

PLURI Online course

Languages in focus: From EU policy to Multilingual education

Project PLURI - Plurilingualism for better education, cohesion and linguistic diversity -
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Partner



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Working With Language Visibility in Schools and Learning Spaces

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Languages in Focus: From EU policy to Multilingual education



Why It Matters?

For students

- Real-world language and literacy learning
- Recognising identity and voice
- Critical awareness of inclusion and language rights

For teachers

- Ready-to-use pedagogical resources
- Support for multilingual pedagogy
- Cross-curricular learning opportunities
- Gain insight into what students see and value

For school community

- A more inclusive and welcoming climate
- Reflection on hidden language policies
- Stronger links between the school and the neighbourhood/home

Learning Objectives

- Explain language visibility as a learning approach
- Implement practical activities
- Adapt tasks to group capability and context
- Understand and prevent common pitfalls and plan supportive strategies

What We Mean by “Language Visibility”?

- Which languages and voices are present?
- What do people see and hear every day?
- What is valued, and what is missing?



Dimension 1: Written Language

Written language

- Signs, posters, labels, timetables
- Rules and information in shared spaces
- Student work on display

Key question:

Which languages are considered acceptable to appear in public?

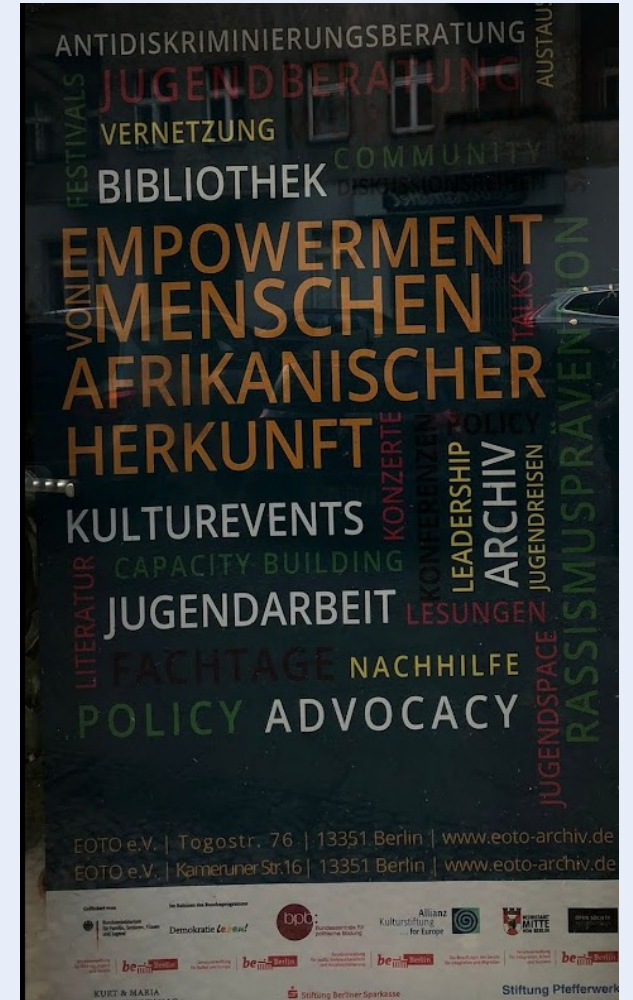


Photo by M. Markova © Koopkultur e.V.

Dimension 2: Images, Symbols, Colours

Images and visuals

- Photos, drawings, symbols, emojis
- Flags, colours, cultural references

Key question:

Who is represented, and who is not?



Photo by O. Chayka © Koopkultur e.V.

Dimensions 3: Placement and Hierarchy

Placement and hierarchy

- Where messages are placed
- Size, visibility, and permanence
- Central vs hidden locations

Key question:

Which languages are considered important?



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Dimensions 4: Sounds and Voices

Sounds and voices

- Announcements and greetings
- Assemblies, music, videos
- Languages heard in everyday routines

Key question:

Whose voices are heard, and whose are not?



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Working With Language Visibility in Schools and Learning Spaces

Part 1 – Languages We Bring With Us

Languages in Focus: From EU policy to Multilingual education



Languages We Bring With Us

Purpose

- Make languages present in the room
- Create a shared starting point
- Lower the threshold for participation

Materials

- Sticky notes or colourful cards with tape
- Black markers
- Written prompts
- Wall or board



Photo by M. Markova © Koopkultur e.V.

Languages We Bring With Us

Practical tips

- If the group is new to language awareness and/or exceeds 10 people, use fewer prompts and allow more time for reflection.
- Reflection can happen in different languages if there are people who do not speak the common language well.
- Allocate enough time for reflection and consider holding reflections in small groups.
- Everyone takes part in this activity. Facilitators model the task and explicitly signal which languages students can use to communicate and ask for support.

First Look at Language Diversity

Prompts:

Languages we are comfortable reading and writing in

Languages we speak

Languages we can understand, but don't speak

Family languages (think not only about parents, but also aunts, uncles, grandparents, other relatives)

Languages we want to learn

What languages do you speak?

How, when, with whom do languages matter in everyday life?

Languages We Are Comfortable Reading And Writing in

Meaning

- School influence on language competence
- Literacy hierarchies

Discovery

- Differences between oral and written language skills
- Languages learned informally vs formally

Deeper insights

- Some home languages may be strong orally but absent in literacy
- Literacy often reflects access, not ability or value

Languages We Speak

Meaning

- Languages associated with public interaction
- Languages used actively

Discovery

- Languages feel “safe” to claim publicly
- Public and socially accepted languages

Deeper insights

- Speaking ≠ dominance: some spoken languages may be used only in specific contexts
- Some students may underreport spoken languages due to insecurity or stigma

Languages We Understand But Do Not Speak

Meaning

- Passive or réceptive multilingualism

Discovery

- Hidden multilingual competence
- Asymmetrical language practices within families and communities

Deeper insights

- Hidden language knowledge
- Family language dynamics

Family Languages

Meaning

- Languages connected to home, care, emotions, and relationships
- Intergenerational transmission (or breaks in it)

Discovery

- Languages that matter emotionally, but may not be visible in school
- Languages that are heard, but not actively taught
- Gaps between family languages and school languages

Deeper insights

- When is these languages used? With whom?
- Are these languages spoken, heard or understood more than actively used?

Languages We Want To Learn

Meaning

- Aspirations, identity orientation, peer influence
- Languages linked to future plans, media, or a sense of belonging

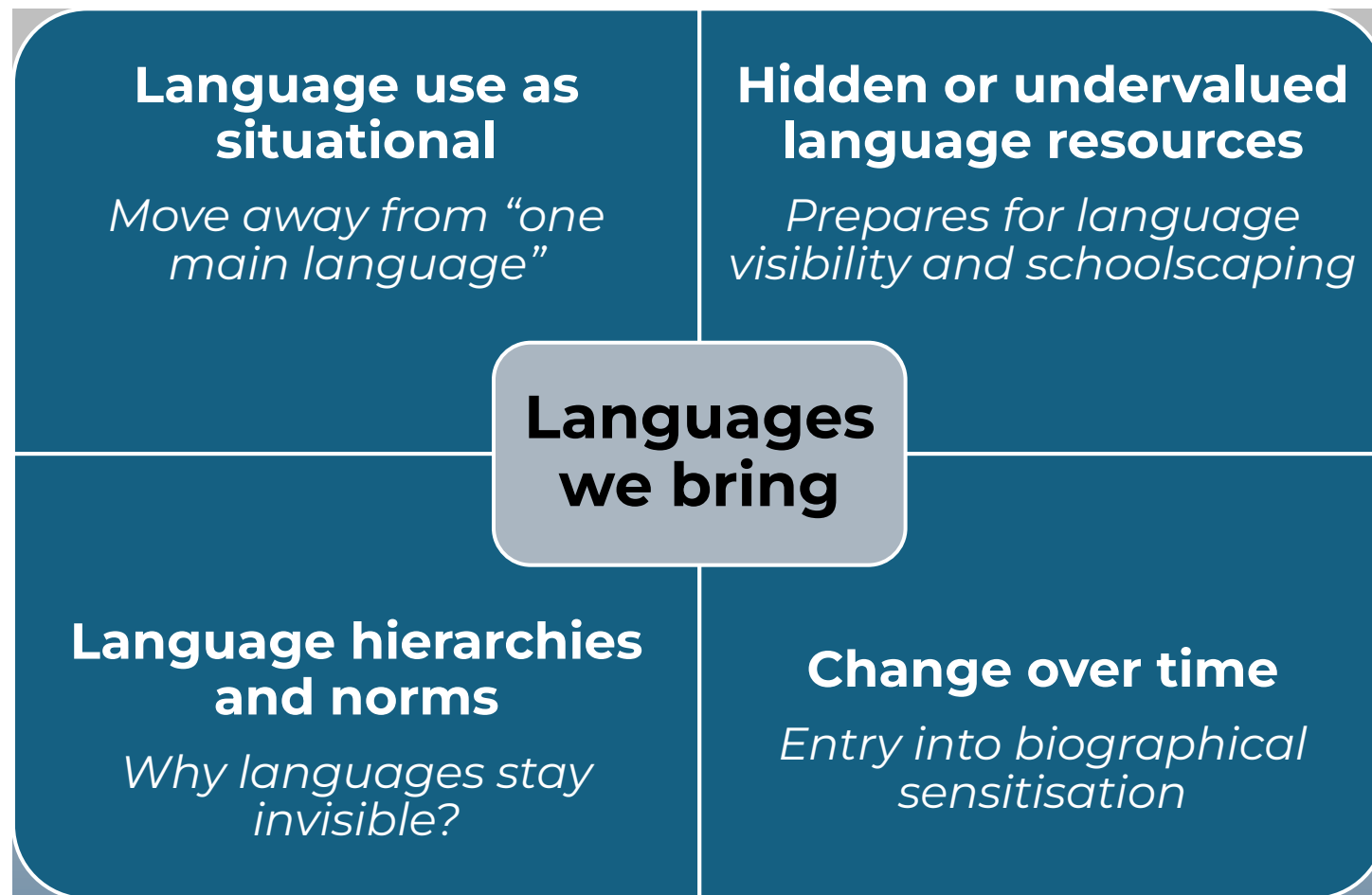
Discovery

- Languages considered useful, cool or powerful
- Motivation and identity orientation

Deeper insights

- Desire does not always align with family background
- Choice vs obligation in language learning

Languages We Bring With Us - Overview



Reflection Ladder

Move up the ladder only as far as the group feels safe and engaged

- You always start at Level 1
- Each level is complete on its own
- You do not need to reach the top
- Stopping early is fine
- Safety matters more than depth

NOTICING

What do we see?
What is here?

*No explanation
required*

PATTERNS & COMPARISON

Speak ·
Understand ·
Read/Write

*Partial & changing
language use*

SITUATIONS & USE

When? Where?
With whom?

*Home · School ·
Friends · Media*

MEANING & VISIBILITY

Visible vs
invisible ·
Public vs
private

*Which languages
feel safe to show?*

CRITICAL REFLECTION (optional)

Power · Value ·
Choice ·
Visibility

*Who decides which
languages matter?*

Level 1 – Noticing – Always Start Here

Goal: make languages visible without pressure

Suitable for all groups and ages, including those with no prior experience of multilingualism.

Questions

- What do we see on the wall?
- Which languages appear more than once?
- Do some languages appear in several groups?
- Did anything surprise you?

Discovery

- The presence and diversity of languages.
- Initial patterns without personal exposure.

When to stop

- The group is new or hesitant.
- Younger children.
- Limited time.
- High emotional sensitivity.

Level 2 – Patterns & Comparison

Goal: understand how languages are used differently
Suitable for groups beginning language awareness.

Questions

- Were some languages easy to place? Which ones?
- Which languages are spoken most often?
- Which languages do many people understand but not speak?
- Which appear mainly in reading and writing?
- Do some languages belong to only one category?

Discovery

- Partial and uneven language competence.
- Differences between oral and written language.
- Hidden multilingualism.

Why does it matter?

- It normalises 'not speaking perfectly'.
- It reduces the hierarchy between languages.

Level 3 – Situations & Use

Goal: shift focus from 'what' to 'how' and 'when'

Suitable for groups with some trust and experience.

Questions

- When do you use different languages?
- With whom do you use them?
- Are some languages used only in certain places?
- Which languages are easier to use at school? Which ones don't?

Discovery

- Context-dependent language use.
- Home vs school vs peer language
- Early awareness of language norms..

Tips

- Keep answers optional.
- Avoid asking 'why' too early.

Level 4 – Meaning & Visibility

Goal: connect language use to value and visibility

Suitable for older or more experienced groups.

Questions

- Which languages feel more visible here?
- Which languages feel more private or hidden?
- Are there any languages that we know exist in the group, but which did not appear?
- How does this compare to the languages seen in school spaces?

Discovery

- Language hierarchies.
- Visibility vs importance.

Why does it matter?

- Preparing for multilingual activities especially for schoolscaping.

Level 5 – Critical Reflection (Optional)

Goal: reflect on power, choice and norms

Suitable for adolescents, youth groups and trained settings.

Questions

- Who decides which languages are valued?
- Why might some languages feel safer to express than others?
- What could make invisible languages more visible?
- What does this level support?

Why does it matter?

- Democratic awareness
- Agency and voice.
- Critical thinking.

Moving towards meaning

- In what situations do you use different languages in your daily life?
- Are there any languages that you understand but rarely use?
- Are there any languages that you would like to use more?
- Which languages feel 'school-like' and which feel 'private'?

Wrap-Up and Reflection

- What might this activity reveal about the languages in your group that you hadn't noticed before?
- What do I already know about the languages within the group?
- Where would this activity fit naturally?
- What would be a realistic first step?

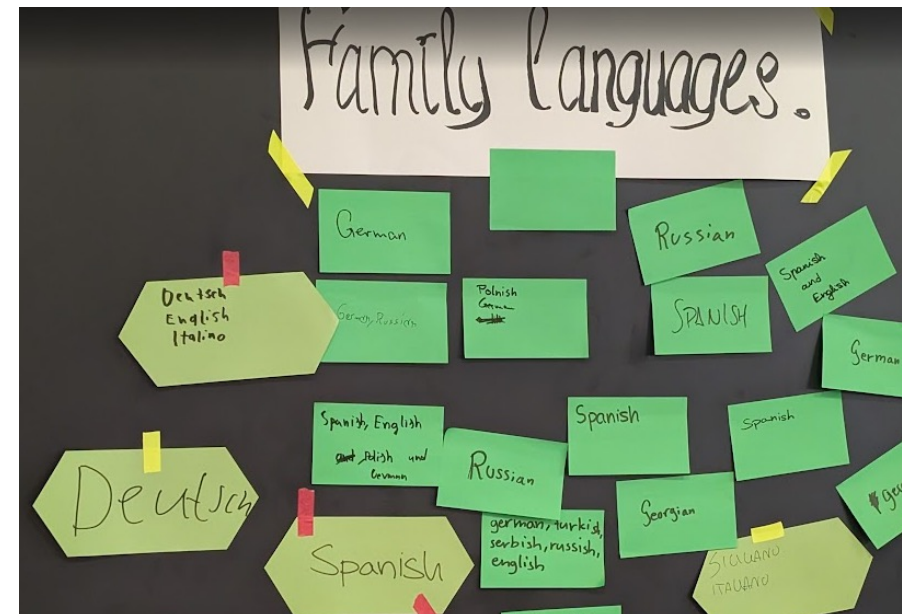


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List of useful resources:

Activities to support multilingualism at school. Teacher's guide How to motivate children to use languages. <https://www.skolapelican.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Activities-to-support-multilingualism-at-school.pdf>

Making Space for Multilingualism in Schools: Five simple steps.
<https://multinclud.eu/2020/12/16/making-space-for-multilingualism-in-schools-five-simple-steps>

Buchs, C. (2025). Multilingual cooperative activities for classroom social climate in heterogeneous contexts. *Intercultural Education*, 36(1), 68–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2024.2426949>

Bongartz, C., M., Rohde, A. (2016). *Inklusion im Englischunterricht*. Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang Verlag. Retrieved Jan 9, 2026, from 10.3726/978-3-653-05268-8 <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/id/17539bf1-7885-4138-be18-eae0b23a2a9c/1002737.pdf>

Celebrating International Mother Language Day. Blog post by Denise Sullivan.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/international-mother-language-day-classroom/>

Thank you for watching!

Visit the PLURI project website to find more activities, links and inspiration.

