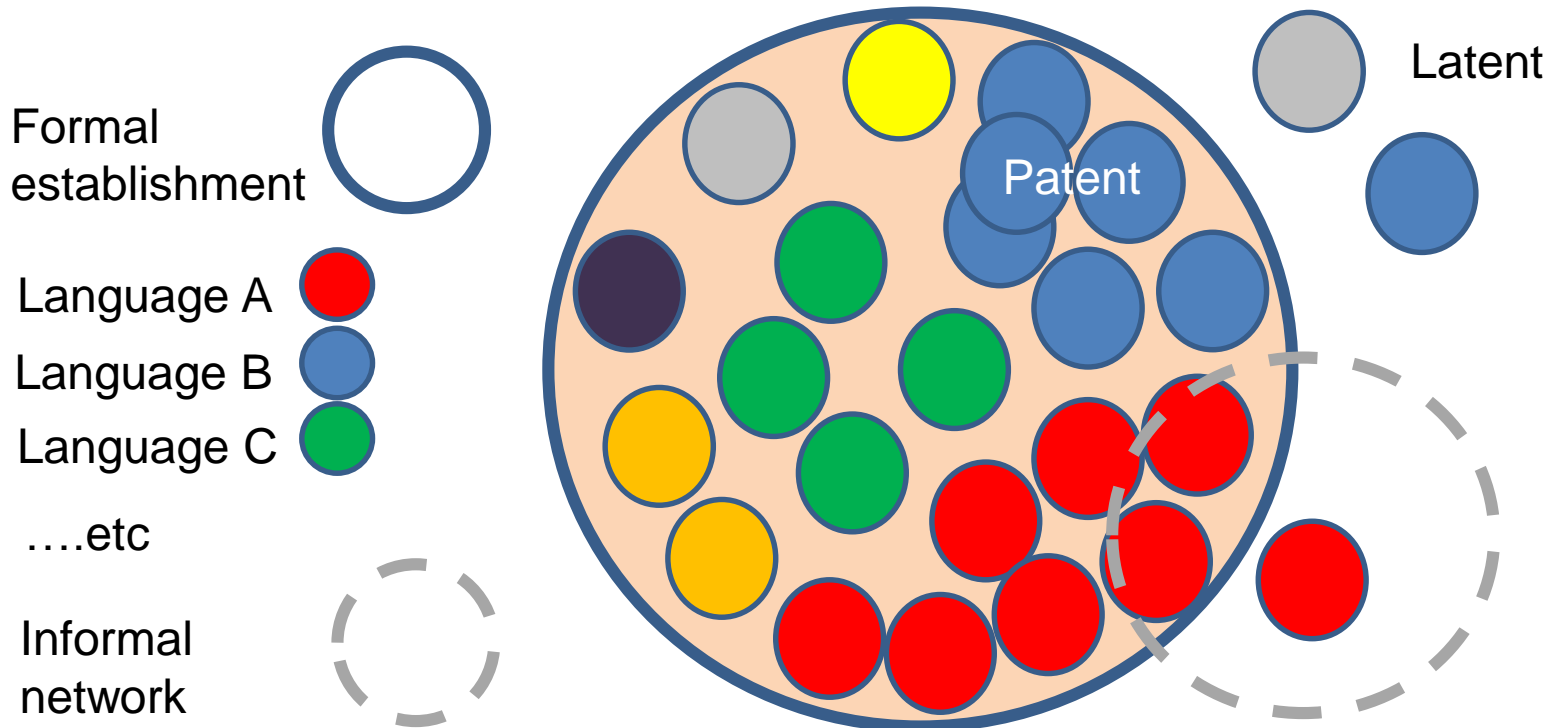
In the UK this includes:

- **Access to formal military language training** – tutors are willing to help but are fixed by their formal teaching commitments.
- **Personal Development schemes** – various funded options (college courses, refresher programmes. Take-up is varied and/or hidden.
- **Financial Incentives** – linked to STANAG qualification and welcomed but it is not always about the money.

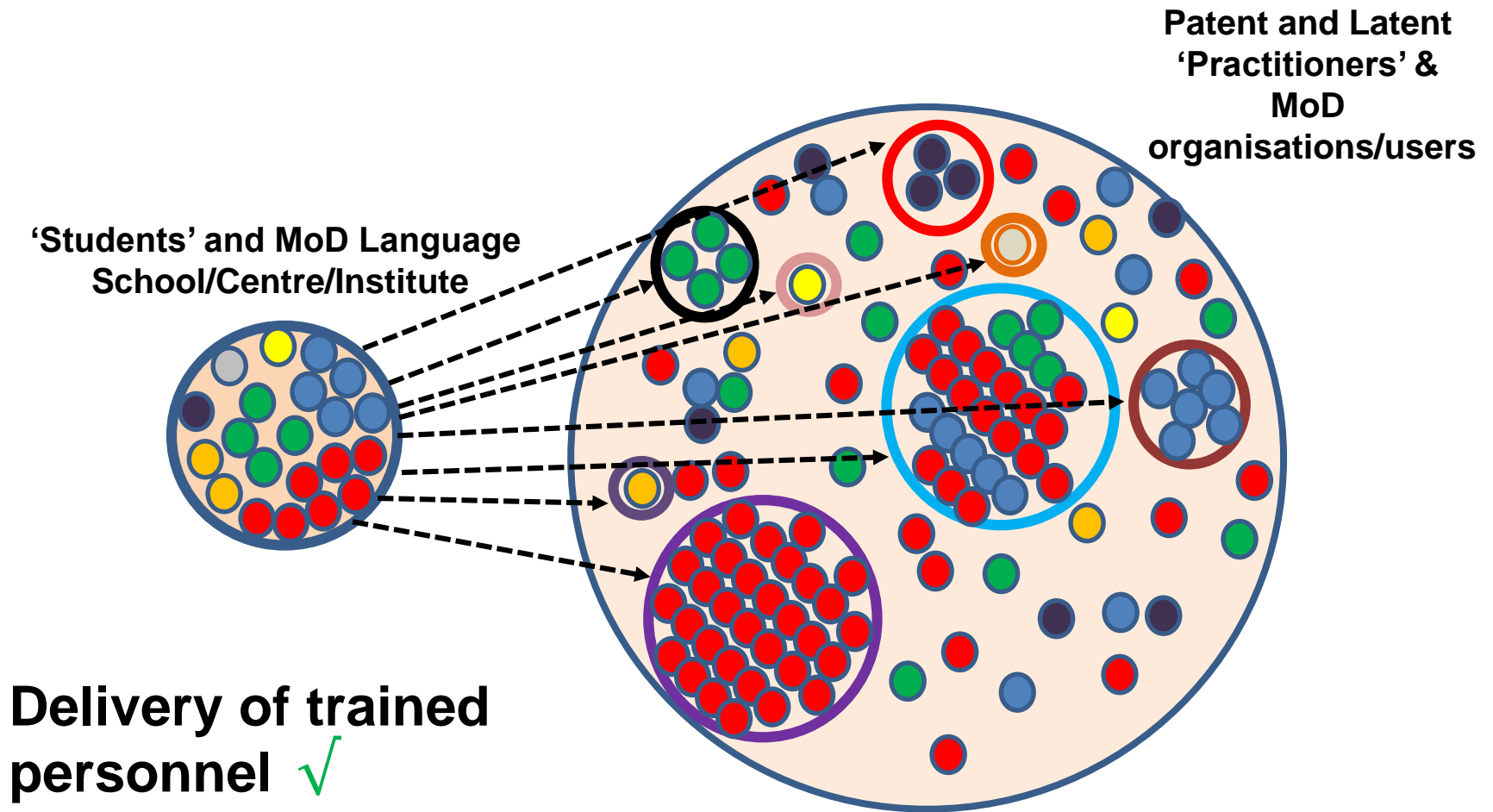
These are all good offers but a recurring story amongst UK Service Personnel is that their motivation to retain their language skills is to **apply them as practitioners.**

So, what else could we do to try to bring this together?

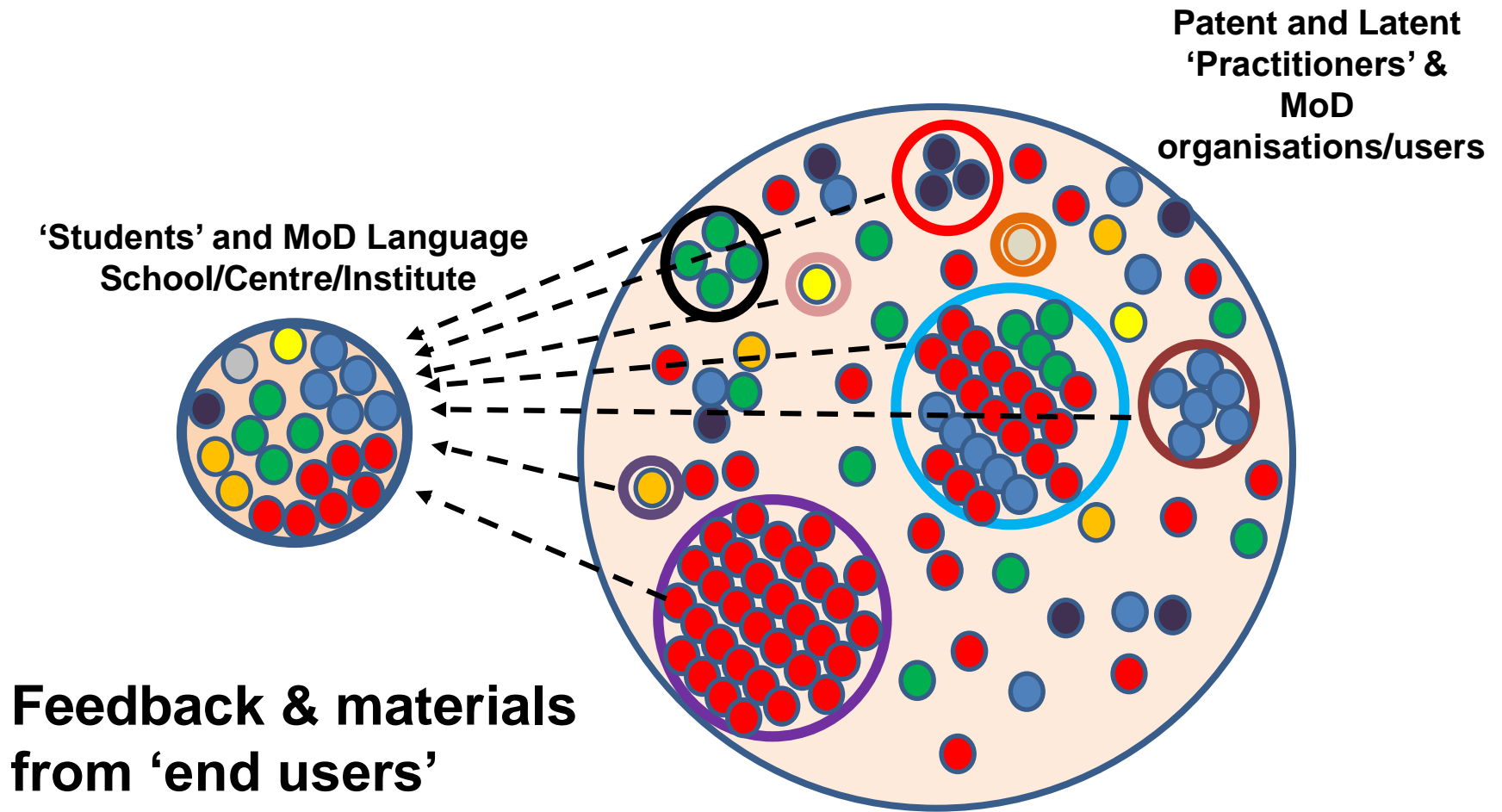
A few graphics to tell a story about networks..



Currently...



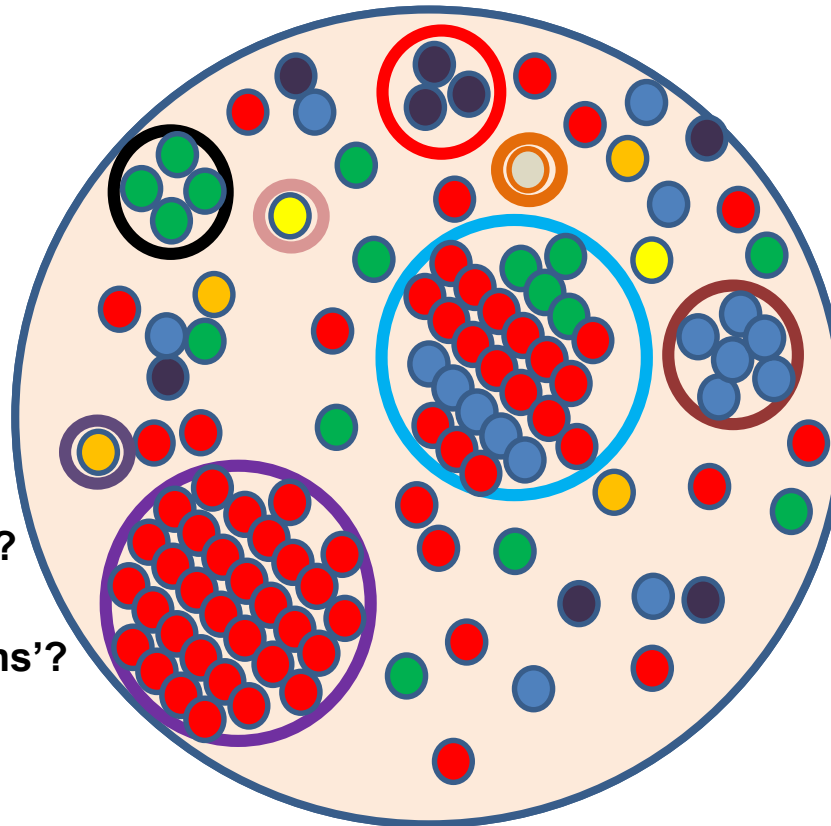
Sometimes...



What if?

Patent and Latent
'Practitioners' &
MoD
organisations/users

- a. We encouraged informal language networks?
- b. We sought out language 'activists'?
- c. We encouraged language 'champions'?
- d. We encouraged professional networking?





Italian Language Forum

Following in 1 stream [Leave group](#)

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Have you used your Standard Learning Credits this year?

You can use the £175 available per academic year towards private language tuition and online language courses.

Your SLC application must be approved before you start the course.


5/5

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What we have been learning about language networks:

- UK MoD membership of informal language networks has seen **150% growth** between 2019 and 2021. The 'forums' have used an internal UK MoD system (Defence Connect) but are otherwise **self-sustaining**.
- Senior personnel, often working in UK Defence Engagement appointments, are willing to act as '**language champions**' but are generally busy people and so networks require willing '**language activists**' to organise/do the work. The 'activists' need some **formal endorsement**.
- Whilst a little help is required to get started, the networks must be **naturally occurring** and **meet members needs**... if they don't they must be allowed to die back.
- Members must **contribute content** to the networks and activists must be empowered to prompt them to do so.
- Language networks provide a mechanism to **communicate opportunities** for **skill maintenance** and **active use** but they are also a '**window**' on practitioners wants, needs and expectations.
- Common sense? Yes, but worth looking after the basics and avoid the assumption that this just happens. Always worth investigating the reality and '**lived experience**' of practitioners.

A lived experience.... over to you Elizabeth

Questions welcome

