

# Turku University



## StoRe (Stories make readers) - project creating communities of readers Aerila, Juli-Anna, Kauppinen, Merja & Moisio, Katri

### The StoRe-project

Stories make readers (StoRe) – projects is a project concentrating on supporting educators in creating positive reading climate with the children in their groups. Additionally, the educators are encouraged to share their pedagogical innovations and test new pedagogical approaches with the support of other educators and experts. The StoRe-project was initially a one-year (academic year 2017-2018) project with several sub-studies promoting literature reading. This piloting project was implemented in a network of 10 class teachers in Finland.

The Store-project strives for its goals with the following principals:

The StoRe-project

1. promotes educators' and adults' consciousness of their readership.
2. supports educators' agency as a literature instructor.
3. creates a positive culture of reading in their groups which enable the society of readers.



## The background of the StoRe-project

The literacy skills as well as the interest and pleasure in reading has been reducing over the last decade. However, the importance of literature and literacy skills in the development of a child is undeniable whether we think of academic skills, emotional development or coping with the life in general. As multiple research results promote, there is a link between motivation, literacy, readership, child's self-esteem, and general school achievement. This means that by adding positive reading experiences and improving literacy, we can prevent the exclusion of young people and promote the general wellbeing of children.

Making children read and enjoy reading more is not complicated. Creating a **positive environment for reading** develops through the teacher's will and values and is promoted in a educators' peer groups through active collaboration. The best ways to inspire children to read in an educational context is an educator, who makes her/his readership visible. This means sharing reading experiences with children, discussing reading and being interested in children's reading experiences and views on books.

For an educator to create **communities of readers** she/he must be encouraged to develop and share individual preferences and enthusiasms, to acknowledge family, community and cultural influences on reading, and to consider the pleasures of reading for enjoyment. All this means that educator's **agency as literature instructor** improves and the educator has an

understanding about a text world of fiction, is getting more aware of children's literature and pedagogical approaches as well as is creating opportunities for peer discussions. Children's readership is based on the models of adults and peers, and the attachment to positive images of readers. Educators are important role models in reading, but so are the parents. However, the parental support during emergent literacy varies a lot. For example, 28 % of Finnish parents reports not reading regularly to their children (PIRLS 2016). Supporting parents in their readership is important, since the meaning of parental support is highlighted in international literacy assessments: there is a strong relationship between reading attitudes at home and reading commitment of a child.

Adults often promote reading in their discourses and verbally encourage their children to read, but reading and literature is not present in daily activities. However, children mirror their reading in adults' reading and make conclusions about reading and the importance of reading often in concrete ways. This means having a bookshelf, reading books, talking about books and telling about experiences connected to reading. The children love listening to adult reading and value the moments of presence of parents in the reading session at home.

## Pedagogical innovations of StoRe-project

The educators in StoRe-project came up with several pedagogical innovations, which promoted reading in their groups. The following innovations show that making reading more enjoyable does not require a lot of money or special arrangements.

### The bedtime story shelf

(For parental support)

A bedtime story shelf is a collection of about 25 different picture books. The books must be so short that they can be read during one evening and at best, they are bedtime stories. The books are on a special shelf or a box and the children can loan the books for one night. It is important that they can choose the book from the shelf themselves. The books are taken home and they are read at home together with an adult. One of the reasons for the success of these books is the fact that they must be returned to school the next day. This means the books must be read during the same day.

While asking the educators, children and the parents about these bedtime story shelves, they have given only positive feedback: The possibility to make own choices in reading materials is important for children. Many parents find finding suitable reading materials difficult and they are sometimes too busy to go to libraries. One of the children in StoRe-project said that his/her parents have never time to go to library. Therefore, the bedtime story shelves make the reading at home easy.

Having 25 books on the shelf means reading material for almost a month. During that time both children and the parents felt that they were able to create a positive reading climate and routine at home. Additionally, the families were surprised how the children still like the closeness and reading aloud moments with parents and other family members.



The bedtime story shelf



## Book Exchange Market

(For peer support)

The book exchange market was organized with four children's groups in StoRe-project. The educators in the project wanted to help children discuss about their reading experiences and illustrate how reading is enjoyable and meaningful for many children and educators outside their group.

The book exchange market is easy to organize: The educators asked the children to bring to their class or kindergarten group a book from home, which they are willing to give to somebody. For those children, who reported not having such books at home, the educators had books. Before the market, all the children dictated some positive thing about the book and added some recommendations to others. These texts were attached to their books.

On the day of the market, almost 100 children gathered to one of the schools. They placed their books on tables and part of the children started looking for something to read and the others recommended their books to others. There was live conversation on books and reading. After one hour, all the children had checked the books and has something to read. It was a bit funny, that some children recommended their books so convincingly that they decided to read their own books. The book exchange market ended in peaceful reading with a friend or alone. The book exchange market was a success: it was easy to organize, enhanced the participation of children and it was fun!

## Picnic Reading

(For peer support)

The reading picnic was organized with two StoRe-groups located in different schools. The teachers arranged the meeting. The main idea was to share reading experiences in a nice reading climate. The reading picnic began by getting to know each other: they played some outdoor games and presented their names. The place for the reading picnic was a park in the center of the city.

The teachers had some blankets and small lunches with them and the children has some books. The children were divided into mixed groups of 3 – 4. They were asked to share a blanket and read. They were allowed to read aloud in pairs or read individually in silence. After a while, the teachers asked them to share their reading experiences (present the book they were reading, tell about the part they had read and share their opinions as well as thoughts on a book).

The reading picnic ended in voluntary performances based on the reading. Some blanket groups presented drama, some puppetry and some just read their books in roles.

During the reading picnic, the children have to know many books, shared their reading experiences and had a positive experience on reading together. Some children repeated this activity at home with their families.

## Going to movies together

For many years, the most popular activity after reading a book is watching a movie based on a book. This is also apparent in our research. Therefore, we organized a movie event in one of the lecture halls of the university. Altogether, four classes from different parts of the city read the same children's book and came to watch it. To make the experience resemble movies the children were allowed to have some sweets.

The children really enjoyed themselves and eagerly compared the book and the movie. After the movie, the children went back to their schools and while walking to schools some of the children were shouting: We are readers!

## Encouragement posts to other children

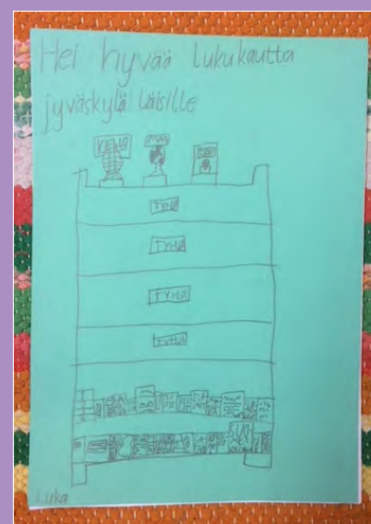
The children send traditional postcards to StoRe-class members in another town and with those postcards encouraged the other children to read. The old-fashioned post cards were really expected among children and contained very original messages on reading to other children, which inspired the receivers.



Book exchange market



Going to the movies together



An encouragement letter from a child to another saying "Have a nice reading season!"



## Reflecting the pedagogical Innovations

These innovations are in accordance to the prior research: helping children to create positive attitudes to reading and enhancing, the motivation to reading does not require money or any special resources. In reading the positive reading climate, time and a good company are the most valuable resources.

In Store-project, the possibilities to meet children from other groups and schools seem to be effective from the perspective of communities of readers and the positive readership. The activities implemented (the pedagogical innovations) during the StoRe-project made the educator's, other children and their families readership visible to the children and increased the amount of reading in all groups. After the project almost 80 % of the children felt that, the educator encouraged them to read and almost 90 % felt that some adult in their home environment encouraged them in reading. They also felt quite sure that the educators liked reading and only 20 % of the children were unsure. The change in comparison to the children's starting point was remarkable.

Children's answers on what convinced them on the fact that the educator values and likes reading may also serve as inspiration for reading activities in groups. According to children, they know that the educator is a reader because she reads to them aloud, she likes to read long books, she never says that the children are not allowed or do not have time to read, she knows a lot of fairy tales and good books for me to read.

## Read more

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