

Azadin

Empathy interviews with learners and teachers



EMPATHY MAPPING TO UNDERSTAND THE TEACHERS AND LEARNERS NEEDS

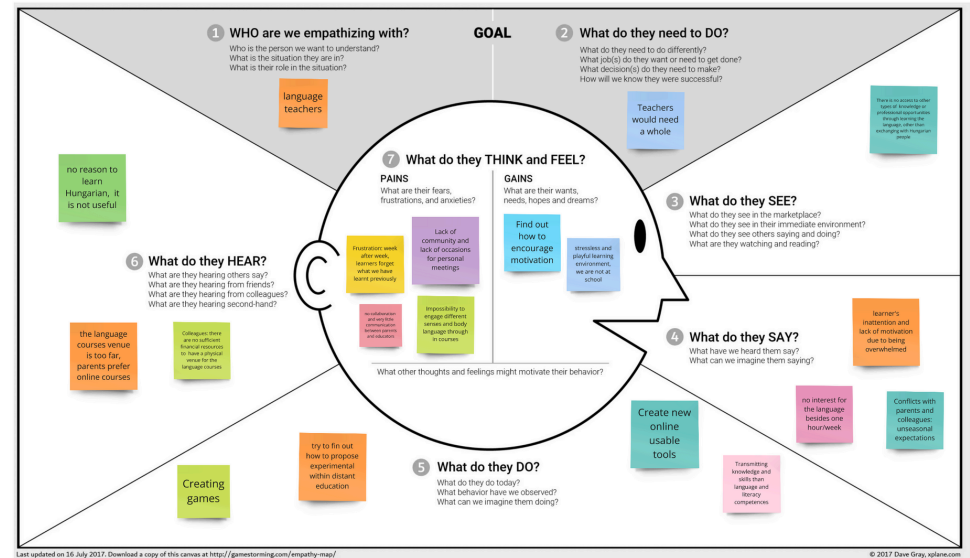
ABOUT THE METHOD

The empathy mapping method has been applied in order to collect and analyse the needs of our target groups. Empathy mapping is a part of the Design Thinking (DT) method offering a solution-based and target-oriented approach to tackling complex human and social problems. DT is based on close cooperation with the target groups, by supporting them to be part of the entire design process, from the identification of the needs until the finalisation.

“The empathy interview is an approach used to find out as much as possible about a person’s experience as a “user” of a space, a process, an objective or an environment. We want to understand the choices that people make and why they make them. By entering and understanding another person’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations, we can understand the choices that person makes, we can understand their behavioural traits, and we are able to identify their needs. This helps us innovate, and create products or services for that person.” (1)

Empathy mapping is a narrative-based needs assessment method, that is based on a free dialogue between interviewer and interviewee and helps the interviewer to analyse the results of the interviews by categorising the messages provided by the interviewee according to the different

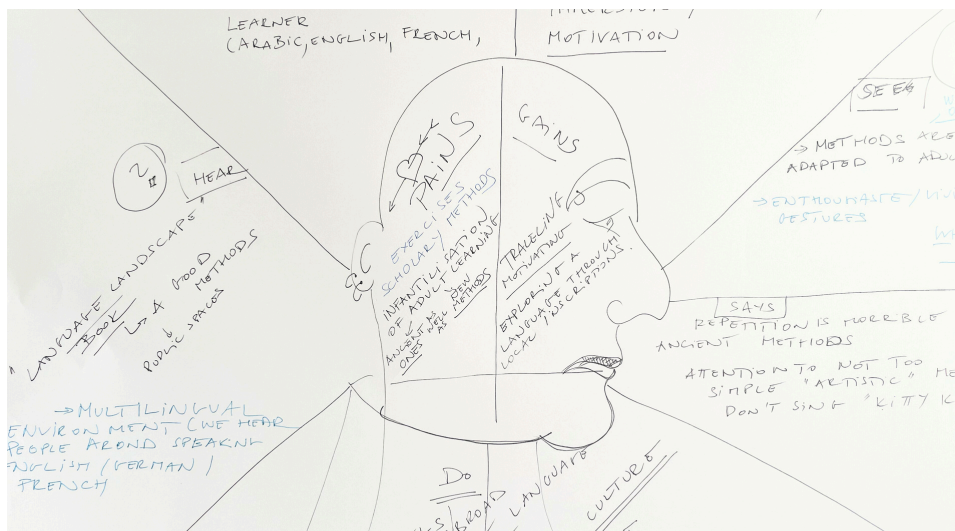
(1) <https://webdesign.tutsplus.com/articles/techniques-of-empathy-interviews-in-design-thinking--cms-31219>: Techniques for Empathy Interviews in Design Thinking.



Example of empathy map based on a teacher interview in the ALADIN project

levels of their manifestation: verbal and non-verbal expressions, feelings, deep thoughts, and the observations of the interviewee on the reactions of the external world on a given topic. In this way, one can obtain a global picture of the real needs of the interviewed person, including needs/ideas that the person could not articulate verbally or directly as a concrete need, but rather just as a feeling or as a thought.

The empathy interview always starts with an open question that leads the interviewee slightly into the topic, but that is open and general enough to let the person direct the narrative in a non-biased way, in the direction that is convenient for her/him/them. The leading question therefore often starts with a How? For instance: “How was it the last time that you...” Following this initial question, the interviewer will only ask questions that are related to the information provided by the interviewee - just as in a “normal”, sensitive and empathic conversation.



Exercising the method of empathy mapping with a learner during the ALADIN Kick-off meeting (Paris, 2024)

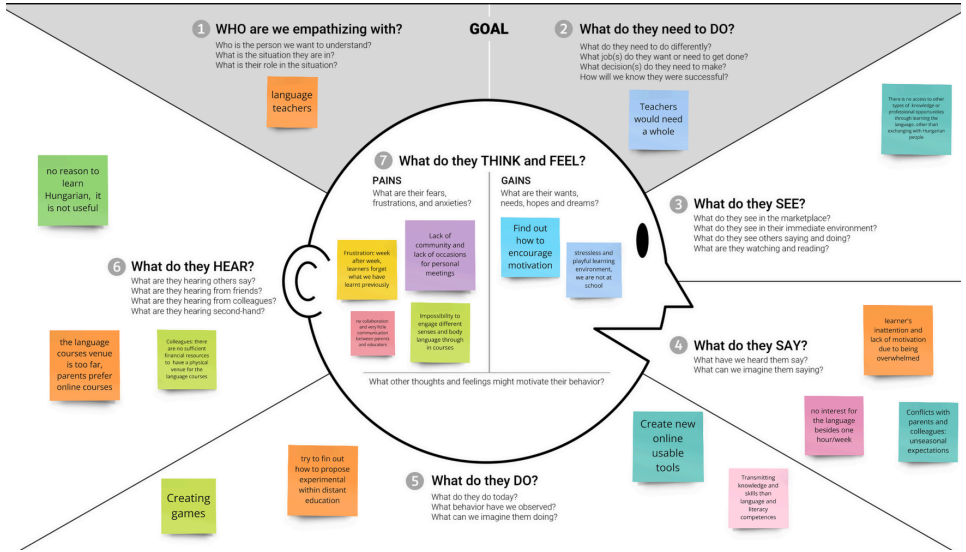
While the interviewee is talking, the interviewer does not only observe his/her/their narrative but also the nonverbal expressions: the gestures, the mimics, the voice tones, the laughs, the body movements, etc. Ideally, the interview is conducted by two interviewers: while one of them follows up the discussion by asking questions, the other observes the discussion and takes notes. It is also recommended to make an audio or video registration of the interview, of course following the previous consent of the interviewee.

One interview usually shouldn't last longer than 5, maximum 10 minutes.

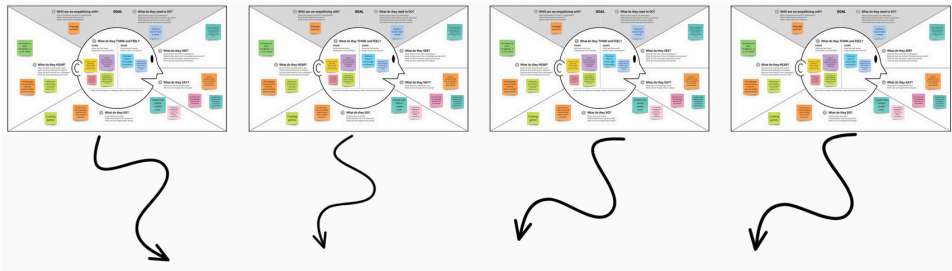
Once the empathy interviews are done, the interviewers will discuss the results, and fill together the empathy map, indicating the thoughts, feelings, fears and actions of the interviewee as follows:

SEES, HEARS, OBSERVES	SAYS, THINKS
<p>What does the user observe in his/her environment?</p> <p>What people around him/her do tell, think and do?</p> <p>What kind of voices, and opinions can be heard around?</p> <p>What kind of actions, and behaviour can be seen?</p> <p>What changes can be observed</p>	<p>What is in the user's mind?</p> <p>What are the main topics he/she is raising? What is the user's opinion? What are his/her thoughts, ideas, and reflections about the topic?</p>
FEELS	DOES
<p>What are the main feelings of the user?</p> <p>What are the feelings she/he expressed verbally?</p> <p>What are the feelings she/he expressed through non-verbal communication?</p>	<p>What are the concrete actions the user is engaged in?</p> <p>What is the short story of the action?</p> <p>What are the main results of the action ?</p>
GAINS	PAINS
<p>Summarise the positive elements evoked by the person</p>	<p>Summarise the negative elements evoked by the person</p>

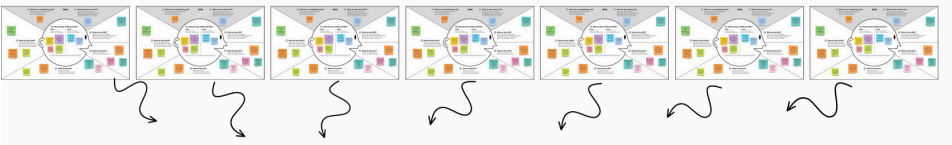
The process analysing and synthesising the empathy maps:



What are the individual needs of the interviewed teachers/learners and parents ?



What are the common needs of teachers/learners and parents of each partner organisations' target groups?



What are the common needs of teachers/learners and parents targetted by all the partner organisations ?

The empathy mapping method is particularly apt to map the needs of a target group, as it highlights the real feelings, observations and thoughts of the people. Once the empathy interviews are done, and the maps created (one map for each interview) the interviewers engage in the sensemaking process, when, based on the observations, they identify the main skills, wishes and needs of the target group. These needs can be then used for better articulating a service and a product to be provided to the target group.

In the ALADIN project, the local empathy interviews and the empathy maps were created individually and remotely by each partner. Partners filled out their empathy maps after each interview.

Based on these: by resuming, analysing and comparing the empathy maps, we could identify the common needs of teachers and learners which in the case of ALADIN happened mostly through interviewing learners parents.

The results of these contribute to design specific activities the best adapted to the identified needs and challenges.

THE ALADIN EMPATHY INTERVIEWS RESULTS

In the following part, we have summarised the results of seventeen empathy interviews conducted by the ALADIN consortium partners with heritage language teachers and parents of young heritage speakers. Empathy interviews were chosen because they promised to provide rich quality data through semi-structured interviews that would allow interviewees to freely narrate their own experience with heritage language teaching. To ensure the collection of roughly comparable data, the graphical template reproduced below was used to guide interviewers and map the thoughts and feelings of the interviewees.

Nine interviews were conducted with heritage language learners' or the learners' parents and eight with heritage language teachers, with equal weight being given to the four languages that are at the heart of the ALADIN project: Arabic, Hungarian, Polish and Romanian.

INTERVIEWS WITH LEARNERS AND LEARNERS' PARENTS

The interviews took place with parents of younger and older speakers to better contrast the specific challenges parents are facing in transmitting the heritage language to the core group. Their distribution by age and the languages spoken at home are summarised in Table 1 below.

The results of the interviews with parents will be presented in roughly chronological order, starting with those whose children are youngest. The first parent is a Romanian mother with a German husband who communicate in English. Their children, who are respectively four and two years old, speak both Romanian and German but are also regularly exposed to English.

Table 1. Family languages, age of heritage speakers/learners and languages spoken at home by empathy interviews

Family languages	Age of heritage language learners and languages spoken at home	
Arabic-French	Daughter of 6 years old (and infant of six months) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • father: Arabic speaker • mother: French speaker 	Two children of 13 + 18 years old <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Arabic speaker
Hungarian-French	Daughters of 19 and 13 years <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Hungarian speaker • father: French speaker 	Two teenage sons (10 and 13 years old) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • father: Hungarian learner • mother: French speaker
Polish-German	14 year-old daughter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Polish speaker • father: German speaker 	13 year-old son and 9 year-old daughter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Polish speaker • father: German speaker
Polish-German (+ early exposure to English)	11 year-old daughter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Polish speaker • father: German speaker 	
Romanian-German (+ early exposure to English)	2 and 4 year-old children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Romanian speaker • father: German speaker 	
Russian-German-English	11 year-old daughter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mother: Russian speaker 	

They both attend a German-language only early childcare facility, as there are no bilingual or Romanian-language local nursery schools in the city. They use Romanian only with their mother and Romanian speakers who are not proficient in German, and tend to communicate with each other in German. The mother strongly regrets that there are not enough opportunities for her children to spend time with other Romanian-speaking children when she is not present. She worries that there will be no heritage language classes in the city once her children will reach school age. She organises herself reading and playing activities for children who are heritage speakers and has a collection of children's books in Romanian at home, which she uses for reading with her children. She wishes that there would be more interactive materials and games available in Romanian for children of that age group and that translations would be of a better quality. Trips to Romania are major occasions for her children to practise Romanian. The mother hopes that these activities will succeed in maintaining her children's interest in the Romanian language.

The second parent is an Arabic speaker from Syria with a French wife. He only speaks Arabic (dialect) with his two children, one of whom is still an infant. He seems to be more at ease in English, which he has taught himself, than in French. His (older) daughter does not attend any heritage language classes but the father teaches her Arabic at home with the help of songs and stories, which are either taken from books or which he invents himself. In addition, he has acquired two apps to help her learn the Arabic alphabet and build sentences through games and songs, as well as a wooden alphabet that allows her to construct words and simple sentences. More recently, he has also introduced his daughter to standard modern Arabic (fushā) and encourages her to connect with other Arabic-speaking children. According to him, his daughter enjoys speaking Arabic. His aim is to maintain his children's links with their Arabic identity, roots and community and to be proud of them. Moreover, he hopes that proficiency in Arabic will later in

life offer them more opportunities at the personal and professional level and make them feel at home wherever Arabic will be spoken.

The third parent is a Russian-speaking mother with an eleven-year-old daughter and a husband whose first language is also Russian. Both parents work in the fields of science and education. The family has a transnational migration history and uses Russian, English and German at home. The daughter attends a bilingual German-English school. However, she prefers to communicate with her friends in English, read English-language books and play English-language games, a situation that, according to the mother, is quite common for children with a similar background and life experience. The parents would like to see their daughter become fluent in all three languages and try to support and motivate her in improving her Russian and German language skills. The mother regrets that the daughter has been losing interest in learning to read and write in Russian. She complains that it is difficult to find age-appropriate teaching materials for home schooling in Russian (and German) and compares this unfavourably with English, for which such materials exist in greater abundance, especially for older children. Thus, her daughter has been learning English easily and with great pleasure thanks to the "Oxford reading tree" methodology.

The three Polish-speaking parents interviewed are all mothers married to a German. The first has a fourteen-year-old daughter who was born in Berlin and speaks Polish with her mother at home. She has undertaken great efforts to ensure that the daughter became fluent in Polish from an early age by organising frequent trips to Poland, making sure that her daughter had Polish-speaking friends and sending her to a weekly heritage language class as soon as she entered school, despite the burden this imposed on the accompanying parent; the daughter now commutes on her own to attend the classes. In recent years, the daughter also regularly has spent

part of her summer holidays with a group of Polish-speaking children. Moreover, the mother regularly provides her daughter with Polish-language books. Constant exposure to Polish has thus been ensured. In her opinion, the daughter speaks Polish quite well and feels at ease doing so, even attempting to communicate in the language with Polish speakers who use German. She only occasionally lacks specific vocabulary. A major hurdle are writing skills, which are difficult to acquire in the absence of interesting age-appropriate learning materials, such as books, and require a lot of home work.

The second Polish-speaking parent has a 13-year-old son and an 8-year old daughter. Polish is used as a family language at home and during trips to Poland, an immersion experience which enhance the children's motivation to speak Polish and makes them feel proud to be able to do so. In addition, the mother reads to the children in Polish and teaches them Polish songs. Both children are attending meetings of local Polish scout groups and are generally in frequent contact with other Polish-speaking children. The mother considers the learning experience as positive for the children's personal development, with the particular benefit that Polish is part of a different language group from German. At the same time, she states that encouraging the children to speak Polish is not always easy and requires a lot of efforts, such as employing easy language. It is often more comfortable and quicker to use German in daily life. The children are at times reluctant to speak Polish if they lack the words to express themselves and tend to switch to German if they encounter difficulties. During playing sessions they need some time before they switch to Polish. In many ways, the mother considers Polish as the children's second language. The older son is more fluent than the daughter and makes regular attempts to read Polish but the mother faces the problem of finding reading materials that are appealing to him and correspond to his level of proficiency. The mother worries that her children might lose interest in the Polish language,

although she also observes that they are happy when being successful in using Polish, which they consider as a kind of "super power".

The third parent has an eleven-year-old daughter who was born in the United States, a fact of which she is very proud. The family uses Polish, German and English at home. English has remained the favourite language of communication for the parents and was initially used by them as a "secret language" (e.g. to discuss plans in front of the daughter), which was, however, quickly picked up by the daughter. The mother spoke exclusively Polish with the daughter in early childhood, including for story-telling and, later on, in Germany, because she was apprehensive about transmitting incorrect German to her daughter, but nowadays also uses German at home, for such topics as the school life of the daughter. The father has over time attended Polish-language classes and become quite fluent, although it became quite difficult to find classes for higher proficiency levels. The father's knowledge of Polish comes in quite handy during frequent trips to Poland and visits to the daughter's maternal grand-parents who speak neither German nor Polish. He is also able to follow conversations in Polish taking place at home. During later early childhood, the daughter attended a Polish-German public nursery school, though German tended to be the dominant language there. Thus, Polish-speaking educators used both languages, while the German ones, with a single exception, only spoke German. No particular efforts were made to teach the children Polish but some activities took place in both languages. (Not all attending children had a Polish-speaking parents.) Once the daughter entered school, German became more prominent as a family language. The mother continues, however, her efforts to promote the daughter's fluency in Polish, notably through frequent trips to Poland (three or four times each year) and through making available Polish-language books and an app, Storytell, that allows her daughter to listen to stories in Polish and English. Until the Covid pandemic, the family took part in

frequent outings organised on weekends by a group of Polish-German speaking parents. The mother is overall content with the level of proficiency in Polish reached by her daughter, who uses the language to communicate with her maternal grand-parents or other monolingual speakers of Polish, to exchange voice, but not written, messages with a friend in Poland, and continues to listen to stories in Polish. She does not consider her daughter to be fully fluent but clearly enjoying speaking Polish whenever the occasion arises. When her mother is present, the daughter sometimes asks her for the translation of a word she ignores. The mother regrets that her daughter never learned how to phonetically realise the Polish “rolling R” and that her parents encouraged this idiosyncrasy by complimenting it as “cute”, but she never undertook steps to remedy it. More generally, she is reluctant to push her daughter to learn more Polish if this goes against the daughter’s personal preferences, although she would like her daughter to become more familiar with Polish culture and history. Overall, both parents are happy with the fluency their daughter has achieved, as she is able to communicate in Polish whenever necessary or she feels like it. The mother contrasts this situation with that of other Polish-speaking parents and points to a broad variety of configurations: while children with two Polish-speaking parents tend to be fully fluent and speak without an accent, those of bilingual parents often lack full proficiency. Attendance of heritage language classes as an extracurricular activity doesn’t seem to work well in the long run, although parents who have since moved back to Poland made considerable efforts (e.g. summer camps in Poland, stays with a grandmother or signing up to a nursery school in Poland) to ensure a successful reintegration into the Polish school system. At the other end, a couple who had sent their children to an English-language school in Berlin saw their children adopt English as a preferred language of communication between themselves and were thought to have even acquired an English accent when speaking German or Polish.

The two Hungarian parents interviewed seem to experience particular difficulties to transmit their language to their children, as the number of heritage speakers in France is low and the geographical dispersal great, which leads to a lesser exposure to the language through contacts or the attendance of heritage language classes. The first parent is a mother with two daughters, one of them already grown up. During the interview, which was conducted in Hungarian, she seems to be more at ease in French, as her search for appropriate words and sentences points to cross-linguistic influence. However, she uses Hungarian in a professional context. She still has family members in Hungary and even owns an apartment in Budapest, where the family travels to twice a year. In the past year, she (and her daughter?) joined an online Hungarian-language online course to test it but abandoned after a short time. She mentioned that attending a weekly physical language course had been too demanding on her time, especially if the lessons took place during the week. She would like to participate in joint activities that are linked to the Hungarian culture but rather on a monthly basis. She also thinks that the current political polarisation makes it difficult to have discussions about the country between adults. She is in contact with other Hungarian speakers but her younger daughter is not. When her daughter was younger, both participated in collective celebrations, such as St Nicholas, and in dance workshops. These days, they still maintain some cultural practices at home, such as the painting of Easter eggs, for which they consulted a video tutorial on the internet, the confection of Hungarian-type Christmas decorations and embroidery with traditional Hungarian patterns. Last year they attended a workshop to learn how to create decorated gingerbreads. Her younger daughter, indeed, is very keen on manual, creative and craft activities. However, during the workshops the family members attended, participants mainly spoke French and didn’t really talk much to each other. Her older grown-up daughter speaks and writes better Hungarian, which she studied on her own when she was younger. She is still very much interested in linguistic and other activities related to

Hungarian and Hungary but is unable to find any because most are targeted at younger children. Her younger daughter, by contrast, shows little interest in the Hungarian language as well as in English and Spanish, which she learns at school. When the mother tries to speak Hungarian at home, both daughter most often answer in French. In her mother's view, the daughter sees no additional value in her Hungarian origin, although she "to boast of it" and appears to enjoy telling her friends about the things she knows about Hungary and undertakes in relation Hungarian culture or giving advice to those who intend to visit Budapest. In fact, both daughters are enthusiastic about the Hungarian culture and language during trips to the country but tend to lose interest once back in France. The mother describes her younger daughter's lack of motivation as "laziness" but also thinks that it is more difficult to maintain interest when children are getting older.

The other parent is a father of Hungarian origin with two teenage sons who have been attending an online Hungarian-language course for the last years with the interviewer. The father himself takes lessons in Hungarian. Before the Covid pandemic, the sons had attended a weekly one-hour heritage language class organised by the local Hungarian Catholic Mission and thus were in regular contact with other Hungarian speakers and learners. Unfortunately, taking the boys to the course was very time-consuming (four hours of commuting with public transport for a one-hour lesson), and many contacts were lost during the pandemic. Continuing to learn Hungarian in an online course therefore seemed a good option. The family usually participates in end-of-the-year celebrations at the Mission, which has a Christmas market and visitors exchange small-talk in Hungarian. Both sons are present during the online interview but the older refuses to participate in the discussion, which takes place in French, and only provides technical assistance. The father's Hungarian-language skills are rather limited and his restricted vocabulary makes it difficult to

share it with his sons. His repeated attempts to promote his sons' Hungarian-language skills through reading and board games have been frustrated by their lack of interest. They are said to strongly prefer online games and look up "stupid" things on their smartphone. The father's ambition for his sons are modest. He evokes, for instance, a board game, such as Monopoly, which would allow the sons to learn some words and names and find words to describe images. The oldest son does not enjoy learning languages and has similar difficulties with English and German which he studies at school. The father would also be interested in collective activities, preferable at a venue closer to the family home and only several times a year. The father would like to travel more often to Hungary with the family. However, the mother is not very interested, and each time "it's a fight" to organise visits and a sightseeing programme. The last time the father went to Hungary on a weekend was on a work-related trip during which he preferred to visit a local market where he could exchange smalltalk in Hungarian rather than to visit monuments. The family's lack of interest in Hungary makes him sad but he admits being happy that his sons are attending the Hungarian lessons.

The last parent is an Arabic-speaking mother with two daughters who arrived respectively at age 13 and 18 in France but who are now grown-ups. At the time of immigration, the mother attempted to homeschool the youngest daughter in Arabic with school manuals she brought with her but decided to abandon her efforts after she realised that the burden was too high for her daughter, notably because of the schooling. At home the family speaks Arabic and French, with the first being the main language of communication. It's often difficult for them not to mix the two languages in daily communication. The daughters correct the mother when she makes errors in French. Both daughters are fluent, though not perfectly, in colloquial Arabic but the younger one has limited reading and writing skills. Although the daughters had already attained a good level of

Arabic at the time of leaving their home country, it has been particularly difficult to improve their reading and writing skills.

INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

Of the two Arabic teachers, the first teaches Arabic to children and adult second-language learners who are beginners through individual lessons or for groups. His main professional activity is artistic. He works as an actor and director in theatrical performances and is also a practicing musician. He talks very enthusiastically about this teaching experience and believes that teaching a language is easier, nicer and more stimulating for both the students and the teacher if it is art-based: singing songs, playing with words, etc. As an example, he quotes a game in which students have to find the name for a physical object in the classroom and then establish links between the various objects. The songs he uses for teaching are often about the culture and history of the children's country of origin. He is strongly convinced of the benefits of creative teaching methods because students remain motivated and progress faster. Both creativity and students' good learning results are seen as highly rewarding. His two regrets are that teaching is a lonely job and that job opportunities in this field are scarce.

The second Arabic teacher teaches children aged 6 to 8 both in classes and through individual lessons, usually at the rate of one hour per week. She is herself a native speaker and has two children, with whom she only communicates in Arabic at home. Both children are now perfectly fluent in French and English, which they study at school. She is strongly committed to the transmission of Arabic as a heritage language to keep children "grounded", maintain their relationship with the culture and history of their country of origin and allow them to communicate with other family members and relatives who don't speak the majority language French. During

the interview she appears very focused and calm and exhibits a lot of confidence. She has clear ideas about her teaching goals and methods, illustrating them with examples of exercises and tools she is using with her students. In her opinion, teaching a language to children is at the same time easy and repetitive, the first because they are learning fast and the second because they forget a lot between the too rare lessons. She also tries to involve parents by giving the children homework to accomplish together with their parents, often in the form of games. Learning through playing is a key pedagogical concept for her. She regrets that job opportunities for heritage language teachers are rare.

The first Hungarian teacher interviewed teaches Hungarian to children of different age groups as well as to French-speaking adult second-language learners at all levels. She has a language diploma but didn't intend at first to become a teacher. It was personal life circumstances that led her to start teaching Hungarian. The interview took place on the terrace of a café near her teaching location because she wanted to enjoy some fresh air and not stay indoors all day long. She showed keen interest in the ALADIN project and was in particular inquiring whether it would result in the development of new teaching methods that could be useful for her work. Talking about her teaching experience, she evokes feelings of happiness and satisfaction when a class is going well and she succeeds in gaining the children's attention. She derives a strong motivation by proposing creative learning methods that she attempts to tailor to students' individual needs, which she considers an important aspect of her teaching role. To achieve this aim and to offer appealing and enjoyable lessons to her students, she regularly uses music and movement. A little gymnastics, she says, goes a long way to help the children to get to better know their different body parts. At other times, she uses dictation exercises, which work particularly well with adults. For teaching she uses her own home-made materials and attempts to employ a lot of creativity.

She tells that she participated recently in a conference on professional training where she discovered fascinating aspects of story therapy and particularly appreciated the small role plays and dramatic scenes employed. Asked about existing tools and support for teachers, she is getting upset and admits feeling tired of being expected to daily work on motivation. For her, a student's overall development isn't necessarily a key factor in teaching. She is most satisfied with the small daily results she is able to achieve. Feedback on her way of working is precious to her, as it allows her to better evaluate which methods and tools are proving to be effective. She has the impression that there is never enough time to address all the necessary knowledge and skills. Moreover, the job appears sometimes quite repetitive, because children tend to quickly forget salient facts about Hungary's history, for example. She also regrets the lack of more systemic support for teachers through conferences, further trainings, meetings, exchanges about their teaching experiences and fun activities.

The second Hungarian teacher interviewed offers language courses for the small groups of children but also individual training for adult learners. The interview took place at the interviewer's place, around a coffee, there were no disturbing sounds around and the user felt at ease. Among her main motivations to teach Hungarian, she evokes the feeling of being able to involve children actively and observing that introverted children become enthusiastic.

She mentioned as the main challenge that language courses are mostly online which limits the possibility of keeping the learners' attention and motivation and also limits the possibility of making creative exercises involving movement or working with materials.

She is thinking of solutions such as online courses alternated with workshops on a 2 monthly basis to ensure personal encounters and the implementation of creative activities. She regrets that Hungarian is not a priority for the children (nor for the parents), and their link to Hungarian is

limited to one hour per week. Furthermore, paying attention in online courses also demands some discipline which is hard to ask to children on weekends.

She also mentions that the expectations of colleagues and sometimes parents are not always realistic. The Hungarian language has a general image of an exotic and rare language, ergo demand is not very high.

The first Polish-speaker is a professional teacher in early childhood education and works, in addition, as a volunteer moderator of a Polish scout group of 6-to10-year old children in Berlin. She sees her main task as organising activities that appeal to this age group while also teaching them about Poland and provide them with Polish-language skills. She sometimes finds it difficult to identify appropriate teaching materials, those available are often outdated. She often creates her own materials, which can be very demanding and time-consuming. She pays particular attention to the vocabulary, which should raise the children's interest and whose level should not discourage them to speak Polish. In her eyes, it is crucial to offer time and space to those children with a less rich vocabulary and avoid any judgments that might lead to a loss of motivation. They are not meant to switch to German because it appears easier, a temptation she experiences herself occasionally. She makes an effort to avoid methods that remind children of school and prefers them to learn by playing. Her students are, for example, encouraged to memorise short passages from song lyrics and she has observed that children often sing Polish songs at home that they have learned during the scout group's fortnightly meetings. To avoid children getting bored, she attempts to introduce into the meetings elements of surprise and to frequently alternate different kinds of activities in line with the scout guidelines: a bit of movement, some creative play, such as cooking, reading short Polish texts, but also exploring nature outdoors or visiting a museum, etc., to enrich the children's Polish vocabulary and cultural experience. As a pre-school

teacher she worries sometimes that the activities she is proposing might bore the older children in the group. Her main teaching satisfaction, and even pride, derives from the observation that children discover a sense in using the Polish language, including when talking to each other or during the meetings, and their parents are very happy as a result.

The second Polish teacher has been trained as an English-language teacher and has worked in Poland and, later, in Ireland, before moving to Germany with her family. Unfortunately, her professional qualifications have not been recognised in Germany and she has therefore not been able to work as a teacher in a German public school. She is now running voluntary heritage language classes for Polish children in Berlin, during which she mainly employs methods of learning by playing and reading Polish-language books. As the venue of the classes is located near a train station, she has named them with a play of words that combine *stacja*, *Stacyjkowo* (the Polish title of the British animated children's film *Chuggington*) and *książkowo* ("bookish"). Thus, children always collect "tickets" related to each reading activity, or book, which they can use to create slogans once they have completed an activity cycle. She observes that very few children are reluctant to attend her classes and that most of them are greatly enjoying her course, not least because she has always some surprise up her sleeves for each lesson, which the children are eager to discover. Children are generally aware what the structure of the activity will be like but are kept in ignorance about the topic. She thinks that her earlier experience as a teacher is beneficial for keeping the children interested. She identifies repetition and the element of surprise as key features of her teaching method, which aims at creating positive associations in the children's minds. The classes thus have some permanent features, such as a Letter Club, where children learn how to read syllables, artistic and multisensory activities related to the theme of a chosen book, retelling the story of a book in the right sequence of events and reading aloud while children listen

Others change from one lesson to another, such as different themed activities. With the help of a book on fruits, the children learned in a playful manner the names of the fruits, and the teacher brought a blender to the class to prepare smoothies for everybody. The variety of activities are crucial to avoid children losing interest in the lesson. The teacher, thus, invited a Polish author and another time organised a Children's Day. The feedback on these events from parents and children has been very positive. She observes that, after class, children run to their parents and grand-parents to tell them in Polish what happened in class, using words they have just learned. Moreover, this forces parents and grand-parents to interact and get involved in the learning process. For the teacher, who talks about her classes with great joy and commitment, this conveys a strong meaning to her teaching activities.

The first teacher interviewed by Koopkultur is an experienced pre-school educator, who works mainly with pre-school children but also runs workshops for multilingual children for several NGOs. For her classes she prepares activities and materials designed to maintain their language skills in Ukrainian and Russian or support them with learning German. She relies a lot on English-language databases to identify methods and materials which she then adapts to her target groups. She strongly recommends the use of books and sensory games that allow children to learn in a playful manner. A main obstacle to her teaching efforts is that children often lack any motivation to make progress in their heritage language because their linguistic environment offers only few or no opportunities to use it. She observes, for example, that siblings often prefer to communicate in English with each other and that parents who bring their children to her workshops avoid using the heritage language when talking or reading to, or playing with, their children, despite her persistent attempts to encourage them to do so. Children's motivation to learn their heritage language is particularly low when they have been born in Germany and have not benefited from

teaching in the heritage language before the age of 6, as they see little sense in improving their language skills. On the other hand, children who have started earlier and been supported in this by their parents are generally interested, but not all parents consider their support necessary. The best learning results can be found with children who have been born outside Germany and have learned to speak or even to read and write the heritage language. In the teacher's view, heritage language teaching should therefore strive to achieve close cooperation with the parents to obtain their support, to maintain activities carried out in the classroom at home and to offer their children more opportunities where they can use the heritage language. In addition, there is a great need for simple and entertaining materials for both teachers and parents so that both are empowered to mutually support each other in preserving and furthering the language skills of their children.

The second person interviewed works as an educational trainer with primary school students and teenagers with a migrant background and runs workshops for multilingual children for various NGOs and so-called welcome classes for new arrivals in Berlin. The aim of these activities is to maintain the target group's language skills in their heritage language but also to support them in becoming proficient in German. The trainers observe that children and young people may not be allowed to use any other language than German at school or in welcome classes on the grounds that they primarily need to learn the German language and use it for communication with each other, even if they have another language in common. This regularly leads to discrimination, racism and bullying not only between recently arrived and the other school children but also within the group of newcomers. In this situation, neither children nor parents have the opportunity to discuss these problems with teachers because they lack the necessary language skills in German and are afraid of being ostracised or themselves blamed. If there are no other children speaking

their first language, children may suffer from feelings of isolation and loneliness. There exists therefore a considerable need for activities and methods that succeed all children in a classroom. These activities and methods should be designed as short, action-packed and art-based to encourage children to remain focused, enable them to work in groups and individually, and become involved and engaged. Teachers working with multilingual classrooms mostly lack the tools and experience to make progress in this sense and are often not really motivated. Conventional language teaching methods work poorly and it therefore takes children longer to learn languages, especially when first languages are banned in the classroom and children have no opportunities to use technical gadgets to facilitate communication. The greater the diversity of languages and age-groups, the greater the challenges in the classroom. In addition, there are children entirely unmotivated because of earlier experienced traumata or who are "frozen in time" who expect to return to their home country on the first occasion and fear wasting their time learning another language. On the positive side, children appear being really happy when they are offered opportunities to talk with adults in their first language, and some teachers are eager to try out something new, in the form of projects or activities, that motivates children and allows them to explore new ways of learning a language. Group dynamics are greatly improved when a common language can be found or activities be launched that conveys to the children the feeling that their language is visible and valued by the group. For this, simple materials and activities are required that children can use at home with their parents or on their own and that teachers can use in class.



CONCLUSIONS

Despite the small size of the sample, the interviews conducted are in line with findings reported in the literature. Most parents of young heritage speakers express a strong desire to see their child or children become proficient in their own first language, as well as the culture and history of their country of origin, although one teachers reports that this is not always the case. Their efforts to achieve this aim encounters, however, a number of obstacles. First among them are the children's attitude towards the heritage language. While many children make significant progress in the heritage language during early childhood and acquire fluency in a family context, especially when both parents speak the language at home or when the children's learning receives strong support from one or both of the parents, others are reluctant – or even refuse – to use the heritage language if conditions are unfavourable, such as the influence of early childcare provided exclusively or predominantly in the majority language. As children enter schools, where teaching generally takes place in the majority language, the latter tends to become more prominent in daily communication, including with parents when, for example, school-related matters are discussed, or between siblings once the oldest has entered school. After the young heritage speakers approach adolescence, they often lose interest in the heritage language or content themselves with the level of proficiency already achieved, which is often considered sufficient, by both the children and the parents, for communication within the family and with relatives in the country of origin or friends and acquaintances who speak the heritage language. In this context, parents are overwhelmingly reluctant to push their children to attend, for example, heritage language classes or participate in other activities where the heritage language is spoken against a child's wishes or at the expense of nascent interests in other subjects, including another foreign language. Exceptions are parents who have concrete plans to move back to their home country or, more

rarely, those who prepare their children for an international professional career by sending them to an international or bilingual school where English is often the main, or one of the main languages, of instruction. In the latter case, children often adopt English as their daily language of communication, including with siblings. More generally, the predominance of English as a lingua franca and because of its soft power (interesting online content, games, etc.) also militates against children pursuing studies in the heritage language. However, individual teenagers sometimes develop a strong interest in their heritage language and then often continue to study it on their own.

Second, heritage language classes and activities organised in the heritage language, if available at all, often take place as extracurricular activities or outside school on days and at hours inconvenient for the parents, who may have to accompany their younger children to a distant venue. Some parents also worry that the additional learning may negatively affect a child's academic progress at school. Nonetheless, a significant share of parents go to considerable lengths to ensure that their child or children become more proficient in the heritage language, having recourse to offers by the non-profit or private sector (e.g. language schools) if there are no heritage language classes provided at school. Those who persist are in general very satisfied with the learning results.

Indeed, heritage language teachers appear to be mainly enthusiastic about and highly motivated by their teaching job, despite difficult working conditions. Thus teaching is often a part-time or second job, sometimes because not enough positions exist. It is also very demanding. In the absence of appropriate published teaching materials and methods targeted specifically at young heritage speakers, teachers and educators have to prepare the lessons with little general support

on their own and deploy considerable efforts to create appealing ways of teaching to maintain the interest and motivation of their students. During teaching they also have to adopt teaching content for individual students since very unequal proficiency levels are common among young heritage speakers of all age groups. Institutional and financial support is often weak. Some struggle to reconcile pedagogical aims, with the inability or unwillingness of parents to fund these activities. Most consider that a one-hour weekly lesson or an occasional activity in the heritage language is not enough, as children tend to forget learning content quickly – this can make teaching repetitive and boring. Moreover, some experience difficulties to get parents more strongly involved. Supportive behaviour by the parents and close cooperation with them is deemed crucial for ensuring the progress of their students. Here, materials and methods that parents (and learners) can use at home are sorely lacking.

A particular difficulty has been described by the two interviewees who work in multilingual classrooms, especially in formal education and including with welcome classes where students and their parents often have just started to learn the majority language. The main focus in these classes is on the acquisition of the majority language (i.e. German) as an educational language, which tends to reduce the visibility of other languages used by students and inhibits their recognition in the learning process. On the other, it makes it often impossible for parents, students and teachers to better communicate with each other, in particular to address frequent practices of discrimination and bullying that are common in these multilingual classrooms. Materials and methods are even less available for these kind of pedagogical situations.

And last, but not least challenges linked to maintain the attention and motivation of children within online courses were also mentioned by some of the interviewees.



Storytelling workshop in Ukrainian for children and parents by Koopkultur (Berlin, 2024)