

# Welcome to **READING NESTS**

## **A shared project of EstRA, FinRA, & LatRA**

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**t**HE ENGAGEMENT AND joy of reading grows from positive emotions connected to reading and reading-related activities in which students can make choices and be active learners. Further, reading and literature should contain positive values for all involved and there should be a teacher who loves reading. In this article, we describe an international project of the Estonian Reading Association (EstRA), Finnish Reading Association (FinRA), and Latvian Reading Association (LatRA): Reading Nest, which involves partners from kindergartens, schools, and universities in each country. The project aims to establish and promote inspiring reading environments developed in teacher networks and supported by the researchers in the universities.

The project originally started in Estonia 20 years ago and was inspired by the ISSA (International Step by Step Association) practice of activity centers. In the current project, the concept developed from reading environments to the pedagogy of Reading Nest.

### **Engaging and active reading environments**

The teachers started developing reading environments by creating the physical or virtual environments, moved gradually toward increasing inclusion and participation, and ended at a social and emotionally positive atmosphere of shared reading.



The emphasis is placed on social, psychological, and cultural elements that are intertwined in the physical environment.

## Autonomy and collaboration

The Reading Nest project highlights the competence, innovation, and professionalism of teachers and how these qualities can be enhanced by teacher networks, and sometimes by a little budget and support from researchers. Sharing their own ideas, good practices, and experiences of reading environments gave the teachers encouragement and confidence to make changes in their classrooms and practices. During the project, the teachers cooperated with national and international partners and were given concrete ideas of how to shape the reading environments.

## A communal and child-oriented process

In Estonia, the teachers' work started with rearranging the classrooms to making them more comfortable. Reading materials were changed more often, and children became familiarized with new books. Teachers tested new ways to offer and work with books: reading aloud, dramatizations such as role plays, as well as digital tools. In the Reading Nests, teachers changed their reading practices to be more child centered and active. The children participated in shaping the reading environments and in making choices between activities.

The teachers were able to increase the time they invested on reading by having reading moments every day and everywhere: in morning circles, outdoor playtime, and integrated into the other learning contents in a holistic way. The website [lugemispesa.eu](http://lugemispesa.eu) was created to share visual examples, stories, and methods of the Reading Nests. The Reading Nest Handbook was compiled by the experts: kindergarten and schoolteachers, teacher trainers, and special educators.

## Holistic environments

Finnish teachers started the Reading Nest project based on the needs they



had noticed in their own reading environments. Some started shaping their physical environments further, some chose a specific reading practice, and some had a new pedagogical approach in mind.

In Finland, the teachers were supported by student teachers. There were escape rooms, gamification in applications, drama and arts-based activities, and cooperation among classes and schools. In the Reading Nests, some key features were found: they concentrated on the empowerment and agency of the students through storytelling activities with performances or real or virtual imaginary worlds, and other projects had more structured and clear-cut activities such as immersed reading moments and storied play as well as gamification.

## Spaces for versatile activities

In Latvia, the idea of the Reading Nests was new, but the teachers were familiar with the Step by Step program

in the 1990s. In many Reading Nest projects, the teachers were allowed to reintroduce them and develop them further. Most Reading Nest projects in Latvia started by defining the physical reading environment as an inviting and calm environment which could be a space for children to work by themselves and a space for the teachers to display different props and use them in role play, word and reading games, and more.

For Latvian teachers, the Reading Nests were quiet, peaceful, semi-enclosed areas, corners with soft furnishings such as a sofa, cushions, pouffes, or a rug. Further, they wanted to make sure that any reading material was freely available to students at any time of the day, and they could choose books for reading according to their interests. The Latvian teachers noted several positive effects of the Reading Nest project, one of the most important being the increased participation of children and parents/caregivers in reading pedagogy at the kindergarten and the school.



# The ILA Network

## The power of collaboration

Reading Nest projects highlight the power of sharing good practices and developing research-based, hands-on methods among teachers. The model of Reading Nest projects could be transformed into a tool for teachers' in-service education. Further, it seems that a relatively free method such as Reading Nests boosts pedagogical innovations and

is motivating for teachers to apply as it is based on teachers' needs and gives scope for their pedagogical choices and innovations.

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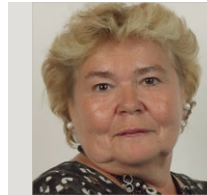
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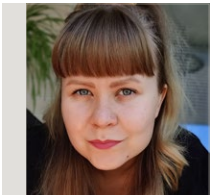
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