

Christmas Reading Calendar -project

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Age of students: 3-6-year olds

Due to COVID-19 pandemic daycare centers are forced to impose some restrictions in their daily routine. One of them is not to allow parents and kids to enter or leave the daycare at a time. Everyone needs to wait for their turns. Therefore, every morning parents along with their kids need to wait in front of the door for several minutes to get into the daycare center. This waiting time is boring and at the same time challenging for the parents to keep their kids calm.

We took this challenge as an opportunity to bring children literature into this place. The idea was to provide the parents and their kids with an opportunity to spend 2-3 minutes for reading text together and enjoy quality time collectively. We also wanted to help parents to find some books to or read with their kids. We thought it would especially be useful for the immigrant parents who sometimes find it difficult to select books for their kids due to language barriers. Moreover, we thought this project would bring an opportunity to the daycare staff to try something new for the kids during this hard time.

The project

First, we wrote a detailed project plan describing our goals, target groups, significance, action plan and so on. The idea was to give a clear understanding of our project to the daycare staff. We also decided to write a leaflet to the parents to encourage them to take part in our project. In that leaflet we gave a short description of our project and explained the importance of reading to or with their kids. We planned to suggest some books for the parents so that they could read those to or with their kids during Christmas holidays.

After making our plan ready, we contacted the daycare staff and discussed our project with them. They were very much excited as well as interested to implement our project at their daycare center. Then we visited our local library, borrowed children's books, and gave them to the daycare staff to select a few books for reading to the kids during the Christmas time. We selected books about Christmas and books with important themes, such as relationship with parents, gender issues and understanding others' circumstances and being kind to them. It's important to mention here we gave the staff full freedom to choose books from our collection as we believe they know their kids better. After selecting the texts, we translated those into English as well for the immigrant parents. At the same time, we made a leaflet for the parents and sent it to them through the daycare staff. In the leaflet we gave them a book list that they could read with their kids at home.

After the selection and translation of the texts, we gave it to the daycare staff for printing. They printed all the texts, made a frame for the calendar, decorated it, and placed it inside the

glass window due to challenging weather conditions. Every morning they put new text on the calendar frame for the kids and their parents to read it. Kids also could see and read it during their outdoor play time.



Evaluation and Feedback

This project attracted the attention of kids and their parents, engaged them in interaction, and opened a door for new similar activities for kids. It also has set a great example for the daycare staff to develop children's motivation towards reading using literature in an innovative way.

Feedback from Daycare Staff

- The staff found the project important as it aimed at supporting parents to explore literature with their kids. They also emphasized that the idea was simple enough to understand and implement. It was easy for them to add more activities to the Calendar time with the themes of the selected books.
- We wanted to know their feelings and experiences while implementing our project. They replied that it was great to see the excitement of some kids about the calendar and their eagerness to see and read new texts every morning. When they read a story to their group, kids got excited as they already knew some parts of the story. Their remarks include *"my mom was reading it to me in the morning"*. Kids also liked the visualization of the calendar. Daycare staff noticed that most of the children were interested in exploring the visualization on kindergarten's window during the day.
- They were quite happy to get positive feedback from the parents, and it was nice to see parents read the texts with their kids. They also pointed out that it was a very beautiful and functional Christmas calendar for them.
- In response to our question how they implemented the Christmas calendar in their

daily activities with groups, they replied that in the morning kids explored the texts with parents on the way to daycare center. In addition to that, they arranged the calendar time activities in the drama room, where they put a Christmas tree and did some decoration. Teacher read a part of the story and play something related to it. They also gave children little tasks suitable for the theme, for example sing a song, do an exercise, or count something. At the end of the day, teachers would give a short summary of their reading time and activities connected to the story.

- As regards the effectiveness of our project and implementation of similar projects in the future, we got the most positive feedback from them. They had recognized the value of outdoor public space as a learning and cultural space. After the implementation of our project, they have been using the same place as a skiing gallery. They have also some ideas for future displays.
- We also have discussed the scope and importance of **Kirjavinkkaus**. Now they have a plan to ask kids to bring their favorite books from home, present them to others and display them in the window.



Feedback from Parents

- We also received some wonderful feedback from the parents about our project. Most of them told that they read the 'Christmas Reading Calendar' time to time and found it very interesting to read together with their kids. They used to talk about the stories with their kids on their way to daycare and back home. One parent commented, "*.... my child was very much interested in reading stories. The more they were exposed to the reading calendar, the more she showed interest in reading and telling stories.*"

- We also wanted to know if they want to see this kind of project again. All of them gave the positive response. One parent said: *"Yes, I would love to see and read it throughout the year. It should not just be limited to Christmas, rather throughout the year, such stories can be introduced with various themes".* Another parent also said: *"It was a nice addition to the daycare trip in the morning."*
- Parents got a leaflet with a booklist and we wanted to know whether they found the booklist helpful. The response was quite positive. We also wanted to know if they faced any difficulties in selecting books for their kids. Parents with immigrant background found it difficult to select books for their kids as most of the books are written in Finnish and there is a limited collection of English books.
- Parents also gave positive feedback regarding the importance of promoting children literature in public place. One parent commented: *"Books are read in schools, daycares and at home. I think it encourages kids to read themselves as well. But they could be present even more, like in project like this."*

What we as educators learned from this project?

This project was a great experience, and it has taught us some wonderful lessons.

- To develop children's motivation for reading, it's important to present it in an attractive and innovative way. This increases children's pleasure for reading.
- Reading to or with kids is crucial to develop their reading habit and skills. It also strengthens the relationship between parents and children.
- Presenting literature in public places has an important role in involving people with reading practices.
- Feedback from the immigrant parents implied that language barriers have a negative impact on reading habits. We realized due to limited reading resources in English or in their mother tongue, they could not continue and develop their reading skills. It's needless to mention how important it is to learn and explore literatures in one's own language. We always get recommendation from the daycare to teach kids their mother tongue at home. Therefore, we believe central as well as local library can play a vital role in this by increasing the number of multilingual books.
- Finally, this project gave us the realization that children's literature should be presented more in public space for their holistic development. Therefore, we recommend other daycares and educational institutions to implement this kind of project on different occasions. It can also be a great project for libraries to reach out to the readers during corona-restrictions and in the future.