

# “Read with me”: How teachers in Aarhus support parents to improve their children's reading skills

 Innovation image

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**Organisation:** The Municipality of Aarhus

**Country:** Denmark

**Level of government:** Local government

**Sector:** Education

**Type:** Partnerships, Public Service

**Launched in:** 2009

**Overall development time:** 1 year(s)

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# Description

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READ (Research in Educational Achievement and Development) and the Early Childhood Programme is a co-production project in Aarhus which aims at helping parents of school children to improve their child's reading ability. This new co-production initiative is closely linked to the Early Child Programme of the City of Aarhus which targets young children attending pre-schools. Both projects are managed by the Municipality of Aarhus, VIA University College and Trygfonden's Centre for Child Research at Aarhus University, which is an interdisciplinary research centre founded by the non-profit foundation Trygfonden.

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## Why the innovation was developed

- According to the African saying "it takes a village to educate a child" the Municipality of Aarhus (almost 300 000 inhabitants) in Denmark has made school education a priority and taken action to work with parents in school education.
  - In Denmark, local government is responsible for local schools. Based on the belief that parents are the most important adults for a child, the Municipality seeks to create strong relationships with parents through co-production.
  - The parent satisfaction survey undertaken by the Department of Children and Young People Services of the Municipality of Aarhus in 2013 revealed key success factors in effective cooperation between schools and parents:
  - Close contacts between schools and parents, and mutually matched expectations between parents and teachers. However, about half of parents stated that they do not have a clear understanding of what schools expect from them.
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## Objectives

Improve effectiveness, Improve service quality, Increase citizen engagement

- The City of Aarhus has the ambition of engaging citizens and professionals in an effort to improve education outcomes through two co-production initiatives: the Early Childhood Programme, targeted at young children aged 3-6 years. The READ Programme is focused on children aged 8-9 years.
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## Main beneficiaries

Families, General population, Government staff, Students, Young people

- Children
- Parents
- City of Aarhus

# Results

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## Effectiveness

- The results of the Early Childhood Programme show increased language comprehension among children with low-SES parents, as measured in a municipal language comprehension test. In particular, the reading ability of low-SES children participating in the Early Child Programme increased significantly – the effect corresponds to the difference between having a mother with a higher education and a mother with a lower education.
  - Furthermore, the programme substantially lowered the share of children attending reception classes when they started in school, down from 6.7% in the control group to just 0.7% in the Early Child Programme group – a reduction of 89%. The co-production approach was clearly effective in improving education outcomes for disadvantaged children.
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## Service quality

### Responsiveness:

- There was also an increased volume of reading with their children on the part of parents who state they have low Danish proficiency but who do have the time to help their child with reading. These families read aloud 3.84 times per week on average, whereas the control group families read aloud 3.0 times per week on average.
  - Finally, on average there was an 8.8% increase in the knowledge of parents about what they can do to help children read. However, amongst disadvantaged children this increase was as high as 16.5%. The remarkable thing about this co-production approach is that these results were achieved with fairly small resources, both on the part of professionals and of parents.
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## Other improvements

# Development

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## Design

In the Early Childhood Programme, the Municipality of Aarhus and Aarhus University were engaged in a joint effort to inform parents of bilingual children at pre-school about why it is important to read with their children and how best to read with their children; moreover, it provided them with resources to do this reading. Since the parents and children were bilingual, all materials were supplied in several languages. The results of the evaluation of The Early Childhood Programme showed that most parents – despite their social background – were willing and able to support their children's language development, if given adequate tools.

READ is a follow-up programme to the Early Childhood Programme and is provided in schools in Aarhus. The children taking part in the Early Childhood Programme were in 2nd and 3rd grade in 2013, which is why this age group was chosen for the follow-up programme. This allowed research to identify whether an early co-production approach at pre-school level was more effective than a later intervention at school level and whether two interventions involving the same child are better than one intervention or none at all. The READ project provides an invitation to parents to help their child read in short periods of 15 minutes each day or as often as possible.

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## Testing

- The Municipality of Aarhus had evidence from an earlier co-production experiment – The Early Childhood Programme led by Morten Jakobsen and Simon Calmar Andersen from Aarhus University – that supplying immigrant parents with a suitcase containing children's books, games, and a tutorial DVD about language development techniques had a remarkably positive effect on language proficiency among the most challenged immigrant pre-school children.

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## Implementation

### Tools used:

- For the Early Childhood Programme, the suitcases were delivered to the parents by the municipality via the professionals at pre-schools. The suitcases were free of charge to the parents. An important part of the initiative was the interaction between the parents and the professionals.
- For the READ programme, the project ran for one year and on two occasions provided parents with instructions on how they can support their children's reading. During the first stage, teachers provided parents and children with books and instructions on how to engage in shared reading, and how to find additional reading resources either online, at the library or at the school.
- The schoolteachers were instructed to provide additional reading materials tailored to the competencies of each child. Four months later, the teachers provided parents and children with additional books and instructions, now with a focus on reading aloud (in the 2nd grade) and numeracy (in the 3rd grade). Again parents were provided with information on how to support their children and were given different materials to do so.

### Resources used:

- All written materials were supplied in nine languages, the film was translated into six languages. The materials can be found at [www.aarhus.dk/read](http://www.aarhus.dk/read).
- The cost of the material provided to one child and its parents in the READ-project is DKK 600. (about GBP 65 or EUR 80), ignoring the cost of wages. READ did not require employment of more staff, as the training of parents was done through the existing teachers, who themselves were trained through a three hour course.

# Lessons Learned

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## Lessons Learned

- While we are still waiting for the full evaluation, the most important learning point from the Early Child Programme is that governments can actually successfully increase the level of citizen co-production and, by doing so, improve outcomes for the citizens and civic society.
  - We have also learned that even small-scale co-production initiatives require cooperation and extensive coordination between different organisations to succeed. Both the Early Child Programme and READ are based on a strong partnership between local government, schools and daycare institutions and two universities.
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## Other information

For more information about the Early Childhood Programme, two articles have been published which are available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/puar.12094/full>, and <http://jpart.oxfordjournals.org/content/23/1/27>.

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