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Educators, parents and children engaging in literacy activities in multiple languages: an exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

There is a consensus that home languages are the foundation on which to develop additional languages and that collaboration between homes and institutions of early childhood education and care (ECEC) can contribute to the development of children's language and literacy skills. Nevertheless, educators seem rarely to draw on multiple languages in literacy activities. Furthermore, situations where educators and parents jointly read to children are scarce. Luxembourg, which has implemented a programme of multilingual education in ECEC, is an ideal context to investigate literacy practices and language use of educators and parents. Drawing on observations in two multilingual centres in Luxembourg as well as interviews, the present study examines the interactions between the educators and the 3-year-old children and those between the educators, parents, and children when the parents occasionally read books in the centres. The findings show that the educators in both centres used several languages and that the types of interactions differed. When the parents offered literacy activities, their use of languages and the roles they played also differed, varying from being fully involved to taking a marginal role. The findings can help educators and policymakers develop inclusive and participatory literacy practices which actively involve children and parents.

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1. Introduction

Children learn most effectively when they can make connections between their home and out-of-home learning environments (Sheridan et al., 2011). This understanding, based on sociocultural learning theories or ecological systems theories, has found its way into educational policies that emphasise partnerships with parents, for instance as a means to value children's home languages (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021) or redress educational inequalities (Betz et al., 2017; Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017). There is evidence that collaboration between home and institutions in early childhood education and care (ECEC), in

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particular around literacy activities, promotes monolingual and multilingual children's oral language(s) and literacy skills (Sheridan et al., 2011; Zucker et al., 2021).

While there is a consensus that home languages are the foundation on which to develop additional languages and that literacy needs to be supported from an early age (Bialystok, 2018; Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2017), educators in ECEC settings seem to rarely build on young children's home languages or offer literacy activities in multiple languages (Michel & Kuiken, 2014). Educational documents frequently suggest inviting parents to the day care centre to read stories to the group to value children's home languages (e.g. Chapman de Sousa, 2019) as is the case in the national framework for ECEC in Luxembourg (MENJE & SNJ, 2021). However, to date, there is little research on literacy activities where educators and parents read or tell stories to young children thereby using home languages.

The present study explores the literacy activities in which educators and parents engage with children in two ECEC centres in Luxembourg. This small country in Western Europe has three official languages, Luxembourgish, French and German, and is linguistically diverse, with 67% of the children in elementary schools speaking as their first language mainly French, Portuguese, German, English and Italian (MENJE, 2022). In 2017, a programme of multilingual education was implemented for 1- to-4-year-old children in ECEC (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). To deliver the programme, one educator in each centre specialises in multilingual education by taking a 30-h professional development course. The other educators can attend other training sessions. Apart from language education in Luxembourgish and French, the national framework requires ECEC educators to collaborate with parents, for among other reasons, to value the children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. However, it offers few concrete suggestions of joint educator–parent activities or the use of languages in such situations.

The present paper examines, firstly, the ways in which educators engage children when sharing books in multiple languages, and, secondly, the ways in which the parents and educators jointly read and tell stories when the parents come to the day care centre (thereafter joint activities). The aim is to identify the types of literacy activities and interactions, the use of languages, as well as the role of the parents in joint literacy activities. The findings can help educators and policymakers identify the means of strengthening inclusive and participatory literacy practices which succeed in involving children and parents.

2. Collaboration between home and ECEC settings regarding literacy

In this section, we clarify concepts and review relevant literature on literacy activities at home and in ECEC settings, as well as that on parent–educator collaboration. We choose the word 'collaboration' because it is frequently used in the Luxembourgish national ECEC framework. According to this document 'collaboration is characterised by esteem and respect, identifies parents as experts of their children and creates opportunities for participation' (MENJE & SNJ, 2021, p. 40). Our use of the term 'literacy activities' refers to experiences with scripts and narratives, and, in this paper, focusses on instances of reading and telling stories.

2.1. Literacy in multiple languages

Studies continue to show that the quality and richness of early literacy experiences shape monolingual and multilingual children's language and literacy trajectories and can predict

their school achievement (Bradley et al., 2011; Skibbe et al., 2011). The infants' literacy experiences often begin at home. Frequent and qualitatively rich literacy activities in which parents and children engage at home contribute to the development of their pre-literacy skills and oral skills in all of their languages (Farver et al., 2013; Højen et al., 2021). While the frequency of home literacy activities can be increased through family literacy programmes (Liu et al., 2018), this is not easy as the home literacy environment depends on, among other matters, parents' socioeconomic status, educational background, literacy level and language background (Hemmerechts et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2018). In the case of multilingual children, it is also affected by the parents' ability to access literacy material in different languages (Armand et al., 2021) and their beliefs regarding language learning (Weigel et al., 2005). Their perspectives on multilingualism and biliteracy shape the strategies deployed to support the children's language and literacy development. The approaches of multilingual parents may look similar on the surface, but they are underpinned by the parents' diverse language repertoires and portfolios (Sims et al., 2016).

To successfully develop children's languages and literacies in ECEC institutions, professionals need to take note of the parents' approaches as well as their expectations and the values they place on the different languages. Literacy activities, especially interactive story reading, have received considerable attention both at home and in the ECEC context. Reading such as dialogic reading helps sustain rich and meaningful interactions during the reading process. The adults actively listen to children and use various strategies to encourage interactions such as asking open-ended questions. They may also repeat, expand, and reformulate the children's utterances and, in this way, contribute to their language development (Whitehurst et al., 1988). Systematic reviews and meta-analyses confirm the positive effects of such literacy activities on the development of language and pre-literacy skills in one as well as more than one languages (e.g. Wasik et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2018). But despite the growing consensus on the relevance of home languages as a tool for supporting the learning of the societal language (Ramirez et al., 2021), educators in many ECEC settings appear to rarely draw on young children's home languages or offer literacy activities in multiple languages (Michel & Kuiken, 2014).

There appears to have been a change in Luxembourg following the implementation of the programme of multilingual education. Findings of a questionnaire completed in 2020 by 452 ECEC educators, reveal that 65% reported daily reading and 62% telling stories. Furthermore, most read in several languages (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). However, overall, few studies have explored the ways in which literacy activities in multiple languages allow for translanguaging¹ and help educators build on and enhance children's language repertoires (Buysse et al., 2014). Even in Luxembourg, where multiple languages are commonly used, the majority of educators read in French and Luxembourgish, the main languages of the education policy, although some also read in German, Portuguese, and English or, more rarely, in other home languages such as Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Arabic or Cantonese. Collaboration with parents is one means of increasing literacy activities in multiple languages and connecting home and school contexts.

2.2. Benefits and challenges of collaboration between ECEC centres and homes

Several empirical studies, mainly with teachers and parents of school-aged children, have shown that collaboration can influence the parents' and teachers' attitudes and

expectations, and improve the parents' involvement in their children's education (Hayakawa et al., 2013; Reynolds et al., 2017). In ECEC settings in several European countries, including Luxembourg, the most common types of collaboration documented in the literature are passing conversations, parent cafés, parent evenings, seasonal feasts, or conversations when parents enrol their child in a centre or talk about the personal development (e.g. Betz et al., 2017; Kirsch, 2021).

Empirical studies on collaboration, particularly in multilingual settings, are scarce, possibly because parent involvement is complex and multi-layered (Aghallaj et al., 2020). Among the reasons behind the difficulties of collaborating are power relations which can result in parents with minoritised home languages not being given a space to make their voice heard or have their expertise valued. Furthermore, Aghallaj et al. (2020) identified the frequent cultural and linguistic mismatch between parents and teachers, the struggle to overcome it, and the fact that parental expectations are rarely acknowledged and worked with. Among the reasons may be the strong ideologies and beliefs at play. Tobin (2016) reported that even when some schools endeavoured to use home languages, some parents feared that this could negatively influence the children's learning of the school language. This last example highlights the central role of education systems and their language-in-education policies which tend to be built on monolingual language ideologies. Policymakers, teachers, communities, or parents do not always manage to 'open implementational and ideological spaces' to promote multilingualism (Hornberger, 2005). A positive example comes from Dueñas (2015), who shows how communities fought for the inclusion of indigenous languages in Peru, giving the example of parents who requested the employment of indigenous teachers. When all educational actors work in a team, they can carve up spaces for multilingual education and contribute to its effective implementation.

2.3. Home-ECEC collaboration in relation to literacy

Collaboration between parents and educators in relation to literacy activities can take different shapes, the most widely studied type being home literacy programmes (Zucker et al., 2021). These programmes try to ensure continuity between ECEC and homes by increasing awareness of each other's literacy practices. For example, parents in the United States were familiarised with dialogic reading (e.g. Sheridan et al., 2011) and children in Canada took the ECEC centre's multiliteracy material home to explore it with their parents (e.g. Armand et al., 2021). Other programmes promote a more collaborative perspective and build more strongly on the parents' expertise. For example, in the ERASMUS + project AVIOR, teachers and parents from six European countries translated and adapted books and card games, which were subsequently used both at home and at school and which strengthened continuity (Kambel, 2019). While many family literacy programmes value the parents' and children's linguistic and cultural background, the agency seems nevertheless to be frequently in the hands of the ECEC professionals who decide how to involve parents.

In general, the results of home-ECEC collaborations can positively influence children's literacy skills and their confidence in using home language in front of other children (Arnold et al., 2008; Kambel, 2019). Positive effects extend to parents' involvement as

well as the educators' increased awareness of the role of the parents' language portfolios in shaping their children's language and literacy environment at home (Sims et al., 2016).

Literacy activities have even more positive effects on children's narrative skills when culturally relevant material is used and mediated by both parent and teacher to bridge home and school learning environments (Armand et al., 2021; Garcia-Alvarado et al., 2022). Collaboration with parents can also happen when parents came to the ECEC settings to read and tell stories. Initial insights come from a survey in Luxembourg following the implementation of the programme of multilingual education. The ECEC educators were asked to indicate in which joint activities they engaged with parents, and their frequency. Of the 289 participants, 17% reported that parents took part in joint activities every few weeks but 44% and 34%, respectively, indicated that parents did so once or twice a year, and never. The educators agreed that parents rarely used their home languages when reading stories in those situations (Kirsch & Aleksić, 2021). Thus, despite the programme, joint activities are still rare. To this date, few qualitative studies in Luxembourg or elsewhere have investigated what happens when parents and educators jointly engage in literacy activities with children.

In sum, there is evidence that collaboration between home and ECEC centres can bear results, particularly in relation to language and literacy development in multilingual settings (Sheridan et al., 2011), as it strengthens continuity, familiarises parents with promising literacy activities and materials, and promotes the development of literacy skills. However, it is also known that collaboration is complex and might be difficult to achieve. Despite the relevance of literacy for multilingual children, few studies have examined the use of multiple languages and translanguaging in literacy activities in ECEC settings and even fewer have explored literacy activities that engage educators, parents and children jointly. To gain understanding of literacy practices in day care centres as well as the roles parents play in joint literacy activities, the present paper investigates book sharing under two conditions in two centres: firstly, when the educators engage children in such activities, and secondly, when parents come to the ECEC setting and engage with the educators in literacy activities. Drawing on observations, the following questions are explored:

- 1 Which literacy activities do the educators and parents offer in the centres?
- 2 In what ways and in which languages do the adults interact with the children?
- 3 In what ways do the educators involve the parents?

3. Methodology

The data for the present paper stem from the mix-method project *Collaboration with parents and multiliteracies in early childhood education* (COMPARE).

3.1. Participants

The participating educators worked for two for-profit day care centres hereafter *Earth* and *Water*. In May and June 2020, the manager and the specialised educator for multilingual education at these centres had, together with professionals of 12 other centres,

participated in a professional development course on literacies and collaboration organised by the COMPARE research team. Following this training, the participants could volunteer to take part in an observational study the following academic year. The educators in *Earth* and *Water* volunteered as they had experience of passing conversations, parent cafés, parent meetings, and feasts although little experience of engaging parents in joint literacy activities. To guarantee diversity, we selected centres based on their main languages, their size, and geographical location. The centres *Earth* and *Water* are housed in small villages and their municipalities host families of the same comfortable socioeconomic index² (Allegrezza, 2017). *Water* is located close to the German border. The two centres differ in size and main language. At the time of the data collection in 2020/2021, one group of about eight children aged two to four attended *Earth* and two groups of the same age group *Water*. The educators in both centres had different qualifications and linguistic backgrounds (e.g. German, Luxembourgish, French, Portuguese) and most spoke German, Luxembourgish, French as well as English. Staff in *Earth* spoke predominantly Luxembourgish to the children, and staff in *Water* German and Luxembourgish. In both centres, at least one educator spoke Portuguese in addition.

Given our focus on literacy, we chose to observe the 2-to-4-year-olds, the parents who came to the centres, and the educators of these children (three in *Earth*, six in *Water*). Many children spoke two languages at home, including Luxembourgish, German, French and Portuguese, and in addition, in *Earth*, Swiss German and Icelandic, and in *Water*, Arabic and Greek.³

3.2. Collection and analysis of the data

This paper draws on observations and interviews made by four researchers between September 2020 and October 2021, in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. During that period, collaboration increased in *Earth* as both the manager and the parents wished to participate in regular activities despite the social and physical distancing measures in place. They therefore met outside the centre. The centre *Water* invited the parents to take part in regular walks and visits to the local library from Spring 2021, once the restrictions were eased.

The observational data were collected on 48 days in the academic year 2020/21 and include fieldnotes, video-recordings, and thick descriptions (detailed narratives explaining a situation and the context, Denzin, 1989). Furthermore, the researchers took fieldnotes of the feedback sessions held in both centres in Autumn 2021. In addition to the observations, four semi-structured interviews for a total of 7 h were carried out with the manager and specialised educator in each centre.

Most videos were transcribed, and relevant details were added (see Excerpts 1, 2, 3). The remaining videos were described in detail. The transcripts and descriptions were analysed in the programme NVIVO. When coding, we read both the texts and watched the videos in order not to miss details. Initial coding included the type of joint collaborative event (e.g. celebration, going for a walk, literacy activity) and the type of literacy activities (e.g. reading, singing, rhyming, writing). We then zoomed in on the 8 h of video-recordings on sharing books and coded the language use (e.g. languages and translanguaging), the type of books (e.g. fiction, age range) and the adults' and children's activities (i.e. viewing, reading/ telling a story, encouraging narration). In this paper, we define

'viewing' as situations where adults and children browsed through books and talked about particular pictures and words with mostly non-fiction books. Reading/ telling stories denote situations where the adults read in a more or less dialogic manner, while encouraging narration refers to moments when the adults encourage children to jointly tell stories with the support of pictures or role-play them.

Table 1 gives an overview of the type of literacy activities carried out by educators and parents, the hours of recorded observations and number of days when we observed the activity.

Next, we analysed the interactions between the adults and children. Based on conversation analysis from a sociocultural perspective (Seedhouse, 2005), we identified the strategies deployed to encourage participation (e.g. asking questions) and promote understanding (e.g. pointing to details, explaining, translating). Furthermore, we analysed the role of the educators and parents. Inspired by communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), our codes included parents as bystanders, observers, or full participants. We understand 'bystander' (non-observer) as a person who is present in an activity but does not play an active role; an 'observer' as interacting minimally with others, and a 'full participant' as being fully engaged and playing an active role.

In parallel, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and subjected to a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this paper, we use the interviews for triangulation purposes. Finally, we examined similarities and differences between the interactions of the educators and parents and between the centres, zooming in on the adult's roles.

4. Findings

The educators used multiple languages and had different ways of engaging children in shared reading. Furthermore, the parents of both centres read stories in their home language in the centres but played different roles. The following sections present the findings by looking at both centres separately. We will firstly examine the literacy activities offered by the educators without the parents and, secondly the joint activities.

4.1. Literacy activities in earth

4.1.1. Reading and telling stories: the educators

In *Earth*, we observed six events where the educators read and told stories, and six where they encouraged children to narrate stories previously heard (Table 1). The prose books and the poetry covered the then current topics (e.g. friendships, apples, animals, birds in winter) or were typical bedtime stories. The educators explained in the interviews that they did not read the texts word by word (apart from the verse) but rephrased it to adapt it to the children's language skills. For instance, books in German were 'read'

Table 1. Type of activities and duration of recordings.

	<i>Earth</i>		<i>Water</i>	
	Educator alone	With parent	Educator alone	With parent
Viewing	–	–	1 h 10 min, 7 days	
Reading/telling stories	1 h 37 min, 6 days	1 h 7 min, 5 days	3 h 6 min, 14 days	6 min, 2 days
Encouraging narration	56 min, 4 days	–		

in Luxembourgish with the educators trying to use similar sentence structures to those in the written text. Having 'read' a small chunk of text, the educators were observed pausing, encouraging the children's participation, and helping them connect the stories to their experiences. While speaking mainly in Luxembourgish, the educators also used French and Portuguese with Etienne and Gloria, respectively. Translanguaging happened in a natural and authentic way. The strategies deployed in the interactions are illustrated in the representative excerpt below where Ms Joana told seven 3-year-olds a story of 999 frog siblings and their parents searching for a bigger pond.

Excerpt 1. The 999 frog siblings, June 2020

In the translated excerpt, utterances originally in Luxembourgish are in normal script, those in French are in italics and those in Portuguese underlined.

	Translation
1 Ms Joana	{pointing to the picture of the chain of frogs lifted in the air by a hawk}
2 Gloria	<u>A seal, a seal.</u>
3 Ms Joana	Do you think so?
4 Gloria	<u>Yes</u>
5 Ms Joana	Does it look like a fork?
6 Gloria	<u>No, a seal, yes.</u> {imitating the movement of a seal}
7 Ms Joana	<u>Like a seal?</u> Yes, or perhaps like a snake.
8 Ms Joana	{turning to the book} And the hawk begins to get tired. {sounding exhausted} I cannot deal with this anymore. The frogs are too heavy for me. {turns the page. pointing} Look, here they are. And whoops, he lets all frogs go.
9 Ygor	{screaming} Uuuuh.
10 Ms Joana	{screaming} Uuuuh. All frogs scream. Oh no, what happens now? {turning to Etienne} <i>Look, they all scream because they have fallen.</i> Uuuuh {screaming}. And then {imitating frogs plunging in the water} Plip, plop.
11 Niklas	<i>In the water.</i>
12 Ms Joana	<i>Where are they?</i>
13 Gloria	{Enthusiastically} <i>A big</i> {drawing a circle with her arms}.
14 Etienne	<u>Fish</u>
15 Ms Joana	<i>They are with the fish? You think so? We'll see.</i> Look. {turning the page, reading}. And where are we, they ask each other.
16 Yalena	{Laughing}
17 Ms Joana	Where have we landed? Where do you think they are?
18 Niklas	<i>In the water.</i>
19 Ms Joana	Yes, in the water.
20 Gloria	<i>In big</i> {showing a circle}.
21 Ms Joana	<i>In a big what?</i>
22 Niklas	<i>Big water.</i>
23 Ygor	<i>Big pond.</i>

The educator, Ms Joana, deployed a range of strategies to support story comprehension: making good use of tone of voice, mime and gestures, pointing to details, explaining and translating. To keep the children engaged and encourage their participation, she confirmed their verbal and non-verbal participation, encouraged them to anticipate, asked questions, answered questions, repeated their utterances, and elaborated. In addition to Luxembourgish, Ms Joana drew on French and Portuguese to understand children and make herself understood. For instance, she had misunderstood Gloria's Portuguese word for seal (line 3), queried it and then translated the word incorrectly as 'fork' (line 5). Gloria confirmed her answer in Portuguese and illustrated it non-verbally (lines 4, 6) which resulted in Ms Joana providing an alternative (line 7). Ms Joana and Etienne, the youngest child, communicated in French. Like Ms Joana, the children used features of their entire semiotic repertoire to express themselves (lines 6, 9, 13, 14, 20). They

answered questions, volunteered details, and reformulated each other's' utterances (lines 22, 23).

Excerpt 1 is representative of the observed storytelling practice of the three educators: it is dialogic, inclusive, and participatory. The educators confirmed in the interviews that their pedagogical concept focused on equity, community, and sustainability and that they endeavoured to strengthen children's participation and autonomy. They told the same story in a range of ways and offered children creative ways to participate which helped them appropriate the vocabulary and develop basic knowledge necessary for their daily life. They were pleased to see that children grew increasingly interested in stories and borrowed books to tell stories to each other, thereby using key words of the text and reproducing the educators' interaction patterns. The participatory approach and the rich interactions continued in the presence of the parents, as described in the next section.

4.1.2. Reading and telling stories: the parents

Engaging in joint activities with parents was important to the educators. From the two interviews, we noticed their strong vision of the social function of the centre. Being a community meant to them having children and parents participate more and more in appropriate and meaningful ways as well as establishing trustful and respectful relationships. In their words (translated from Luxembourgish):

In our pedagogical concept of community, being together is important. I find it important to have children participate in our everyday practice, in everything, in meaningful things. (...) We found that we had to include parents, all parents, in our daily activities. (...) [Parents come] when you approach them and when they feel understood and respected and when they can have choices. (Interview 1, director, October 2020)

We have mega [good] relationships with the parents and therefore it is much easier, and you dare ask them if they fancy coming to cook, for example. The dialogue is different. (Interview 2, educator, May 2021)

Despite the good relationships and their attempts to include all parents in daily activities, some parents only came once a year to engage in joint activities. During our observations, we noticed that the educators made the parents feel welcome upon arrival by greeting them in their home language and integrating them into the group. On five of the days when we observed, parents came with a book to read and tell stories. The books drew on the topics covered in the centre or highlighted a particular cultural element such as trolls. All parents used their home languages when they read, though in diverse ways. For instance, when Lia's mother noticed the children were unable to follow her, she paraphrased in Luxembourgish the sentences she previously read in Swiss German. Another mother read a simple and brief story about Christmas in French which the children could follow because of the repetitive structure and the good illustrations. The children found it more challenging when the Icelandic father read a long story about trolls. Realising that the children had understood little despite the pictures, his wife summarised the story in Luxembourgish. While the parent read and pointed, paraphrased, explained, and asked questions, the role of the educator was no less active. For example, Ms Dominique systematically provided explanations, gave additional details, reformulated the parents' utterances so that they were easier to understand, and made connections to the

children's experiences. The educators always engaged children in a conversation after the story (with or without parents) and the visiting parent joined in. An example of a conversation is shown in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2: Talking about a book, October 2020

The transcript has been translated from Swiss German (italics) and Luxembourgish

Speaker	Utterance
1. Mother	<i>Where is the one leaf now?</i> Where is the one leaf now? {pointing to the page}
2. Ms Dominique	Oh, where is the cat's leaf, the one it wanted to catch?
3. Nick	That one.
4. Ms Dominique	Can you still see it in this heap of leaves?
5. Nick	On its head.
6. Mother	On its head {laughing}.
7. Nick	{nodding}
8. Ms Dominique	That one on its head?
9. Mother	Could be.
10. Ms Dominique	Yes, could be. You could be right. (...)
11. Linda	The cat is falling down now.
12. Ms Dominique	Yes, look, the cat fell of the tree. {pointing to the image}
13. Mother	Ouch!
14. Linda	Yes
15. Ms Dominique	Look. {pointing to the image}
16. Lia	Ouch!
17. Mother	It did not, it did not hurt itself much because there were so many leaves below. {pointing to the heap of leaves under the cat}
18. Lia	A little boo-boo.
19. Mother	Little boo-boo?

Having read a short story in Swiss German about a cat who had fallen off a tree because it tried to catch a leaf, the mother of Lia pointed to the picture of leaves (line 1) and then asked both in Swiss German and Luxembourgish where the leaves were. The educator (line 2) rephrased the question, and together with the mother, had the children hypothesise about the location of the leaf (lines 1–10) and the cat's injuries (lines 11–19). The mother acted like the educator, a full participant.

In all observed situations, the educators and parents worked in a team and, together, ensured the children's comprehension and participation. The children, parents and educators seemed to feel included and part of a community.

4.2. Literacy activities in water

4.2.1. Literacy activities of the educators

In the centre *Water*, we observed two types of literacy activities: 'viewing' (14 situations) and 'reading/ telling stories' (22 situations) (Table 1). In most situations, the children or educators chose books with large pictures and sparse text, aimed at younger children. In what follows, we will provide details of both types of activities.

When 'viewing books', the adults typically invited children to label objects, at times in different languages, translanguaged, confirmed the information, corrected, repeated, asked questions, or added information, for instance about a noise an animal made or the function of an object. In October 2020, for example, Ms Henrike pointed to a worm in a picture book and said 'This is a worm. And what does the worm do?' Upon hearing 'it digs a hole', she repeated the answer, adding 'correct'. Tobias pointed to a

rabbit, uttering 'look'. Ms Henrique asked for the name of the animal which Tobias volunteered. She repeated the one-word answer and asked, 'what does the rabbit do?' Tobias used baby talk to express sleeping which the educator repeated without providing a more elaborate word. This question-answer game continued for several minutes.

To make conversations meaningful, the educators always tried to connect pictures or details to children's experiences. For instance, in March 2021, when Ms Isabela shared a book with Luisa and Tobias, she asked Luisa first in Luxembourgish and then in Portuguese if her mother made soup like the character in the story. The educators often trans-linguaged, drawing on features of German and Luxembourgish and, if they knew it, Portuguese. They did not, however, use any French in conversations with French-speaking children.

While 'viewing' lasted a couple of minutes after which the child or the educator chose a different book, 'reading' could take up to 15 min. This meant that children frequently left the group when they lost interest. In general, the strategies deployed by the educators were similar to 'viewing' although the professionals read in different ways. Three educators tended to read swiftly and with expression in either German or Luxembourgish. By contrast, three others read one sentence at the time in either German or Luxembourgish before they rephrased it in very simple Luxembourgish words. As a result, the children's opportunities to engage with longer stretches of text and the more complex language of books depended on the educator. All professionals asked questions, often at the word-level, but children rarely spoke about the whole story.

In the interviews, the manager and specialised educator associated literacy activities with listening and answering questions. This required the children to concentrate which proved a challenge on account of the noisy environment. The educators were pleased about the increase in the number of literacy activities over the academic year.

It is certainly much quieter in the room, and it is easier for children to concentrate. (...) The team works much more with books, with pictures, and [there are more situations where] they sit down during a quiet moment and read a book with the children. (...). (Interview 2, educator, May 2021)

They also commented positively about Ms Isabela's use of Portuguese with a Portuguese-speaking child and of German with a German-speaking one (interview 2). While they noticed in the interview that the educators did not speak French to French-speaking children although they knew this language, they did not reflect that they used German, Luxembourgish, and Portuguese at the expense of other home languages. Furthermore, they did not comment on their interaction patterns which led to children's low-level participation. One of the issues mentioned was the high staff turnaround two months prior to the beginning of our study in 2020, which made teamwork challenging.

4.2.2. Literacy activities with the parents

Activities with parents depend on the pedagogical concept of the centre. Unlike *Earth*, a small day care centre in a rural community headed by a qualified pedagogue, *Water* was one of several centres which made up a bigger institution. In the interviews, the educators in *Water* regretted that they were not allowed to invite parents owing to the Coronavirus-pandemic. The person responsible for pedagogy, who regularly visited the centre, and guided and supported the educators, confirmed:

I have to say that the institution slows us down. The director does not want [parents come in]. We really had peace and quiet until December, no major sickness leaves, no corona cases, that's thanks to our measures. He does not want to have a mum or dad in the group every week. (...) We could have a mother in and try to do it in a way such that she is with us for a quarter of an hour. (Interview 1, pedagogical responsible, January 2021)

When the restrictions eased in April 2021, the educators voiced their satisfaction with the uptake of the collaborative events they offered. We observed six parents join the educators on walks and two mothers accompany a small group of children to the local library. We will focus on the activities with the mothers of Tobias and Jacob in the library in April 2021.

On 9 and 30 April 2021, respectively, the educators carried out their regular literacy activities in the company of a mother in the library: reading a story to the group, viewing books with individuals, and singing. On both days, the mothers observed the group reading and thereafter, in the absence of a concrete task, engaged in diverse activities and took on different roles. Tobias' mother became a bystander: she strolled around the library and browsed through books (9 April). Jacob's mother continued to stay in the role of legitimate peripheral observer and remained seated (30 April). Both mothers changed their roles each time when one or two children approached them with a book in hand; they then read to the small group while the educators simultaneously read to a different group. They pointed at pictures, explained, corrected, and asked questions, like the educators, and, like them, found it difficult to keep the children on task. Both mothers communicated in German, a language all participating children understood.

While the mothers and educators tended to engage in parallel activities (e.g. reading to different children), we observed altogether three moments on 9 and 30 April when the mothers and educators jointly interacted with the children. Ms Isabela briefly joined Jacob's mother, who had spent most of the morning reading to her own son, and added an explanation in Luxembourgish. The interactions between Ms Henrique and Tobias' mother appeared to be laden with tension. When the mother read to three children, Ms Henrique intervened by removing a boy from the group, stating he was too noisy. A second educator interfered, explaining the boy could go back to the mother as he had participated well. Later that day Ms Henrique contradicted Tobias' mother as shown in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3. Jellyfish, April 2021

- | | | |
|----|-------------|---|
| 1 | Mother | Yes, it bites and then it has a poison and sprays it on the skin, then the skin gets all red and hurts. |
| 2 | Ms Henrique | Mmmhh{tone of voice expressing doubt} |
| 3 | Mother | This is very dangerous. |
| 4 | Ms Henrique | Uncomfortable, yes. |
| 5 | Mother | Yes. |
| 6 | Joyce | There {pointing to the aquarium in the picture} that's why there is glass, that it cannot hurt me, uh. |
| 7 | Mother | Exactly, you can look at them and then you know when you're swimming in the sea and you see one of them, that you swim quickly in the other direction, swim away quickly. |
| 8 | Joyce | But it follows. |
| 9 | Mother | Yes, you must be careful that it doesn't follow you, that's true. Now, look {turning to the book to read} |
| 10 | Ms Henrique | But I don't think they can swim at all, they get washed back and forth, right? |
| 11 | Mother | I don't know. |
| 12 | Joyce | Like this? {making wavy movements with arms} |

- 13 Ms Henrique I think they are washed back and forth by the ocean currents.
 14 Mother It's possible.
 15 Joyce It can swim {making movements to indicate swimming}.
 16 Ms Henrique I don't know if they can make movements on their own. We have to look this up tonight, don't we, Joyce?

When Joyce mentioned that jellyfish bite, Tobias' mother explained that the animal's sting is venomous (lines 1, 3). Ms Henrique showed disagreement (lines 2, 4) and reformulated the mother's expression. Joyce and the mother continued to talk about escaping from jellyfish when Ms Henrique stated that the animal cannot swim (lines 10, 13). The mother showed uncertainty (lines 12, 14) while Joyce insisted that they can swim, imitating the movements (line 15). Ms Henrique then suggested she and the child could look it up (line 16). One wonders how comfortable Tobias' mother felt when Ms Henrique positioned herself as the more knowledgeable person. In the interviews, the educators confirmed that they were not at ease with all parents and had not given them a particular role.

5. Discussion

We will summarise the findings before discussing them. In relation to the first two research questions, the findings show that the educators and parents offered various types of literacy activities (e.g. viewing, reading) and used home languages in their interactions with children. The roles they played differed, depending on the centre and its underlying pedagogy. In relation to the third research question, we found that the parents in *Earth* were perceived as valuable partners and full participants while those in *Water* were not given a role. They were guests who could choose to take on more active or passive roles.

In what follows, we will discuss our findings in relation to the centres, the types of literacy activities, language use, and collaboration. Firstly, it is important to understand the literacy practices and collaborative events within the larger structures in which they are embedded. *Earth* was led by an experienced and hands-on professional who worked daily with the children together with her colleagues. She knew the children and their parents very well and all wished to continue their continuous exchange. The pedagogy of her centre was based on social constructivist learning theories and community values and the educators perceived their role as increasing children's and parents' participation in inclusive and holistic ways. In *Water*, a slightly larger and hierarchically structured institution, the pedagogical approach depended on the educator. The professionals explained the lack of consistency by the big staff turnaround prior to the start of the study. Furthermore, they were frustrated with the director's strict policies aimed at minimising the risk of catching Covid-19 in the centre, which thwarted collaborative events with parents. Both the director of *Water* and the manager of *Earth* had implemented the government's Covid-19 social and physical distancing measures, but the former had tightened them in his institution, whereas the latter had carved a space to ensure the regular contact with parents continued. In *Earth*, all activities took place outdoors. The role of the educators testifies to their agency in the process of appropriating, creating, and implementing local policies (Hornberger, 2005).

Secondly, the types of activities observed reflect a different understanding of literacy. The educators in *Earth* valued rich and meaningful interactions and frequently engaged

children in dialogic reading (Whitehurst et al., 1988). By contrast, the educators in *Water* perceived literacy as a listening activity with emotional and educational benefits. They frequently let children choose books and spoke about details they believed would interest them. They also engaged children in simple question-and-answer games at the word and sentence level. Contrary to the children in *Earth*, the children in *Water* had fewer opportunities to engage with longer text and make meaning of stories. Nevertheless, the children in both centres were likely to develop their oral skills owing to the educators' use of reformulations, expansions, and corrections (Wasik et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2018).

Thirdly, the educators read and told stories in the main languages of the centres while also addressing some children in their home languages. The parents read in their home languages and, in *Earth*, also conversed about the stories in the languages of the centre. Home languages play a key role for the development of all languages and literacies (Armand et al., 2021; Farver et al., 2013; Kambel, 2019) and, therefore, it is important to consolidate this message to both children and parents. The findings also illustrate that books afford, what Wagner (2020) called, different 'languages contexts' where people may read in one language but talk about the story in another language. Through translanguaging, the adults leverage the children's multilingual repertoires (García & Otheguy, 2020) and contribute to the development of multiple reading identities. However, it needs to be noted that not all home languages were used even if the educators knew them as was the case in *Water* with French, an official language of the country and a language of the policy. Even when a multilingual policy promotes the use of multiple languages such as in Luxembourg, educators (like parents) may use some languages at the expense of others on account of their language ideologies and preferences (Sims et al., 2016). Monitoring one's language use and using languages strategically is important as it contributes to inclusion (Hamman, 2018).

Finally, our findings show that literacy activities that jointly involve educators, parents, and children, rarely documented in the literature, have begun to be offered in some ECEC centres in Luxembourg. In both *Earth* and *Water*, the parents read and told stories to children, which confirms that literacy is a valued tool for collaboration, as also shown in previous studies (Armand et al., 2021; Kambel, 2019; Sheridan et al., 2011). In contrast to many home literacy programmes where parents are 'coached' to reproduce the practices of the setting (e.g. Zucker et al., 2021), the parents in both centres, but particularly *Earth*, were trusted to share their own practices which may indicate that the educators gave parents some agency and did not have a deficit-oriented view of (these) parents (Sheridan et al., 2011). Nevertheless, none of the two centres managed to involve all parents. This result reflects the difficulties of creating collaborative spaces with families from all backgrounds (Aghallaj et al., 2020; Lengyel & Salem, 2019; Tobin, 2016). Furthermore, it shows that a 'top-down' policy that encourages multilingual education and parent collaboration, as proposed in the ECEC programme in Luxembourg, may be a first important step, yet it is not enough to guarantee collaborative practices. For those collaborative moments to occur and be meaningful for children, parents, as well as educators, all actors need to value each other's expertise, engage in 'bottom-up' planning, and collaboratively reflect on them (Hornberger, 2005).

6. Conclusion

The present article offered insights into literacy activities in which educators, parents and young children participated, thereby contributing to studies in the fields of early literacy, language use, and collaboration. One limitation is the low number of day care centres presented in this paper although this strategy allowed us to provide insights into literacy activities observed over one academic year and interviews. As such, the results confirm that collaboration is not an established practice yet even in centres where educators are interested in developing collaboration. A further aspect which limits the findings was the Covid-19 pandemic which impacted collaboration in the centres.

While this article does not investigate positive outcomes of collaboration such as changes of educators' and parents' practices (Kambel, 2019) which influence children's language and literacy skills, it nevertheless indicates the potential that joint literacy activities have in supporting language and literacy development and valuing children's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It also highlights potential issues such as the uncertainty over how to implement dialogic approaches to storytelling in several languages. Furthermore, it hints at the values that educators and parents place on languages (Sims et al., 2016), offers insights into the complexity of collaborative activities, and points to differences in the educators' pedagogy which influences collaboration (Betz et al., 2017; Reynolds et al., 2017). The educators in *Earth* appeared to involve parents with a pedagogical focus (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) while those in *Water* appeared to implement a task required by the national framework. They involved parents in their institution, as required, but the educational aim was less clear.

Overall, the findings show that national programmes that call for literacy in multiple languages and joint literacy activities can be implemented but educators require guidance (and training) both on approaches to literacy and collaboration. These findings could be taken up by educators and policymakers when planning courses for initial and further training.

Notes

1. Translanguaging is the strategic deployment of a person's entire semiotic repertoire to communicate and make meaning (García & Otheguy, 2020).
2. This index regroups five values, including the average salary of the residents and the level of unemployment. The index of the two municipalities ranged from 0.30 to 0.51, with values close to 0 indicating a comfortable environment.
3. We have changed two home languages to protect the anonymity of the parents and centres.

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