

Language Learning x Needfinding

Global Grand Challenges - Team 4

13 Interviews

We spoke to a mix of people with different language learning experiences, some successful and some unsuccessful, and a range of people with English as a native or foreign language.

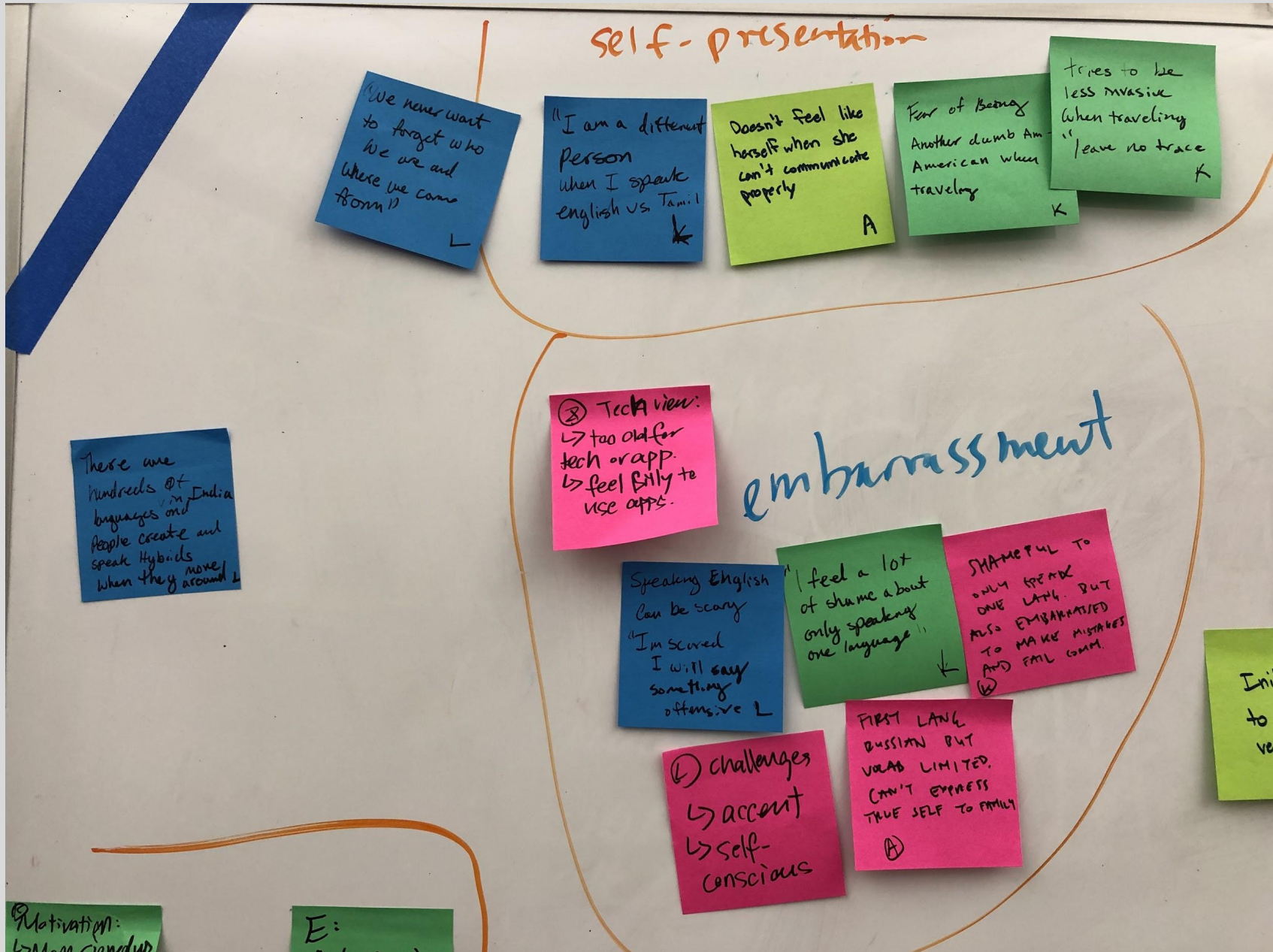
Age	Native language	Foreign language	Notes
Adult	English	Spanish	"unsuccessful" grad student at Stanford
	EXPERT		director of Habla Tutoring Program for Stanford affiliates to learn English
Adult	English	Spanish, Russian, French	"successful" grad student at Stanford
Adult	English	Chinese	from Ireland, teaches in China
Child	Chinese	English	native Chinese, in kindergarten here in PA, 6 years old?
Adult	Chinese	English	visiting scholar
Adult	teacher		from the UK; teaches in China
Adult	Tamil and Kannada	English and Hindi	successful learner
Adult	English	Spanish; Chinese	successful in Spanish, not so much in Chinese
Adult	Chinese	English	successful
Adult	Chinese	English	from Singapore; successful bilingual
Minor	Chinese	English	"unsuccessful" ESL and attending pre-college training because of low language score
Adult	Russian	English	successful

Affinity Mapping

Themes: self-presentation, embarrassment, difficulties in learning languages, difficulties caused by language, technology making communication difficult, culture, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, immersion, prior knowledge, traditional classes, and what works.



Embarrassment



Difficulty

② Challenge
↳ speaking
↳ not enough practice
↳ don't like talking to people

② Problem
↳ don't see the point of learning

E: difficult in speaking
↳ lack of practice

② Challenges
↳ not enough practice

② Current teaching
↳ takes too long
↳ lots of repetition
↳ keeps forgetting
↳ other kids memorize things better

"The problem was so big, I didn't even know where to start"
(grammar) A

(mother tongue)
Russian became very rusty after not using it A

① Challenges
↳ Chinese sentence structure

① Challenge
↳ tonality
↳ pronunciation

② Challenge:
↳ not enough self-discipline
↳ don't study outside of class

② Difficulty
↳ confuse with English

Initial exposure to English was very challenging A

NEED TO GET FAMILIAR W/ DIFF. DIALECTS OF SPANISH, MORE CONFIDENT W/SOME A

LESSONS W/ FOREIGN TEACHER. IN CHINESE, NOT GOOD FOR YOUNGER CHILD W/ LOW PROFICIENCY. A

SEAMLESS TRANSITION TO NATIVE LANG. ENGLISH BUT NOW UNCOMF. IN RUSSIAN A

"School classes were useful, but I didn't get to fluency." A

ABLE TO SPEAK AND PRESENT WORK, BUT DIFFICULTY ANSWERING QUESTIONS A

VOCAB NOT A PROBLEM, MAYBE SPEED AND PRON. A

Connections with people are shallow because I don't speak the language K

TO FOLLOW CONVERSATIONS SPEAKING W/ EACH OTHER A

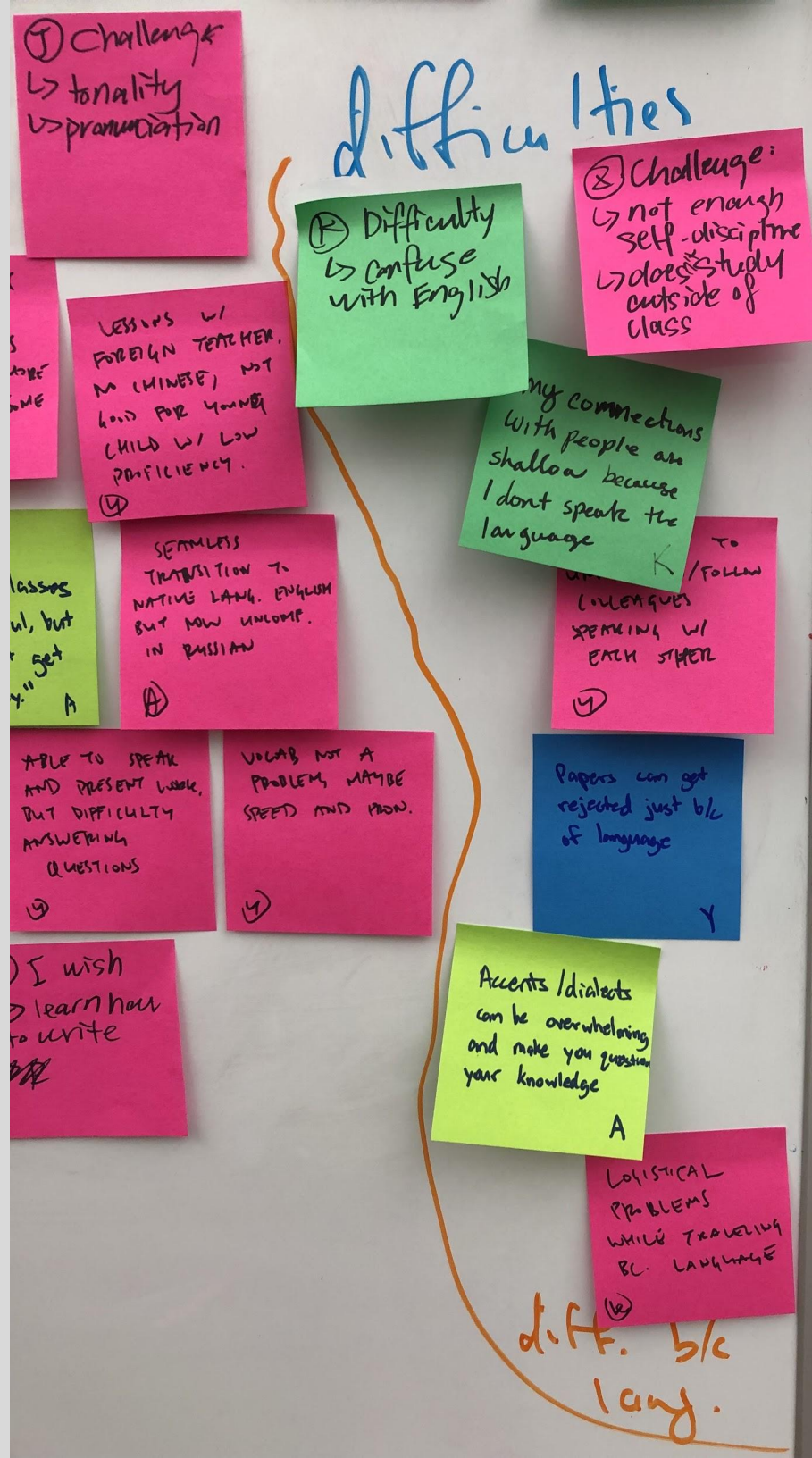
Papers can get rejected just b/c of language Y

② I wish
↳ learn how to write
with

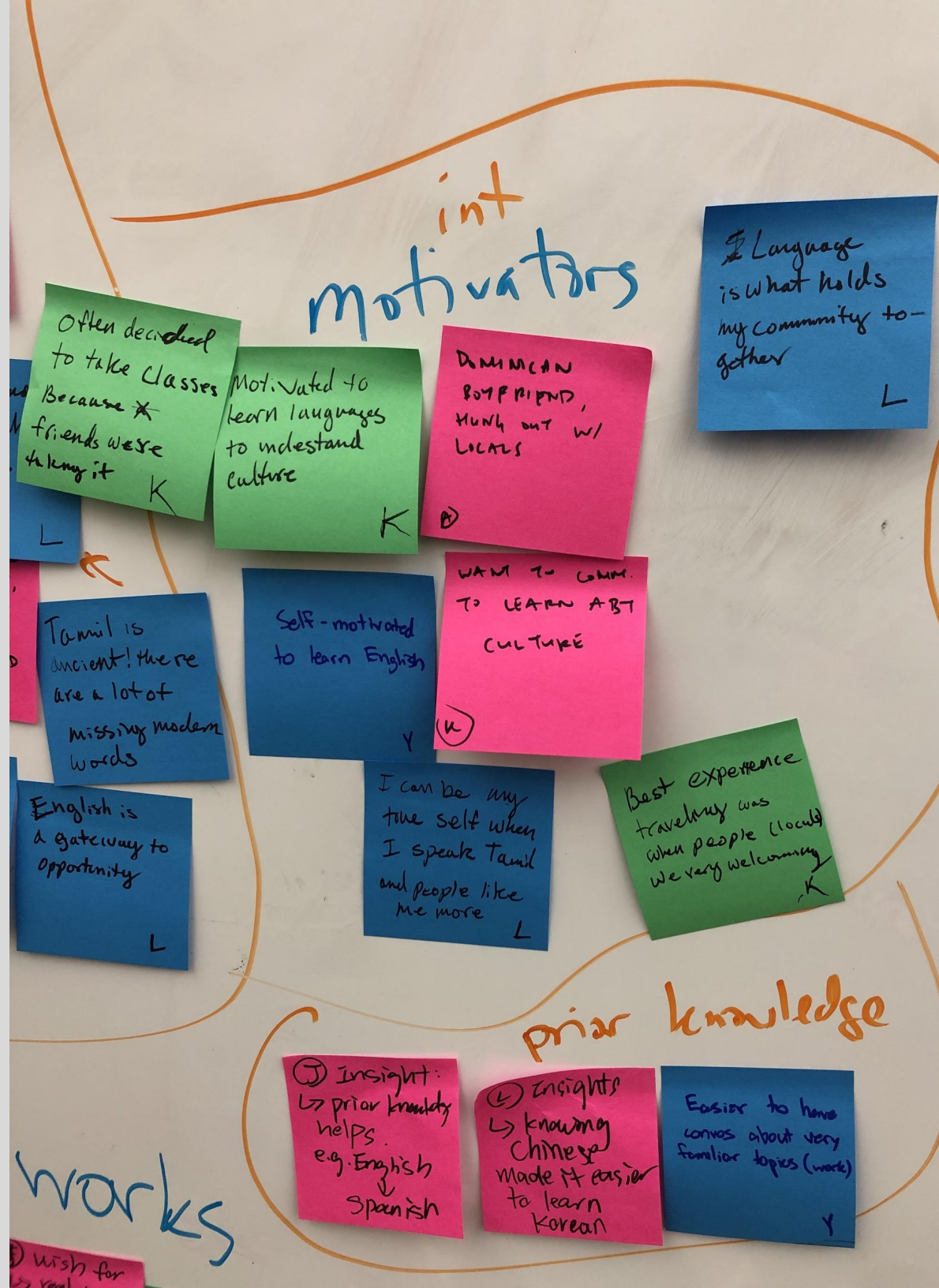
Accents/dialects can be overwhelming and make you question your knowledge A

LOGISTICAL

Difficulty due to language



Intrinsic Motivations



Extrinsic Motivations

① Motivation:
↳ Mom signed up
the class
↳ to prove here
& able to talk
to kids here

Started son's
exposure early bc
she saw the
importance of Eng.

② Motivation
↳ to study
abroad
↳ pass
exams

TRAVELING OFTEN
TO LATIN AM.,
TRANSLATING FOR
DAD

③ Motivation
↳ practical
↳ to prevent
Alzheimer
↳ Communicate

"NO PURPOSE"
LEARNING
LANG.
IN SCHOOL

④ Motivation
↳ forced
↳ for school
now
↳ better cal

When traveling
in northern
India, I was
greatful to
know Hindi

Hindi was a
survival language
in the US, and
northern India

if you want to
get into politics
in India, you
need to speak
Hindi

E:
Motivation
↳ for school

⑤ Motivation
↳ School
↳ mandatory
↳ for subject
learning

When talking
about tech
we always use
english

FRENCH & SPANISH,
FRENCH ↓
SPANISH ↑
now CLASS RELATED
INTERESTS

English is
a gateway to
opportunity

Often decided
to take classes
because *
friends were
taking it

Tamil is
ancient! there
are a lot of
missing modern
words

ext

Immersion

immersion

what h

Mastery of
the language come
from immersion
(movies, SO, books, etc.)
A

LOOKED UP SONG
LYRICS, READ
SPANISH-LANG LIT,
PLAYED CONVO
W/ BOYFRIEND ON
PHONE
D

Interactive / Fun
settings are
effective (movies,
songs, games)
Y

"Having a local
Narrative experience
[when traveling]
is special
K

What
works:
↳ documentary
with key words
explained
↳ multi-modal

Learning
tools
↳ English
cartoon

Best classes
were taught by
native speakers
A

Need
↳ feedback
↳ supervision
↳ someone to
force her to learn

Wish
↳ real-
transl
↳ feedback
↳ correct
mist

APP
works
→ read
answer of
→ can ea
points ei
right or w

Works
↳

What works

what works

① Insight:
↳ prior knowledge helps.
e.g. English
↓
Spanish

② Need
↳ feedback
↳ supervision
↳ someone to force her to learn

③ Wish for
↳ real-time translator
↳ feedback
↳ correct mistakes

E: feedback & accurate info are important
↳ not to make the same mistakes

E: need
Tools → dictionary
→ google
↳ need accurate results

④ APP that works:
→ read books & answer questions
→ can earn points either got it right or wrong.

E: ideal tool
↳ multi-modal
↳ same time
↳ immediate feedback
↳ highly accurate
↳ just-in-time

"Having a local narrative experience [when traveling] is special"
K

Best classes were taught by native speakers
A

⑤ Learning tools
↳ English cartoons

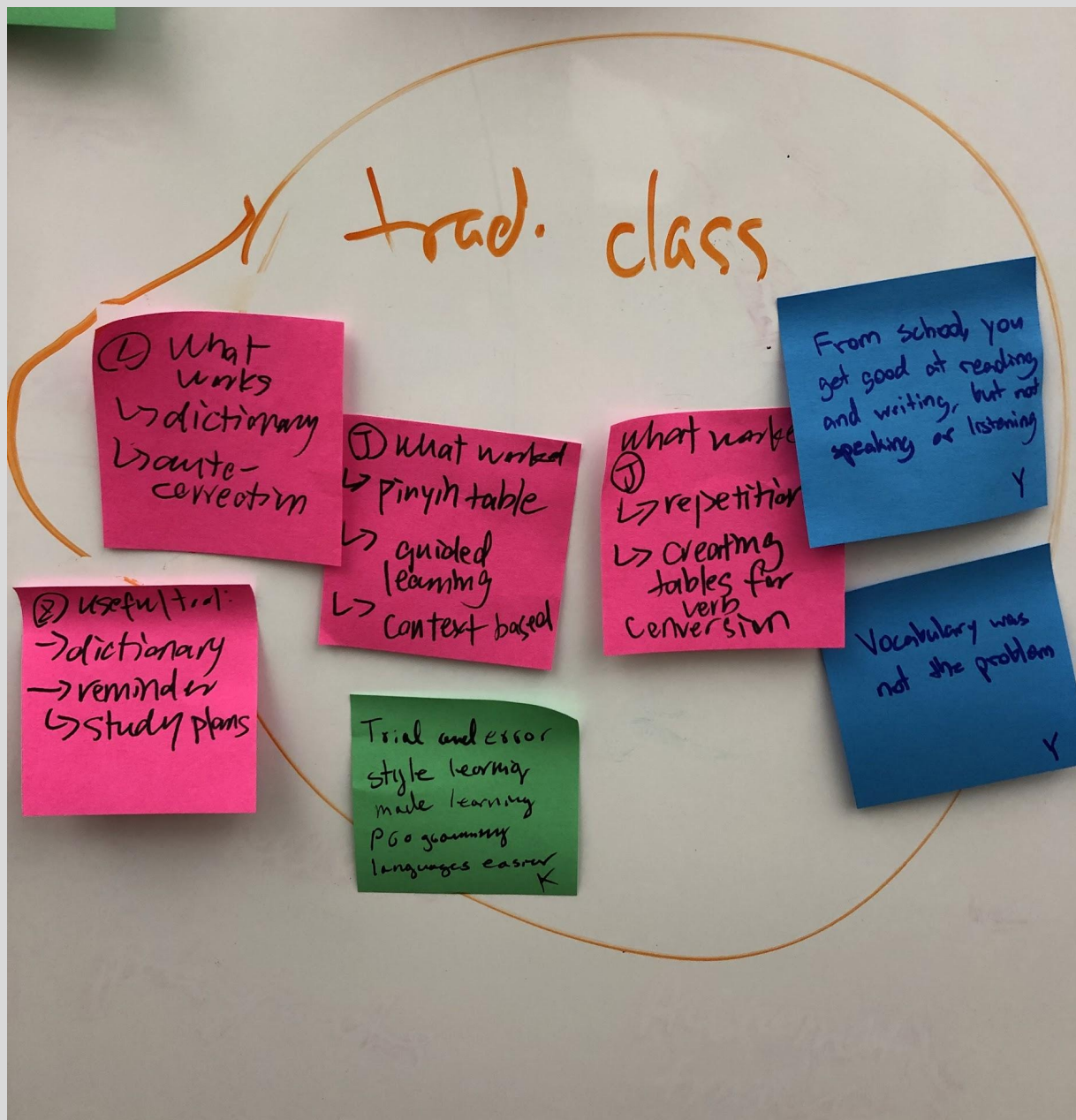
⑥ Works
↳ 1-to-1 tutor

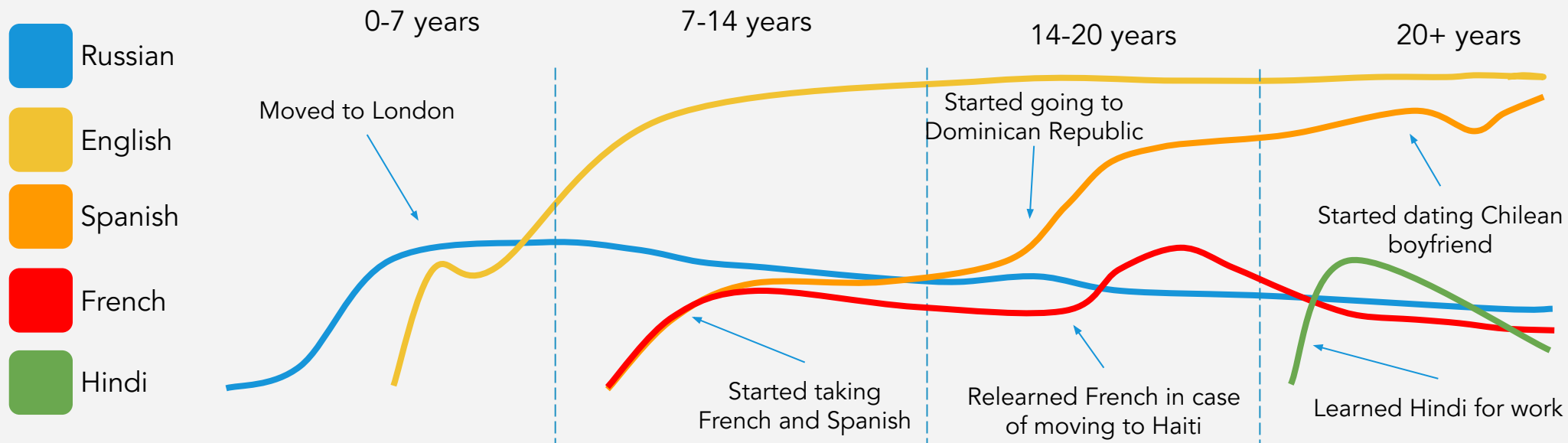
⑦ What works
↳ listen & observe & imitate
↳ read papers

⑧ What works
↳ dictionary
↳ auto-correct

⑨ useful tool
→ dictionary
→ reminder
↳ study plans

Traditional Class/Teaching





Feel	Nervous and shy getting adjusted to London (moved from Russia when she was 3)	Spanish felt more exotic and appealing than French	Genuinely interested in the Spanish culture	Uncomfortable when with Chileans because of their different way of speaking
Do	Spoke Russian when at home with parents and English everywhere else	Took Spanish and French classes in school	Immersed herself in the Spanish culture to better engage with her boyfriend	Tries to only talk in Spanish to her boyfriend once a week
Think	Do I really fit in?	Very uncertain about her Russian despite doing very well on the national exam	Sometimes nervous about speaking Spanish	People could mistake her as a native Spanish speaker
Say	"I still remember not knowing how to write my name in English and feeling very frustrated."	"The gap in my [Russian grammar] was so big, I didn't know where to start"	"Classes were useful, but didn't get me to the point of fluency"	"I don't feel like my grandparents really know who I am"

Key Insights **The best classes were taught by native speakers**

True mastery of Spanish came from full immersion

Using a language in real world settings is very engaging



Klint's Language Learning Journey

Unsuccessful learner

"I am very monolingual"

Emotional energy

Early life

High school

Undergrad

Present

Forced to learn Spanish at a community college with people 2-3 times his age

Learning Italian

Learning Japanese

Successfully trades traditional languages for programming ones

Traveling internationally with no foreign language skills

Touchpoints
Painpoints

Feel

Didn't feel like he **belonged** in the class.

Started off trying really hard, but didn't have a knowledgeable teacher and therefore didn't have a meaningful outcome.

Coding languages can be used to build useful things, unlike traditional languages

Having a local narrative experience made trips very special

Do

Muddled through the 2 week class without really learning anything

Took Japanese and spanish because a bunch of friends were also taking it, wasn't motivated.

Convinced his advisor to count C++ and FORTRAN as a foreign language

Struggled to make meaningful connections with people while traveling

Think

Never had any exposure to other languages before this class, no family members that spoke other languages

I've always been motivated to learn language because of culture, but didn't care about memorization of vocabulary

"Trial and error nature" of learning coding languages works better because the feedback is instant

"I feel like speaking only one language is a very shameful thing"

Say

"I got frustrated when I couldn't communicate..." "I learned "Taco Bell" level Spanish"

"I had never met a Japanese person at this point in my life" .. it felt very pointless

When trying to learn how to do something, always look on Youtube first, find tutorials and instructional videos

"Every time I'm in another culture, I wish I could speak another language and not be another dumb American"

Insights



Studying language without also studying culture can make the experience seem pointless

Learning in sub-par environments can whittle away at motivation

Goals outside of the learning objective itself, (i.e. being able to build connections with people, accomplish real world goals) builds motivation

Say

"When I was at school, there is no motivation ... I was a good student and did all the homework"

"If I can immediately ask someone, then AI might be better (24/7)"

"The solutions now are not very individualized. What you learn is not very specific ... teachers are expensive and you have to find a match"

"I don't trust chatbot's results."

"I need an instant opportunity to check where the result came from ... if it is accurate... if native speakers use it that way... I want to see the back-end"

I think it is useful to "see how words are written ... shape content to things that are relevant to my own life"

"I'm not afraid but I am conscious about my mistakes."

Think

Had difficulty talking in English during college.

Her writing is much better than her speaking.

Individualized learning is important but it could be hard to find a teacher that's a good match.

Things about learning technology that are important to her: 1) accuracy 2) just-in-time help 3) task-relevant 4) less time consuming (ranked in order of importance)

She doesn't like making the same mistakes. It is important for her to double check English uses to prevent making new mistakes.

Using multiple modalities and having context are important in language learning.

It is not scary to talk to people in English.

Do

Always try to avoid learning the wrong things and double check using different sources to prevent mistakes.

Use Google to search English phrases and over time learned to use the number of search results from Google and Google book to tell accurate uses from misleading uses.

Use Google book to check Grammar.

Showed disbelief when talking about current solution in language learning.

Feel

Feeling cautious when learning new English phrases.

Feeling annoyed about misleading uses that's available online and the possibility of learning the wrong things.

Hate making the same mistakes and developing

Feeling distrust about technology.

Say

"I thought it [Spanish] might be practical to know; it is also a popular language to learn in High school. I didn't know anyone who speaks Chinese and French. I don't have people to speak them but I can talk to friends in Spanish. I don't know what's the point of learning if I don't use it"

"I was pretty good at it, but I don't use it anymore ... It should be easy to pick it up and learn ... it's intuitive"

"It's [spanish] Latin based root and feels it's similar to English. I can predict the meaning by the sound of the words. Verse Chinese, I have no ideas because there is no correlation ..."

"I like the online pinyin table ... It makes it easier for an English speaker to understand the scope of the sounds, to pronounce words and recognize what's Chinese"

"I can just open the app and decide I want to learn about the weather today"

Think

Language learning takes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. His motivations are all for practical reasons.

Having someone to practice a language is essential in learning the language.

Prior knowledge of English helped him learn Spanish. It should be easy for him to pick up Spanish again.

Language one speaks shape how one thinks.

Learning different Spanish tenses is difficult.

It's challenging to grasp Chinese sentence structures.

The Chinese learning app made learning more accessible - reduce mental effort, motivational and psychological barriers.

Do

Spoke to Mexicans in San Diego in Spanish. "They laughed but I didn't care because I think I understand it. I don't need someone to tell me I'm good or not, unless I know I'm struggling with it."

Spoke in Spanish and imitated how his teacher gave instructions in their Spanish class to show me his Spanish level and how he learned Spanish in class.

Acknowledged that his Chinese level is "ultra-beginner"

Acknowledged that he is learning Chinese for a girl that he met and for preventing Alzheimer's as he've heard learning another language is a prevention.

Showed confusion when talking about Chinese sentence structures. Tried to make up a Chinese sentence and expected me to correct him and show him the right way to say it.

Spoke a few Chinese words to give me some examples of words that cannot be translated into English.

Feel

Feeling confident in his Spanish and metacognition (i.e., awareness of his Spanish skill).

Feeling confident about his Spanish speaking.

Feels it's okay that his is a beginner now, and there is nothing to be ashamed of.

Feeling confident that he can improve his Chinese.

Feeling it's okay to acknowledge his highly practical reasons for learning new languages.

Feeling confused about Chinese sentence structure but showing interests in learning it.

Feeling confused about some Chinese words but trying to make sense of them.

Insights, Contradictions, Surprises

- Need for a strong purpose to successfully learn a language, but intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can both be effective
 - For learning English, extrinsic
 - For learning non-English (native English speaker), intrinsic
- Language as a potential source of shame: failing to speak a heritage language well, not being able to communicate in a foreign language
 - “I don’t feel like my grandparents really know who I am” -- Anna
 - “I feel a lot of shame about only speaking one language” -- Klint
- Can be embarrassing to make mistakes or fail in communicating (especially speaking), so may avoid opportunities despite interest
- Desire to be able to speak a language but not putting in efforts to learn
- Different self-presentation depending on the language, able to explore different facets of self