



# FAMILY READING

*- how to facilitate literature and promote reading to children and their adults*



**Nordplus**



Deichman Biblo Tøyen, library for 10-15 year olds, Oslo.

## FAMILY READING

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In May 2020 librarians from four Nordic countries were excited to learn that their libraries had secured funding from Nordplus to exchange knowledge on good practices for facilitating literature and promoting reading to children and their adults.

This guide to fellow librarians in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden is a short summary of some of the many good ideas for encouraging positive reading habits for families to ensure a future growth in pleasure reading that were exchanged between the participating libraries during the two-year long project.

If, after reading this guide, you are curious to know more about the project or wish to contact some of the project partners, please don't hesitate to write Anna Zieler: [anzhi@slagelse.dk](mailto:anzhi@slagelse.dk).

# DENMARK

*Blågårdens Bibliotek in Copenhagen and Slagelse Biblioteker in Slagelse*

## PAJAMAS CINEMA

At Slagelse Biblioteker one of the most popular family reading events is Pajamas Cinema. The event is a collaboration with local cinemas. The concept is that children under the age of 6 and their adults can come to the cinema at six o'clock in the evening, dressed in their pajamas and with their duvet and cuddly toy to enjoy a few short films and a story that is being read aloud by a librarian (also wearing pajamas). While the librarian is reading, the picture pages of the book are projected onto the big screen. After half an hour, the families go home and can prepare to go to bed.

## VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES (VTS)

As the saying goes: a picture says more than a thousand words. But do we all see the same thing when we look at a picture? Early literacy is about more than reading words, it is about being able to understand communications. A lot of communication, especially today, is relayed through images, such as photos, paintings, pictograms and drawings, and the meaning can be construed very differently, which makes talking about what we see all the more interesting. VTS is a newly introduced method in the public libraries in Denmark, and it is a method you can use for a family reading session at the library – either as a reading picture session with for example three images, as an intergenerational event or as part of a story time.



*Inspirational trip to Blågårdens Bibliotek, Copenhagen*



*Inspirational trip to Biblioteket Kulturværftet, Elsinor*

With VTS you have a facilitator, who poses three questions:

- a) What is going on in this picture?
- b) What do you see that makes you say that?
- c) What more can we find?

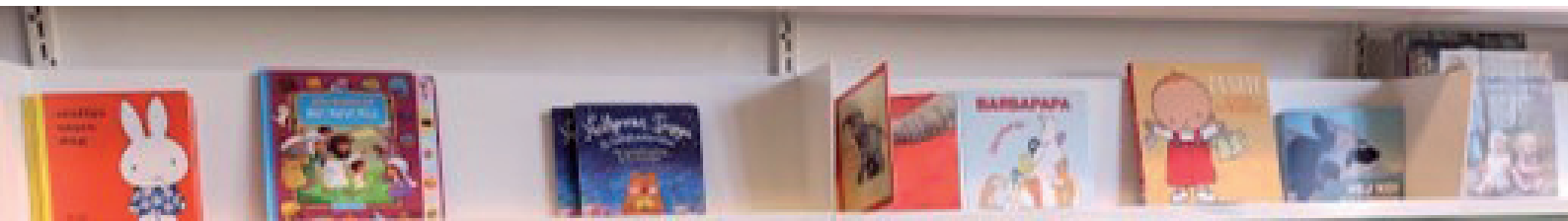
After the first question, the facilitator chooses one person to answer. After the answer, the facilitator gives a summary of what was said using different words, if possible, but making sure the meaning is the same. The facilitator then follows up with the second question to the same respondent and again repeats the answer whilst pointing to the elements in the images the respondent is referring to. The facilitator then thanks the respondent and opens the conversation up to the group again with the third question. You can never say anything wrong with VTS as you always refer to something you see. In that way, the conversation is very safe and can be a bit of an eye-opener, as we don't always read what we see in the same way. If you do VTS with young children, they can point at what they see, and you can help them find the words they are looking for to express their observations. VTS is a great method for both supporting democratic, social and language skills. As an extra bonus a VTS conversation often makes you even more curious about an image – for instance a work of art – so you want to know more about the picture and the story around the image.

## A “GRAND” DAY WITH GRANDPARENTS

Most children in Denmark are in daycare institutions in the mornings and early hours of the afternoon and sometimes their grandparents are so lucky they can collect them a bit earlier and have an afternoon with them to themselves. So why not host an event for grandparents? Here, grandparents and grandchildren to celebrate their special bond, where they can meet each other and have a good time with storytelling, songs and games. During the fall of 2021 Slagelse Bibliotek tried out the concept of ‘the grandest day of the month’ and both grandparents and great-grandparents attended. One of the things that was learnt was that it is a great activity for fall and winter, and that the event is even better if you are specific about the age group of the grandchildren. If that were not the case, you otherwise have to come prepared with activities for every age group between 0 and 6 years of age.



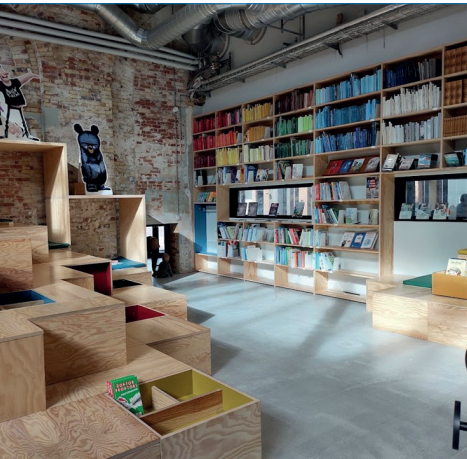
*Inspirational trip to Hovedbiblioteket, Copenhagen*



Hvor I kan sanse og sætte lyd



*Inspirational trip to Nørrebro Bibliotek*



## **DIALOGICAL READING**

Dialogical Reading is a method that is widely used in Denmark in daycare institutions and in public libraries for stimulating children's language skills and their early literacy – and it is very good to introduce to parents for reading at home in the family. On [www.sprogsporet.dk](http://www.sprogsporet.dk), parents can learn how to use, amongst other things, dialogical reading at home. The method is quite simple: the adult reads the book before introducing it to the child/ren and thinks about what the child can learn from this reading experience. Is there any new vocabulary or concepts in the text that should be explained and contextualized? If so, how would you explain those words? Do you need visual aids or props? Is there a song or a game you can think of that can further your child's understanding of it? When you are ready, you read the book in its entirety to your child, so your child gets a feel for the book and the rhythm of the language. You then read the book again, but this time you stop at each page and introduce your props and, most importantly, ask your child questions about the story. When you engage in a dialogue with your child about the story, you get to follow your child's way of thinking and to support your child's joy in books and in storytelling. After having read the book, you can refer to the book when you sing a song or experience something with your child that touches on the same themes as the story you read together. That way the child experiences that reading a book is something that has a longer reaching effect and that it is something that can be shared and built upon.

# FINLAND

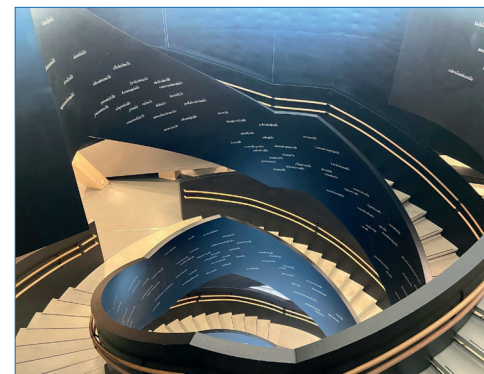
*Oodi in Helsinki*

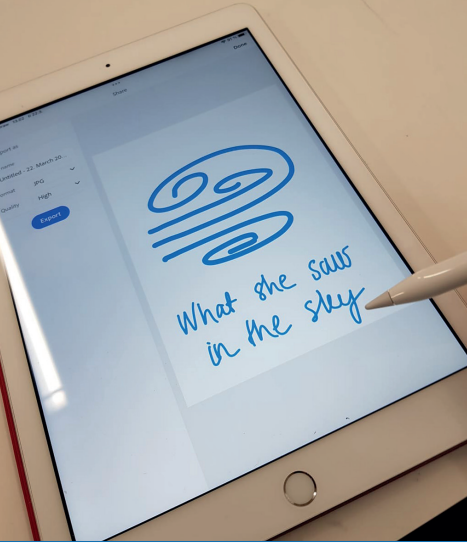
## BOOK CLUB FOR BABIES

It is never too early to start reading in the family. So why not join a book club for babies? At Oodi in Helsinki librarians host baby book clubs in Swedish, where families, with children under the age of 1, meet every other Friday in a calm space. At the book club meeting, all the participating parents get the same pile of board books which have been chosen by the librarian. The librarian then reads the board books aloud whilst the parents sit comfortably with their babies and simultaneously point to the pictures in the books and read along. After the reading session, the librarian follows-up with a couple of more books for babies as inspiration – mostly with a focus on rhythm and rhymes. During the book club, the babies can also hang out with each other in an empty wading pool, where they can check out books and each other. Afterwards, all the parents get to loan the board books. The book club gives the children an early connection with books and helps support their language and imagination development. It also offers new parents the opportunity to get to know other families with babies and to get good advice on early literacy from the library.



*Oodi, Helsinki*





*Maker Space experience at Oodi, Helsinki*



## ILLUSTRATE THE STORY

At Oodi, they have Maker Spaces for public use. They also use their Maker Spaces as part of their story telling for young people and kids. An idea for a family event could be to go to the library, get an Apple pen and iPad and doodle, whilst hearing a good story being read aloud. When the story is finished, you have your artwork, inspired by the storytelling, printed on a vinyl printer, and hot pressed onto a tote bag. You leave the library, both with knowledge about how to use some of the facilities in the Maker Space, and with a physical reminder of the story you heard – a story you can retell and embellish, both about the Maker Space experience and the actual story. If your library doesn't have a Maker Space, the idea is easily transferred to more analogue methods. Making a drawing on ordinary paper with coloured pencils, or another creative activity inspired by a story telling. The main goal of the creative process, is to make the family active participants in the story and to support and enrich their imagination, invite them to continue- and modify the story, and maybe give them new skills. After all, a story is much more than just a book and it can be brought to life using different methods.



## **A LIBRARY OF THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE**

Oodi is the people of Helsinki's house. It has been designed considering the wishes of the local population and as such it is both a library, a culture house, a youth club and an indoor piazza. In other words, a place where families and others can come and get together and partake in different activities or just hang out. The fact that the library is part of this setting makes literature easily accessible to everyone and a natural part of family life. The fact that the libraries in Helsinki in general include for example iPads and musical instruments that people may borrow for free also plays a factor in how people regard libraries as a positive resource in their everyday lives. It is instrumental in making children and young people stay keen on using their public libraries and in enhancing their joy in reading.

## **LIBRARY BUSESSES**

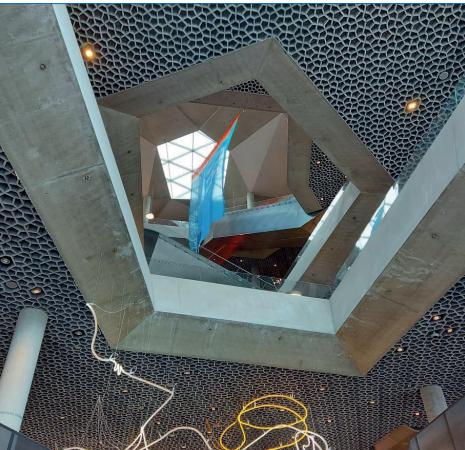
Not just a bus filled with books that stop at different places so you can return and loan books or get the books you have ordered. No! An actual library on wheels in which you can hang out. Is it complete with reading nooks and a collection of books that is designed to entice your curiosity about books. The library bus service in Helsinki is top notch. The buses bring not only the library collection to the public, but also the library experience to the people. It visits daycare institutions, schools, and goes to places where the public library is not easily accessible or where people don't use their public library that often. The service is part of the public libraries' vision to engage with the public and to support the population both linguistically, spiritually, academically, and mentally.



*Library bus in Helsinki*



*Deichman Bjørvika, Oslo*



# NORWAY

*Deichman Libraries in Oslo*

## **LIBRARIES AS A COMMON SPACE**

Each library in Oslo is designed with the local user groups in mind. The idea is to make people feel not only welcome and at home in the library, but also to invite them to engage actively with each other in the library space. Common for all the libraries is that there is a stage area, lots of reading nooks and space for studying – but aside from that, the décor and the book collection varies according to the user groups' needs. One library shares space with a youth club, another library holds the largest comics collection, a third is uniquely for 10–15-year-olds. The young people have been involved in the planning of both the interior design and the way the book collection should be organized and labelled according to their logic. Different organizations can use the libraries to host events – like Mammaprat ([www.nabonorge.no/nabonorsk](http://www.nabonorge.no/nabonorsk)) – and the organizations have the possibility to store things at the library, for example in a locked locker. The libraries also collaborate with, for instance, the health care centre for kids to host maternity group meetings during which they inform and inspire parents to read to their children from as early an age as possible.

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS PART OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

The libraries in Oslo have collectively decided to make social responsibility a part of libraries' DNA. The sharing of resources is already at the heart of every library – but in Oslo, the libraries are also actively promoting sustainability. The libraries have 'seed' libraries with information about when and how to plant vegetables and plants. Some libraries have weekly vegetarian cooking classes for kids (from self-sourced communal vegetable gardens), others have a collection of sewing machines where you can come and get help from others on how to repair or upcycle your clothing items, and some have a collection of tools you can borrow. Families who struggle economically can get a helping hand to assist them to get on an equal footing with other families. The main goal of all of the initiatives is to make it as easy and natural as possible for everyone to take social responsibility.

## **DO A PODCAST**

During Covid19 lockdown, some librarians in Oslo decided to start a Podcast for families in which they answer some of the most common questions they have been asked by parents and children. They also use the Podcast to give book tips and share ideas about reading strategies etc. The Podcast has been well received and is now a fixed feature in the work to support family reading.



*Seed library, Deichman Libraries in Oslo*



*Project partners are interviewed for "Leseboden", Deichman Libraries podcast for parents*



*Deichman Biblio Tøyen, library for 10-15 year olds in Oslo*



## **LET THE YOUTH LEAD THE WAY**

As part of an outreach initiative to engage families in reading during and after the Covid19 lockdown period, young people (between the ages of 15 and 18) were hired in temporary positions by the libraries to facilitate activities for children and families in parks and other outdoor public spaces. The children and other young people responded positively to activities led by young people. It made reading more readily accessible when a young person acted as a role model for the activity and also youngsters and children were more inclined to address the young staff with questions. Some of the young people were kept on as staff at some of the libraries where they either have a large group of young users or where they wish to attract more young people. The young staff help put materials back on their proper shelves – but they also help facilitate activities for families and act as hosts for young people and children in the library room.



# SWEDEN

*Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm and Botkyrka bibliotek, Botkyrka*

## INTERACTIVE PICTURE BOOKS

Interactive picture books are excellent for family reading. They are fun and easy to read and as a family, you can play your way through the reading experience. The books are fun to read for children between the ages of 2-8 and they work both with one child and with groups of children together. These children can be of the same age or mixed aged-groups together. With the mixed aged-group reading sessions, the children learn from their peers whilst reading/playing. With the one-on-one reading experience between adult and child, the interactive picture books are an excellent way to engage with your child and to be able to follow your child's lead. The interactive picture books are also very good for language stimulation and language learning – and as an adult you don't necessarily have to be a strong reader yourself to have an enjoyable reading interaction with your child. Some of the titles to recommend could be: "The Book with No Pictures" by B.J. Novak, "Press Here" by Hervé Tullet, "What's Next Door" by Nicola O'Byrne and "Finn Herman" by Mats Letén.



*Rum för Barn, Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Stockholm*



*Rum för Barn, Kulturhuset Stadsteatern,  
Stockholm*



## **GET RID OF TOYS!**

As part of a renovation of the children's library "Rum för Barn", the staff decided to challenge the idea that young children and their adults wouldn't come to the library for the books alone. They got rid of all toys from the library and organized their collection of books in ways that placed the books at the eyelevel of the users. In every room, they decided to front as many books as possible.

Exposing the front pages has turned out to be a great way of capturing the young children's attention. For the youngest readers, the books are organized by colour so the children can help put the books back in the right place. Collections of picture books are also organized by illustrator instead of by author, as some children recognize the style of the illustrator before they recognize names of authors. The new library is a labyrinth of books and reading nooks and to create a calm atmosphere there are lots of cosy spaces that invite both grownups and children to sit on the floor and read. To make everybody feel at home in the library and to encourage families to read together, the collection holds children's books in more than 50 languages. Even to just have one picture book in a specific language is an acknowledging and welcoming gesture. The result of the renovation is that the book collection is so much more in play and book loans have skyrocketed!

## POP-UP LIBRARIES

Another good idea is to bring the library collection to the people. It can be done very low-key by bringing a selection of books in a cargo bike to a well populated area, a shopping area, a park or other popular meeting points for people. To advertise the book collection, bring a blanket and do readings for children and their adults – or bring a collection of books of a certain genre and have a quiz prepared or a treasure hunt with fun facts about the books for the targeted audience.

## HAVE STORY TIME

Every Wednesday at four o'clock? Every Saturday at ten? Find the time that appeals to the greatest number of people or to the group of users you wish to attract – and make Story Time a fixed happening. Set the scene – for example by placing a blanket, picnic-style, on the floor for people to lounge on. Pick three to five picture books you wish to share and/or have the audience suggest books for you to read aloud. Invite other adults or children to read a picture book aloud to the group, if you feel that they would welcome the idea. If you wish, you can have a Story Time club – more or less officially – where participants get a card and collect stamps for every story time session they attend. After 10 sessions, they receive a Story Time diploma. Also, another good idea is Bilingual Storytime where the same picture book is being read aloud in both the national language and in another language (like Spanish, Finnish or Arabic) one page at a time. It is a brilliant concept that never goes out of style.



*Tio Tretton, Kulturhuset Stadsteatern, Stockholm*





Hovedbiblioteket, København, Denmark

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

### THE AIM OF THE PROJECT

The overall aim of the project was to exchange knowledge on good practices for facilitating literature and promoting reading to children and their adults. The project explored educational tools and pedagogical methods to encourage positive reading habits for families to ensure a future growth in pleasure reading for children and young people. Multiple studies show that pleasure reading is important for children both socially and academically. The project aimed to enhance the joy of reading for children through their parents. In light of this, the participating libraries tested and evaluated four different methods to engage families in reading activities. The objectives were to make parents aware of the resources available to them at public libraries and to give them hands-on pedagogical tools to read with their children. The emphasis was on reading for pleasure and to learn how to encourage family reading in the best possible way through public libraries and in a public library setting.

### BACKGROUND

According to the extensive study 'Children's Reading Habits 2017' by the Danish Think Tank 'Libraries for the future' children are – especially due to social media, streaming services and digital gaming spending less time reading for fun than they did only a couple of years earlier. Surveys done by PIRLS in Sweden, Denmark and Norway show that although children in these countries are highly confident readers, they don't express delight in



reading. In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture funded the national program 'Joy of Reading' from 2013-2015 with the aim of supporting the development of reading comprehension and enjoyment of reading. The program placed emphasis on a collaboration between schools, libraries and parents to ensure that children read for pleasure in their spare time. That children are inspired to read by their parents is also one of the conclusions in 'Children's Reading Habits 2017'. However, a lot of parents don't know how to encourage their children to read for pleasure and they don't know what resources are available to them at public libraries. Transnationally, public libraries have the common goal to democratically serve as platforms for lifelong learning. In Nordic countries, libraries also serve as cultural meeting grounds and the way we view children and children's culture is very similar. This means we have a common understanding of our target group - families - and can relate to each other's practice and easier implementation strategies for children and their adults across national borders. How we facilitate and promote good reading practices, however, may vary a lot. This is why it is valuable to do a transnational project on exchange in good practice and of knowledge and mutual inspiration and innovation in the field of family reading to help us all reach the shared goal of ensuring joy in reading for generations to come.



*Maker Space with Sewing Machines,  
Deichman Grünerløkka in Oslo*



*Lava, a library for 14 to 25 year olds,  
Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm*



*Deichman Tøyen, Oslo*

## **ACTIVITIES**

Each partner institution hosted a partners' meeting during the project period. At each partner meeting, the host institution gave a presentation of their library and of how libraries in their country work with enhancing the joy of reading – in particular with emphasis on family reading. Each host also prepared a workshop on a good practice/methods that they either have experience with using to promote reading for pleasure or that they proposed as a method to facilitate literature for families. The partners used each other as sounding boards on how they could implement the method in their own daily practice.

The results of the project are presented in this guide to fellow librarians and also in a guide to parents.



*Deichman Bjørvika, Oslo*



**BLÅ  
GÅRDEN**



**Oodi  
Ode**

Helsingin keskustakirjasto  
Helsingfors centrumbibliotek  
Helsinki Central Library

**Helsinki**

**KULTURHUSET  
stadsteatern**

**D=ICHMAN**

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**SLAGELSE  
BIBLIOTEKER &  
BORGERSERVICE**