

Methods and research regarding
bookgifting programmes for young
children and their families

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Bookstart Around the World

A black and white photograph of a woman and a young child looking at a book together. The woman is on the right, smiling, and the child is on the left, looking down at the book. The image is partially obscured by the large title text.

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Preface

Six years have passed since the Swedish Arts Council launched *Bokstart* in Sweden. Five pilot projects were conducted, inspired by the initiatives called *Bogstart* in Denmark and *Bookstart* in England. A great deal has happened since then. In the autumn of 2020, we released the *Bokstart i Sverige* [Bokstart in Sweden] report, which gives a good picture of the Bokstart projects between 2017 and 2020.

With this overview of current knowledge – Bookstart Around the World – we have asked ourselves the question: What knowledge is currently available in Sweden and around the world on bookgifting programmes directed towards families with young children? The aim is to collect relevant research and successful methods for improving work on Bookstart.

It is our hope that this overview will be of interest to many, including those outside of Bookstart circles. Knowledge about language development in children and the significant role that parents play in developing their children's language is important for the whole of society. This is something noted also by *Läsdelegationen* [The Reading Delegation] in its official report called *Barns och ungas läsning – ett ansvar för hela samhället* [Reading for children and young ones – a responsibility for the whole of society] (SOU 2018:57).

The authors of this overview establish that the bookgifting programmes described are effective and do make a difference. They also describe the key factors for a successful Bookstart project.

Bokstart in Sweden was conducted as a government assignment between 2017 and 2020. The government has now decided that the Swedish Arts Council should continue to propagate and develop Bokstart for some time to come. The aspiration is that Bokstart should reach out across the whole country. We are considerably proud and happy to have been given this assignment. This overview and our previous report stand us in good stead for the continuing work.

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“Book giveaway programs were particularly effective when they included multiple personal contacts with caregivers, information sessions, and demonstration of book reading.” (Bondt, Willeberg & Bus, p. 366).

According to this study, regular contact with the families in connection with book giveaways is a prerequisite for an effective bookgifting programme.’

‘Additionally, other studies show that families who participated in Bookstart seem to be more likely to read about how to read with a child, that fathers read more with their children, and that library visits increase (Hashimoto, 2012).’

‘There is evidence that bookgifting programmes such as Bookstart and Reach Out and Read lead to parents engaging more in language activities in the home, and that the programmes generally serve as a support for language development in young children (Needlman & Silverstein, 2004; Sanders et al., 2000; Fricke et al., 2016; Golova et al., 1999; High et al., 1998; Berg, 2015; Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020).’

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Swedish Arts Council's Bokstart initiative aims to stimulate language development in young children from 0–3 years of age, targeting caregivers and other adults who are close to young children. Introducing literature and literacy activities (such as reading, singing, playing, talking and rhyming) early on in a child's life promotes their relationship with and development of language.

In short, Bokstart involves working with family literacy; that is, efforts aimed at the whole family to promote reading. The core of a Bokstart project is to find ways for new parents to foster a child's relationship with literature and language. In the Bokstart projects that are currently under way in Sweden, the various interested parties (usually) work together – public libraries, regional libraries, child healthcare services and preschools. They are therefore projects that require, and aim to promote, collaboration between different responsible organisations, which all share the task of supporting language development in young children.

In 2015, the Swedish Arts Council launched Bokstart in Sweden. Three pilot projects (which later became five) began distributing books as gifts to families in residential areas characterised by socio-economic challenges. Between 2017 and 2020, the Swedish Arts Council was tasked by the government to expand the Bokstart initiative to more municipalities and regions in the country, and to connect this work with preschools (from 2018). This initiative gives municipalities and regions the opportunity to receive grants for project activities and language networks. The Swedish Arts Council also provides additional support, including the provision of information materials and a website (bokstart.se). There are currently about 30 initiatives under way in municipalities and regions in Sweden, in which libraries, child healthcare services, preschools and other similar organisations work together to improve the opportunities for young children to become individuals who can read and write.

On behalf of the Swedish Arts Council, a review of the national Bokstart initiative was conducted in the spring of 2020. On the basis of Swedish and international research, the Swedish Arts Council now wishes to also gather knowledge and experience from bookgifting programmes aimed at young families. Bookstart is a concept that exists all around the world; about 30 countries run programmes to promote reading amongst the very youngest children. This means that there is a considerable amount of knowledge and research available from similar bookgifting programmes. In this report, we collect knowledge so that everyone who works to promote reading for the little ones should be inspired and able to relate their practical knowledge to experiences and research from similar initiatives.

It can probably be considered common knowledge that reading out loud with one's children is important for their written-language development. However, it has not been quite as obvious just how early in a child's life such reading aloud should begin, nor how much of a difference it can actually make. Bookstart is aimed at the very youngest ones, and is designed to introduce young children to the world of language through books. Introducing families to literature and promoting simple, fun-filled, language-stimulating literacy activities (such as reading aloud, singing, rhyming, chanting and playing) is the essence of Bookstart. This is based on the understanding that the process of a child's language development begins early on and that various literacy activities contribute to this development.

A child's home language environment and the literacy habits of the family are key to its language development. Bookgifting programmes that aim to have a positive effect on this have great potential for doing so. In this report, we examine what research says about the impact that bookgifting programmes have on language development in children. Bookstart representatives (or book givers as they are often termed internationally) from libraries, child healthcare centres and preschools can play an important part in supporting children and their families during their language development process. For this reason, this report examines observations from bookgifting programmes in different countries. There is considerable

knowledge available on language development in young children and the impact that bookgifting programmes have on it, but there are also aspects that are not fully known to professions or academia. This report attempts to shed light on these various aspects.

1.2 Purpose, questions and boundaries

The purpose of this overview is to collect relevant knowledge of initiatives to promote reading aimed at young families (such as Bookstart), according to research within Sweden and internationally. This overview is primarily intended for employees working at public authorities, municipalities, regions and other organisations that engage in efforts to promote reading, with the aim of giving inspiration and contributing to increased understanding about this subject. The main question for consideration is as follows:

- What is currently understood about bookgifting programmes aimed at families with young children?

This question is divided according to certain areas that are considered to be of particular relevance to the future development of Bookstart. The analysis questions and framework for this overview are presented in full in Supplement 1. These areas are:

- Models for bookgifting programmes (methods and target groups)
- Evaluation and effects
- Collaboration
- Prerequisites for national bookgifting programmes
- A simple meta-analysis of existing research

Given the difference between how extensive the research is and this overview of current knowledge, it was necessary to set limits. The main way in which this has been done is to select a small number of countries whose programmes have been studied in more detail. This has been combined with a broad literature review, in which material was collected by searching in research databases.

1.3 Outline

This report consists of five parts. The first describes the purpose and approach used in the overview. The second part provides an introduction to the core concept of literacy and related assumptions. The third part describes a few examples of bookgifting programmes in other countries as described in the interviews. The fourth part presents a review of the material gathered for this overview by briefly describing the main results of these studies and evaluations. The report is concluded with some brief reflections on the results of Bokstart in Sweden.

1.4 Method

This section contains an abbreviated description of the method used for this overview. A more detailed description of methods, a list of interviewees, the selection criteria, and the interview guide can be found in Supplements 1 and 2.

This overview was designed to i) review the existing studies that deal with bookgifting programmes, and ii) highlight a number of examples of specific programmes in different countries. The purpose of this study is for the Swedish Arts Council and interested parties involved in Bokstart in Sweden to be able to have access to relevant knowledge and inspiration from this study. For this reason, the countries the examples come from were selected on the basis of some aspects connected to this. The hope was to see a variation of different methods used in these countries' bookgifting programmes.

Based on these criteria and in consultation with the Swedish Arts Council, the following programmes and countries were selected as illustrative examples:

- Bookstart (United Kingdom)
- Lesestart 1-2-3 (Germany)
- Bookstart (The Netherlands)
- Reach out and Read (USA)
- Bookstart (Japan)

To begin with, a number of interviews were conducted with representatives of international and national organisations and academia in order to gain an overview of the field of knowledge and for guidance on the background to the Bookstart programmes and how they are organised. The interviewees were identified from the Swedish Arts Council's contact network, and a total of nine interviews were conducted.

The material for this overview was collected in two ways; partly by means of a database search and from interviews, and partly through a snowball selection procedure based on a reading of pre-collected material. The material was then analysed according to a framework that aims to capture the key aspects of the bookgifting programmes (models, reviews and effects, collaboration, prerequisites for bookgifting programmes and meta-analysis).

1.5 About Governo

Governo has provided this overview of current knowledge on assignment from the Swedish Arts Council. Governo is a management consultant company focused on the public sector, and the authors have considerable experience in analysing and evaluating different types of activity within the field of culture and education. In 2020, Arvid Segerström and Rebecka Strandberg previously conducted a review of Bokstart in Sweden on behalf of the Swedish Arts Council. Maria Adenfelt is an associate professor in business administration, and has substantial experience in conducting research reviews.



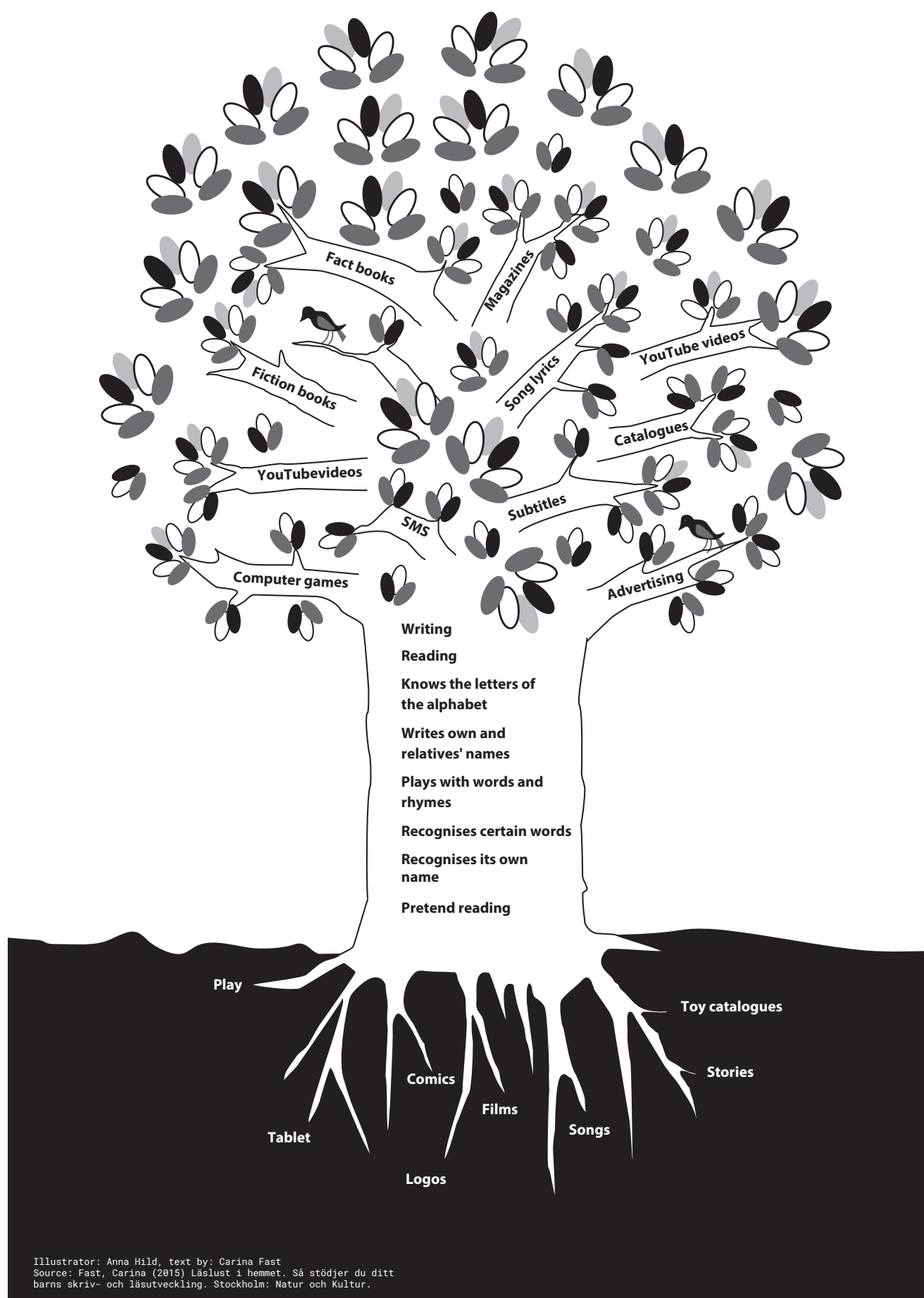
2. The art of promoting reading and writing

In order to understand the background to the various initiatives and programmes that have emerged in Sweden and internationally, it is important to first take a closer look at the concept of literacy. A Swedish translation for this word has been sought for some time (Josephson, 2006), but there is no clear-cut translation of the word or understanding of the term. A common way of translating the word 'literacy' into Swedish is *läs- och skrivkunnighet* [reading and writing proficiency] or *läs- och skrivförmåga* [reading and writing ability] (Josephson, 2006); another is *skriftspråklighet*, [loosely: written-language-ness] and sometimes even *litteracitet* is used (Rydsjö, 2012). The concept, however, has been expanded to include more modes of expression: the verbal side of language and multimodal texts (that is, text in the broader sense of the term that includes pictures and symbols) (Fast, 2007; Rydsjö 2012; Kullberg, 2007). The concept should also be understood as a social activity centred on texts. Carina Fast (2007) proposes that literacy should rather be understood as a social activity centred on text (in its broader meaning). In her paper, literacy is instead described as text-oriented or written-language activities, but also as a discourse on how language development should be viewed (Fast, 2007). A written-language activity, or a language-stimulating one, can therefore be understood to be a social interaction that has something to do with the written language; for example, reading aloud, chanting, rhyming, singing etc. The field of research is called *early literacy*, *early childhood literacy* or *emergent literacy* (Rydsjö, 2012; Kullberg, 2007; Fast 2007).

The development of reading and writing skills in children can be described using a so-called literacy tree. The tree trunk consists of a child's reading and writing abilities, and the roots represent its early experiences from a young age. Put simply, the roots can be described as early contact with the written language, such as books, games, songs, stories, and so on. These activities contribute to developing what is sometimes termed *emergent literacy skills*, which could be described as early preparatory skills for developing written-language abilities, including listening, finding their way in a book, turning pages, recognising print etc. (High et al., 2000). The branches that then grow out from the tree trunk are the literacy activities that the child can personally be involved in by using its own abilities (Fast, 2015). Something that is often emphasised regarding the concept of literacy is that it is not only the technical abilities that should be taken into account when considering the early development of reading and writing skills:

'A child's route to reading and writing may be found through play or conversing with others in their vicinity, via pictures and symbols, reading aloud, and through verbal narration. In this way, a child's literacy development tree is nourished' (Fast, 2015, translation ours).

The development of reading and writing skills in children can be described using a so-called literacy tree.





The fact that literacy development begins early on also means that the role the family plays becomes vital in the literacy development of young children (Fast, 2007; Bonci, 2011; Eurydice, 2011; Nickel, 2013; Berg, 2015). From this understanding stems research on *family literacy*. The concept was coined by Taylor in an ethnographic study that examined young children's day-to-day activities that were connected to language (Taylor via Fast, 2007). At around the same time, Heath identified the so-called text-oriented activities that occur in the home (Heath via Fast, 2007). Family literacy can be described as the written-language activities that occur in the home (Rydsjö, 2012 & Bonci, 2011). Of all places where early language development takes place, the home is highlighted as the most important (Nickel, 2013). Activities such as reading picture books, reading aloud, singing, rhyming, chanting and playing are the kind that characterise the home literacy environment that influences a child's school results later on (Ibid.). One research review confirms that the parents' involvement in a child's reading is fundamental for early literacy development (Eurydice, 2011). Based on these arguments, so-called family literacy programmes have been initiated all around the world. A family literacy programme is characterised by initiatives directed towards families of children to promote reading for the children. Of course, there is a great variety of such programmes; some are aimed at the entire family whilst others are specifically intended for the child's language development, or the parents' language development respectively. Some focus on increasing parents' awareness of their role in their child's literacy development (Bonci, 2011). The latter is largely what Bookstart involves. The goal of such programmes could be concisely described as to increase the amount of literacy activities in the home (Nickel, 2013). It should be emphasised that a written language activity is not primarily a pedagogical activity that involves plodding through letters and words. The purpose is to create a social interaction between the child and the adults through the use of written, verbal, visual and body language. A *literacy activity* is understood in this overview to be a collective term for reading aloud, singing, chanting, rhyming, playing and talking etc. Bookstart involves fomenting a desire for and gaining joy from various literacy activities within families, thus allowing the child's language roots to grow so that the literacy tree can begin to grow too.

Before taking a closer look at how Bookstart began, we can establish that the concept of literacy encompasses a great many different elements and can be defined in many ways. In this overview, we do not seek to apply any clear-cut definition or translation. What is most important is the essential insight that literacy development begins early on in a child's life and is aided by means of literacy activities in the home. There is therefore also great reason to more closely consider the way in which such initiatives and efforts can be expressed around the world, the impact they have, and things that interested parties should keep in mind when implementing a bookgifting programme.

3. Bookgifting programmes – some examples

3.1 The emergence of bookgifting programmes

Bookgifting programmes have existed for a long time. As early as 1989, paediatricians working at a hospital in Boston began handing out books to the youngest children who came for medical examinations (Reach out and Read). BookTrust's Bookstart programme was launched in 1992 as a pilot project in Birmingham, in which 300 children between the ages of six and nine months were offered books as gifts when they had their medical checkups. At that time, BookTrust, an organisation for promoting reading, joined forces with the library and child healthcare centre in Birmingham to promote reading to young children. During a child's medical examination, books were given to the family, and the nurse encouraged parents to read with their children. The Bookstart concept has since expanded and similar initiatives can currently be found in about 30 countries. Many of these (24) are affiliated with the global network for early bookgifting programmes as part of EURead, which is an EU institution that works to promote reading (EURead, 2020).

Bookgifting programmes of varying sorts are not new for Sweden, either. As early as 1984, *BokNallen* was started in Markaryd. This was an effort to promote reading and involved, amongst other things, child healthcare centres making home visits to give away books and to play 'book games' (Rydsjö, 2012). 35 years later, public libraries and child healthcare centres working together to distribute books as gifts to young children remains the most common activity they collaborate in (Hampson Lundh & Michnik, 2014; Rydsjö, 2012). Collaboration between public libraries and paediatric healthcare services within municipalities and regions in Sweden is not uncommon, and of all public libraries in Sweden, about half mention that they work with paediatric healthcare services and preschools (slightly more than half) (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020). In addition to Bokstart, there are some reading promotion projects and programmes in Sweden that target the very youngest ones. Between 2012–2015, the *BERÄTTA, LEKA, LÄSA* ['TELL, PLAY, READ'] initiative for promoting reading was implemented by Läsrörelsen. This initiative aimed to promote collaboration between preschools and libraries by working with reading for children between the ages of one and three years old (Johansson & Hillén, 2016). The project aimed to increase knowledge about children's literature in the organisations, stimulate the involvement of parents, and promote encounters between young children and literature. Other similar programmes have included *Med språket framför sig* ['With the language before them'] (Västerbotten and Halland counties) and *Läs för mig pappa* ['Read for me, Daddy'] (ABF), which are examples of how different entities work to promote reading for the very youngest children. Other efforts to promote reading to the very young have also been common in Sweden, such as the work done by preschools on cloakroom libraries (Johansson, 2017) or book gifts in collaborations between libraries and child healthcare services (Rydsjö, 2012). With no claim to provide a complete record of all initiatives to promote reading in Sweden, the overall picture appears to be that, in different places and from a variety of interested parties, there have emerged a number of more or less long-term initiatives for promote reading for the very young, often by means of various kinds of bookgifting ventures.

3.2 Bokstart in Sweden

Here we give an abbreviated description of how Bokstart is organised in Sweden. For a more detailed description, please see the review of Bokstart in Sweden (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020).

Bokstart was initiated in Sweden in 2014 by the Swedish Arts Council, following the pattern of the Danish Bookstart programme. This means that the five selected pilot projects focused their activities on a certain target group on the basis of their socioeconomic situations, but there was also a complete model for home visits and book giveaways for those aged 6, 12, 18 and 36 months. In 2017, the Swedish Arts Council received a government assignment to develop Bokstart further. That assignment stretched until 2020. The national programme is based on municipalities and regions applying for project funding to initiate a Bokstart project or language network, for which collaboration between libraries, paediatric

healthcare services and preschools is vital. However, the exact local set-up of Bokstart is left fairly open for municipalities and regions to design themselves, although there are some requirements that a Bokstart initiative should satisfy; it must:

- constitute a long-term initiative for stimulating language and reading development in children at an early age
- target children aged between 0–3 years old, as well as adults that are close to them
- be based on the individual needs of each family and child
- strengthen the important role of parents in the child's language and reading development
- develop sustainable collaborations between public libraries, paediatric healthcare services and preschools

The Swedish Arts Council allows leeway for organisations to interpret and explore methods in their Bokstart efforts (applies to the current 2017–2020 government assignment). A majority of municipalities and regions have started with families with newborn babies, for whom they have to some extent had an intercultural and/or socioeconomic perspective. The initiatives often involve various combinations of home visits and group meetings. The most common way has been for libraries to make home visits and arrange various kinds of group meetings for Bokstart families. Several Bokstart projects involve the child healthcare services, which hold book discussions and distribute books as gifts during their regular home visits. As a first step in Bokstart, preschools have often arranged cloakroom libraries, and all over the country, various efforts are now being made to involve preschools more in Bokstart. Bokstart in Sweden is currently working to formulate a national framework for how the Bokstart concept can be designed for a municipality or region. This overview of current knowledge is one component for inspiring such a framework.

Bokstart is organised nationally by the Swedish Arts Council, and, in addition to granting financial resources to the project, they have also provided skills-development initiatives, such as training conferences and experience sharing for project participants. The Swedish Arts Council's supportive efforts also include providing information materials and the dissemination of knowledge. The material that the Swedish Arts Council currently provides to Bokstart projects consists of information material on language development in young children of various ages (6 months, 12 months, 18 months and 3 years) in 25 different languages; folders containing tips and advice for parents regarding promoting reading at an early age; cards for use when contacting the families; and cloth bags displaying the Bokstart logo.

There are some examples described below regarding the bookgifting programme as part of the global EURead network. These descriptions are based on interviews and other sources as stated.

3.3 The United Kingdom

BookTrust is the UK's largest charity for promoting reading amongst children. BookTrust gets most of its funding from the Arts Council England, with additional financial support coming from trust funds and donations. Bookstart is one of many programmes run by BookTrust. All children in England and Wales are eligible to be part of the programme and receive free books. The programme reaches approximately 650,000 families every year.

Bookstart is organised at the national and local levels. The national level has overall responsibility for organising Bookstart and provides support in all matters relating to it. Local Authorities implement Bookstart and give books to families. BookTrust's regional managers serve as intermediaries and aim to foster the relationship and communications between those on the national and local levels. The national level supports, for example, the local programmes by providing a number of different guides and other materials for the Bookstart practitioners who meet with families (BookTrust, 2019b).

At present, Bookstart consists of three programmes aimed at different target groups: *Bookstart Baby-*

Pack, *Bookstart Treasure* and *Bookstart Corner*.¹ However, the UK's Bookstart programme is currently undergoing significant changes. At the time of writing, it is yet to be established exactly how Bookstart will take shape in the future, but some details of its main approach and strategies are in place. In the future, Bookstart will place more importance on certain target groups that are in greater need (vulnerable families and those less inclined to read). The general book giveaways for all children will continue, but, going forwards, greater emphasis will be placed on target groups with specific needs. This change is intended to help find a Bookstart model that works for all children but that puts those with the greatest needs foremost.²

3.3.1 Model

The original Bookstart model involves giving young children gifts of books in connection with their medical examination (as was the case with the pilot project in Birmingham). The book gifts are distributed by the child healthcare services, libraries or municipal registrars. Local programmes can vary somewhat because the Bookstart coordinators organise the local implementations according to local circumstances (Interview 1; BookTrust, 2019a). However, it is most common for books to be given during home visits by child healthcare services; other locations include family centres, clinics or libraries (Eliot, 2014). The model is based on a collaboration between the various organisations, in which the one that is best suited to give the books is the one that will do so, but often through a cooperation between libraries, child healthcare services and family centres.

Bookstart Corner is a targeted initiative aimed at families that for various reasons are in greater need. Bookstart Corner can give these families extra support by giving them additional personalised meetings within the programme. There are also books adapted to various needs, such as according to language (BookTrust, 2019c). The initiative makes use of both group meetings and home visits, and extra meetings can be arranged with families that are included in the base programme, according to local and family circumstances (BookTrust, 2019d). In the targeted initiatives, it is common for different organisations to be involved according to the local context and the needs that these families have (BookTrust, 2019a, Crill, 2019).

3.3.2 Evaluation and research

On the national level, support tools are provided for local review and evaluation. The reviews reported by local Bookstart programmes include things such as the number of books given away, as well as more informal feedback. For additional support, there is also a template showing how the professions can review visits (Interview 1; BookTrust, 2019e).

After having gained an overview of how the programmes are evaluated, the review, evaluation and research are themselves subject to development in the changes that are now being made on the national level within Bookstart. The aim is to strengthen the evaluation system and gain greater insight into the needs of families and practitioners. Part of this is that, every other year, a large number of households should be involved in a survey in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the situations and needs of families.

Various aspects of Bookstart UK have been evaluated more than once. On several occasions, Wade and Moore studied the effects of the pilot study in Birmingham that indicate that the programme appears to have had positive effects on participating children (Wade & Moore via Rydsjö, 2012),³ even in the

1. Since this initiative is aimed at slightly older children, it will not be described in greater detail in this overview.

2. This development was initiated in 2020, and the work is now well under way. Since it is as yet unclear exactly what the programme will be like in the future when this overview is implemented, Bookstart will be described according to what it was like until these changes began, subject to changes that will occur in the future.

3. See Rydsjö (2012) for a more detailed description of early evaluations from Bookstart UK.

long term (Wade & Moore, 1998). In recent years, more evaluations of Bookstart and Bookstart Corner have been carried out, and the overall picture that emerges from these is a positive one, both from the perspectives of the families (O'Hare & Connolly, 2010; Venn, 2014; Demack & Stevens, 2013; Apps et al., 2016) and practitioners (Eliot, 2014; Demack & Stevens, 2013). O'Hare and Connolly (2010) examined the effect of Bookstart on families, and their results indicate that Bookstart has a positive effect on the attitudes of parents and reading habits in the home. Another study examining Bookstart Corner shows that participating families stated that they got involved with literacy activities to a greater extent than before their participation (Demack & Stevens, 2013). The study also shows that families and practitioners alike value the programme, as did Rix et al. (2015), who, by observing group sessions with families, also highlights the importance of the relationship between practitioners and families for successful interventions. However, they note that the workload at family centres was a major challenge, and that the relationship with the centre was pivotal for the outcome.

Apps et al. (2016) found that the location and context of the book gift is important. Amongst other things, they highlight the fact that book giveaways at libraries are good, based on the fact that parents form a relationship with the library and can connect reading with a broader spectrum of literacy activities. They also emphasise that home visits create a favourable personal contact and atmosphere for the visit, and that clinics offer structure to the book giveaway and a personal contact with parents.

Venn (2014) describes parents' thoughts about reading in the home. In a survey, participating parents stated that their situations for reading with their children had improved. Such an effect was also shown to be stronger in groups that were socioeconomically weaker. Additionally, the challenges and motivations that parents have for reading with their children are described. The motives included a desire on the part of the parents to form a closeness with the child and to be a support in their language development. Things that prevented parents from reading with their children included time constraints, a lack of energy, and the children's interests.

3.4 USA

Reach Out and Read was started as early as 1989 by a few paediatricians from Boston City Hospital who noticed that some of the families they met did not have any books available at home. They saw an opportunity to reach out to these families. First, books were placed in the waiting rooms, and soon, books were being given away during the children's routine medical checkups. The doctors subsequently perceived that these families read more with their children and at an earlier stage. The concept soon spread beyond Boston, and today, the programme can be found in 50 states, reaching out to about 4.8 million children (out of approximately 15 million children up to the age of five in the whole of the United States) by means of 6,400 local programmes (Interview 2; Reach Out and Read, 2020a).

During its active years, the national organisation has grown considerably. It is a non-profit organisation funded primarily by donations, but it also receives public funding (Reach Out and Read, 2020b). Clinics around the country can apply to the national Reach Out and Read centre to join the programme. The central organisation's role is primarily to support the clinics working with Reach Out and Read, such as by providing a catalogue of suggested books that clinics can request at favourable prices thanks to a cooperation with publishers.

Nationally, an online platform is also provided for training employees at the clinics. All participating paediatricians attend a basic training course, and there are also specific courses available for targeted initiatives. Another important part of the training takes place during the apprenticeship phase for resident doctors, which includes practical experience with Reach Out and Read.

3.4.1 Model

The basic idea of Reach Out and Read is to promote reading as an integrated part of paediatric health-care. The model involves a paediatrician giving books as gifts and providing guidance to families in

connection with routine medical checkups for children. The model involves three interventions: proactive guidance for parents, book giveaways, and waiting rooms that promote reading (Needlman et al., 2019). Apart from paediatricians, other staff at the clinics are also involved, and in some cases, there are volunteers who read with families in the waiting rooms. By means of this model, families receive about 10 books by the time the child has reached five years of age, although there are local variations, and the amount differs depending on the extent to which parents attend all of the visits. The programme is aimed at all families with children at locations where Reach Out and Read is active.

There are targeted initiatives for certain groups that have different circumstances, such as children with disabilities, minority groups such as indigenous populations, Spanish-speakers and multilingual families, and there is a programme for the children of parents who serve in the military. Another programme that was recently started aims to encourage simple counting exercises when families read out loud (Reach Out and Read, 2020c).

The target-group-oriented initiatives do not involve any organisational changes – the book giveaways and discussions continue to take place during medical checkups. Instead, it is the content of the discussions and books that are adapted for each family, which is actually always the aspiration. The targeted initiatives and associated materials thus constitute an additional help for doctors in their meetings with families (Interview 2). However, other changes are made in certain areas, such as ensuring that care staff speak certain languages, or organising libraries with children's books at clinics (Diener et al., 2012; Byington et al., 2008).

Since approximately 91 percent of all children in the United States up to the age of five visit child health-care services at least once per year, a large proportion of families can be reached in this manner. This also means that Reach Out and Read only extends to families that attend medical checkups, which is also the reason why special targeted initiatives have been developed.

3.4.2 Research and evaluation

When Reach Out and Read first began to grow and more and more clinics started to introduce the concept, a need was identified for studying the effects of such programmes. Since Reach Out and Read is a programme based in clinics, there are close connections with research institutes, so evaluations and studies of the programme consist mainly of research publications. About 18 academic studies have been published throughout the programme's 30 years. The research focuses mainly on the effects that can be observed in family habits with regards to literacy activities and child language development; but in more recent years, other potential effects the programme may have, and the families' relationship to child healthcare services in general, have also been examined more closely.

The results can be described as consistently positive in that links have been demonstrated between interventions from Reach Out and Read and family habits with regards to literacy activities and language development in children. The results from a selection of these studies are presented in later sections.

3.5 The Netherlands

BoekStart is a national bookgifting programme in the Netherlands aimed at families with children up to the age of four. BoekStart is part of a wider national reading-promotion programme that also includes an initiative at school libraries aimed at older children.

The programme is organised nationally by the Dutch Reading Foundation and the national library (the Dutch Reading Foundation, 2020). BoekStart is further coordinated at the reading level by the regional library organisation. The local libraries run BoekStart in collaboration with other local interested parties in the municipalities (Bos, 2019). Newly started initiatives may receive initial funding, but local initiatives need to be funded as part of the regular budgets in the long term. The national and regional levels also provide tool kits for each organisation. Since its inception in 2008, BoekStart has grown in scope and, today, 98 percent of libraries participate (EU Read, 2019a).

The local libraries are the core of BoekStart, and it is they who implement the programme. This choice was due in part to the fact that it was considered an opportunity to develop libraries in the Netherlands, since it was observed that people visited libraries to a greater extent. Preschool and child healthcare services are important partners in the Netherlands, and collaboration between these entities is currently being developed.

3.5.1 Model

The library is the central part of the Dutch model, and when children reach three months of age, gift vouchers for books are sent to the families' homes. The free books are then collected from the local library. Libraries and their staff have set up BoekStart corners for handing out the gifts, which each consist of a small suitcase containing books, information material and a library card for child. This system reaches about 40 percent of families with children in the Netherlands, which is approximately the number of those who take advantage of the gift vouchers and collect their free books.

The role of preschools is mainly to include activities that promote reading to a greater extent in their educational planning, in cooperation with libraries. Some of the ways this is done is through furnishing reading corners on the premises, training, and establishing reading plans in collaboration with libraries. This collaboration takes place on the local level, and approximately a quarter of all preschools are currently involved in some way (Bos, 2019).

The role of child healthcare services has mainly been to provide information about BoekStart as much as possible. Since paediatricians and nurses have lacked time and opportunity to work in any other way with BoekStart, 'BoekStart coaches' have begun visiting child healthcare centres. It is employees from participating libraries who visit the centres to read with families and inform them about BoekStart. The idea is for them to reach out to more families to provide information about BoekStart.

Collaboration between these three parties has been highlighted in the interview as a prerequisite for BoekStart to be able to be fully implemented, since the libraries' operations are either not large enough or they lack the necessary financial resources.

3.5.2 Research and evaluation

As regards evaluation of the local BoekStart initiatives, the national reading foundation has developed a review tool for the organisations. Evaluation is done via a digital survey that childcare workers and library staff are asked to respond to each year. Questions cover such things as reading habits at child healthcare services, and library policies about BoekStart and collaboration therewith. The material is intended to be used at both the national and local levels in order to identify areas needing improvement, as well as to provide support in formulating strategies and policies.

Several reviews⁴ and a major ongoing research project have been conducted regarding BoekStart. In the *From BookStart to BookSmart* study by Heleen van den Berg (Berg, 2015), BoekStart is described as a low-dosage programme, based on the reasoning that the interventions are simple to do and do not need to be done often. This approach allows efforts to be directed to all families whilst remaining fairly resource efficient (Berg, 2015).

The study established a causal relationship between families starting early with reading aloud via BoekStart and the language development in their children. When parents participated in BoekStart, the children's exposure to books and text-oriented activities in the home increased, which, in turn, showed

4. These are only available in languages other than Swedish or English and have not been included in this overview.

that these children had better results in language tests (Berg, 2015). By means of language tests,⁵ this study is one of the few that have been able to demonstrate a causal correlation between stimuli from exposure to books and language skills in children (Ibid.).

Additionally, the study also describes how BoekStart affects language development in temperamental children; i.e., children who are prone to anger and frustration in everyday activities (Berg, 2015). The study shows that temperamental children run a greater risk of falling behind in their language development. The study also examines the hypothesis that parents of temperamental children will be less inclined to engage in literacy activities in the home together with their children, since, for obvious reasons, it is more difficult. However, the results show that BoekStart can serve as an incentive to parents to continue with these activities in spite of any negative reactions from their children (Berg, 2015). The results thus show that BoekStart can serve as a protection against these children falling behind in their language development, because their parents are more likely to engage in literacy activities than they would otherwise have been.

The third study examines which parents are attracted to participate in BoekStart. Interviewees were selected at random from amongst parents of young children during medical checkups. The results show that parents who describe their children as temperamental are much more likely to collect their free books.

Some parents also participated in a so-called LENA test. This involved recording verbal interactions between children and their parents for a period of time in order to measure the extent to which such verbal interaction between a child and its parents occurs in the home. In cases where the verbal interaction in the home was either considerably limited or very extensive, parents seem to be more inclined to collect the free books. It is therefore those parents at opposite ends of the spectrum (very high or very low levels of verbal interaction) who primarily appear to be attracted to the programme.

Unfortunately, the results also show that parents with a low level of education are less likely to collect their free books than parents with a high level of education. The study concludes that BoekStart is an effective programme for parents who are well educated and for parents with temperamental children. However, there is a risk that the programme intensifies the so-called Matthew effect (described in more detail in chapter 4) in reading (Berg, 2015). This result is also one of the reasons why the BoekStart coaches described earlier were introduced (Interview 3).

There are certain challenges with this model, such as the fact that it is more difficult to reach out to families with a lower socioeconomic status, meaning that they are slightly less inclined to collect their free books (Bos, 2019).

3.6 Germany

The bookgifting programme in Germany was started in 2011 by the national organisation for promoting reading, the German Reading Foundation. The German Reading Foundation is a non-profit organisation funded by the government and through donations and partnerships.

The Lesestart bookgifting programme is financed exclusively by the government, which has secured funding until 2027 (Interview 4; the German Reading Foundation, 2020).

The national level supports local practitioners in various ways. Books that are given away are paid for on

5. Language tests are often performed in similar ways in different studies; a common method being McArthur CDI, which was also used in this study. The language tests used in the studies often focus on measuring a child's receptive and expressive vocabulary, which essentially means the words that a child can understand (receptive) and express verbally (expressive).

the national level, which also takes care of the related logistics. Apart from working with communications and national solidarity for Lesestart, offering practitioners training and introduction for the programme is also an important aspect. The same will also be done for librarians. There is also a platform to giving inspiration and encouraging best practice for local practitioners.

Apart from promoting reading amongst families and other interested parties who work with children, the reading foundation also raises awareness on the national level for the importance of reading.

In 2011, the 'Lesestart: Three Milestones' bookgifting programme was initiated in Germany, which continued until 2019. Following an evaluation, the programme was revised and continued under the name 'Lesestart 1-2-3'. The most significant difference was that the intervals between books being gifted became shorter and schools no longer distributed the free books. There are two Lesestart programmes in Germany. One of these is a universal bookgifting programme, and the other is a targeted programme aimed at families seeking asylum.

3.6.1 Model

In the Lesestart 1-2-3 bookgifting programme, books are given by paediatricians and libraries. Children receive free books every year until the age of three. The first two gifts are given by paediatricians during medical checkups, and the third by libraries. The programme is universal and is directed to all children within the area the programme is active in (about half of all children were reached between 2011 and 2019 (Ehmig, 2020; EU Read, 2019b). The main aim is to reach families that are in need of extra support, so regions where such families are overrepresented are prioritised.

The targeted 'Reading is our Future – The Lesestart for Refugee Children Reading Programme' is aimed at child refugees aged 1–6. In Germany, those waiting for a decision on a residence permit live in refugee centres. It is common for such centres to provide educational care and preschool, with a person employed especially to work with children and their families. These practitioners distribute targeted gifts of books to families as part of the programme. The books contain mostly pictures, but also have some words in German. Apart from promoting language development in general, this is also intended to be an introduction to the German language (Interview; Lesestart für Flüchtlingskinder, 2020).

In Germany, about 95 percent of all children are reached via early medical checkups by the child healthcare services, so almost all children can be reached. Furthermore, families tend to have a high level of confidence in child healthcare services, which makes the programme quite rigorous within child healthcare. Libraries, however, can differ somewhat with regards to how they work to distribute the free books. One difficulty for libraries has also been encouraging families to go and collect their gifted books.

3.6.2 Research and evaluation

The German Reading Foundation has a department for research in reading and media, which regularly studies the reading habits of the population. These studies are conducted cumulatively, based on the programme's existing challenges. For example, the latest study focused on families who read with their children, so as to gain insights into how interventions can reach these families.

The evaluation of Lesestart 1-2-3 was carried out by an external party,⁶ and was aimed at both professionals and parents. It was designed such that surveys were to be conducted with participants as well as control groups of all target groups. A methodological problem highlighted by this evaluation is that those who are not comfortable with reading and parents who do not speak German were under-represented amongst parents who responded.

6. The evaluation in its entirety is not available; instead, reference is made to Simone C Ehmig's summary of the results and the interview.

The results from the evaluation showed that the programme has had a positive effect in several areas. Participating parents showed increased awareness and knowledge about reading aloud, as well as for their role in the language development of their children. Institutions beyond the education sector also showed an increase with regards to taking responsibility for language development in children. Even more importantly, the results showed that parents had also changed their behaviour and were reading more with their children. Additionally, the results indicated that participation in the programme promoted collaboration between various different institutions and interested parties, which can contribute to and simplify efforts to promote reading (Ehmig, 2020).

Some other interesting aspects that were highlighted in the evaluation involve the roles of child healthcare services and libraries. Child healthcare services have proven to be very important in the German model, and the evaluation shows that the programme is widely accepted amongst paediatricians in Germany. Of special interest is the fact that parents who stated that they had had individual qualitative conversations with the healthcare workers who supplied the book gifts often made greater use of the material than those who were only given the books without any specific comments being made (Ehmig, 2020).

With regards to libraries, the evaluation showed that most parents who collected their free books were already familiar with the library. Libraries found that many families in need of additional support continued to be a challenge for them. However, awareness of Lesestart has meant that many libraries have found new ways of reaching out to families by working together with preschools or by arranging activities for families with children (Ehmig, 2020).

3.7 Japan

In Japan, Bookstart was initiated in 2000 following a pilot study in Tokyo (Bookstart Japan, 2020). Bookstart Japan is a non-profit organisation that administers the country's bookgifting programme. On the national level, the organisation's primary role is to support the local Bookstart programmes. This is mainly done by providing books to local Bookstart initiatives, and by sharing knowledge and information. Local Bookstart municipalities can request books at a reduced price and then receive support and advice on implementing Bookstart (Interview 4). The participating municipalities do this on a voluntary basis, and there are currently approximately 60 percent of municipalities doing so (Bookstart Japan, 2020). When a local Bookstart programme is initiated, they are asked by the central organisation to put together a steering committee as well as to plan and prepare a budget for Bookstart. It is primarily libraries that are responsible for funding, with support from social and healthcare administrations (Satou, 2019).

3.7.1 Model

The most common model used in Japan is for libraries – which are the core of the programme – to work together with child healthcare centres to organise a Bookstart corner where parents can meet with Bookstart practitioners during their child's first medical checkup (within its first year) and receive a their free books. The health centre is also visited by a Bookstart representative, which is often a volunteer or library worker. The Bookstart representative provides information to families and reads aloud together with them, as well as giving them a gift containing one to three books (EURead, 2019c).

Volunteers are trained by the local programmes before they meet with families. In several cases, volunteers constitute a relatively large part of the programmes (Satou, 2019). There are also some local programmes that make invitations to follow-up meetings, which often take the form of group meetings for reading aloud, singing and dancing etc (Interview 4; Sauto, 2019, EU Read, 2019c).

Something highlighted in the interview is that there are differences between how Bookstart is implemented. Depending on local circumstances, there may be variations in the number of books that are given and the interested parties that are involved, etc. One difference involves the budgetary leeway for this. Since the central Bookstart organisation does not provide financial support for the local pro-

grammes, funding depends on local circumstances and priorities. The fact that books are given away at child healthcare services is related to the goal of reaching out to all families, since the vast majority go to medical checkups.

3.7.2 Evaluation and research

Part of the help that the Bookstart organisation provides to local programmes consists of a handbook. This handbook contains support and advice on how a Bookstart programme can be effectively implemented, and includes examples from the organisations. It also provides guidance on how local programmes can work in evaluating Bookstart.

Suggestions are given regarding data that can be collected from and by the various parties, including both quantitative and qualitative aspects; for example, the number of book gifts, follow-up activities and similar details can be collected. The qualitative aspects could be the opinions of parents and other parties. The central organisation also provides a number of different templates for conducting reviews and survey forms that can be directed to organisations or parents. Support is also given in the administrative evaluation and following up on users.

Bookstart has been evaluated on several occasions, and positive results are indicated.⁷ Bookstart Japan has conducted two of these. The first evaluation was aimed at parents and their impressions of Bookstart, and the second was directed at municipalities and involved the organisation of Bookstart.

These evaluations showed that parents appreciate participation in Bookstart and the gifted books themselves. The evaluation also shows that parents use the books and consider reading to be important. Almost 90 percent of these parents stated that they had used or use the books frequently. A similar proportion agreed that it was good to see their children's interest in stories, and that the book gift could be an important tool for communicating with their children in the future. However, the evaluation that was directed at municipalities revealed considerable differences in the number of books that were given away and indicated that there were differences in how much municipalities invest in their Bookstart programmes.

It thus seems that the results from Bookstart are good, because parents appreciate and use the books. From a methodological perspective, however, it should be mentioned that internal evaluations of an organisation's own activities run the risk of making overestimations or underestimations.

Additionally, other studies show that families who participated in Bookstart seem to be more likely to read about how to read with a child, that fathers read more with their children, and that library visits increase (Hashimoto, 2012). One observational study from Bookstart sessions in Japan shows that children interact with the reading in different ways (Tsuji, 2013). This can also be connected with gender and reading habits at home. Although this study cannot demonstrate a link between language development in children and participation in Bookstart, the author argues that participation can have a positive effect on the reading habits of parents in the home, thus promoting children's language development in the long term (Ibid.).

3.8 The various programmes

All bookgifting programmes have a national organisation that is responsible for providing administrative support, dissemination of knowledge, and logistics etc. They are often non-governmental organisations that promote reading, such as BookTrust in the United Kingdom or the German Reading Foundation.

7. The evaluations from Bookstart Japan have been summarised in the interview, since the material is only available in Japanese.

Financing is often a mixture of public funding and private partnerships or donations. The national organisations support local programmes in various ways and carry out and coordinate evaluations. For example, several have developed local project evaluation templates and collect national data for evaluations.

It is also important to emphasise that the various countries' administrations are organised in different ways, which means that care should be taken when making direct comparisons between libraries, pre-schools and child healthcare services, since these organisations differ in many ways between countries. Some similarities and differences between the various bookgifting programmes are described below; however it is beyond the scope of this overview to make a more detailed comparison and analysis due to country-specific differences.

3.8.1 Bookgifting programme models

From these illustrative examples, it is possible to distinguish some common setups and models for bookgifting programmes. The biggest differences appear to comprise the entity that actually gives the books away. A common method is to have paediatricians or other child healthcare workers distribute the books during the children's routine medical checkups or vaccinations (Reach Out and Read, and Lesestart 1-2-3). Reach Out and Read is the only programme that exclusively involves the child healthcare services in its programme. The German Lesestart 1-2-3 programme first includes paediatricians, followed by libraries. The model used in the Netherlands is almost the opposite; books are given to families at the library, which is the core of the programme, and child healthcare services and preschools are involved according to local circumstances.

The most common way, however, appears to be to involve several different organisations and to have a model that is based on collaboration between several parties and activities aimed at young children. The reasons seem to be that, in many places, local circumstances must dictate how local activities can be organised. In the United Kingdom and Japan, it is most common for books to be given out at child healthcare services, but libraries and preschools are often also involved. The same is true of the child-healthcare-centric programme in Germany, where the third gift is collected from the library. In the Netherlands, too, where libraries are central, preschools and child healthcare services are also involved.

Another common model is for Bookstart practitioners to visit families at home. This has been the core of the Bookstart programmes in Denmark and Sweden. The Danish model is based on librarians (primarily) making home visits to give books as gifts and provide advice to families with children in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (Espersen, 2016; the Swedish Arts Council, 2018). Despite promising results from the evaluation (Espersen, 2016), Bogstart in Denmark is no longer active, since the programme was not granted financial support after 2016. In the United Kingdom, home visits are also made, but these are done in connection with medical checkups from child healthcare services (Eliot, 2014), and as part of Bookstart Corner (Rix et al., 2015).

In addition to the examples highlighted in this report, there are other models used for bookgifting programmes. In Nova Scotia, Canada and Poland, books and information are given to families right at the hospital when a child is born (EU Read, 2019d; EU Read, 2019e).

The most obvious challenges seem to be reaching the children that are in greatest need of these interventions. One advantage of using child healthcare services as practitioners seems to be that there is a continuity and that these can reach out to the vast majority of children, as can be seen in Germany and the United States. Reaching out to families that have the greatest need is precisely the challenge being faced in the Netherlands, where libraries are the principal practitioner. In that country, it is collaboration with the other organisations that becomes key. As we will see later in this overview, the question of who gives the books away is not so simple to answer, and it appears to depend greatly on country-specific and local circumstances.

3.8.2 Target groups

In each country, all of the programmes have specific models for how Bookstart should be designed – though there is scope for local adjustments to be made according to the target groups, available resources or other circumstances. The bookgifting programmes that have been highlighted in this overview are primarily focused on general interventions/providing free books to as many children and their families as possible. However, the underlying intention seems to most often be to attempt to reach certain target groups where children are at greater risk of falling behind in their language development, such as groups that are socioeconomically disadvantaged. For this reason, some special programmes have been initiated to help these groups. These can involve additional outreach, as is the case with Bookstart Corner in the UK. Within Reach Out and Read, some clinics focus on adapting the regular programme's content to certain target groups, and collaborating with local associations or groups. In Germany, there is a special programme for families who are asylum seekers, and the programme in general targets regions where the need is greater. A relevant question for many programmes within the EURead network is how to most effectively reach the groups where the need for interventions is greatest. According to the interviews, it seems that several programmes are working to reach out more to certain target groups through additional targeted efforts.

The professions involved in book giveaways are usually employees at child healthcare centres or libraries. In some programmes, volunteers are used, but their presence and role also varies locally within these programmes. These volunteers can be assigned to work together with families, such as in waiting rooms at child healthcare centres.



4. Overview

In this section, we describe the material that has been collected about bookgifting programmes.

4.1 What literature is available?

The study of language development in children stretches across several fields of research and disciplines, which can make it difficult to gain an overall view. Based on this overview of current knowledge, some observations can be made about what is studied and evaluated with regards to bookgifting programmes. First and foremost, it can be established that there is a growing number of studies on the effectiveness of bookgifting programmes. Research on early literacy and family literacy is based on sociocultural perspectives, and has therefore traditionally been studied using ethnographic observations in the home (see, e.g., Fast, 2007 and Taylor via Fast, 2007). An important part in adapting and expanding bookgifting programmes has been to also evaluate their effectiveness. In recent times, however, it has become increasingly common to make various kinds of measurements to evaluate and quantify the effects the programmes have had by studying participating children and families. Needlman (2004) describes the questions for evaluation of the Reach Out and Read programme as a chain of inquiries that need to be answered, the last of which is of greatest interest but also the most difficult to answer. The first is perhaps the simplest to answer, and thus also the most researched. The chain of evaluation questions is described using four questions (Needlman, 2004):

Do the interventions of bookgifting programmes lead to:

- changes in the attitudes of parents with regards to language activities in the home?
- an increase in language activities (such as reading aloud) and exposure to books in the home?
- an improvement in language development in young children?
- fewer children having problems with reading and writing at school?

It is also common for the effectiveness of a programme or project to be evaluated according to interviews with participating practitioners. Observational studies for learning more about the interactions between children, their parents and Bookstart practitioners are also conducted, which is more akin to the way that Taylor or Fast study early and family literacy.

In the United States, a lot of research focuses on the paediatric effects of Reach Out and Read. Given the research tradition in medicine, these studies are often quantitative in nature, where RCT (Randomised Controlled Trials) or quasi-experiments are common ways of isolating and measuring the effect of an intervention; that is, that two groups are compared, one of which receives an 'intervention' (in this case, free books during a medical checkup) whilst the second group does not receive it. This has, of course, also been done elsewhere, such as in the United Kingdom (Wade and Moore) and the Netherlands (Berg).

Based on interviews and searches performed for this overview, Swedish research on language development in young children appears to be centred on pedagogy and is intricately linked to preschools. The previous focus on the role of the family for a child's language development no longer appears to be as strong. There are, however, several research projects following up local Bookstart projects, and the completed results of two of these are presented in this overview. The research conducted is thus close to practice and is based on the activities included in the programmes. These studies also mainly examine the qualitative aspects of language development and bookgifting programmes rather than measuring the effects, as is the case with Reach Out and Read, for example.

There are also isolated studies within the political science discipline from the Taiwanese Bookstart programme. In this case, the spread of Bookstart as a programme and policy has been studied.

4.2 What does the literature say?

What does the literature say about bookgifting programmes in relation to the home language environment and early language development? All in all, there is a striking consensus within the literature and the empirical results that are presented. Early language activities in the home are important for language development in young children, and bookgifting programmes such as Bookstart and Reach Out and Read can contribute to increasing the amount of language activities in the home. The presentation of research results begins by examining the ways that bookgifting programmes are able to affect the home language environment (attitudes and behaviour in the children's families and homes towards literacy activities such as reading aloud). Some studies are then described that show the link between the home environment and a child's actual language development. Finally, there is a description of the studies that researched the effect of bookgifting programmes on language development in children.

4.2.1 The home language environment

One key issue for bookgifting programmes involves the home language environment for children and their families. At the heart of bookgifting programmes is promoting reading and language activities in families with young children, so this issue has also received much attention. The main question is whether bookgifting programmes like Bookstart and Reach Out and Read promote such home language environments for young children or not. This is often measured by seeing how often parents read together with their children, how many books they have in the home, whether reading is one of the child's favourite activities, if it has a favourite book, what attitudes the parents have towards reading etc. The overall picture that emerges from this overview is that bookgifting programmes affect parents' attitudes and behaviour in the desired direction. There is evidence that bookgifting programmes such as Bookstart and Reach Out and Read lead to parents engaging more in language activities in the home, and that the programmes generally serve as a support for language development in young children (Needlman & Silverstein, 2004; Sanders et al., 2000; Fricke et al., 2016; Golova et al., 1999; High et al., 1998; Berg, 2015; Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020).

Reach Out and Read in the USA is a programme that has served as a starting point for several studies on home language environments. Early on, a study by High et al. (1998) found that families participating in Reach Out and Read were more likely to read bedtime stories with their children than families that did not participate in the programme (i.e., did not receive free books and guidance from child healthcare services). Attitudes towards reading as an activity were also noted to be better amongst those who participated in the programme. Golova et al. (1999) also found that children who participated in the programme had someone read to them more often and had more books in the home. Both of these studies have limited their samples to low-income families, since socioeconomic factors constitute a risk variable for language development in children. The results thus also indicate that bookgifting programmes similar to Reach Out and Read can contribute to promoting the right conditions for language development in children belonging to socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Several similar studies have been conducted that measure literacy activities in the home, all of which came to similar conclusions (Fricke et al., 2016; Sanders et al., 2000; Canfield et al., 2018; Needlman et al., 2005). It is also worth noting that, although most of these studies had fairly small sample sizes, Needlman et al. (2005) had a national sample (1,647 participating children) in the United States; however the sample was not representative of the entire population⁸ and the locations were not randomly selected, so the results should be interpreted with care. Nevertheless, the study does confirm earlier results showing that Reach Out and Read results in participating parents and children engaging in literacy activities to a greater extent.

8. The selection was based on a so-called convenience sample – that is, that participants in the study were gathered from clinics where ROR had not been (though planned to be) implemented and was compared with children from clinics where ROR was already active.

The evaluation of Bogstart in Denmark shows that many parents were not in the habit of reading with their children or visiting the library. However, the library staff felt that many parents and guardians were interested in their message and the books. During their second home visit, practitioners got the impression that the families had made use of the books they had been given (Espersen, 2006).

Logan et al. (2019) calculated children's exposure to words. They worked out the difference in the number of words that children are exposed to, based on how often someone reads to them. They find a considerable gap in potential vocabularies between children who do and who do not have someone to read for them at a young age. They emphasise that this can have major consequences on these children's continued language development. The more literacy activities a child participates in, the more opportunities they have for developing their language skills and abilities. The home language environment creates the circumstances for this. In the next section, we will first take a closer look at research on the link between the home environment and actual language development, which will be followed by a description of the studies that have been made on the actual effect of bookgifting programmes on language development.

4.2.2 The impact of the home environment on language development

Promoting literacy activities in the home and creating a good home language environment requires insight into the aspects that play an important role in laying the foundation for language development in young children. These correlations have also been seen in some studies. In one study involving a large sample of participants (n=2581), Raikes et al. (2006) showed the links between the amount that parents read with their children and the language development in those children, measured using language tests. The results show that children whose parents are involved in language activities (reading aloud, for example) have better results than children whose parents are not. The authors describe this as a *snowball effect*, in that regular reading and a child's language development are related to each other. This effect is also supported by other researchers who describe their findings as a snowball effect (Berg, 2015; Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020). Another study also shows that reading aloud in the home at an early age (2–3 years) affects school results (8–9 years) because the children's language and other cognitive abilities are more developed (Shahaeian et al., 2018). This effect can also be described as a 'Matthew effect' for reading:

'Children who read better than their peers read more, thereby becoming even better at reading. Children who do not read as well read less, causing them to fall even further behind!'
(Andersson, 2015, translation ours).

This can be considered the basis for efforts to promote early reading. Children who learn decoding early on have a greater tendency to create a reading identity, to associate reading with something positive and therefore also read more, which gives them greater practice. The opposite is true for children who are late in their reading development. Andersson (2015) establishes that early efforts to promote reading therefore have a considerable effect on children's positive relationship with reading.

Such a snowball effect, the Matthew effect, or the use of a literacy tree to reason on a child's language development (Fast, 2015) thus all show that bookgifting programmes that have succeeded in stimulating language activities for children in the home also actually foster their language development.

In order to be able to determine the effect of these programmes, several studies have focused on attempting to measure the way that the programmes affect the actual language development in children. This is often measured by using various language tests that measure the children's receptive and expressive vocabulary. There are many indications that bookgifting programmes have a positive impact on language development in young children. We now turn our attention to the studies that have researched the impact of bookgifting programmes on language development in children.

4.2.3 The impact of bookgifting programmes on language development in children

In their study, Hight et al. (2000) found that children who participated in Reach Out and Read later had better results from language tests (receptive and expressive vocabulary). Based on a statistical analysis, they reason that this effect is most likely due to the fact that Reach Out and Read has influenced participating parents to read more with their children, which, in turn, leads to better results in language tests.

One particularly interesting study worth mentioning in this context – Theriot et al. (2003) – examined whether medical checkups at paediatric healthcare centres that include book giveaways and guidance affect language development in children (receptive and expressive vocabulary). They found that, not only is there a clear connection between Reach Out and Read medical checkups and language development, but that this connection also shows evidence of a so-called dose-effect. This means that the more visits that are made with book gifts, the more books parents bought themselves, and the better the children performed in language tests. Such a *dose-effect* is also discussed in a previous study (Mendelsohn et al., 2001). The results from that study showed that children who participated in the Reach Out and Read programme demonstrated that they had a six-month lead in their receptive vocabulary and a three-month lead in their expressive vocabulary compared with children who did not participate in the programme. The meta-analysis conducted by Bondt, Willenberg and Bus (2020) describes in a similar spirit how their findings support a so-called snowball effect as a consequence of the bookgifting programmes, as described in the following quote:

**‘The findings corroborate the assumption that book giveaways promote family book reading routines, which consequently results in children scoring higher on measures of children’s literacy-related behaviour and skills. The findings thus support the theory that the early initiation of book reading promoted by book give away programs generates a “snowball effect”’
(Bondt, Willeberg & Bus, 2020: 366).**

There is thus an abundance of evidence supporting the fact that bookgifting programmes contribute to bolstering language development in children in the long term. Are there only studies that indicate that bookgifting programmes are effective? No, other results have also been found that are important to highlight. One study on the effects of Reach Out and Read even shows negative results on family reading habits (Fortman via Needlman and Silverstein, 2004). However, problems with the control groups were reported in this study, which makes the results difficult to interpret. The study was also unusual in that its sample group consisted primarily of middle-class families, unlike many of the other studies. In their study of Imagination Library, Thompson et al. (2017) found evidence of only minor effects on language activities in participating families. Nor did the researchers find any beneficial effects for participating children in terms of language development in later measurements. It should be noted that Imagination Library is a bookgifting programme that, unlike Bookstart and Reach Out and Read, does not include any contact or guidance from professionals; the books are sent to families by mail. According to the authors, this could explain the absence of positive effects. This is also valuable insight showing that programmes for promoting reading need qualitative interventions for families if they are to prove effective. Another desired effect from bookgifting programmes is for families to visit libraries to a greater extent. However, it appears to be unclear as to whether this is the case. There are studies that exemplify both negative (Wade & Moore, 1998) and positive links to library visits (Canfield et al., 2018). The fact that library visits decreased in the short term was explained by Wade and Moore (1998) as being due to a reduced need for borrowing books from the library after receiving free books. They therefore emphasise that longer-term measurements are needed in order to be able to establish any definite correlations.

4.3 The design of bookgifting programmes

In this section, we describe how bookgifting programmes can be designed so as to have the greatest impact and to influence families as much as possible. We then discuss some studies that describe the relationship of bookgifting programmes with target groups and targeted initiatives.

4.3.1 What makes bookgifting programmes effective?

There appears to be considerable support for the idea that bookgifting programmes have contributed to promoting language development in young children. A prerequisite for this, however, is that the programme is designed appropriately. What it is that makes bookgifting programmes effective is a very important question. One study that discusses this is the thorough meta-analysis that compares Bookstart, Reach Out and Read and Imagination Library. In that study, Bondt, Willenberg & Bus (2020) analyse 44 previously conducted studies to test the effectiveness of the various programmes. The study examines the effects that the programmes have on the home language environment and the language development of children. The results showed that all bookgifting programmes had an effect on the participants' home language environment as seen by an increase in reading together with the children:

'Our findings support the basic premise of these programs, namely, that book giveaways have an important function in encouraging caregivers to make an early start with shared book reading by providing free books as an incentive' (Bondt, Willeberg & Bus, 2020: 367).

the results also showed that bookgifting programmes had an impact on children's home literacy environment and development. The effects were also related to the children's interest in reading; that is, the effects of these programmes were greater for children who showed an interest in reading. Effects were seen in all three programmes regarding children's interest and abilities in the written language, although this effect was significantly greater in the Reach Out and Read programme. In addition to the fact that this study showed that all programmes had an effect, one conclusion is particularly telling:

'Book giveaway programs were particularly effective when they included multiple personal contacts with caregivers, information sessions, and demonstration of book reading' (Bondt, Willeberg & Bus, p. 366).

According to this study, regular contact with the families in connection with book giveaways is a prerequisite for an effective bookgifting programme. Reach Out and Read offers several book gifts in connection with medical checkups, where parents receive instructions and suggestions about how to read with their children. Although IL had a greater effect on language activities because they distribute more books per child, the results indicate that the guidance families receive from the child healthcare services carries weight.

The identities of the book donors/Bookstart practitioners and those providing guidance as part of the programmes, and whether this influences their effectiveness, could not be ascertained in the Bondt, Willenberg & Bus study (2020). Those giving away the books are usually staff at either the libraries or child healthcare services. There appear to be advantages with both. As mentioned in this study and, for example, in the evaluation carried out of the German *Lesestart* (Ehmig, 2020) or Bookstart programmes (Apps et al., 2016), many parents have considerable confidence in the child healthcare services and have regular contact with them, so a gift of books and guidance provided by a paediatrician or other employee can increase the chances of having an impact on the parents' behaviour. Similarly, the advantages of librarians distributing free books during home visits are emphasised. For example, the evaluation of the Danish Bogstart programme is highlighted, in which personal contacts are formed when librarians visit families at their homes, creating a good environment for conveying in a simple and personal way the message about the importance of reading. The contact that is created is considered to be crucial to reaching out with the message and to encourage families to visit the library for other literacy activities (Espersen, 2006). In like manner, practitioners within Swedish Bokstart projects describe how a personal relationship and contact generates opportunities for presenting the message informally (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020), and Hultgren and Johansson (2020) emphasise the importance of the expert knowledge of librarians regarding children's literature. When a person receives free books at a library, a relationship with and context to the books and literacy are formed, which are also important (Apps et al., 2016). Increasing the chances of reaching out with Bookstart and creating an effective programme is perhaps not primarily founded on who it is that presents the message, but rather that it is presented within a trusting relationship and through contacts between the Bookstart practitioner and the families. It is difficult to determine which way is the best to take, since it has been important for all bookgifting programmes to adapt to local circumstances.

Several studies have focused on measurable indications of literacy activities in the home. There are also studies that focus on other, more qualitative aspects of these activities. Kucirkova et al. (2018) examined things that may affect the quality and frequency of reading in the home. They created a scale in order to be able to assess the quality of sessions in the home where parents and children read together. The scale was created according to known methods for reading aloud in an educational context, such as interaction, asking questions, pointing to things in the book, being supportive and encouraging etc. This scale then makes it possible to study the correlation between various variables and the quality of the reading session. Amongst other things, they found that the relationship between parents and children has an impact, and that parents with temperamental children generally have more qualitative reading sessions.

One recurring reading concept is dialogic reading, or dialogue reading, which, in simple terms, is when a child is involved in the reading. This interaction could involve asking the child questions, pointing to things in the book, repeating words, adapting the reading to the child's interests, connecting events to things the child is familiar with etc. (see, for example, Wirth et al., 2019 and Bergström & Wijk, 2018). Bookgifting programmes aim to increase the desire to read in the home, and emphasise the importance of families doing so, because apart from being beneficial, it can also be a fun and cosy activity. However, there is an aspiration to increase the quality of reading, which is also important (Bergström & Wijk, 2018) in order for reading aloud and other literacy activities (such as chanting, rhyming, singing etc.) to have the effects described here for children. The guidance offered to parents when they are given the books is therefore especially important, and this is also highlighted as a success factor as to why the Reach Out and Read programme seems to be so effective (Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020). Based on Språkstegen (a Bokstart programme in the Blekinge and Kronoberg regions), Bergström and Wijk (2018) emphasise that it is important to demonstrate to parents how dialogue reading is done. Training and skills development for the professions that become Bokstart representatives are thus particularly important.

Apps et al. (2016) describe a number of factors that appear to be recurring themes for successful book giveaways. Examples highlighted in the evaluation, and which are also seen in other contexts, are committed book givers, personal contact, listening to the family and child, good guidance for parents, and regular occasions for personal contact. From the evaluation of *SPRÅKA*, *LEKA*, *LÅSA*, the authors highlight how important it is for those implementing the project to be given sufficient time and resources for planning to make the project successful. Regular evaluation and planning discussions are also important. Another important aspect is that efforts should be anchored amongst managers and decision makers (Johansson and Hillén, 2016).

4.3.2 General or targeted efforts?

Many bookgifting programmes directly or indirectly target families who are in need of extra support. In this section, we describe some aspects of adapting to target groups, especially in relation to multilingual families and those with poorer socioeconomic circumstances. According to research, we know that socioeconomic variables comprise a risk factor for language development in children (see, for example, Shahaeian, 2018). Furthermore, several impact measurements indicate that bookgifting programmes can be effective with regards to evening out these circumstances (Needlman et al., 2019; Byington et al., 2008; Diener et al., 2012; Venn, 2014; Needlman & Silverstein, 2004). Many studies that measure the impact also focus on groups with a lower socioeconomic status (Needlman & Silverstein, 2004). In an evaluation of Bookstart, families with a lower socioeconomic status reported a greater benefit than did those with a high status (Venn, 2014), and Fricke et al. (2016) also noted that the effects of Reach Out and Read are often relatively larger in families with lower levels of education.

As Berg (2015) shows, the greatest fear is that a bookgifting programme should fail in reaching out to these groups. In the case of the Netherlands, the challenge is related to the fact that the interaction between the Bookstart worker and the parents relies on the parents going to the library. In that model, therefore, it appears to be a challenge to reach those families who have less insight into how important reading is to their children. As Berg further describes, such a model can support those who already have favourable conditions rather than the opposite:

'The current results indicate that BookStart does not contribute to narrowing the word gap at school entrance between children from less and highly educated families. The project may support "the rich" instead of "the poor", which may strengthen the Matthew effect: "the rich get richer and the poor poorer" (Berg, 2015: 68).

As shown in Berg's (2015) study, BoekStart in the Netherlands appears to be more attractive to families in good socioeconomic situations. This issue is especially topical amongst bookgifting programmes in EURead. Here, of course, the model of the programme is important, and a number of different methods are likely needed in order to be able to reach out to all families. However, this does not necessarily mean that general efforts are not needed or that families in good socioeconomic situations do not need to learn more about how important their role is in the language development of their children. Most of the programmes make general as well as targeted efforts.

Another aspect regarding targeted efforts is multilingualism. In one literature review, Anderson et al. (2017) included family literacy programmes⁹ that focus on bilingualism amongst children. They establish that these programmes show promise in strengthening the language development of children in multilingual families through the concept of additive bilingualism (Cummins via Anderson et al., 2017); i.e., that children are able to learn new languages in parallel with their mother tongue. Most bookgifting programmes seem to include an element of multilingualism, and the message that families should engage in literacy activities in their mother tongue is central. Something else they note is that reading aloud is not a universal tradition, but it is a core part of all bookgifting programmes. This could be significant with regards to different language cultures, which has also been noted by many bookgifting programmes. It is the literacy activities (reading, singing, chanting, storytelling, rhyming etc.) that are important, but books are a valuable and essential tool for helping families to initiate such activities. According to Sanders et al. (2000) and Byington et al. (2008), an important part of bookgifting programmes in terms of multilingualism is that books and information should be available in a family's mother tongue (the study involved Spanish-speaking families connected with Reach Out and Read).

Being able to communicate is, of course, vital in order for the actual meeting with a family to inspire confidence and so that books in more languages can encourage multilingual families to read in the home and make it easier for them to do so.

4.4 Bookstart representatives, collaboration and conditions

In this chapter, we describe the relationship that the various interested parties have with bookgifting programmes according to the reviewed literature. The parties are discussed on the basis of questions regarding how the professions giving away the books are affected and what impact they have on families by means of the programmes, what role collaboration plays in this, and the conditions for implementing bookgifting programmes. Finally, Swedish research on the role of preschools and the participation of children in Bokstart is described.

4.4.1 Bookgifting programmes in relation to various organisations

The results from measurements taken of the effects on language development in young children point almost exclusively in the same direction. What has received attention in recent times is whether bookgifting programmes have other effects, and in such case what these effects might be. How does participation in bookgifting programmes affect organisations and employees? How do bookgifting pro-

9. Note that the studied programmes are not exclusively aimed at young children, and that it is not solely the nature of bookgifting programmes that is the main focus of this study.

grammes affect the families' relationship with these organisations? Is it possible to evaluate bookgifting programmes in financial terms?

There is still limited research in these areas, but there are some indications that bookgifting programmes may have positive effects in addition to language development in young children. In one study, Needlman et al. (2019) examined whether the implementation of Reach Out and Read had increased attendance for young children's medical checkups. They found that parents tend to be more inclined to participate in medical checkups after the implementation of Reach Out and Read, and reason that this is likely due to the visits being more memorable.

Another effect of bookgifting programmes is connected with the way that employees view their professions. What is described in interviews with various employees within child healthcare services, libraries and preschools is that many find working with Bokstart and the like to be rewarding and enjoyable (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020). In a similar vein, Burton & Navsaria (2019) describe how the implementation of Reach Out and Read can aid the work of child healthcare services. Employees working at clinics that implemented Reach Out and Read perceived that they had better tools with which to promote reading, and that the book discussions served as a useful means for forming relationships and talking about other health-related matters with families. Many also felt that participation in Reach Out and Read raised morale and was enjoyable. Compared with clinics that had not implemented Reach Out and Read, employees felt that they had good conditions for supporting families in their children's language development. The challenges of implementing the programme were also discussed in the study, the most common of which for clinics affiliated with Reach Out and Read was funding.

There are also results indicating that parents who visited Reach Out and Read clinics perceived the staff as being more helpful (Jones et al., 2000). Another study that analysed the way parents responded to child healthcare clinics showed that parents demonstrated considerable gratitude for the programme. The clinic was located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area in which a large proportion of families did not have English as their first language. The three common themes seen in spontaneous thank-you notes were that parents 1) expressed gratitude for the programme, 2) that they benefited from the programme, and 3) that they had a positive experience from their visit to the clinic. Although this material most likely represents responses from satisfied parents, and even though the sample size is small, the results indicate that parents feel that the programme is beneficial to them (Byington et al., 2008).

In the evaluation of Bogstart in Denmark, it is highlighted that libraries benefit from their work with home visits and group activities within the scope of Bogstart (Espersen, 2016). Bogstart employees have been able to reach out to groups that libraries should reach. They have even gained insights into the circumstances of some citizens and formed relationships with them in local settings. They have also been able to apply this in library activities aside from Bogstart, such as by arranging activities for families with children. One challenge that has been identified in this context is that employees who make home visits have sometimes had difficulties communicating with families because of language barriers, which has also proven to be the case with Bokstart in Sweden.

Closely related to the issue of whether the programmes are effective or not is the question of how much these initiatives cost. As Bondt (2020) mentions, personal contact appears to be important in order to achieve the desired results for families, but these also drive up the cost somewhat. It is always difficult to discuss costs for long-term initiatives. However, a financial analysis of the programmes has been conducted. A so-called Social Return of Investments Analysis (an analysis of the savings that can be made based on the size of an investment) was conducted for Bookstart, and the results show that each pound invested in the programme should yield four pounds in return (Bookstart, 2010).

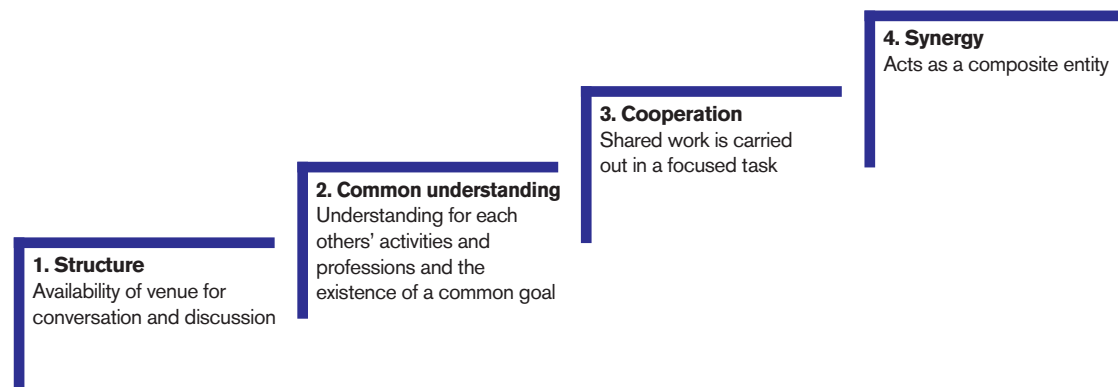
The total savings to society (extra support in school for children with reading and writing difficulties, other costs connected with low literacy in adults) were calculated to be many times greater than the cost of the programme. Needlman et al. (2019), too, notes that the costs for Reach Out and Read are fairly small as an effort to increase participation in medical checkups compared with other measures. It is difficult to say anything about the costs of the programme in this rather limited overview of current

knowledge, but there is nothing indicating that bookgifting programmes for young children are poor investments in terms of financial resources.

4.4.2 Collaboration and circumstances

In most cases, Bookstart is based on a collaboration between child healthcare services, libraries and preschools. It is therefore of interest to know more about how this collaboration works and what challenges there are in this area. This is also linked to the circumstances that are needed in order to be able to implement a bookgifting programme. There have been relatively few studies and reports in this overview that consider this in depth. A general reflection, therefore, is that research is quite limited regarding collaboration within bookgifting programmes. Compared, for example, with early, coordinated efforts for children and adolescents or in general regarding organising healthcare interventions, the focus on collaboration itself is somewhat less transparent. However, collaboration is often highlighted as a very central element of bookgifting programmes. There are a few interesting aspects and insights that should be addressed with regards to collaboration and circumstances for promoting reading at an early age.

Although this overview is not able to cover an in-depth description of the general research in collaboration that exists, there are some theoretical aspects of the subject that should be highlighted. However, the most central aspect that can be featured is the structural situation that is often described as important in order for collaboration to be lasting and sustainable. This can be described in various ways, such as by using the so-called collaboration ladder that can be found in the Bokstart evaluation (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020).



Source: SOU 2018:11, p. 6, modified by Governo

Another way is found in Ögland's taxonomies of the collaboration and cooperation between public libraries and other parties, such as child healthcare services (Ögland, 2013). Ögland gives seven levels that describe different degrees of collaboration, which can serve as a guide for how an organisation can consider its collaborative work as a strategic matter.

Whilst collaboration is often a prerequisite for Bookstart programmes, it can also be time-consuming and difficult. However, one reference point highlighted in SOU 2010:95 that deals with the work schools carry out on behalf of disadvantaged children (Annex 4) can be raised here. It is there described that:

'Long-term and structurally organised collaboration that is person independent is built both top-down in the organisation and bottom-up' (Danermark et al., 2010, translation ours).

Collaboration is an issue for both the management and political levels, as well as for employees within the organisations that are expected to collaborate operationally. Something often raised in the context of

collaboration is the importance of structural circumstances, for employees in the organisations to have leeway for working together (see, e.g., Rydsjö, 2012; Hampson Lundh & Michnik, 2014).

In the ongoing evaluation of *Språkstegen* – a Bokstart project in the Kronoberg and Blekinge regions, it is described how employees in some cases feel that a mandate for collaboration efforts is lacking. They feel that these efforts do not come ‘from above’ but instead emerge at the grassroots level (Hultgren & Johansson, 2020). This can be a considerable challenge, as is also highlighted elsewhere in the country (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020). Shortcomings in collaboration structures are also identified, and forums for meetings and networking also tend to be in short supply, even though child healthcare services and libraries have collaborated for an extended length of time (Lundh & Michnik, 2014).

Hultgren and Johansson (2020) describe how having common objectives can promote and facilitate collaboration between different organisations. By taking advantage of one another’s knowledge and complementing each other, paediatric healthcare services, libraries, speech pathologists and preschools can collaborate in supporting families and children in their language development. This also reflects how other Bokstart practitioners around the country described the benefits of collaboration. The fact that professions can increase their understanding of each other’s skills, conditions and situations appears to be an important aspect of getting collaboration to work.

Most of the interviews and literature indicate that collaboration is described as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of bookgifting programmes. There is no panacea for collaboration, although mandates and structures for meetings and exchange appear to be important prerequisites.

Another important aspect of collaboration is that skills from different professions can complement each other in efforts relating to children. As Hultgren and Johansson (2020) describe regarding the core of knowledge amongst *Språkstegen* employees, there is considerable expertise amongst those who work with book giveaways. For example, they are well aware of the meaning of early literacy as a social process and the underlying research that Bokstart is based on, they also know how to arrange literacy activities such as reading aloud, theatre, singing time etc. They also highlight some aspects that employees would like to know more about, which they identify primarily as skills they already have but that they wish to expand upon or deepen. This includes increased knowledge in the professional role and work methods of the other entities, the concept of Bokstart and *Språkstegen*, organisational sustainability, didactics; how effects and differences can be measured after various interventions, and how to formulate and request skills for the organisation, which in essence can be understood as how they can establish and argue for the organisation on a political level (2020, p.18f.).

The fact that bookgifting programmes have largely grown organically from the grassroots level is an important aspect. The studies of policy dissemination regarding Taiwan’s Bookstart programme highlight some interesting perspectives, although they are highly theoretical explorations. They describe how the expansion of Bookstart in Taiwan has gone from ‘bottom-up’ to ‘top-down’; that is, that Bookstart was initially spread by local entities and expanded within and between regions, but that policy decisions on the national level were later the most important factor regarding the growth of Bookstart (Lin & Chang, 2014). This expansion was mostly affected by decisions on the governmental level, since Taiwan is a centralised state; however, they found some indications that the dissemination and generation of information about the programme by local interested parties could also affect growth (Hsu & Sun, 2014). One study of Bookstart in Taiwan emphasises that the dissemination and use of information can have a considerable impact on the spread of Bookstart (Ke & Huang, 2014). One theoretically oriented article highlights some of the main influencing factors that may affect the expansion of Bookstart. Amongst other things, they emphasise the organisational circumstances of local entities, such as available resources and a culture of change within the organisation (Sun et al., 2013). Studies that research distribution patterns for Bookstart appear to be quite limited, apart from those in the Taiwanese context.

4.4.3 Preschool and participation

According to the interviews that have been conducted and materials that have been collected in this

overview, it seems that, in Swedish research on language development in young children, most studies have concentrated on preschool. According to the picture provided by interviews and database searches, there are few studies on the role of the family in language development in young children and bookgifting programmes similar to Bokstart. It seems that the focus that just a few years ago was directed at the family and the role of the home is somewhat on the wane. Although ongoing evaluations are being conducted of several Bokstart projects (such as in Blekinge, Kronoberg and Gävleborg, as presented in this overview, and Gotland's ongoing evaluation that intends to examine how the attitudes of parents are affected by participation in Bokstart), in addition to these, it seems that most research is concentrated on the preschool world. This is perhaps not particularly surprising, since preschool plays a very central role for language development in children, and most young children in Sweden attend preschool (the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2017). This overview will not delve deeper into educational research relating to early literacy, since our focus in this context is the role of the family for children and in helping them to enjoy reading. There are, however, some interesting studies that we will highlight in light of the role that preschool plays for Bokstart in Sweden. They relate to the way in which preschools engage children in language-stimulating activities and the link between preschool and the home. They also have to do with the way that Bookstart entities can encourage children and their parents to participate in such activities.

Reading aloud and promoting reading at preschool

Firstly, some authors have taken a closer look at the extent and methods of reading aloud with children in Swedish preschools. Damberg (2015) emphasises that reading aloud is not done often enough and is too unstructured. Additionally, the reading was seen as being insufficiently interactive. According to the picture provided by interviews and database searches, there are few studies on the role of the family in language development in young children and bookgifting programmes similar to Bookstart. Alatalo and Westlund (2019) also examined how preschool staff understand reading aloud as a tool for language development in young children. Like Damberg (2015), they believe that reading aloud competes with a number of other priorities in preschool. As noted by Svensson (2009), literacy activities in preschools can take forms other than reading aloud. For example, Magnusson and Pramling Samuelsson (2019) describe how it is possible to work with language development by playing shop at preschool; it is emphasised that play is a tool for preschools to work with a child's language development. In the *Levande läsning* ['Living Reading'] project in Varberg municipality, preschools developed their systematic work with reading aloud in preschool. By means of several in-service training sessions for the educators, and the establishment of cloakroom libraries, the project resulted in preschool workers gaining greater proficiency in working with reading aloud with the children. Several parents and guardians stated that they had altered their reading habits with their children at home after cloakroom libraries had been introduced (Bengtsson & Mellberg, 2015). The way that preschools must, can, and should work with language development in children has recently been a central discussion. In order to increase knowledge about the importance of reading aloud and other literacy activities, the Swedish National Agency for Education has occasionally offered skills-development initiatives, such as *Läslyftet* ['Reading Uplift'] in preschools. An interesting example from Bokstart is from Sjöbo, where it has been decided to give away the books during the introductory discussion at preschool (which is also done in Härnösand municipality) (Jönsson, 2020).

As Nordberg (2019) describes, collegial discussions around the 'entry hall situation' can promote language development in children. The entry hall, or cloakroom, is a place where children change their clothes as well as where preschool staff meet the families. The article describes a few ways in which the cloakroom can be made more language friendly and how staff can interact with children. A common way of promoting reading for children in the entry halls of preschools is by means of cloakroom libraries. A cloakroom library is exactly what it sounds like – a library in the cloakroom at preschool (or other educational institution) where children and families can borrow books to take home.

Magnusson (2020) describes cloakroom libraries as a method that is applied by the Bokstart initiative in Gävleborg. Several preschools in the region will soon have, or have already, established cloakroom libraries, and several believe that it encourages conversation about language and literature together with parents when they meet to collect or return books. In identifying cloakroom libraries in Sweden, and

especially Jämtland Härjedalen, Johansson (2017) explains that there are many good examples, but that one major challenge is that collaboration between preschools and libraries is not sufficiently deep-rooted. Gathering around a common goal has the potential to make such methods more successful, according to the author.

Participation

The enactment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Sweden has raised questions about the influence of children. In the context of language activities in the home and preschool environments, this is also a relevant area in which more information may be needed. In her ongoing evaluation of the Bookstart project in Gävleborg, Lena Magnusson (2020) describes how a child's participation and influence is expressed and how this is dealt with within the project. An important point that is highlighted is that a child's language development naturally depends on that child's interest in joining in language activities, which means that a child's influence over preschool activities therefore becomes important. This could, for example, involve a direct influence, where a child might choose to read together with an adult or select the book that will be read. *Indirect influence* is also described in the study, where an adult takes a child's interests into consideration by adapting books or language activities accordingly. Magnusson also highlights the fact that preschool staff made use of, started using, and developed strategies for involving the children in what she terms *language-play* in preschool.

In their ongoing research report called *BERÄTTA, LEKA, LÄSA* ['TELL, PLAY, READ'], Johansson and Hillén (2016) similarly emphasise the importance of listening to children so as to facilitate their participation in literacy activities within and outside of preschool. Apps et al. (2016) also emphasises the importance of listening to the children. They also believe that, in order to reach out to and engage all parents, preschools and libraries need to use a great variety of methods to promote reading.

Listening to the children when designing the programmes, selecting books, storytelling and reading, and involving their interests have been highlighted as important elements for successfully arousing their desire to read and getting the snowball rolling. This may also be the case regarding both the frequency and quality of reading aloud at preschools, as well as when the preschool staff have contact with families. What children do during the day at preschool may also affect what they do at home during the evenings and weekends.

4.5 Gaps and challenges

From this literature review, it is possible to identify some knowledge gaps in the growing literature. These gaps will be described in this chapter, and according to the scope of this overview, we will also describe the literature that does exist within these gaps. The challenges of measuring the effects of bookgifting programmes will then be described.

4.5.1 Need for longitudinal studies

There is a shortage of longitudinal studies, which means that long-term effects cannot currently be adequately described (Needlman & Silverstein, 2004 & Carpentieri, 2013). This is also described in the study by Andersson et al.:

'...there is a general dearth of longitudinal research in family literacy programmes, although there is some evidence that they do have a lasting impact...' (Andersson et al., 2017: 650).

Amongst the mentioned studies that aimed to measure the effects of bookgifting programmes, it is quite unusual for these to be of a longitudinal nature; that is, that the effects from interventions by bookgifting programmes are measured repeatedly over time. Often, language development or language activities are measured before and after an intervention. Sometimes, control groups are measured in such studies on several occasions, but it is rare for children to be monitored for a longer period of time. The long-term

effects of bookgifting programmes are thus difficult to quantify. There are, however, some examples of longitudinal studies that all point in the same direction. Wade & Moore (1998) followed children who participated in the Bookstart pilot project in Birmingham, and the results showed positive effects for the children's language development (as well as mathematics). Cates et al. (2012) examined the way that cognitive stimuli (e.g. reading aloud) at an early age affect language development in children. They also established that there are links in longitudinal analysis. For example, another study shows connections between a low level of language activities in the home at an early age and low receptive vocabulary at the age of five (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013). Shahaeian et al. demonstrate a correlation between reading aloud in the home at a young age and school results at eight to nine years of age (2018). For example, one study shows that children who were rarely read to from the age of two and onwards had poorer results at school at six years of age (Hayes & Berthelsson, 2020). Although they did not measure language activities at ages younger than two, this does indicate that there are long-term effects. The three aforementioned studies use the same empirics and do not study the effects of any bookgifting programme. Of course, these insights are still significant, but there appears to be a lack of longitudinal studies on the long-term effects of language activities in the home for young children and the impact of bookgifting programmes.

4.5.2 Socioemotional aspects, digital literature and age when receiving gifted books

There are also few studies on the possible effects of bookgifting programmes in addition to a child's language development, such as emotional and social aspects for parents and children (Needlman and Silverstein, 2004). Socioemotional development can be described as simply the child's ability to manage and convey feelings and social interactions. Wirth et al. (2019) studied whether the home literacy environment affects a child's socioemotional development. They found a link between language skills and socioemotional skills; i.e., that children who have developed further also tend to be more socioemotionally developed. Via language development, the home literacy environment thus appears to affect socioemotional development in children. Such effects suggest that effective bookgifting programmes can have positive consequences for families in more ways than literacy alone. Related to this, according to our interview, is a growing interest within Reach Out and Read in a concept called early relational health. This concept aims to draw more attention towards the nursing relations that can contribute to children's health development (CSSP, 2020).

There are also several questions regarding media exposure and e-books and how these should be used within bookgifting programmes, or whether they should be used at all. More research is called for regarding this potential (Mol et al., 2014; Bus et al., 2015; Kucirkova, 2019; Magnusson, 2020). It could, for example, involve the patterns that can be found in how children are exposed to different media in the home. For example, Mol et al. (2014) describes patterns such as parents who were experienced readers owning more books but fewer DVDs. As our exposure to media generally increases in our day-to-day lives, it becomes particularly important to better understand such research questions for the future for bookgifting programmes.

The question of at what point during a child's earliest years the first intervention by a bookgifting programme should be made has also been discussed (Needlman, 2018 & Sinclair 2019). The results from one study show that reading at home when the child is as young as two weeks of age has no negative effect, which contradicts certain reservations some have, such as that parents would not continue reading with their children if it were to be introduced too early or would consider it a chore. Instead, the trends from that study show that families who received an intervention as early as at two weeks tended to read a little more than the group that received an intervention at the age of six months, although the differences were not statistically significant (Sinclair, 2019).

4.5.3 How to measure the effects?

There are certain challenges in measuring the effects of bookgifting programmes. Some examples of these are that it is often necessary to rely on self-assessments from parents, where they themselves

state how much they read with their children. A risk with this, however, is that parents may understate or exaggerate the facts because many are aware that reading is something that they 'should' do, which could lead to them providing so-called socially-desirable responses. This is discussed often in the studies and is taken into account. One way of avoiding this problem is to follow Berg's (2015) example, where parents participating in the study were asked to point to the covers of books they were familiar with on a chart that contained only a certain number of real book covers. In this way, they were able to get a better indication of how many books children had been exposed to in the home. There are other ways of collecting empirical data than self-assessments from parents, but they are more resource intensive, which is an obstacle.

Regarding the large number of studies on the Reach Out and Read programme, most of them indicate that the programmes are effective. In a systematic overview, Needlman and Silverstein (2004) examined the methodological problems and possible biases. Amongst other things, they investigated whether there was a so-called publication bias, i.e., that studies showing positive effects from the programme were more frequently published than those that showed no effect or a negative result. Of the unpublished drafts that they analysed, there was only a small proportion that showed no effect or a negative result from Reach Out and Read, so they found no risk for such a bias.

Another challenge is that statistical analyses often have fairly small sample sizes, which causes some difficulty in generalising the results. The studies are often conducted in limited cities or areas, which is highlighted in the literature as a challenge. Longitudinal studies have also been few in number, and are therefore in demand (Carpentier 2013; Needlman, 2004). It is both practically challenging and difficult to isolate the effect of a bookgifting programme itself, since a large number of variables need to be taken into consideration during a child's upbringing.

Overall, it appears to be challenging to adequately measure the effects of bookgifting programmes. Something that was highlighted in interviews and studies is that it is important that evaluations of these programmes should not be too one-sided. Additionally, the significance of highlighting different aspects of the effects of the programmes and language development in young children is emphasised. It is well known that it is difficult to measure some things. Literacy development occurs through social processes and during interactions between children and adults, which makes it difficult to capture such developments using quantifiable indications. Placing too much importance on what can be measured can mean that important aspects of the social process that is language development can be missed. This can, in turn, lead to bookgifting programmes being developed on the basis of a one-sided description of effects, which can consequently result in programmes that are not appropriate for their purpose.

On the other hand, it would undeniably be a shame if the tools were not developed to display the important impact of bookgifting programmes on language development in children. Rather, the issue is likely to be regarding the amount of time and resources that local Bookstart projects should spend on this themselves. There may be reason to make careful consideration before a large number of small attempts to make impact assessments are launched by the Bookstart initiatives themselves, which is something that is also highlighted in the evaluation of Bokstart (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020). It is both difficult and time consuming to carry out such studies, especially longitudinal ones.

5. Concluding reflections

It can be established that the bookgifting programmes described in this study are effective in promoting literacy activities in the families involved. A number of impact assessments and other studies show that the programmes tend to be effective and can support families of all backgrounds, but especially groups with poorer socioeconomic circumstances. Furthermore, evaluations and qualitative studies show that there are some important observations that are key to succeeding in reaching out with Bookstart's message and assignment to promote fun-filled, language-stimulating activities in families. Repeated meetings as part of building a trusting relationship with Bookstart practitioners is an important example of these. The following table summarises the main observations from this overview, according to the areas described in chapter four:

Area	Main observations
Home language environment	Bookgifting programmes have a positive effect on the home environment and contribute to altering the attitudes of caregivers and children towards reading, as well as helping to increase the priority of reading aloud and literacy activities in the home.
Language development in children	A positive impact has been demonstrated in the language development of children who have benefited from bookgifting programmes. This language development takes place through 'snowball effects' or 'dose-effects'; i.e., that increased literacy stimulus leads to improved circumstances for language development.
Designing effective bookgifting programmes	<p>Build trusting relationships through (preferably repeated) personal meetings between Bookstart representatives and families is important in order for the programme to be effective.</p> <p>Work to support parents to improve the quality of their reading sessions according to proven methods, such as 'dialogue reading'. At the same time, it is important to maintain the essence of Bookstart (promoting reading pleasure, imagination and language and literacy development).</p> <p>It is important that local bookgifting programmes have the right conditions for implementing the projects in terms of resources and time.</p>
General or targeted interventions?	General bookgifting programmes can in some cases have difficulty reaching out to families with the greatest need. Targeted programmes can support families in need of support in their children's language development. The programmes show promise in being able to support development in both the child's mother tongue and other languages.
Bookgifting programmes in relation to various organisations	<p>There are indications showing that professions and organisations can benefit from bookgifting programmes through increased training.</p> <p>There is nothing indicating that bookgifting programmes would be a poor investment for the organisations.</p>
Collaboration and circumstances	There is limited research on collaboration in promoting reading early on. Bookstart grows largely from the grassroots level, and the skills of the various professions involved are important complements to efforts for promoting reading.
Preschool and participation	There is potential for improvement in how preschools in Sweden work to promote reading with young children. A common way that preschools work to reach families is by using cloakroom libraries. There is great potential in developing the way that preschools work with children's and parents' participation in efforts to promote language.
Knowledge gaps and challenges	<p>Longitudinal studies are in short supply in the study of bookgifting programmes. The few that exist indicate that the effects shown in other studies seem to persist. There is also a desire to investigate the impact of these programmes on socioemotional aspects amongst children. There are some indications that the programmes may promote such development.</p> <p>There are challenges in measuring the effects of Bookstart. It is important to not only focus on measuring the impact. Qualitative studies are also needed in order to understand the impact of efforts to promote reading.</p>

The various bookgifting models tend to place different emphasis on different activities, which all have advantages and disadvantages. With the Swedish situation and context in mind, this overview contains

some observations of particular interest. As can be seen in the studies on the programme in the Netherlands, having libraries as the core for book gifting seems to bring challenges in involving all families. There are additional challenges in reaching the groups that have the greatest need. On the other hand, library staff provide important skills relating to children's literature and language development.

The example from the Netherlands shows that BoekStart provides a development opportunity for libraries, which becomes central for getting families to use them to a greater extent. Child healthcare services also have an important role to play in several models. The advantages include providing opportunities to reach out to almost all families, and that families often have a trusting relationship with healthcare providers. The role of preschools is often less well defined. In the case of Sweden, however, we can note that preschools play quite an important role in implementing Bokstart, and a large proportion of research also focuses on early literacy in relation to preschools rather than in the home. As is well known, a very high proportion of children in Sweden attend preschool, which makes it an important entity for Bokstart in Sweden.

However, the most important aspect of interested parties involved in book giveaways is the fact that collaboration in Bookstart is paramount. Apart from Reach Out and Read, every country's programmes are collaborative in their implementation. Research on collaboration in relation to the promotion of reading at an early age is, however, limited. It can be difficult to establish effective collaboration. In Sweden, Bokstart is characterised by effective collaboration on the grassroots level, where different professions can complement each other's abilities. However, structural conditions are important in order for collaboration to continue. Being able to reach out to families in various ways according to their needs and local circumstances can be achieved only if the interested parties collaborate. The three entities – libraries, child healthcare services and preschools – have good opportunities for jointly establishing a continuity surrounding the message of Bokstart, which is also highlighted in the recommendations presented in the evaluation of Bokstart in Sweden. Amongst other things, it is recommended that a common assignment to promote reading should be given by government authorities to the aforementioned entities (the Swedish Arts Council, 2020). Linked to this, it is worth noting the policy directive in the USA since 2014, stating: Literacy Promotion – An essential component of primary care pediatric practice (American Academy of Pediatrics).



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* Articles that have been collected through the systematic collection process via research databases. Read more on pages 47–48.

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Supplements

Supplement 1: Method and approach

This overview was designed to i) review the existing studies that deal with bookgifting programmes, and ii) highlight a number of examples of specific programmes in different countries. The purpose of this study is for the Swedish Arts Council and interested parties involved in Bokstart in Sweden to be able to have access to relevant knowledge and inspiration. This this reason, the countries for discussion were selected on the basis of some aspects connected with this. The aim was to see a variation of different methods used in these countries' bookgifting programmes. Different models or designs of bookgifting programmes have therefore been included in the selection. Additionally, one criterion has been that a programme should have been running for a considerable length of time and extend nationwide or be widespread. Another aspect that has been taken into consideration is whether there are similarities between the Swedish context and the countries/programmes included in this overview. Based on these criteria and in consultation with the Swedish Arts Council, the following programmes and countries were selected as illustrative examples and for comparison:

- Bookstart (United Kingdom)
- Lesestart 1-2-3 (Germany)
- Bookstart (The Netherlands)
- Reach out and Read (USA)
- Bookstart (Japan)

Initially, a number of interviews were conducted with representatives of international and national organisations and academia in order to gain an overview of this field of knowledge and for guidance on the background of the Bookstart programmes and how they are organised. The interviewees were identified from the Swedish Arts Council's contact network. An interview was conducted with each programme/ country, three regarding Swedish research and one about the overall picture of bookgifting programmes internationally. In total, nine interviews were conducted. The question guide was adapted to each individual interview. For representatives from bookgifting programmes, specific questions were asked about the programmes; for the general interviews and those with researchers, questions were posed about current research. See the supplements for a complete list and the interview question guide.

Material

The material for this study was gathered in two ways; through a literature search in research databases, and by collecting information through interviews.

First, a literature search was made in research databases that include primarily international research. The studies for the general overview were chosen on the basis of some selection criteria:

- The study discusses Bookstart programmes or similar bookgifting programmes relevant to Bookstart.
- The study focuses on young children (0–3 years of age).
- The study deals with at least one of the focus areas that apply for this overview.
- The study was published in 2010 or later.
- The systematic collection of literature from research databases was done mainly in

June and July. Searches were made in databases and journals (Ebscohost, J-Stor, Taylor & Francis; Early child development and care, Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Ped.) using a number of search terms ('Bookstart', 'Book giveaway programs', 'bookgifting programs', 'Reach Out and Read', 'early literacy programs', 'early shared reading'). The hits that were clearly not relevant were not included.

After collection, the studies were scanned and filtered based on predetermined criteria. 19 studies finally remained and were included in the analysis. These are marked with an asterisk (*) in the reference list.

The second part of material collection consisted of gathering country-specific studies for each programme, based on interviews. These interviews were conducted with representatives for each country's bookgifting programme. Additional studies were also included according to an ongoing selection process that was based on, for example, reference lists from studies and evaluations that were already included. The interviews also served as the basis for describing the programmes in each country.

The studies for the country-specific programmes were selected on the basis of some predetermined criteria:

- The study focuses on the Bookstart programme in the specific country.
- If the programme contains subprogrammes, only those that focus on young children (0–3 years of age) are included.
- Both existing research and other evaluations/investigations are included.

The material includes both research publications and other types of evaluation and report. This varies between the different programmes and how much they have been researched, so there have been some challenges in providing a comparable picture of all programmes. One limitation of this overview is that, in some cases, the literature is unavailable in anything other than the country's language. Only Swedish and English texts could be included in this work. For this reason, the interviews have played an important role in bridging the language barriers. This overview does not claim to provide a *complete* picture of research in the language development of young children, since this subject extends across several disciplines, areas and fields of knowledge, and this would be beyond the scope of this overview of current knowledge.

Analytical framework

In reviewing the material, the following analytical framework has served as a guide for analysis:

Focus areas	General questions	Analytical questions
Models and design of bookgifting programmes	How are bookgifting programmes designed in different countries?	<p>Who are the main entities giving away the books in these different countries, and what methods are used?</p> <p>How do the different programmes work with different target groups?</p> <p>What is the relationship between choices of methods and target groups in the programme?</p> <p>What are the similarities and differences between the programmes?</p>
Collaboration	How do different interested parties/ organisations collaborate within bookgifting programmes?	<p>What social players are included in the bookgifting programmes?</p> <p>What success factors and obstacles for collaboration are described in the literature?</p>
Prerequisites for implementation	What are the prerequisites for nationwide bookgifting programmes?	<p>What national, regional and local support is available for the various initiatives?</p> <p>What examples of broad implementation can be found, and how has it been done?</p> <p>Does this differ between countries?</p>
Review and effects	How are bookgifting programmes evaluated and reviewed, and what effects have been demonstrated?	<p>How do organisations follow up the results and measure the effects of their efforts to promote reading?</p> <p>How can performance reviews and measurements of effects from activities for promoting reading be carried out? What effects have been demonstrated, and how are they described?</p> <p>Are there any effects from the bookgifting programmes other than language development in children?</p> <p>Does the research indicate that there are any societal gains? How is this described?</p>
Meta-analysis	What research is being done on bookgifting programmes?	<p>What research disciplines are studying the initiatives?</p> <p>What different research methods are used?</p> <p>How does the research differ between countries?</p>

Supplement 2: Interviewees and question guide

Interviewees

- Adriaan Langendank and Stichting Lezen, the Netherlands.
- Brian Gallagher, Reach Out and Read, USA.
- Carina Fast, (formerly) Uppsala University.
- Elisabeth Mellgren, (formerly) Early Literacy Learning and Awareness (ELLA), University of Gothenburg.
- Lena O. Magnusson, University of Gävle.
- Naomi Wake, MIE University, Japan.
- Peter Jenkins, Global Network for Early Years Bookgifting, EURead.
- Ruthann Hughes, BookTrust. United Kingdom.
- Simone Ehmgig & Sabine Bonewitz, German Reading Foundation, Germany.

Question guide

Background

- Could you describe the bookgifting programme in... and how it developed?
- Did any specific countries inspire the bookgifting programme in ...?
- How is the program organised?
- How does Bookstart operate today?
- What is the scope of Bookstart?

Model and target groups

- What methods are used within Bookstart?
- Other common methods used in family literacy programmes?
- Any effects linked to specific methods?
- Who are the ones executing the activities and book gifting?
- How is this done?
- How does the programme work with target groups?
- Any specific effects linked to target groups?

Collaboration/partnership

- How does the general collaboration and/or partnership work amongst the Bookstart organisations?
- Library? Paediatric care? Social services?
- Day care/nursery school/early preschool?

- Different roles?
- What works well in the collaboration?
- What is challenging the collaboration?

Evaluation, results and effects

- How is the national programme organised? What structures are there to support the local initiatives?
- What has been working well in the programme?
- What challenges have you seen in the programme?
- How are the local activities monitored?
- Could you describe how the Bookstart programme is evaluated? What has been done and what will be done?
- What are the general results and effects of Bookstart?
- What effects have been shown?
- Are there any negative effects from bookgifting programmes or other similar programmes?
- Are there any specific evaluations/studies of Bookstart that are relevant to include in this overview?

‘The results show that children whose parents are involved in language activities (reading aloud, for example) have better results than children whose parents are not. The authors describe this as a *snowball effect*, in that regular reading and a child’s language development are related to each other. This effect is also supported by other researchers who describe their findings as a snowball effect (Berg, 2015; Bondt, Willenberg & Bus, 2020).’

‘Such a snowball effect, the Matthew effect, or the use of a literacy tree to reason on a child’s language development (Fast, 2015) thus all show that bookgifting programmes that have succeeded in stimulating language activities for children in the home also actually foster their language development.’

BOKSTART

Further information about Bokstart in Sweden and other countries can be found on Bokstart’s website. Information is also provided on how to apply for grants for regional and municipal initiatives to promote language development in young children, and information material can be downloaded in several languages.

www.bokstart.se / www.facebook.se/bokstart

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