

Abridged version

Boost Reading for Young People

Promoting reading for and with
young people in areas facing
socio-economic challenges

Abridged version

This is an abridged version of the knowledge base *Stärk läsning för unga. Läsfrämjande för och med unga i områden med socioekonomiska utmaningar* (Boost Reading for Young People. Promoting reading for and with young people in areas facing socio-economic challenges).¹

This documentation has been produced with the support of Läsrådet, the Reading Council. This abridged version presents the key findings from the knowledge base in a concise and condensed format.

Several different knowledge fields, both practical and scholarly, need to be integrated in the development of reading promotion initiatives for and with young people in areas facing socio-economic challenges. The Swedish Arts Council welcomes further knowledge and action in this field.

Areas facing socio-economic challenges

Statistics Sweden (Statistiska centralbyrån, SCB) produces statistics that classify certain areas as areas facing socio-economic challenges. Data is calculated on the basis of a socio-economic index providing a starting point for classification into five types of area.

Area types 1 and 2 are collectively referred to as areas facing socio-economic challenges.² The higher the socio-economic index of an area, the worse the socio-economic conditions.

Municipalities, businesses and organisations can use their own data or various statistical tools to identify relevant areas when working on reading promotion initiatives. The Segregation Barometer³ and the school map⁴ produced by Berättarministeriet (the Ministry of Storytelling) use statistics from Statistics Sweden. The Swedish Arts Council recommends that municipalities and organisations use the data and tools available.

Recommendations

Given the summary and analysis provided by the Swedish Arts Council in the knowledge base, we present nine recommended development areas for reading promotion activities for and with young people aged 13 to 25 in areas facing socio-economic challenges:

1. Swedish Arts Council, 2024.

2. statistikdatabasen.scb.se

3. <https://segregationsbarometern.boverket.se/>

4. https://www.berattarministeriet.se/skolkartan_berattarministeriet/

1. Organising on the basis of strategically important activities.
2. Collaborating with many different parties.
3. Working innovatively and involving young people.
4. Developing evidence on the target group's perspectives.
5. Creating good relationships and safe spaces.
6. Making sure diversity is taken into account in the context of reading promotion activities.
7. Adapting the activity to young people with different disabilities.
8. Carrying out regular follow-ups.
9. Including the activity in regular reading promotion programmes.

These development areas are presented below, and links are made to organisation, strategies, collaboration and participation for and with the target group.

1. Organising on the basis of strategically important activities

Areas facing socio-economic challenges differ in terms of factors such as socio-economic conditions, quality of schools, provision of public services, transport systems and learning in the home environment, to name but a few factors. As areas differ, it is important to examine the prevailing conditions in the specific area in which the reading promotion initiatives are to take place.

This provides a good starting point for planning the most appropriate reading promotion initiatives. Even if there is a general model or methodology from which to work, it is important to make local adaptations to the specific area and the conditions applicable there.

It is possible to refer to local organisation; that is, organisation adapted according to local conditions. There needs to be consensus among the businesses and organisations involved in the initiative if local organisation is to work. This includes:

- gathering information or being aware of the resources and skills needed,
- division of roles between different stakeholders,
- division of responsibilities between different stakeholders.

Important steps in this work may involve:

- gathering information about target group perspectives and living conditions on the basis of demographics,
- gathering information about the organisations and stakeholders trusted by the target group so that they can be integrated into the reading promotion initiative,

- gathering information about what motivates the target group.⁵

The National Literacy Trust in the UK has developed principles that they apply in order to implement reading promotion initiatives in a specific area. If local reading promotion activities are to be successful, they argue that this requires principles such as a common agenda between partners, joint use of data, mutually reinforcing activities within various organisations, clear, consistent external messaging, coordination of initiatives, a commitment of about a decade to the communities in which work is done, cross-sector partnerships, and local community engagement in every stage of the project.⁶

2. Collaborating with many different parties

Developing relevant long-term reading promotion initiatives for different target groups requires collaboration. Collaborative working with different stakeholders has also become more common in the cultural sector. One key factor when it comes to developing effective cooperation is to ensure that all parties agree on how to work together. All partners should agree on common strategies and methods for reading promotion activities during planning and implementation.

It is also important for everyone involved to agree on the roles and responsibilities of the various parties. This should be planned and agreed with all parties before the initiative is executed. Local stakeholders of relevance to the target group and who are aware of the target group's living conditions should be selected when choosing partners. These may include sports clubs, youth centres or religious communities, for example.

Collaboration and the meaning of collaboration can be implemented on the basis of various ambitions, such as:

Discussion – exchange of information between stakeholders.

Consensus – the parties hold a discussion where they can form a common understanding of problems and solutions. There are no obligations linked with the discussion.

Cooperation – stakeholders come together to achieve a common goal.

Collaboration – all stakeholders have a common goal and contribute their skills and resources with a view to achieving it.⁷

Collaboration planning also includes defining clear goals. Having specific goals also facilitates future follow-ups.

3. Working innovatively and involving young people

Working innovatively and involving the target group involves working in various ways with participation for and with the target group. The target group must feel that they are part of the organisation and that their knowledge, experience and opinions are reflected in the planning and implementa-

5. National Literacy Trust, 2020.

6. National Literacy Trust, 2020, pp. 20–21.

7. Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 2021, p. 19.

tion process: this is a key aspect. The right of children and young people (aged 0 to 18) to culture and the right to participation and influence are set out in various articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁸ Sweden's national youth policy goals also state that all young people (aged 13 to 25) should have good living conditions and have the power to shape their own lives and influence the development of society.⁹

Participation and empowerment of young people from a rights perspective are key to all initiatives involving young people. The issue of participation is a broad one, and the context defines what participation involves.

Our discussions with stakeholders provide different perspectives on what participation may involve. For instance:

- working with motivation among young people,
- providing young people with identifying markers for reading promotion activities, such as reading role models that young people can identify with,
- finding out what interests the target group and offering custom reading in that area,
- developing understanding, curiosity and acceptance of lifestyles, interests and attitudes among the target group,
- having the courage to question and collectively explore new approaches and conditions on the basis of good relations,
- promoting reading by offering new areas and challenges to young people.

Young people aged 13 to 25 in areas facing socio-economic challenges are a heterogeneous group. This group includes both experienced readers and people who are unaccustomed to reading. If the target group is to get involved, it may be essential to work with a broadened concept of text that includes speech, writing, images, film and sound in various forms of activities.

4. Developing evidence of the target group's perspectives

Reading promotion initiatives should always be based on evidence of the target group's perspectives and lifestyles.

When working with reading promotion initiatives for and with young people in areas facing socio-economic challenges, there should be evidence of:

- demographic conditions,
- young people's own perspectives,
- young people's living conditions,

8. unicef.com, Article 31 and Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9. Government Bill, 2013.

- multilingualism (where applicable),
- which socio-economic challenges need particular attention in a given area,
- which leisure activities young people engage in,
- specific places in the local area where young people meet up.

This should be included in planning and collaboration on initiatives. This evidence is a prerequisite for long-term planning and support for reading promotion activities for and with the target group.

Areas facing socio-economic challenges may include areas where residents speak several languages and where Swedish is not always the language people use at home. That is why it is necessary to make multilingualism and the use of different languages a key element in reading promotion activities.

5. Creating good relationships and safe spaces

In the discussions by the Swedish Arts Council, many stakeholders highlight the fact that good relations are a prerequisite for target group participation and effective collaboration. Good relationships are built on trust and the perception of safety.

Building good relationships involves developing understanding, curiosity and acceptance of other people's lifestyles, interests and attitudes. It may also involve having the courage to question and collectively explore new approaches and conditions on the basis of good relations. At the outset, the relationships and perceptions may be more important than the reading itself. However, everything has to be adapted to the young people encountered by the party promoting reading. Participation in a context such as this is the result of trusting relationships and confidence. The starting point is to listen to what young people need and are interested in and implement reading in connection with that, in a variety of ways.

The results achieved by the Swedish Arts Council present the following examples of criteria that promote good relations and safe spaces in practice:

- opportunities to have one-to-one discussions with individuals in the target group as part of the reading promotion initiative,
- involvement of local associations in implementation,
- inclusion of multilingualism as part of the reading promotion initiative,
- understanding, curiosity and acceptance of other people's lifestyles, interests and attitudes when talking to young people

6. Making sure diversity is taken into account in the context of reading promotion activities

In our discussions, we have heard many testimonies about how important it has been for many young people who read aloud, and for children who listen to others reading aloud, to read and listen to the language they use at home. We have also heard testimonies about how different social and cultural perspectives, as well as multilingualism among people working with reading promotion

initiatives, play an important role in providing motivation and creating good relations. Young people are empowered by role models with whom they are able to identify. That is why it is important for people working to promote reading in areas facing socio-economic challenges, and the materials used, represent different cultural backgrounds and multilingualism.

If there is representation, there is more of a chance of motivating a target group which consists of multilingual young people and young people from different cultural backgrounds. This then provides them with more opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and identification. It is also important for young people to meet reading role models among their peers or slightly older young people who have similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

7. Adapting the activity to young people with different disabilities

It is not possible to provide an indication of the extent to which disabilities affect reading and reading development among young people in areas facing socio-economic challenges as there is a lack of data on this group. That said, research shows that it can be difficult to determine whether reading and writing difficulties are due to dyslexia or the acquisition of a second language.

General reading and writing difficulties include anyone who has problems with reading and writing, regardless of reason. Dyslexia is a specific problem with reading and writing.

Regardless of whether people experience general or specific difficulties with reading and writing, it is relevant to link reading disability with accessible reading and media. Adaptations and various reading tools can make reading accessible according to each reader's circumstances.¹⁰

There is potential for development when it comes to thinking about universal design and inclusion when planning an initiative. The Swedish Arts Council perceives a further need to compile and distribute information about reading promotion methods and accessible media for this particular group.

8. Carrying out regular follow-ups

Follow-ups provide an opportunity to evaluate whether the goals defined for reading promotion initiatives have been achieved, and if so how. This is also an opportunity to identify challenges that need to be addressed and gather input from the target group. Clear definition of goals as early as the planning stage is a prerequisite for relevant follow-up. That is why planning of how to follow up the work should take place right from the time of the initial work on the initiative and when the goals are being formulated.

9. Including the activity in regular reading promotion programmes

Achieving good results with reading promotion activities is a long-term endeavour. This initiative needs to be sustained, year on year. Long-term sustainability is reliant on having a plan to integrate projects into ordinary activities when regional or state funding comes to an end.

10. Centerwall & Hagberg, digiteknet.se

Methods in Sweden

In the knowledge base, the Swedish Arts Council also presents various methods used to focus on reading promotion initiatives in areas facing socio-economic challenges in Sweden. The methods discussed should be viewed as good examples providing inspiration and lessons to be learned.¹¹

Läsa äger and Reading Ambassadors

Läsa äger (Reading is cool) is a methodology designed to boost reading among children of primary and secondary school age. The methodology is based on a reading promotion activity that involves a number of different organisations and stakeholders. These include schools, libraries, guardians and young people who read aloud to younger children as part of their holiday jobs. The business community is involved on account of the guidance work offered by the Bonnier Family Foundation to all municipalities working with the methodology. All these different stakeholders are brought together to promote reading development. Young people who are employed to read aloud to younger children are involved to varying degrees, depending on how the municipality sets up the work. If young people who read aloud are to feel motivated, it is important for them to perceive their work as meaningful, for them to receive support for the work that they do in various ways, and for them to be paid for the work they do.

There are also a number of municipalities working exclusively with young people who read aloud to younger children during the summer holidays. These are known as Reading Ambassadors. Some municipalities also employ young people during the summer holidays to work on reading promotion initiatives, reading aloud being one of a number of different reading promotion activities. According to the municipal representatives with whom we held discussions, all these initiatives have one thing in common:

- multilingualism among the young people has reinforced their contact with the younger multilingual children,
- young people have developed their own reading skills while they have been reading aloud to the younger children,
- young people have become proud readers who feel they are doing something meaningful and significant for others.

Läsa för integration

Läsa för integration (Reading for Integration) is a methodology developed by the non-profit organisation Läsförmedlingen, the Reading Promotion Institute. The Läsa för integration methodology aims to ensure that target groups find reading promotion activities to be meaningful from both a social and a cultural perspective. Läsförmedlingen has been devising strategies over a long period of time. All activities are based on a sense of motivation among and involvement with the target groups.

11. See the report entitled "Stärk läsning för unga" (Boost Reading for Young People), Swedish Arts Council, 2024 for more in-depth descriptions, references and a statement on sample selection.

The key aspect is that reading promotion activities should be closely related to participants' own life experiences; experiences that also include the target group living with multiple languages, having a history of migration and/or experiencing socio-economic vulnerability.

Shared Reading

Shared Reading is a reading promotion methodology based in particular on good relationships and safe spaces so that experiences of a text that everyone has read can be shared. This is an inclusive methodology where the reader leader adapts the reading to the group's circumstances.

One fundamental principle is that even non-experienced readers have the right to engage with high-quality texts that express profound life experience. All participants are treated well and given space to allow them to participate and express themselves. The reader leader helps to forge links, as well as helping participants to view their own life experiences in relation to the content of the text. Participants read together when they meet, with no time to prepare or follow-up work. Clear structures are in place for implementation of the methodology.

Youth councils

Youth councils are a methodology that can be deployed strategically to include young people's perspectives and their influence on development of an activity, for instance. Youth councils can also serve as a forum for reading development for and with the young people who are members of the youth council.

In other words, the youth council can assist with exploration and development of reading promotion activities for and with young people. This is also an example of working on participation together with young people on the basis of a structure. Setting up a youth council and getting young people involved redistributes power from adults to young people and gives young people a real opportunity to make a difference. Youth councils work on the basis of both participation and collaboration.

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