

## Parents' multilingual storytelling in the school setting: exploring influence on family language practices

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### ABSTRACT

**EN** The family language policies (FLP) that parents establish while communicating with their bi- and multilingual children are essential to the development of their children's linguistic repertoire and multilingual development. The involvement of parents in the implementation of multilingual pedagogies in preschool settings can play a fundamental role in fostering awareness on topics related to multilingualism. This paper explores school-based multilingual storytelling activities conducted by parents in a pre-school in northern Italy. The activity was designed as part of the project L'AltRoparlante (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020), an Italian network of schools which adopted multilingual pedagogies at curricular level. The findings suggest that involving parents in multilingual pedagogies has an influence on family language use as they encourage children's linguistic diversity awareness and parents' biliteracy planning. Parents' involvement in multilingual pedagogy can be a useful strategy to build inclusive home-school collaborations and to guide parents in reflecting about their FLP and in shaping storytelling activities in their home languages.

**Key words:** MULTILINGUAL PEDAGOGIES, MULTILINGUAL STORYTELLING, HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION, FAMILY LANGUAGE POLICIES

**ES** Las *políticas lingüísticas familiares* (PLF), que las familias adoptan en la comunicación con sus hijos e hijas bi- o multilingües, son esenciales para desarrollar el repertorio multilingüe en la infancia. La participación de los progenitores en la realización de prácticas pedagógicas multilingües en entornos prescolares puede desempeñar un papel fundamental en la promoción de la conciencia sobre el multilingüismo. En este artículo se examinan actividades de *storytelling* multilingüe realizadas por las familias de una escuela infantil del norte de Italia. La actividad es parte del proyecto L'AltRoparlante (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020), una red de escuelas italianas que han adoptado metodologías multilingües a nivel curricular. Se observa que la participación de las familias en actividades escolares multilingües también influye en la lengua utilizada en el hogar, ya que estas fomentan tanto la conciencia de la diversidad lingüística en los niños y las niñas como la planificación de una alfabetización bilingüe por parte de los progenitores. La participación de las familias en la formación multilingüe podría ser una estrategia útil de colaboración inclusiva entre familia y escuela, para guiar la reflexión sobre las PLF y ayudarles a crear sus propias actividades de *storytelling* en los idiomas hablados en su hogar.

**Palabras clave:** PEDAGOGÍA MULTILINGÜE, STORYTELLING MULTILINGÜE, COLABORACIÓN FAMILIA-ESCUELA, POLÍTICAS LINGÜÍSTICAS FAMILIARES

**IT** Le politiche linguistiche familiari (FLP) adottate dai genitori nella comunicazione con i loro figli bi- o multilingui sono essenziali per ampliare il loro repertorio multilingue. Coinvolgere i genitori nella realizzazione di pratiche multilingui può promuovere la consapevolezza su alcuni temi del multilinguismo nei genitori stessi. L'articolo esamina attività di *storytelling* multilingue realizzate dai genitori degli alunni di una scuola materna del Nord Italia. L'attività fa parte del progetto L'AltRoparlante (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020), una rete di scuole italiane che adotta metodologie multilingui a livello curricolare. I risultati suggeriscono che il coinvolgimento dei genitori in attività scolastiche multilingue influisce sulla lingua usata in famiglia, poiché esse incoraggiano i bambini alla consapevolezza sulla diversità linguistica, e i genitori alla programmazione di un'alfabetizzazione bilingue in famiglia. La partecipazione dei genitori alle attività scolastiche multilingue può essere utile per instaurare collaborazioni casa-scuola inclusive, per guidare alla riflessione sulle FLP e alla creazione autonoma di attività di *storytelling* nelle varie lingue parlate a casa.

**Parole chiave:** PEDAGOGIA MULTILINGUE, STORYTELLING MULTILINGUE, COLLABORAZIONE CASA-SCUOLA, POLITICHE LINGUISTICHE FAMILIARI

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## 1. Introduction

Classrooms across the globe are becoming more linguistically and culturally heterogeneous, yet most educational systems remain based on monolingual practices. In addition, schools that offer bilingual programs do so by considering mainly languages with a prestige status such as English and by keeping the languages of instruction separated (Cummins, 2021). This is also the case for Italian mainstream education, where the languages brought to the classroom by students with migratory backgrounds tend to disappear and where multilingual speakers are constrained into an Italian-only language policy. In limited contexts around the world (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022; CUNY NYSIEB, 2021; Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2020; Little & Kirwan, 2019), things are now slowly changing as research draws attention to the positive outcomes of recognising and validating the use of all the languages of the classroom in the teaching and learning process for both emergent bilingual and monolingual students. This growing attention on multilingual pedagogies points to benefits for both monolingual and multilingual children (Carbonara, 2022; Juvonen & Källkvist, 2021; Ascenzi-Moreno & Espinosa, 2018; Maynard & Armand, 2016) as well as for the whole educational community (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022; Cummins, 2019; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Due to the lack of materials in the minority languages, multilingual pedagogies often include the involvement of parents to provide linguistic input in other languages (which are not the school's main language). Even though bi/multilingual parents play an essential role in the multilingual classroom activities (i.e., translating words, reading stories in their mother tongue, illustrating culture-specific traditions), research is yet to investigate if and how parent-led activities in a multilingual pedagogy influence family language practice as part of family language policies.

This study explores the influence of multilingual pedagogies, with a specific focus on multilingual storytelling and on parents whose children attend a public nursery school in northern Italy. The paper investigates the ways in which multilingual pedagogies (and in particular storytelling activities) have an influence on family language practices. Specifically, it examines the impact of multilingual storytelling activities on the participants of the study and on their language use and biliteracy practices with their children in the home setting. The extent to which the involvement of parents in multilingual pedagogies have an impact on parents and on children is also investigated. Additionally, the expected results are designed to support educators in building inclusive and participatory home-school collaborations while guiding multilingual parents in shaping reading activities in the home languages with their children from an early age.

## 2. Theoretical framework

In this section, the two main theoretical perspectives that this study draws from are presented, and previous studies on similar issues are discussed. Section 2.1 focuses on the concept of multilingual pedagogies, with specific attention to the involvement of parents in multilingual classroom activities (e.g., storytelling activities). Section 2.2 describes literacy activities (e.g., storytelling activities) as part of family language policies.

### 2.1. Multilingual pedagogies

The term multilingual pedagogies refers to educational instructions that include the development of classroom activities based on the recognition of the students' linguistic repertoires and on the fact that all the languages in the class are considered as valuable tools for learning. Moving away from a monolingual ideology and from the separation of languages that characterises bilingual school programs around the world, the term multilingual pedagogies indicates different pedagogical approaches such as the translanguaging pedagogy developed by the CUNY-NYSIEB (CUNY-NYSIEB, 2021), the Council of Europe's "éveil aux langues" (awakening to languages) approach (Council of Europe, 2012), and the "identity text" approach (Cummins & Early, 2006). Despite some differences, these pedagogies share a common understanding of the importance of drawing on students' mother tongues and of the positive effects that this practice can have on the entire class. Research that investigated the implementation of multilingual classroom activities highlighted the positive outcomes of adopting multilingual teaching and learning strategies without having a negative impact on learning the school language. Further studies also reported the development of students' metalinguistic awareness (Leonet et al., 2020; Candelier, 2017), the positive impact on emergent bilinguals' literacy outcomes (Carbonara et al., 2023; Kirwan, 2020; Ascenzi-Moreno & Espinosa, 2018), the creation of inclusive and democratic classroom environments (Menken et al., 2018; Brown, 2012), a change in the educators' attitude towards bilingualism and multilingualism (Scibetta & Carbonara, 2020) and a positive influence on the learning process of another language (Cummins, 2000; Hopp & Thoma, 2021; Turnbull, 2019).

### ***2.1.1. Parents' involvement in multilingual pedagogies***

As outlined by Lotherington (2008), no matter how polyglot, no teacher adopting multilingual pedagogies can be expected to know how to communicate in all the languages of each child in the class. For this reason, amongst the actors involved in the implementation of multilingual pedagogies in the classroom, parents play a significant role. As described in the European Union report Eurydice (2019), almost all European educational systems stress the importance of the collaboration with parents and carers as it is considered essential for pupils' integration (Eurydice, 2019). In this vein, research underscored the relevance of involving parents in school life (e.g., attending school meetings, helping with homework) and creating positive home-school relations since these can influence students' academic outcomes (Santos et al., 2016; Wilder, 2014; Jeynes, 2012). Nevertheless, the same European report (Eurydice, 2019) also specifies that, according to some school headteachers, when parents do not speak the majority language (e.g., the school language) their involvement and collaboration in school activities tend to be lower (Eurydice, 2019). Similarly, Kirsch and Bergeron-Morin (2023) specify that parental involvement can be difficult because of existing power relations which do not allow parents with minority home languages to be heard and valued in the school setting. The collaboration with parents in the context of multilingual pedagogies can contribute to overcoming such power barriers and creating a more inclusive school environment.

### ***2.1.2. Parents' collaboration through storytelling***

Previous studies examined the potential of direct involvement of bi/multilingual parents with a migratory background in the multilingual activities as part of multilingual pedagogies. For instance, there are studies which analysed parents' involvement in a variety of activities such as homework, translation of words, and reading activities (Armand et al., 2021; Cummins & Early, 2006; Hélot & Young, 2006; Kambel, 2019; Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Svensson & Svensson, 2022). Amongst the multilingual activities that parents can be involved in, storytelling has the potential to create meaningful linguistic exposure. Stories can help to establish a positive attitude towards other languages (Krashen, 2004), moreover, given its oral and social dimension, storytelling can be an emotionally positive experience for the students (Masoni, 2018). In addition, exposure to storytelling in other languages can foster students' listening and comprehension skills (Hemmati et al., 2015) and support understanding and word memorising processes (Cabrera & Martínez, 2001).

Despite considering parents' direct involvement in the multilingual activities, current research has not examined the influence of parent-led multilingual activities on family language practices. Hence, in this study, the involvement of parents in the implementation of multilingual storytelling activities will be examined, together with the influence of such activities on family language practices.

## ***2.2. Family language policies***

Despite the assumption which characterises the Italian society as monolingual, the linguistic reality of many Italian households can indeed be described as bilingual or multilingual. An increasing number of students whose parents migrated to Italy, grow up with more than one language, i.e., the home language and the language of instruction. The growing field of research into family language policy (FLP) investigates the dynamics and motivations that determine the loss and maintenance of immigrant groups' and translational families' home languages (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013). Research on FLP has investigated a variety of issues such as (1) the influence of macro-level language policies (e.g., national language policy, language in education policy) on FLP dynamics (Lane, 2010; Canagarajah, 2008), (2) parents' language planning at home through specific strategies such as one parent-one language or minority language-only at home (Baker, 2011; Caldas, 2012), (3) parents' attitudes and ideology and how they affect FLP (Piller & Gerber, 2018) and (4) everyday bi/multilingual family interactions (Hiratsuka & Pennycook, 2020; Van Mensel, 2018; Soler & Zabrodska, 2017). While it is essential for each family to formulate and implement its unique FLP, research suggests a significant positive impact when children are exposed to two or more languages from an early age. Contrary to potential concerns, such exposure has been shown to not negatively impact language development; instead, it actively supports and enhances it (Cummins, 1979; Sorace, 2007).

### ***2.2.1. Storytelling as a family language practice***

Within the framework of FLP, language planning is an integral component, encompassing deliberate strategies and decisions made by families to actively support the development and maintenance of specific languages within the household. Reading activities at home fall into the variety of strategies parents might adopt. The languages in which the parents decide to carry out storytelling practices at home depends on the

FLP, with a specific focus on the language identified for the home literacy. Storytelling is a normal activity parents engage in with their children (Helms-Park et al., 2022) and, amongst other literacy practices, has the potential to develop children's early skills such as phonological awareness and vocabulary outcomes (Niklas & Schneider, 2017; Tamis-Lemonda et al., 2014). Drawing on these considerations, it can be said that (the parental) home language literacy is fundamental to the development of the children's multilingual repertoire (Schalley & Eisenclas, 2022; De Houwer, 2020; Unsworth et al., 2019). This seems to be particularly significant for emergent bilinguals who receive their education in their L2, and whose exposure to their L1 might be limited to the home environment. In these circumstances, multilingual pedagogies (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020; Cummins & Early, 2010) can play a fundamental role to foster parents' awareness on topics related to bi/multilingualism and language choices, and to support their storytelling practices at home.

### **3. Study method: research context, participants and data collection**

This paper examines the influence of parent-led multilingual pedagogies (i.e., multilingual storytelling activities) on family language practices as part of family language policies. The participants of the study took part in a multilingual activity which entailed bi/multilingual parents reading children picture books in Italian and in their home languages in an Early Years department. This paper intends to investigate whether and how multilingual parent-led storytelling activities in class influence family language practices.

#### **3.1. Research context**

The study took place in a nursery section of an Early Years department at a school in northern Italy. Since 2021, the Early Years department has been taking part in the project *L'AltRoparlante* (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020), a network of Italian schools that since 2016 have adopted multilingual pedagogies at curricular level. *L'AltRoparlante* is a transformative action-research project (García & Kleyn, 2016) where researchers from the University for Foreigners of Siena (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022) and teachers from six Italian schools co-design and implement multilingual pedagogies in class. Drawing on previous theoretical and practical implementations of multilingual pedagogies (i.e., De Mauro's democratic linguistic education (2018); Cummins and Early's identity text approach (2006); the CUNY-NYSIEB's translanguaging pedagogies (2021); the pluralistic approaches of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2012)), *L'AltRoparlante* project's main goal is to support the development of students' multilingual repertoires and to create inclusive and democratic learning environments that accept and value linguistic and cultural diversity. In order to do that, a variety of activities are carried out such as training courses and workshop sessions with teachers on topics regarding multilingualism, regular meetings with teachers to co-plan multilingual activities, and presentations with parents regarding multilingual activities at school and at home. By focusing on parent's involvement, this study builds on the *L'AltRoparlante* project whereby different aspects of multilingual pedagogies were already investigated such as (1) teachers' practices and beliefs regarding multilingual pedagogies (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2022; Carbonara, 2022), (2) students' perspectives and uses of their multilingual repertoires (Scibetta & Carbonara, 2020) and (3) the influence of multilingual pedagogies on students' literacy outcomes (Carbonara et al., 2023; Carbonara, 2022).

#### **3.2. Data collection**

The participants of this study are mothers (N=15) whose children attend the nursery section where the study was conducted. The participants were recruited with the support of the school staff that has a direct connection with the parents and that offer an Italian language course to support minority language mothers to learn the language of their children's schooling, i.e. Italian. The data collection process was divided into three phases.

The first phase, conducted in March 2023, included the administration of a sociolinguistic questionnaire to the participants of the study. The questionnaire was designed in three sections to collect the following information: (1) participants' socio-demographic and linguistic information; (2) participants' attitudes towards bi/multilingualism; (3) participants' reading habits at home. With the help of professional translators and interpreters, the questionnaire was translated into the home languages of the participants, allowing them to freely choose the language to use when filling in the questionnaire (N=3 replied in Urdu; N=5 in English; N=5 in Arabic; N=2 in Italian).

The second phase of the data collection, in the months of April and May 2023, was the observation of the storytelling activities in class. This phase was designed in the following way:

1. two visits to the local library with the participants' Italian language teacher (the first visits were aimed at allowing the participants to familiarise themselves with the place; the second visit allowed each participant to choose one book or picture book for the storytelling activity in class)
2. two sessions with the school staff to read and familiarise with the materials chosen
3. three storytelling sessions in class.

The storytelling activities in class involved 74 children, with 59 children belonging to families with a migratory background. The age of the students that attended the storytelling activities ranged between 3 and 5 years old and their linguistic repertoires involved their home language (mainly Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic) as well as Italian, which is the language of instruction.

The third phase, in June 2023, included carrying out two focus groups with the same participants to test whether the activities had an influence on family language practices. The focus groups were conducted with two professional mediators. One focus group, involving 10 participants, was carried out with the support of an Urdu and Punjabi mediator and the other focus group, including 5 participants, was conducted with an Arabic mediator. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. With regards to the ethics, participants' consent was collected at the beginning of the study. Moreover, privacy authorization forms for the minors that attended the storytelling activities were gathered.

In this paper, the data collected through the questionnaires is analysed through descriptive statistics to understand the participants' background and their family language practices, with a specific focus on the home language. In addition, the data collected through the class observations was coded into categories in order to scrutinise the intervention's dynamics (Klette & Blikstad-Balas, 2018). Finally, the data collected through the focus groups was transcribed and the analysis was conducted with the use of the software NVivo, following the Qualitative Content Analysis framework (Mayring, 2000). According to this method, the researcher conducts a data-driven analysis where categories ('nodes'), which is to say recurring patterns in the data, can be identified. The qualitative (assigning the categories) and quantitative (the frequency of the categories) analysis is systematic and context dependent as it is committed to understanding and reporting participants' viewpoints (Hoffman et al., 2012; Mayring, 2014; Schreier, 2014). Moreover, the patterns are then classified into existing theoretical categories (e.g., family language policies, multilingual storytelling, home literacy, etc.).

### **3.3. Participants**

The sociolinguistic questionnaire made it possible to collect information on the participants' background as well as on their family language policies with a particular focus on storytelling activities at home prior to the multilingual activities.

The participants are all female and their age ranges from 27 to 40 years old. They are all stay-at-home parents and live in a small town in northern Italy. They come from India (N=5), Pakistan (N=5), Morocco (N=4) and Egypt (N=1). The participants identified their mother tongues as Arabic (N=5), Punjabi (N=6), Urdu (N=2), Urdu and Punjabi (N=2). All the participants are resident in Italy and their time spent in Italy ranges from 6 to 19 years. More than half of the participants (54%) are university-educated, 27% have a high school diploma, 13% have a middle school diploma and 7% did not provide information on their education. As described in section 3.2, the participants attend an Italian language course organised by the school their children attend. According to their self-evaluation of their knowledge of Italian, 56% of the participants describe their speaking skills as 'intermediate', 25% as 'good' and 19% as 'basic'. In addition, 46% of the participants described their Italian reading skills as 'excellent', 40% as 'good', 7% 'intermediate' and 7% as 'basic'. Regarding their writing skills in Italian, 40% of the participants described them as 'good', 33% as 'intermediate' and 7% as 'excellent'. Finally, 60% of the participants described their listening skills in Italian as 'good', 27% as 'excellent', 6.5% as 'intermediate' and 6.5% as 'basic'. Regarding the participants' linguistic background and family language policy, the data collected shows that most of the participants (N=13) live with their husband or partner while the rest (N=2) live with their extended family. As Table 1 shows, the majority (N=9) describes their family language policy as bi/multilingual, while the others (N=6) describe it as monolingual (e.g., Arabic-only, and Urdu-only).

Table 1  
*The language used at home*

<b>Language(s) at home</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Family language policy</b>
Arabic-only	4	Monolingual
Urdu-only	2	Monolingual
Arabic and Italian	1	Bilingual
Urdu and Italian	1	Bilingual
Urdu and Punjabi	1	Bilingual
Punjabi and English	1	Bilingual
Urdu, English and Italian	1	Multilingual
Punjabi, English and Urdu	4	Multilingual

To better define their FLP, further questions were asked in relation to the specific home activities and practices that the participants carry out with their children, such as language use while sharing a meal and watching television as Table 2 below shows.

Table 2  
*Language use during specific home activities*

<b>Home activities</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
Use of Italian while sharing a meal	0%	20%	26%	27%	27%
Use of home language while sharing a meal	0%	20%	20%	20%	40%
Use of Italian while watching TV	0%	0%	23%	31%	46%
Use of home language while watching TV	0%	18%	27%	18%	37%

The answers to these questions show two different practices. Firstly, the activity of watching TV tends to happen more often in Italian compared to the same activity in the home language. This might be influenced by the monolingual Italian TV screening. Secondly, amongst the participants, those who replied 'always' or 'often' to both questions regarding the activities (share a meal and watch TV) in their home language, are the ones that share Arabic as a home language. In relation to this, participants that described their practices as involving many languages were also asked what determines which language to use. 33% of the participants replied that the language choice depends on which language their child will understand better, 28% said it depends on what language comes to their mind, 28% said it depends on where they are and 11% on what they are talking about.

Regarding storytelling activities, the questionnaire made it possible to collect data on the participants' reading and storytelling practices at home. Participants were asked if there are moments dedicated to reading with their children at home and, if there are, how often and in which language(s). The majority of the participants (N=13) answered 'yes' when asked whether there are moments dedicated to storytelling at home, two participants (N=2) answered 'no' and one participant did not reply. Moreover, the participants were asked in which language storytelling is conducted at home as the Table 3 below shows.

Table 3  
*Reading and storytelling practices at home*

<b>Storytelling practices</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Always</b>
Storytelling activities in Italian	0%	27%	13%	27%	33%
Storytelling activities in the home language	13%	0%	20%	27%	40%

Similarly to the data presented in Table 2, the data presented in Table 3 shows that the majority of the participants that replied 'always' regarding storytelling in their mother tongue are Arabic speakers. Moreover, the same participants also replied 'rarely' to storytelling in Italian. On the contrary, the participants whose mother tongue is Punjabi, explained that storytelling takes place more often in Italian. In addition, the same participants also pointed out that, if they read in a language different from Italian they usually read in English.

In addition, the questionnaire aimed to understand if the parents could access materials to conduct readings in multiple languages (i.e. home language and Italian) and if they were satisfied with the resources

available to raise their children with more than one language. Most of the participants (N=10) declared they did not have materials at their disposal to read in their home language. Similarly, the same number of participants (N=10) stated they were not satisfied with the available resources.

The data presented in this section made it possible to identify the participants' language use at home and their habits in relation to storytelling. Drawing from this context, the following sections illustrate the analysis and findings.

#### **4. Analysis and findings**

This section will discuss the main findings of the study. First, section 4.1 describes the data collected through class observations and section 4.2 outlines the results related to the influence of the activity on family language practices.

##### **4.1. The storytelling activities in class**

Three sessions dedicated to multilingual storytelling were carried out through class observations. The books, picture books and silent books were selected by the participants at the local library with the help of their Italian language teacher and they covered topics appropriate to the children's age group (3-5 years old) such as animals, friendship, etc. The storytelling was conducted by the parents in Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic, English, Italian and Wolof. These activities were organised in a common room where the parents entered and waited for the children. Each child knocked at the door and asked for permission to enter the room in the language they wanted, similarly the parents replied in their mother tongues. Through this introductory moment, a new 'shared' multilingual space was created where all the languages brought by the parents and the children were accepted, valued, and used. The observations made it possible to identify two similar but different activities: (1) plenary storytelling moments and (2) small-group storytelling moments.

During the (1) plenary storytelling moments, the 15 participants were divided into couples with one participant reading in Italian and one participant reading in her mother tongue. The reading was conducted with the students arranged in a semi-circle and the two participants sitting in front of them. To support the children's comprehension and participation, the storytelling was carried out in a dialogic way by asking them questions and translations, and by giving verbal and non-verbal confirmation. Moreover, the participants adopted strategies such as emphasizing key words with the tone of voice, with gestures, and in some cases, with the support of a projector where the book's pages were screened. Despite the participants' familiarity with the materials, as detailed in Section 3.2, their actions remained spontaneous as they independently decided how to engage during the activities.

The second type of storytelling activity that was identified through class observations was organised in (2) small groups. Each group was led by a parent that read the same book that the children had listened to during the plenary reading. This activity was more informal and allowed a greater participation from the children. Parents allowed children to speak, they asked them questions, pointing to pictures in the books, and added information.

Table 4 below illustrates the participants involved in every session and the activities conducted. The observation made it possible to see that the parents' participations were different. Some mothers were more open and eager to speak to the entire class in both their mother tongue and in Italian, whereas other mothers only used Italian while communicating 'outside' the storytelling moments. Finally, through the observation, a participatory and inclusive environment was observed which offered an example of direct home-school collaboration which benefited the three parties involved: the children's interest and participation showed their positive reaction to the activity, the teachers were able to see the parents with their children in an informal but still school-related setting, and the mothers experienced a new kind of involvement with the school by becoming the protagonists of the activity since they brought their linguistic knowledge to the class

Table 4  
*Storytelling activities in class*

Session	Participants involved	Location	Activities	Languages
<b>Session 1</b>	26 students, 2 teachers, 16 parents <sup>1</sup>	Common room	1. Students' entering the room 2. Plenary storytelling conducted by 6 participants 3. Small group storytelling conducted by 6 participants	Italian, Arabic, Urdu; Wolof <sup>1</sup>
<b>Session 2</b>	24 students, 2 teachers 16 parents	Common room	1. Students' entering the room 2. Plenary storytelling conducted by 4 participants 3. Small group storytelling conducted by 6 participants	Italian, Arabic, Punjabi, English
<b>Session 3</b>	24 students, 2 teachers 16 parents	Common room	1. Students' entering the room 2. Plenary storytelling conducted by 6 participants 3. Small group storytelling conducted by 6 participants	Italian, Urdu, Punjabi, Arabic

#### **4.2. The focus groups: after the activities**

Drawing on the context described in the previous sections, the analysis of the focus groups conducted after the storytelling activities is presented in this section. In order to do that, excerpts of the focus group transcriptions are provided. Since the focus groups were conducted with mediators, the excerpts report the interpretation provided by them and not the participants' direct speech.

The analysis of the data collected through the focus groups and conducted through Nvivo software identified 8 codes structured into main nodes and child nodes (sub-nodes) that represent the recurring patterns in the participants' discourse. In this paper, the excerpts related to the influence of the multilingual storytelling activities on family language practices and language use are presented and analysed.

##### **4.2.1. Parents' experience during the storytelling activities**

In general, the participants described the activity as a positive experience to them. Amongst the 12 references identified through the node 'Participants positive experience', 10 references draw attention to the confidence that reading in Italian and in their home language gave to the participants, whereas 2 references describe the emotion of pride that the participants felt while reading in their mother tongue. For instance, participant 3 explains that the activity helped her to reduce her fear and anxiety of reading in Italian.

##### **Excerpt 1, P3**

P3: Dice che è stata una bella occasione. Prima fare una frase (in italiano) era difficile magari per la paura o il primo step, adesso invece non ha più ansia e quando i bambini chiedono (di leggere) riesce a farlo.

P3: She says it was a great opportunity. Before making a sentence (in Italian) was difficult perhaps due to fear or the first step, but now she no longer has anxiety and when the children ask (to read) she manages to do it.

The participant's words suggest that removing these negative sensations while reading in Italian, allowed her to read a story in Italian at home whenever her children wanted to. Hence, it could be said that the acquired confidence has an influence on the literacy practices at home with a specific focus on those moments where the child requests a reading moment in Italian. Similarly, participant 4 explains that the multilingual activity allowed her to acquire confidence in reading in Italian.

<sup>1</sup> In total, the number of the parents involved in the activity is 16, yet one participant (Wolof mother tongue speaker) did not fill in the questionnaire and did not participate in the focus group.



## Excerpt 2, P4

P4: Gli ha dato più confidenza, è passata la paura di leggere in italiano.	P4: It gave her more confidence, the fear of reading in Italian has disappeared.
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On a similar note, the positive sensations felt by the participants are also related to the practice of reading in their mother tongue. Excerpt 3 reports participant 12's pride in reading in her mother tongue.

## Excerpt 3, P12

P12: Ha detto che si sentiva fiera perché comunque era una sua lingua che leggeva davanti agli italiani che comunque per lei sono stranieri. Ma si sentiva proprio fiera a usare la sua lingua.	P12: She said she felt proud because in any case it was her language that she read in front of Italians who are foreigners to her anyway. But she felt really proud to use her language.
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Participant 12's words highlight her pride in reading in her mother tongue (i.e., Arabic) in front of Italians. Similarly, participant 14 also stresses the sensation of pride she felt.

## Excerpt 4, P14

P14: Ha provato un senso di orgoglio leggendo la storia nella madrelingua	P14: She felt a sense of pride reading the story in her native language
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In opposition to these positive feelings, the corpus also includes two references to the participants feeling uneasy when reading in their mother tongue in class. For instance, participant 10 describes the storytelling experience in her mother tongue as 'strange'.

## Excerpt 5, P10

P10: Ha detto che si sentiva un po' strano, perché comunque parlava arabo in mezzo agli italiani	P10: She said she felt a bit strange, because she was speaking Arabic among the Italians
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On a similar note, participant 13 also defines the experience as 'strange'.

## Excerpt 6, P13

P13: Si sentiva un po' nello spazio. Sì, perché era un po' strano.	P13: She felt a bit in space. Yes, because it was a bit strange.
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Participant 13's use of the expression 'in space' suggests that these kinds of activities are not the norm, hence reading in Arabic in an Italian nursery school felt as out of the ordinary.

#### 4.2.2. Classroom activity influence on FLP

In addition to the participants' sensations regarding the storytelling activity, the analysis also identified the main node 'influence on the language use at home', comprising 22 references. Amongst these, four child nodes (sub-nodes) can be identified, e.g., 'children linguistic diversity awareness', 'multilingual storytelling practices', 'library visits' and 'language use at home'.

Regarding the node, 'children linguistic diversity awareness', participants reported occasions in which their children, after having attended the storytelling activity in class, expressed interest and awareness in language diversity. For instance, one participant reported that her son, after having been exposed to the multilingual storytelling activity in class, started asking her mother to translate one Italian word in Punjabi (e.g., the home language) but also in Wolof (e.g., one of the languages involved in the activity) since he was exposed to that language during the activity.

## Excerpt 7, P5

P5: Allora ha detto che suo figlio ha imparato questa abitudine che chiede in italiano una parola in punjabi, chiede come significa in italiano, però chiede anche in wolof, ma lei il wolof non lo sa.	P5: Then she said that her son has acquired this habit that he asks in Italian a word in Punjabi, he asks how it is in Italian, but he also asks in Wolof, but she doesn't know Wolof.
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The excerpt underscores that amongst the implications of carrying out multilingual storytelling activities, children's linguistic diversity awareness should be considered. More specifically, children's appreciation and curiosity regarding other languages and, in general of language diversity. Similarly, participant 8 explained that after hearing her mother reading in Urdu in the class, her children asked whether in Pakistan stories exist too.

#### Excerpt 8, P8

P8: Lei ha detto che quando ha letto la storia in urdu, i bambini hanno chiesto 'Mamma anche in Pakistan esistono le storie?' 'Certo che ci sono le storie' lei ha detto. Sono entrati in un altro mondo ha detto.	P8: She said that when she read the story in Urdu, the children asked 'Mom do stories exist in Pakistan too?' 'Of course, there are stories' she said. They have entered another world she said.
--	--

Participant 8's words highlight two issues. Firstly, that one of the consequences of the multilingual activities is their children becoming aware of language diversity, with a specific focus on the fact that stories 'exist' in multiple languages and, as the child put it 'in other countries too'. Secondly, by saying 'They have entered another world' the participant suggests that such activities open a new world for the children, since they get exposed to a new reality that incorporates more languages.

The analysis made it possible to identify that the request to reproduce the reading came from the children. For instance, participant 4 explains that she read in Italian to her younger son, yet, after the activity, he asked her to read in Punjabi too.

#### Excerpt 9, P4

P4: Con mio figlio piccolo leggo in italiano e lui chiede mamma tu leggere anche in punjabi.	P4: With my little son I read in Italian, and he asks 'mum, you read in Punjabi too'.
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Similarly, participant 1 shares that her daughter wants the storytelling moments to be alternated in Urdu and in Italian.

#### Excerpt 10, P1

P1: Lei adesso alterna, sua figlia a volte vuole ascoltare in urdu a volte in italiano.	P1: She now alternates, her daughter sometimes wants to listen in Urdu sometimes in Italian.
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In addition, the data suggests that on other occasions, the multilingual storytelling activity is suggested by the mothers. For instance, participant 5 explains that she repeated the multilingual storytelling at home, whereas before she was only using board books with simple words to read to her child.

#### Excerpt 11, P5

P5: È il primo anno che è entrato qua e magari anche prima lei non dava importanza alle storie. Magari portava qualche libricino con i nomi di frutta o degli animali. Invece per lei adesso è più interessante proprio alla storia. Lo ripropone (attività storytelling).	P5: It's the first year she has come here and maybe before that she didn't give importance to the stories. Maybe she brought some little books with the names of fruit or animals. Instead, for her now it is more interesting precisely the story. She repropose it (the storytelling).
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This excerpt highlights that the influence in this case is not only on the language itself but on the literacy experience as a whole. The participant used to read books with simple vocabulary to her child, whereas after the storytelling activity, her interest shifted to the story as a narrative, and she replicated the storytelling practice at home. Excerpts 9, 10 and 11 made it possible to identify that the multilingual class activity also had an influence on the storytelling activities at home, suggesting that the school practice encouraged both mothers and children to repeat the activity in the home setting.

In a broader sense, the activity seems to have had an influence also on language use. The participants gave examples of tending to use two languages at home more frequently (home language and Italian) after the activity and reported their children's growing interest in their home language. Participant 2 explains that, after

the activity, she started using both languages (Punjabi and Italian) more, for example by asking her children to translate Punjabi words into Italian.

Excerpt 12, P2

Ha cambiato perché lei chiede ai bambini che cosa significa. Lei dice una parola in punjabi e i bambini dicono la traduzione.	She changed because she asks the kids what it means. She says a word in Punjabi and the children say the translation.
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On a similar note, participant 14 reports her children's interest in Punjabi (her mother tongue) after the class activities.

Excerpt 13, P14

Però è stato bello perché così almeno il suo interesse (dei figli) è aumentato anche in punjabi.	But it was nice because at least his interest (of her children) also increased in Punjabi.
--	--

This is in line with previous studies within the L'AltRoparlante project, that underscored that valuing all the languages of the class had a positive effect on emergent bilinguals since they feel included and valued and, as a consequence, they feel prone to use their home language more often (Carbonara & Scibetta, 2020).

Finally, the last sub-node identified in the analysis is related to the development of a new habit of going to the library. As explained in section 3.2, the visits to the local public library were part of the activity and they took place before the reading activity in the class. In relation to this, from the corpus of data collected, two references mentioned the new habit of going to the library. For instance, participant 3 reported that after the activity she now goes to the library with her son to choose books.

Excerpt 14, P3

E quindi è arrivato l'interesse di andare in biblioteca, di scegliere il libro, di portare il suo bambino. Adesso vanno (in biblioteca) lei e il suo bambino.	And so, the interest in going to the library, to choose the book, to bring your child arrived. Now she and her child go (to the library).
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As excerpt 11 also underscored, excerpt 14 highlights the impact of the activity on the whole literacy perspective. In this case, the reference is the practice of going to the library and of choosing the books to read to her child.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The study presented in this paper investigated the influence of parent-led multilingual activities in class on family language practices. The participants were involved in multilingual storytelling activities in class, with the intention of making home languages visible and creating an inclusive and democratic learning environment.

The findings show that parent-led storytelling activities influence family language practices in various ways. Firstly, in relation to the parents, the qualitative analysis conducted shows that the activity implemented had an influence in terms of boosting parents' confidence in reading in Italian at home and pride while reading in the mother tongue in class. Moreover, the findings also suggest that the implementation of multilingual pedagogies that directly involve the parents can support them in creating bi/multilingual storytelling moments at home. As reported in the previous section, parents reproduced the same activity at home, they managed to satisfy their children's request of reading in a specific language, and they took interest in storytelling, suggesting that the activity enhanced reflection on family language policies and on the planning and practice of literacy moments at home. In addition, the activity encouraged parents' visits to the local library. Secondly, in relation to the children, the analysis illustrates that children can benefit from multilingual learning activities in terms of language diversity awareness, development of interest in their home language and in storytelling. These findings are consistent with prior research that underscores the positive influence on children's development and learning when educators and parents collaborate (Aleksić et al., 2024; Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016). In the context of this intervention, the direct participation of parents in classroom activities not only influenced home language practices but also impacted home literacy activities. This suggests that the

collaborative efforts contributed to enhancing children's development in different ways such as in terms of children's curiosity towards languages, and questions, and demand for reading.

Furthermore, drawing from the participants' background detailed in Section 3.3, it can be asserted that the socio-educational backgrounds of the participants likely played a role in the predominantly positive outcomes of the activity. Unlike some other studies (Ankrum, 2016; Svensson et al., 2022), where parents with migratory or low socio-economic background faced challenges in collaborating with schools, in this study, most participants have an educational background and were in the process of learning Italian. This factor may have positively influenced their engagement and collaboration.

In addition, the observations make it possible to identify that involving parents created a positive and participatory home-school collaboration. The moments dedicated to the multilingual reading changed the usual class settings in two ways. First, parents became the centre of an activity which directly involved them as protagonists. Secondly, the activity stressed the attention on the knowledge (the mother tongues) brought by the parents into the school environment. This aligns with prior research on multilingual education (CUNY-NYSIEB, 2020; Cummins, 2019), which emphasizes that this approach helps to address challenges related to parents' involvement and collaboration, particularly in overcoming language barriers and differences in educational approaches (Svensson, 2022), in reshaping discourses of power and control over languages different from the majority one (Cunningham, 2019) and in valuing parents' contribution to education (Barnett et al., 2020). As highlighted in the literature (Kirsch & Bergeron-Morin, 2023; Kao, 2004), one of the problems of building positive home-school collaboration and involvement is the language barrier. In this case, placing the home language and the parents at the centre of the activity makes it possible to 'give a voice' to the parents and to value all the languages as suggested by the participants' feeling of pride. This is also consistent with European recommendations (European Commission, 2014) that advocate for the promotion and appreciation of family involvement in early childhood services, especially of immigrant parents who may encounter issues of segregation and exclusion.

Overall, this paper offered insights into the involvement of parents in literacy activities in class as part of multilingual pedagogies. Therefore, it contributes to studies in the fields of multilingual pedagogies and early literacy. The limitation of this study could be identified as the small number of parents that took part in the study. This was mainly because many parents do not regularly attend the Italian language class and, therefore, did not attend all the visits to the library and prepare for the storytelling practice. Nevertheless, despite being limited to a small context, this study might have implications for other nurseries since the activities presented could be replicated in other contexts. By planning multilingual pedagogies that involve parents, educators can support the creation of inclusive and participatory home-school collaborations which, in the short and long term, can benefit all the actors (parents, children and educators) involved.

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