

## Child in the City

### Supporting multilingualism within Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels with an online tool



violence.

28 Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use



29 Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.



30 Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion - even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.

The Brussels Capital Region occupies a unique position worldwide in the field of multilingualism. In this relatively small region (162 square kilometres), we count 1.2 million inhabitants with **180 nationalities who speak more than 100 different languages**.

With the language laws of 1963, **the capital officially became bilingual: French and Dutch**. But this bilingual city organizes education in two separate language communities: monolingual French education and monolingual Dutch education. This means that all publicly funded schools must use either Dutch or French as the medium of instruction. **Approximately 20% of Brussels children attend Dutch-speaking schools**, 80% attend French-speaking schools

There are about 150 Dutch-speaking primary schools and about 50 Dutch-speaking secondary schools in Brussels. They provide education for more than 52,000 children (2022 – 2023). **Barely 10% of these children always speak Dutch at home**, almost 19% speak Dutch with only one parent and more than 70% do not speak any Dutch at home or outside school. (They mostly speak French and other languages). This creates **major linguistic challenges for schools and teachers**. Therefore, **supporting schoolteams in this respect is the most important task of the Brussels Education Center**.

The Brussels Education Centre (OCB) wants to ensure that every child in the Dutch-speaking education system in Brussels has a **successful school career. Regardless of their linguistic background** (be it Dutch, foreign, or multilingual) or their socio-economic circumstances. OCB strives to eliminate any barriers hindering this objective. This is achieved through **providing support and training for teachers in the field of urban education** (e.g. language education, dealing with multilingualism and super-diversity, education for children growing up in poverty,...).

To support the 'dealing with multilingualism in the classroom', OCB **developed the website and tool Brussel Vol Taal**. Brussel Vol Taal aims to serve as an **additional online gateway to information and support for multilingualism for Dutch-speaking schools** in Brussels. The

website was launched in 2021 and offers insights into multilingualism in education specifically through a Brussels-focused perspective.

Brussels Vol Taal collects material and guides you through it. The website consists of 3 parts:

**STEP 1: “How to learn a language”:** This part of the website provides information and good practices about multilingual language development, the building blocks of powerful language education, but also more specific items such as corrective feedback.

*Providing corrective feedback on language errors is a way to teach Dutch accurately. Children in Dutch speaking schools receive little feedback on their mistakes, because their classmates are also not Dutch-speaking and make similar mistakes. As a result, they get stuck in interlanguage and don't notice the mistakes they make. That is why corrective feedback is so important in Dutch-speaking classrooms in Brussels.*

**STEP 2: “Language profile of pupils”:** This section of the website contains materials to build a language passport with the pupils and to use these insights in daily classroom practice.

*Creating a language passport is an easy way to gain insight into the languages that students know actively and passively (their language repertoire). The language passport also makes it visually clear that multilingual speakers use different languages for different purposes. It provides information for a rich exchange with pupils, discussing the linguistic diversity.*

**STEP 3: "Language policy at school":** The third part offers an online tool to create a school profile. It shows how the school deals with multilingualism by mapping the beliefs and the way teachers deal with their multilingual classes in order to shape a school language policy that is supported by the whole team.

*The online tool 'Dealing with linguistic diversity at school' consists of 30 statements that the members of the schoolteam have to answer individually. The first part asks personal opinions about language and multilingualism (beliefs). The second part takes stock of the approach that teachers take in the classroom. Based on the online survey, the school receives a report that it can use to further shape its multilingual policy.*

In each part of Brussel Vol Taal (step 1, 2 and 3) you will find concrete instruments and practice examples from the Brussels schools. The third part also includes a collection of classroom activities.

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