

## Reading Engagement in An After-School Program

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### Abstract

The project “Reading engagement in an after-school program” (2023/2024) aimed to develop reading and aesthetic learning processes in an after-school program (ASP). From perceived needs of the children, the staff was encouraged to initiate reading and reading-related activities. The ASP curriculum has a unique potential to offer enjoyable reading activities, with its social focus, based on the pupils' interests. The ASP is a bridge between formal and informal learning. Pupils from homes with poor language environment are dependent on interventions, not least in the ASP, to get an equivalent starting point in life. Reading in ASP is not an extension of the school's reading training, but a journey characterized by students' reading interests, where both reading aloud and joint multimodal activities are in focus. Despite the fact, that language and literacy is a focus area in the curriculum, the project indicated several pitfalls. Staff on sick leave, urgent staffing needs, large groups of children, lack of time and unmanageable schedules created problems. Lack of premises meant substantial problems for both reading in small groups, and arranging creative activities. A challenge with implementing reading activities in this ASP was the reluctance several of the teachers displayed when it came to reading aloud. An environment including genuine conversations, storybooks, writing, drama and other creative activities, is still missing. If the pupils lack interest in reading, the staff's engagement is crucial. If the ASP can't provide space and place for fiction and culture it certainly calls for discussion and action.

Keywords: After school program; Children's literature; Informal learning; Reading; Sweden