

Language Passports

What is a language passport?

The language passport is a kind of mind map which invites and challenges pupils to visualize their language repertoire.

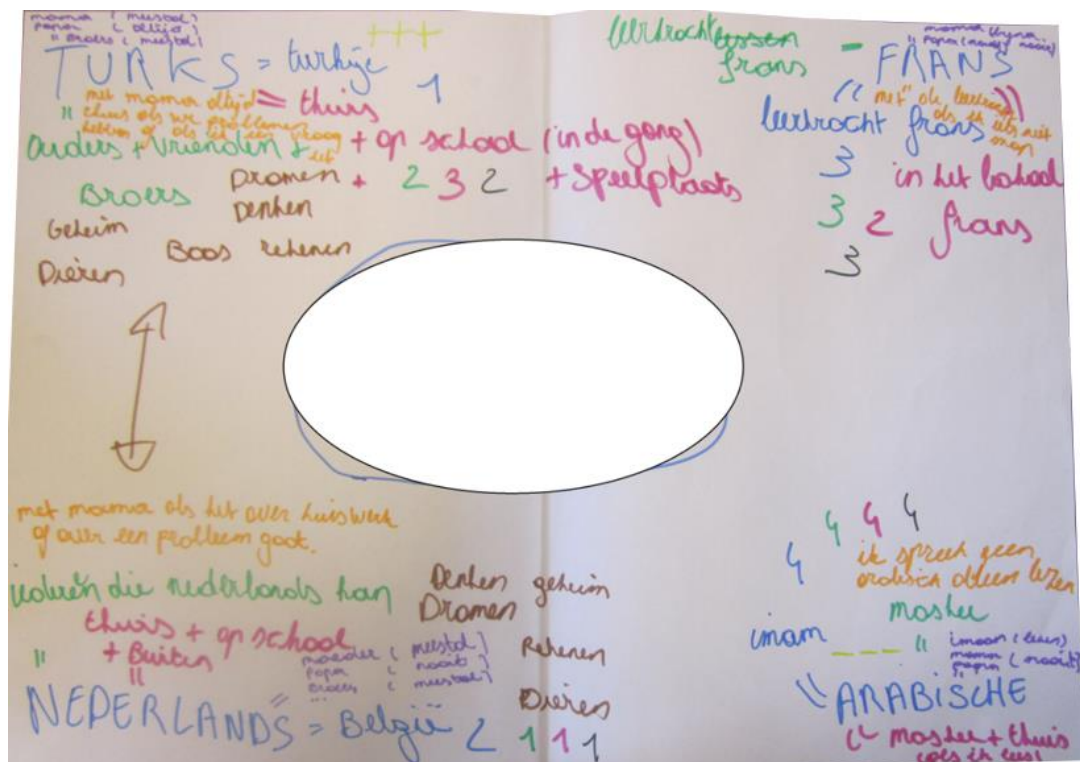


FIG. 1 ILLUSTRATION OF A LANGUAGE PASSPORT BY A SECONDARY SCHOOL PUPIL

You will ask your pupils to record the languages they use and then to add in additional information about each one e.g. with whom and where they use them, the different purposes that each language serves, etc. To make the passports clear and easy to interpret, each element is colour-coded (e.g. places are shown in red).



You could choose to read the instructions to the pupils or alternatively to give them the sheet (you may want to give out one task at a time). Written instructions have the advantage of allowing pupils to reflect and work individually but after each completed task, it's a good idea to ask questions to check they have understood and to help the pupils to fill in any gaps.

TIP: When giving the instructions, try not to give too many examples as these tend to influence the pupils' instinctive replies. It can be helpful, particularly early on in the exercise, for you to make a coloured 'skeleton map' on the board so they can see how to structure their own passport.

Visualising their language repertoire as a mindmap helps pupils to reflect on their ideas and perceptions, but as you are creating the language passports, it is also a good idea to discuss the different elements with the whole class as you go along. This creates a group discussion which often prompts pupils to add in things they might have overlooked.

Why make language passports with your class?

❖ Gaining insight into pupils' language use

The way we use languages in our daily lives is very complex and multifaceted, and as a result, capturing your pupils' linguistic repertoire can be challenging. The language passports can give you an insight into the reality of your pupils' linguistic lives: What languages do they know? When and how do they use them? How do they feel about them?

Research shows that language passports reveal some of the unconscious processes underlying the use of linguistic repertoires. For example, in one study in Belgium, the passports demonstrated that multilingual pupils use the language of schooling not only with people from school, but also to a great extent with people outside school such as friends, parents and siblings. The passports also revealed that for calculating and thinking, pupils preferred using Dutch, which is perhaps not surprising as it is the language of schooling. However, the pupils' home languages were more often used for "emotional" functions such as dreaming or telling secrets. The language passports clearly show how multilingual pupils use their linguistic repertoires in a dynamic and flexible way.

❖ Creating and enhancing interaction

The language passports create an opportunity for teachers and pupils to talk about language diversity. They enhance interaction between pupils and allow them to learn



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about each other's lives and to discover previously hidden skills and talents within the class. The passports also open up possibilities for teachers to talk with pupils about their language repertoire and to understand what it means to them to speak or learn several languages. These conversations might start out focused on the individual but can also extend further into consideration of language diversity in society.

❖ Raising language awareness

The construction of language passports is a classroom activity which enables pupils to present a clear overview of the languages in their repertoire and this will help to increase 'language awareness'. Language awareness refers to "the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of, and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language". Classroom activities focus on attitudes to languages and on raising awareness that can improve language learning and help pupils to understand how they function as multilingual learners.

❖ Creating a safe and positive classroom environment

Language plays a significant role in shaping identity. The creation of language passports in your class helps you and your pupils to recognise and explore some of the dimensions of a multilingual identity. It creates a forum to understand not only the many advantages and opportunities, but also the complexities of life as speaker of several languages. As such, the passports contribute to the emotional wellbeing of the pupils as they create a classroom climate which welcomes and valorises each individual's linguistic repertoire. Discussing the individual passports in the classroom is also a great opportunity for pupils to learn to respect their classmates from different cultures and backgrounds.



Instructions for Language Passports

Timing: 1 to 2 hours

Each pupil will need: 1 sheet of A3 paper; coloured pens for writing (black, green, red, blue, purple, orange, brown, pink)

Task 1

A. Name + languages

Write your name in the middle of a piece of A3 paper (landscape).

Write all the languages you use around your name (you can also put dialects, secret languages, invented languages ...). You don't have to speak a language *perfectly* to add it to your passport.

B. People (green)

Next to each language write **who** you speak that language with in **green**. Try to be as specific as possible, for example, don't just write 'friends' but say *which* friends: friends at school, friends from your football team ... Instead of 'family', write your mother, father, siblings, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, cousins...

C. Places (red)

Next to each language write **where** you speak it in **red**. For example: in the kitchen at home, in the classroom at school, on the playground, in the street, at the bakery,

D. It makes me think of ... (blue)

Next to each language write **what that language makes you think of** in **blue**. What words associations or ideas come to mind when you think about that language?

Task 2

E. How often? (purple)

Next to each language, use **purple** to write **how often** you speak each language with different people: *almost never, sometimes, often, always*. For example: how often do you speak Dutch with your mother?



F. About what? (orange)

For each language write the **subjects** you talk about in **orange**. For example: "I sometimes speak Dutch with my mother, when we talk about school" → you can write *school* in orange next to *Dutch* - *mother* - *sometimes*.

Task 3

G. Functions (brown)

Write in **brown** next to each language (you can write the words next to more than one language if you do the following things in more than one language):

- In what language(s) do you dream? Write **DREAM**
- In what language(s) do you think? Write **THINK**
- In what language(s) do you tell someone a secret? Write **SECRET**
- In what language(s) do you get upset or angry? Write **ANGRY**
- In what language(s) do you prefer to do mathematics or calculate? Write **CALCULATE**
- In what language(s) do you talk to animals? Write **ANIMALS**
- In what language(s) do you play? Write **PLAY**
- In what language(s) do you read? Write **READ**
- In what language(s) do you write? Write **WRITE**
- In what language(s) do you watch television? Write **TV**

H. Connections (brown)

Do you see connections between the languages you use? Draw a line in **brown** between similarities (for example, I dream in Turkish, but I also dream in Dutch. Draw a line between those two).

I. Combining languages (pink)

Mixing or using different languages at the same time is natural for a bilingual. Draw a line in **pink** between **languages you use together**. For example, if you mix French and Turkish when talking with your grandmother, draw a line between French and Turkish. On that line, write how often you use these two languages together in one conversation: *almost never, sometimes, often, always*.



Task 4

J. Strengths

Put your languages in order for each of the skills. If you think you are just as good at something in both languages, you can give them the same score.

- Use **blue** for **speaking**. Write **1** next to the language you are strongest in for speaking. Write **2** next to the language that is your next strongest for speaking, and so on.
- Use **green** for **listening**. Write **1** next to the language you are strongest in for speaking. Write **2** next to the language that is your next strongest for speaking, and so on.
- Use **red** for **reading**. Write **1** next to the language you are strongest in for speaking. Write **2** next to the language that is your next strongest for speaking, and so on.
- Use **black** for **writing**. Write **1** next to the language you are strongest in for speaking. Write **2** next to the language that is your next strongest for speaking, and so on.



What can you do after the activity?

The passport instructions are not fixed in stone: you can adapt them according to your own interests, preferences and local circumstances. You can add, adapt or skip questions. Most importantly, the passports are a great opportunity to start a conversation with your pupils. Below are some suggestions to guide your discussions about the passports, exploring what you can do with them afterwards and what you can learn from them. However, the possibilities are endless and it is totally up to you!

A. What can I do with the passports afterwards?

What you do with the passports afterwards is completely up to you. You could choose to put one up on the wall each week and invite the creator to discuss it with the class. Or you could use them to collect statistics relating to the whole class or at school level and analyse them in more detail, for example using an excel file. To illustrate this, in the last task we ask pupils to put their languages in order for each of the skills. You may find that some pupils feel stronger in speaking than writing in their mother tongue. It is not only an opportunity to discuss their emotions (how does this make them feel?) and preferences (would they like to learn to write better? Do they like listening even if they don't understand that much?) All of this is valuable information for you as a teacher. For example, when a pupil feels more competent reading in his/her mother tongue than in the language of schooling, would you consider using bilingual dictionaries in the classroom? Or you could explore how the passport changes between the beginning and the end of the school year?

B. Can everyone participate? What about monolinguals?

The language passports are intended to be used with the whole class. When so-called *monolingual* pupils participate, they might possibly feel a bit 'deficient', because they don't speak (as) many languages as many multilinguals do. We therefore stress a couple of things during classroom discussions:

1. Pupils can write down any language they use or know, including dialects, as part of their repertoire. All of us are multilingual in the sense that we all know some words in another language.
2. They don't have to speak a language perfectly for it to be added to the passport. None of us speak any language perfectly, we are all language learners.



3. It is possible that can't write down many languages now, but in 5 or 10 years' time, their passport will look completely different. That is because language repertoires are dynamic: people change and grow all the time.

C. Can I participate myself?

Yes, of course! When the teacher participates in the activity and creates his/her own passport, this makes the activity all the more powerful. It encourages you to look at your own language use and enhances the interaction with your pupils, enabling them to find similarities with their own repertoires.

D. Towards a multilingual activity!

Language passports are about understanding and celebrating multilingualism. How about making the activity itself multilingual?. See what happens if you allow pupils to use any language to make their passport and to talk about it. Does this have an impact on classroom interaction? Let them translate for each other into the language of schooling and demonstrate their skills!

E. My pupils find it difficult to fit their language profile into the categories.

People's language use is so complex and it may be difficult for pupils to fit their language repertoire into specific categories. For instance, "school" may appear often in the language portraits as a setting as well as an association. There will be some overlap. Remember that the passports are a stepping stone towards a conversation. They are a the means rather than the goal itself.

F. What should I say when pupils say they *mix* their languages?

When pupils *mix* languages, or use them interchangeably, this is often seen as *wrong* and teachers worry that their students are confusing their languages or will not make progress in the school language if they do *this*. However research demonstrates that this is actually completely natural behaviour. It is rarely random and often demonstrates a skilful and strategic use of several languages or is indicative of a pupil trying to solve a problem using their full language repertoire.



Sources

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