

**Building capacity to address literacy challenges  
and enhance democratic engagement in  
Västernorrland and Mombasa**

**Study report: Inventory and analysis of capacity regarding literacy  
skills and reading motivation in Västernorrland**

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## 1. Introduction

This is the second of three reports intended to provide a foundation for the project *Building capacity to address literacy challenges and enhance democratic engagement in Västernorrland and Mombasa*. The purpose of the project is to strengthen the capacity of organisations to address the problem of declining reading proficiency and promoting reading comprehension in young adults. A focus of the overall project is the development of possible cross-sectoral solutions by working through sports clubs to promote reading. The first report described the context of the project by providing information about the Swedish education system, libraries, county organization and the background regarding increased efforts for promoting reading on the national and county level as well as the central issue of declining reading proficiency. The purpose of this report is to look more closely at the capacity in Västernorrland regarding literacy skills and reading motivation in the indirect target groups of the project, that is to say the stakeholders. The stakeholder groups include primarily: children and young adults (between the ages of 10 and 15) who are involved in sports, youth leaders in sports associations, educators, teachers, librarians and parents. Developments that are having a profound effect on capacity regarding literacy skills and reading motivation in the early years of compulsory school as well as recent developments regarding reading promotion on the national level are taken up in the background section.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 What does the research say?

Jonas Andersson, on behalf of the Swedish Arts Council, examined the questions: what is the purpose of reading promotion, what are the strategies for promoting reading, and what do we know about the effects? His examination of these questions and some of the research done in this field resulted in a book, [The Target of Reading: On Methods and Research in the Field of Reading Promotion](#) (*Med läsning som mål: Om metoder och forskning på det läsfrämjande området*, The Swedish Arts Council 2015). The book also describes and discusses strategies used in reading promotion programs and projects carried out by public libraries, adult education organizations, charities and other institutions engaged in reading promotion. In his book Andersson cites the conclusions of [Linda Gambrell](#)<sup>1</sup> whose major research areas are literacy motivation, reading comprehension, and the role of discussion in teaching and learning.

According to Gambrell, essential factors for improving reading motivation among young people are identified as (1) the literature's and reading task's perceived relevance to their own lives, (2) access to a wide range of reading materials, (3) a generous amount of time for reading, (4) opportunities to make choices about what they read, (5) opportunities to socially

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<sup>1</sup> Gambrell, Linda B. (2011). Seven Rules of Engagement: What's Most Important to Know About Motivation to Read. *The Reading Teacher*. 65, 172-178

interact with others about the text they are reading, (6) opportunities to be successful with challenging texts and (7) incentives which reflect the value and importance of reading.

Andersson makes the claim that Swedish primary school does not take this research into account. He cites a large research overview on reading instruction in Swedish primary School done on behalf of The Swedish National Agency for Education, where one can conclude that reading instruction in Swedish primary School runs contrary to what researchers on reading motivation hold as most important for young people's motivation to read. Along with numerous studies indicating that parents and the home environment are crucial for children's reading habits and attitudes to reading, a picture emerges of reading in Sweden where the socio-cultural factors are to a very large extent allowed to determine who becomes a reader and who does not. In short, there are good reasons for engaging in reading promotion activities.

The combination of reading promotion and sports offers opportunities for reading motivation that are in line with the research referred to here. The combination can be a way of compensating for inequalities. But what about the claim that reading instruction in Swedish compulsory schools is contrary to what reading motivation researchers say is crucial in motivating students and pupils to read? It seems important to mention here that changes have been made in the way teachers in the first six years of compulsory school work with reading today. One project, A Reading Class (*En läsande klass*) is described below. Another project, the Reading Lift (*Läslyftet*), is in-service professional development for teachers. These two projects have enhanced capacity regarding literacy skills and reading motivation in Västernorrland and throughout the country.

## **2.2 Building capacity in the schools**

### **2.2.1 A Reading Class (*En läsande klass*)**

The purpose of A Reading Class is to reverse the decline in reading proficiency. Martin Widmark, an extremely popular author of children's books and books for young adults as well as a teacher of grades 4-6, is the initiator of the project. Several actors support the project including Swedish publishers, the Reading Movement (*Läs rörelsen*, see the first report) and a number of others. The project is financed mainly through one of Sweden's biggest lotteries. In April 2014 a study plan for teachers to use in teaching reading was developed by a number of experienced teachers. The material consists of a study guide with texts that the publishers and authors and illustrators have put at the disposal of the teachers without remuneration. The material is distributed free of charge in printed form to all schools teaching the first six years of compulsory school and to special schools for the intellectually challenged, and also made available freely on [Internet](#). The material is a concrete tool for how teachers can work with reading strategies.

A Reading Class is based on the model, RT (Reciprocal Teaching), TSI (Transactional Strategies Instruction) and QtA (Questioning the Author). Both RT and TSI are based on four basic strategies: predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. In addition to these strategies, the research model used by A Reading Class also includes visualization. However, the keystone in all three models is the conversation around the texts. The target group is one million pupils who are coming in contact with the method. By presenting and introducing the method for the 65 000

teachers who work with the country's 8 400 schools working with the first six years of compulsory schools and 660 special schools, the project is reaching these pupils (around 100 000 children per year in classes 1-6 during five years).

A Reading Class will continue until 2018 when the next international PISA study shall be carried out. The ultimate goal is that Sweden will again be among the foremost countries in reading comprehension.

### **2.2.2 The Reading Lift (*Läslyftet*)**

The Swedish National Agency for Education was given the task by the previous government of carrying out skills development for teachers in language, reading and writing didactics between 2015 and 2018. Teachers in compulsory schools, special education schools, upper secondary schools, preschool teachers, preschool personnel and school librarians are given the opportunity to learn from each other. Through peer learning with the support of a supervisor and material of the Internet Reading and Writing Portal ([\*Läs- och skrivportalen\*](#)), teachers are given the opportunity to develop their teaching by getting knowledge about different tools and methods and by getting a chance to test them. The skills development takes place at the school and is intimately connected to the ordinary schoolwork. Working with a module takes about 30 hours spread out over a term and is carried out during working time. Allotment of time is up to the principal. It is possible to apply for a government grant to defray the cost of freeing a supervisor to work with The Reading Lift's skill develop model and modules. One supervisor from each school with a government grant is offered training.

### **2.3 National capacity building across sectors: Sweden reads with the kids (*Hela Sverige läser med barnen*)**

The present government has seen the need to improve reading comprehension and increase reading among children and young adults and that work cannot be done by the formal education system alone. For that reason it has made a greater commitment to improving reading by initiating Sweden Reads with the Kids (*Hela Sverige läser med barnen*). In order to do this, representatives from schools, culture, sports and clubs have been gathered together in the Reading Delegation (*Läsdelegationen*). October 2016 a press release from the Ministry of Culture named a football trainer as one of the seven members of the reading delegation. The task of the Reading Delegation is to coordinate efforts from these different sectors to ensure that they have a greater effect. Within the framework of Sweden Reads with the Kids, the autumn break will become the Reading Break (*Läslov*). During that week various activities across sectors will be planned to encourage reading. From 2017 – 2020 the government will be providing 5 million SEK per year to different cultural institutions for carrying out activities to promote reading during the Reading Break. The existing effort, Book Start (Bokstart), the goal of which is to stimulate language and reading development in very young children, will be broadened to include more municipalities. Another effort is the expansion of the Reading Lift (*Läslyftet*) described above. It will be broadened to include preschool teachers and librarians. There are a series of reforms within Sweden Reads with the Kids. They include a reading-writing-arithmetic guarantee for the first three years of compulsory school, increased special education competence in school, increased personnel in school libraries and a national library strategy.

### **3. Interviewing the stakeholders**

#### **3.1 Procedure**

In order to identify the capacity of the stakeholders and enhance understanding of the causes and effects of the problem, a series of informal interviews with the indirect target groups were carried out. The questions that form the basis of the questionnaire can be seen in the appendix. The county librarian, the library and culture consultant and the previous library and literature consultant at the Västernorrland County Council proposed representatives from the indirect target groups. Some of the representatives had been involved in projects conducted or supported by the County Library in Västernorrland. Not all of the interview questions were used in the cases where they were not relevant. The interviews were carried out by different people in Swedish and then translated to English. No claims are being made to the scientific value of the interviews. However, some interesting patterns and ideas have emerged that can help our understanding of the existing capacity in Västernorrland.

### **4. The stakeholders**

#### **4.1 Young people participating in sports: Louise and Robert**

Louise (age 12) and Robert (age 16) are siblings. Robert is in his first year of upper secondary school and Louise is in grade 6.

Louise plays football during the football season and plays handball during the winter. Robert played both, but nowadays he concentrates on handball. At his age, training becomes more serious and takes more time. Neither of them has been involved in a reading promotion project.

When asked what they thought was the reason that reading results have declined, they both answered that it had to do with the time young people spend with their various devices. Robert tends to spend a lot of time contacting his friends with his smart phone while Louise spends a lot of time with her touch screen tablet. She uses it to listen to music and to watch video clips. Robert said quite frankly, "Reading isn't cool".

Louise could identify activities at school that could be described as promoting reading. Everyday at the beginning of the day the students read for a half an hour. Louise spoke positively about this time for reading because it prepared her for the rest of the day by calming the class down. Robert couldn't identify anything that promoted reading specifically and didn't seem to feel that they had much to read in their other subjects. Neither of them had much to do with the school library. Louise asked if I meant the shelves of books that were in the corridor outside the classroom. Robert thinks that evaluating sources is as an important part of the work of librarians working with youth at the public library. Interestingly enough, Robert said that discussions about source material and examining them critically were also an important part of nearly all of their subjects.

Both were asked how they would describe themselves as readers. Both of them said that they had read more when they were younger and could trace their decline in

reading opportunities to the time they got their devices. They were in agreement that they didn't read much but both of them felt that they read more than any of their peers. Louise seemed to read more than Robert but both of them liked to listen to talking books. Neither of them had participated in the library's "Book Talk".

When asked if they could see a way to connect sports and reading promotion. They mentioned that they weren't really close friends with the people on the team. Some of the players are their friends because they know them from school but others are people they only meet at training. They do talk, for example, about leadership, nutrition and bullying which could be subjects that could be dealt with in literature. Robert felt that trying to get young people to read might have the opposite effect. Louise felt that reading on a tablet might make it easier.

They both understood that reading was important for many reasons.

## **4.2 A parent: Ruth**

When asked about the decline in reading Ruth, a mother of three children, answered that it was a result of the omnipresence of devices such as smart phones and tablets. Another problem is that parents do not think that they have time to read for their children. She fears that there is a widening gap between children who read and children who do not read. The family plays an important role by reading for their children, making sure that there are books in the home and that reading is valued. She confirmed what Robert and Louise said about their own reading: they both said that they had read more when they were younger, that they felt confident that they read at least as much if not more than their peers.

## **4.3 Librarians: Olle, Birgitta N., Birgitta I., Ann S.**

### **4.3.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

The librarians see the decline in reading proficiency as related to the fact that our lives in general have become more stressful which can affect reading in various ways: people read less for their children, teachers do not have time to work with reading because of the pressure to follow the course plan, and reading books requires more work than more easily accessible media. Films and other media are more attractive in a world where things have to be done fast. The librarians pointed out that non-print media have some positive sides. It was suggested that children might be satisfying their need for fantasy and experiences and going into other worlds through film and other media. Another positive side is the development of English language skills among students who play a lot of games on-line. However, that development is questionable regarding quality. Only one of the four librarians who were interviewed mentioned the problem of the widening gap between children whose parents read a lot for them and had books in the home, and the children who are not read to and do not have access to books in the home.

### **4.3.2 The role of the library**

The librarians see the role of the public library as working to a great extent with reading promotion – it is an important part of the whole point of having a library. They do this in many ways. Having free reading material for everyone in itself promotes reading. Other media are available for free such as audio books, electronic

books, taking books, newspapers and magazines. The library also helps people find what they want in the materials available. The librarians at the public library see their role as different from the school library and while they see the importance of cooperation with the schools, they feel that too few resources have been given to school libraries. One of the librarians saw this as a great problem for the society as a whole.

All of the librarians mentioned special reading promotion campaigns aimed at children. Efforts begin with the very youngest and continue up through school-age children. All new parents receive a book, *The Children's First Book*. For preschool children there are mini-cinema, story time and book bags that preschools can borrow. In one municipality there are a music leader and a drama leader who produce programmes for children of different ages. Each term there is a preschool programme that is built around a story. Sometimes they use puppets, often rhymes and music.

During the term, a librarian can come and present books or run projects like the Book Jury in classes 2 and 5, where children get to read different books and vote for the best book. The librarians all talked about something called Book Talk (*Bokprat*) for older children in the eighth and ninth grades where books are presented sometimes with the help of video trailers. In one municipality there was a reading club on Friday afternoons with children of mixed ages and interests. These children met outside school time to talk about books, read out loud and sometimes write for fun. A librarian in one municipality mentioned book buses that go to preschools and schools in the municipality. Some libraries commemorate the birthdays of literary figures birthday. For example, Last spring to celebrate 400 years since Shakespeare's birth, they invited fifth graders to the library. They talked about Shakespeare and had a little play that the children could be part of. They dramatized certain scenes. The idea was to arouse interest. In fact, they do everything they can to stimulate and create pleasure and habits around reading and storytelling.

Last spring one librarian mentioned that they took part in a national project for reading during the summer. Seventy young people between 8 and 12 received a book bag that they could use to take the books back and forth from the library. There was a kick off at the beginning of the summer, a meeting in July and a wind up at the end. The children were not required to read any particular books or any amount of books. The idea was to read just for the fun of it. They got a little booklet where they could fill in what they had read and then come to the library and tell the personnel about it. They got stickers to put in the booklets and when they had five stickers they could come to the library and choose a book. Before the project began the students in classes 3, 4 and 5 came to hear a presentation of the project and get some ideas about what to read.

One librarian mentioned that they had participated in Book Sport (*Boksport*), but had not done much within the project. They had not been involved in the planning. They felt that it had been fun meeting the sports teammates who sometimes borrowed a lot of books.

### **4.3.3 Background and role in reading promotion**

The librarians that were interviewed had formal library training, but found that it was

the many years of experience that gave them the best qualifications for promoting reading. Some mentioned that they were avid readers in their spare time. Some mentioned that librarians today required other competencies, such as computer skills and other technological knowledge.

The librarians consider the role of the librarian to be important because librarians are knowledgeable about literature. Their role consists of creating a desire to read and finding the right book for the right child while cooperating with other actors such as schools.

#### **4.3.4 Achieving better results**

All of the librarians felt that they needed more time so that they could do a better job. They would use the time for in-service training, for finding ways to create quality in their work and to become more inspirational, and for keeping themselves up-to-date on literature for their age groups. Better facilities at the library with more space for activities and better cooperation with the teachers were also mentioned as things that could help them in promoting reading. Cooperation with school libraries is seen as a key to successful reading promotion. One librarian talked about the importance of strengthening school libraries as part of the solution to the problem.

#### **4.3.5 How could cooperation contribute?**

Some of the librarians immediately interpreted cooperation as cooperation with the schools whereas one of the librarians could name several organisations they were already cooperating with including the Chess Club, the Harry Potter Club, and immigrant associations. One of the librarians pointed out the importance of being where the children and young adults are in their leisure time in.

### **4.4 Teachers: Ulrika, grades 4-6, Ann-Sofi, grades 7-9**

#### **4.4.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

Both teachers found that technology was the factor that most influenced children when it comes to the decline in reading proficiency. Children start using tablets and smart phones early and are used to instant gratification. The result is that they lose patience when reading as it takes more time. That is connected to the fact that there is more stress in society. Parents do not have time to build up an interest in books with their children. One of the teachers found it puzzling that so few people in her town had books at home considering that the town was known to have a fairly high academic standard in general. She also felt that in addition to time spent on Internet, students spent a lot of time on sports.

#### **4.4.2 How does your organization work to improve reading comprehension and promote reading?**

Both of the teachers were extremely enthusiastic about working with reading promotion. Up to grade 6 it was a question of working with A Reading Class (En läsande klass <http://www.enlasandeklass.se/> mentioned in section 2.3 of this report). Working in this way was a decision that individual teachers at the school were able to make for themselves. In grades 7 to 9, Ann-Sofi mentioned that she was working hard to get a school librarian post for her school and to incorporate the work of the librarian into the different subjects at the school according to a model she had seen working successfully in another town. Ann-Sofi pointed out that reading was

important for all of the subjects the students had and that adapting to the special needs of the students was becoming more important. For that reason she had applied for the designation of “first teacher” which would give her a chance to focus on those two areas.

Ulrika pointed out that for the lower grades reading out loud is important for making it possible to share a text and to understand more difficult texts when they lack the ability to read themselves. She encourages pupils to read for pleasure with the book of the month where no special demands are made regarding the pupils choice of books. Some children choose to read or listen to, for example, their geography book to get a chance to learn about the subject during the Swedish lesson. Ulrika also makes use of a site <http://www.legimus.se/102563/in-english> for those who cannot themselves read at their desks. She uses Aidan Chamber’s method with book conversations that gets the children to think.

#### **4.4.3 Background and role in reading promotion**

Ulrika is qualified to teach Swedish and Social Studies for classes 1-7. She has worked 26 years as a teacher. Ann-Sofi is also a qualified teacher with over 30 years of experience. In addition to her qualification as a teacher for classes 4-7, she is qualified to teach Spanish, English and Swedish for grades 7-9. Ann-Sofi has developed her role in teaching promotion over time with reading strategies. She sees her role as giving tools and creating conditions: tools for enabling reading and understanding, and conditions that provide time and opportunities for practising reading.

#### **4.4.4 What would you need to achieve improved results?**

Ann-Sofi seemed to think that the best way to improve results was to keep up with research and to participate in professional training such as the Reading Lift mention above. She felt that sometimes working with new methods that her colleagues were too quick to move on to something else before actually giving the new way of working a chance. She is tired of people always saying that they cannot do something because of time constraints and felt that organizing meetings so that they worked better might be a way forward and working with themes during a longer period of time might be a more efficient way to work with personal development.

Ulrika felt that because it was important to listen to each student everyday that it is hard for a teacher to manage when there are 25 students in a class. There is a teacher who works with pupils who have problems with de-coding but more resources are needed. Her wish would be that all nine years of compulsory school would get extra resources for students who need to have a reading course aimed at improving reading.

#### **4.4.5 How could cooperation with other actors contribute to better results?**

Ulrika thought that there was not enough time for the planning that was needed but that there was an interest from companies and sports associations and so on. A teacher would then, for example, get the instructions from the football club and work with the text in school. That the club and school could work together around current issues that are connected to the children’s reality and leisure time. That does not apply just to clubs, but also to local companies. To get cooperation working properly requires building something with stability done in the long term.

Ann-Sofi's view of cooperation seemed to be within the school world. She could see cooperation with the library. Sharing with teachers from other schools she felt was useful cooperation.

#### **4.5 Sports clubs representatives: Ellen, sports consultant, and Ingela, club chairman**

##### **4.5.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

The youth leaders seemed to think that reading proficiency has declined because there is so much stress in today's society. Neither children nor adults have the peace of mind to focus on slow tools such as books. Parents do not think that they have enough time to read for their children. Parents rely on giving their children Ipad's to get quiet and tranquillity. Ellen thinks that they don't have time to read out loud for each other. An interesting aspect mentioned by the youth leaders is that the focus today is too much on performance; they do not have time to read for each and with each other for anything other than improving performance. Parents no longer have time to listen and explain because they are unable to relax.

##### **4.5.2 How does your sports organisations work with reading promotion?**

During the Book Sport (*Boksport*) Project their sports clubs started reading books when they had their sports activities. Now they read both fiction and non-fiction and read texts on, for example, nutrition, how to get to practice (walk, cycle, get a ride). They have consciously established reading corners and always have discussions about the texts with the kids. They read out loud at all of their activities, even on days out in the schools. The activities could be casting, fishing, reading out loud, nature study, and hunting. Everyone in the association works as a volunteer, we don't have any young youth leaders, instead everyone is an adult and several are retired teachers who volunteer their time. Thanks to the project reading out loud has increased; they thank SISU for their initiative and inspiration.

SISU and VIF have produced the Wilda and Walter material (<https://www.sisuidrottsbocker.se/Tillsammans.aspx>). All of the children get a folder and they do assignments and discuss together. Reading and discussing together, and giving time for a text and knowledge is important. They put a lot of effort into the educational material and books that we put in the hands of people; for example, The Way to Train. Quantity and accessibility give quality.

##### **4.5.3 Background and role in reading promotion**

Both of the sports clubs representatives who were interviewed worked as volunteers and had a strong commitment to working together and the power of cooperation. One of them has a degree in sports education.

One of the people interviewed felt that consciously putting together activities where reading out loud was included was one way to promote reading and encouraging leaders to make reading out loud a natural part of activities. Showing how they can broaden their activities and that both leaders and young people can be more than one thing; you can be both a sportsperson and a reader. Making books accessible, being a good example and being an inspiration were all parts of their role in promoting reading.

#### **4.5.4 Achieving better results**

The sports leaders felt the need for more cooperation, for example, between schools, the children's health centre and the library. Everyone has to understand that school cannot bear the whole burden of raising children and imparting knowledge. The parents have to be more involved. If the parents would stay more often when the children have training, they would see how the sports club works with reading and could also be an inspiration for their children regarding reading. Many people think that they're "just" fishing. They don't see the breadth and the purpose of why they read together.

#### **4.5.5 How could cooperation between different actors contribute to better results in promoting reading and reading comprehension?**

The youth leaders see the parents as a key to better results. The parents have to set an example and have an understanding of why the children are reading and above all be involved. Other actors such as out-of-school recreational centres and other sports associations were also mentioned as possible other actors.

### **4.6 Headmistress of the Special Education School: Erika**

#### **4.6.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

Erika thinks that too little time is spent on reading to and on reading alone. We read shorter texts when we chat and on Internet. People do not read chapter books any more. Young adults do not have as good vocabularies as they used to. They lack understanding of concepts that takes the enjoyment out of reading.

#### **4.6.2 How does your school work to improve reading comprehension and reading promotion in special education?**

In the lower grades the pupils have individual reading tuition everyday. The best compensatory aid is an adult who is present. Erika says that they use several different methods and can adapt to the needs of the individual student. They produce their own reading materials, and have a good teacher student ratio. Their motto is "never give up". Reading and mathematics are central to being able to understand information from the society. She says that reading comprehension is important for all subjects and for life itself.

#### **4.6.3 Background and role in reading promotion**

Erika worked twenty years as a teacher in an after school recreation centre in compulsory school. Then she became a special education teacher and then trained to be a teacher for the early years of compulsory school and then trained to be a headmistress. She has always worked in special education.

As headmistress Erika says that she has to put efforts into the professional development of her staff. Three teachers are now taking part in the Reading Lift (*Läslyftet*) mentioned above and three more are going to participate next year. There are modules especially for special education. She along with her teachers has to make sure that the right material is available at the school. She also sees that part of her responsibility when it comes to reading promotion is to make sure they get the budget they need to do the things they are supposed to do to achieve the goals that have been set. Marte meo ([http://www.martemeo.nu/?page\\_id=2](http://www.martemeo.nu/?page_id=2)) is a teaching method and communication developed for pupils at an early developmental level. Erika considers

this method to be very important for them in their work.

#### **4.6.4 Achieving better results**

Erika sees that being able to continue working with the competent personnel she has is the way to achieving better results. All of the personnel are trained special education teachers. There are also music coaches who are excellent for working with communication. Erika's greatest wish is that stress and demands from society would decrease so that it would be possible to more easily reach each individual pupil because they would have more time to listen and to reflect.

#### **4.6.5 How could cooperation between different actors contribute to better results in promoting reading and reading comprehension?**

Erika suggests that the key may be entrepreneurial learning. The school has been in contact with the idea workshop and town planners that contact requires words, communication, and cooperation that are all important for the pupils at the special education school. The pupils see how the school is connected to the society and real life. She also considers the library to be a perfect partner for cooperation. The "knowledge" ladder that the library produced with the school has been revised with a special section for special education. The school has borrowed book bags and theme bags from the library.

### **4.7 University teacher, Children's literature, previously Library and Literature consultant, Västernorrland County Council: Eva**

#### **4.7.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

According to Eva reading comprehension levels are declining because reading itself is declining. To be a good reader you have to read a lot and practise and be interested in reading in order to be able to appreciate it. The amount that people read has decreased in the last 20-30 years. Swedish children can "read." They can read a text out loud and it sounds good, but they cannot remember what they read and they have not understood what it is about. An easy answer to the question is that there are many media that are competing for our time. All the media together, a lot of Internet and social media, and computer games take time. Eva does not think that you need to moralize; it is purely a question of time. You go into Internet and check something and you hop around and it is fun and you get immediate satisfaction, but maybe not long term satisfaction. She sees this as a possible explanation. She says that there is a lot of brain research that shows that long-term memory deteriorates as a result of the impulses that you get, for example, the impulses you get from computer games. You get quicker reaction times and other abilities, but the deep thinking and long term memory deteriorate.

#### **4.7.2. Your organisation**

Eva's job is to influence the way new teachers think about the importance of reading.

#### **4.7.3 Your qualifications and your role**

Eva has a Ph.D. in Literature with a focus on children's reading and has worked in different ways with reading projects and evaluation of projects and has also run her own project. She has also worked with teacher training from preschool up to middle school with these issues so she is familiar with the literature. Being neither a teacher

nor a librarian, her focus is on reception research - how you read.

#### **4.7.4 Achieving better results**

According to Eva one of the things you need to do is something already being done today and that is working with reading comprehension strategies. Adult readers use these strategies unconsciously and they are really simple things: you read between the lines in texts and come to conclusions that are not explicitly expressed, you find a word or something that you absolutely do not understand and you look it up. If you have never learned these strategies you have to actively be taught them and not just think that they come automatically because they clearly do not. Eva sometimes says jokingly that the best reading promotion would be to forbid reading. There is a risk when you say that it is so useful and good for you that that you take away the pleasure in reading. It is not that easy to make reading hip by trying to make it current.

It is important to start reading promotion as early as possible. There are book projects for newly born babies. But also show that you read yourself. There is a clear correlation between success in school and the number of books in the home. Books and stories have to be used in an active way and talked about. According to Eva, it is the communication between adults and children that develops language and understanding.

### **5. Conclusions**

#### **5.1 The decline in reading proficiency**

All of the stakeholders are in agreement that increased access to media on devices such as smart phones and tablets are the greatest cause of the decline in reading proficiency. The second greatest cause was considered to be the lack of time in today's stressful society. This affects reading in that parents do not read as much for their children, but it also means that children are provided with technology at an early age and become addicted to easy gratification that in the long run makes them lose patience when trying to read longer texts in book form. The texts that children and young people read on their devices tend to be short and not always challenging in the way that research referred to above has shown to be necessary for developing reading motivation. The negative effect is exacerbated as free access to devices also diminishes the amount of time spent for reading longer texts.

Maybe the answer is learning to exploit the advantages offered by devices and see that, with a little tweaking, they can provide some of the essential factors for improving motivation. Devices have potential: to offer easy access to a wide range of reading materials, to offer tasks that have perceived relevance to the lives of children and young adults, and to help them make choices about what they read. What the new technology is particularly suited for is providing opportunities for social interaction with others about what they are reading. It may seem like a bit of a stretch but the media, because of their ubiquity, can alleviate the problem of time constraints. These are things that could be used to advantage.

## 5.2 The role of the stakeholder organisations

The roles of the stakeholder organisations are varied, because of their different functions, but one thing that seemed to be a common role for all was making time and spaces for reading whether it was a question of a parent reading for their child, a librarian working on different reading campaigns or someone from a sports club making sure that reading out loud was one of their activities. Often an adult guided the reading in some way. There is an emphasis on working with texts on three levels: reading as decoding, reading between the lines, and reading beyond the text.

The stakeholders interviewed all seemed to see the importance of offering a generous amount of time for reading and opportunities to socially interact with a text. There are opportunities to be successful with challenging texts and texts that have perceived relevance to the children and young people's own lives. There is an awareness of what is important in reading promotion.

## 5.3 Background and your role in reading promotion

All of the professionals interviewed had formal qualifications for their jobs and in some cases education that qualified them for working at different levels. When describing their qualifications for reading promotion they often referred to things they had learned while working many years in their professions and considered that experience as an important part of their capacity.

When asked about their own roles the answer was often that they themselves should be good examples. All of them understandably had different views on their roles, some of which are in line with the essential factors for improving reading motivation. Some of the roles they saw for themselves were: creating a desire to read and finding the right book for the right child; providing reading strategies; showing a commitment to working together and cooperation; and putting efforts into professional development.

## 5.4 Achieving better results

A theme that repeats itself, especially in the responses of the teachers and the librarians, is the need for continued professional development. However, the importance of teaching reading strategies and starting with very young children was also considered central. There were also suggestions that increased cooperation between the schools and the library, the sports organizations, other instances such as health centres and parents were also important.

## 5.5 How could cooperation improve results in promoting reading and reading comprehension?

In response to this question there was a consensus that cooperation with other actors was positive. However, who the other actors would be was not clear. This is recognition of the fact that cooperation with actors outside the school could offer access to a wider range of reading materials, relevance to the lives of young people and incentives which reflect the value and importance of reading that are essential factors for improving reading motivation among young people. References to existing

projects stakeholders had participated were made with enthusiasm and confirmed a belief in the value of cooperation.

## 6. Recommendations

Because of the small number of people interviewed for this study, it is difficult to make any recommendations that feel statistically significant. However, even if their numbers are few, the results confirm the recommendations made by Jonas Andersson in his book on reading promotion. I think that they are important to have in mind when planning reading promotion projects. Most of the recommendations Andersson makes were implicit or explicit in the interviews conducted for this study and therefore relevant in this context.

On the basis of the findings in this report, the following general recommendations are suggested:

- Start early (and continue). The importance of early literacy cannot be stressed enough and Family Literacy initiatives are recommended. Initiatives aimed at encouraging and informing about the importance of reading aloud is of particular priority. In particular, men are to be encouraged and engaged in reading aloud to their children.
- Identify relevant target groups in order to close reading gaps.
- Provide a wide range of reading materials. Access to a wide range of reading materials has positive effects on reading motivation. To provide a rich and varied reading material also communicates that reading is a valuable and rewarding activity.
- Promote social reading. There is a connection between reading motivation and the opportunity to interact socially with texts. Social interaction involves talking with others about books, read together with others, borrow and share books with others, talk about books and share written text about books with others.
- Make use of reading role models. Everyone, and particularly men, should be encouraged to be reading role models for their children. Promote activities that involve older children reading to younger ones. Such mentoring brings double benefits: younger children receive attention from older peers who strengthens their confidence by being role models.
- Emphasize freedom of choice. Reading motivation is related to the ability to choose what to read. Note that the choice of what to read does not necessarily exclude certain goals in terms of how much to read.
- Work on the basis of different target groups' identified (reading) interests.
- Opt for summer reading programs. Encourage cooperation between schools and public libraries. Emphasize the educational benefits to parents.
- Formulate clear, achievable goals and evaluate.<sup>2</sup>

It is clear that there is recognition of the problem and an enthusiasm for reading promotion among the stakeholders. This is closely associated with a willingness to work towards a solution to the problem of the decline in reading comprehension.

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<sup>2</sup> Andersson, Jonas, [The Target of Reading: On Methods and Research in the Field of Reading Promotion](#) (*Med läsning som mål: Om metoder och forskning på det läsfrämjande området*, The Swedish Arts Council 2015).

The question remains - how can we together strengthen the capacity of the education sector and enhance community involvement to meet the needs of children and young adults that face a variety of barriers to becoming the competent readers who are necessary for democratic societies?

## Appendix

### Interview questionnaire – English version

#### 1.The decline in reading proficiency

Why do you think that reading proficiency in Sweden and Västernorrland is declining?

#### 2.Your organisation

What is the role of your organisation in promoting reading and increasing literacy skills?

#### 3.Your qualifications and your role

You as a reader

What formal and informal qualifications do you have regarding reading promotion?  
How do you see your role in promoting reading and literacy skills?

#### 4.Time and commitment

What do you need to achieve better results in trying to arouse an interest in reading and improving reading proficiency in children and young adults?

#### 5. Cooperation

How could your cooperation with other actors increase the efficiency of reading proficiency?

### Interview questionnaire – Swedish version

1. Vad tror du att det beror på att läsförståelsen sjunker i Sverige?
2. Hur arbetar ni (din organisation) för att öka läsförståelsen och verka läsfrämjande?
3. Vilken är din bakgrund? Hur ser du på din roll när det gäller att främja läsning och läsförståelse?
4. Vad skulle du behöva för att nå bättre resultat när det gäller att främja läsning och läsförståelse?
5. Hur skulle samarbete med andra aktörer kunna bidra till bättre resultat när det gäller att främja läsning och läsförståelse?

