Reading progress in practice
Learnings and reflections from a Swedish school using a reading tool in Microsoft Teams

General Information

Vallaskolan is a municipal elementary school in Enhörna, a district in Södertälje municipality.

The school has about 285 students from preschool class to year 6 and will be expanded in the next few years for classes 7-9.

(Preschool class is compulsory from the age of 6. Sweden will introduce formal school start at the age of 6 so that our school will be grades 1-10 instead of F-6)

The school is located in a scenic area, surrounded by forests and adjacent to an sports field where the sports club Enhörna IF is very active. Many students participate in various sports activities, mainly soccer.

The surrounding environment promotes outdoor activities, movement, play and excursions.

The school offers a safe and secure learning environment.

The school has a dedicated student health team that focuses on promoting health, preventing, and actively supporting students' development towards their learning goals and for lifelong learning.

Valla School also offers an integrated after-school centre with a high proportion of qualified staff and a range of high-quality activities.

Background to the work with Reading Progress

Here we will describe how we at Valla School work to proactively integrate digital tools, especially Microsoft Reading Progress which we have been using since January 2024. The tool is a result of advances in AI that provide new opportunities to support students' learning. Reading progress is now used in grades 4-6[1]but the main focus of this document will be the experiences of the current grade 5 (students born in 2013)

Valla School is characterized by a conscious effort to use digital resources in a structured way to facilitate teaching and improve students' learning. We have often been a pilot school for introductions, such as shared iPad use and for The Prince Couple's Foundation's Minecraft-based dyslexia environment Dexi Ville.

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[1] Sweden will change the classes so that K-6 becomes 1-7.

The overall reading work at Valla School aims to systematize reading training and work more data-driven to adapt the teaching to the students' individual needs.

It is important to understand that when we discuss the use of Reading Progress, it is not an isolated solution, but as one of several tools in the school's work with reading development. The tool should be introduced with solid preparatory work and an understanding of the context in which it is to be used, and as a complement to the regular teaching, not as a replacement.

The starting point for the use of Reading Progress was that the teachers identified shortcomings in the decoding skills in grade 4. The goal was to find a tool that would complement existing teaching methods and provide more comprehensive support for reading development beyond traditional methods

The decision to use Reading Progress was preceded by a thorough preparatory work in which the teachers analysed the pupils' prior knowledge and discussed how best to meet their needs in year 4

To map the students' knowledge, we screen the students several times per school year with tools such as LegiLexi (reading comprehension) and Magma (mathematics) to get an overall picture of the students' knowledge development and to inform the formative assessment. An important part of this work is the technical and pedagogical support offered by the school's special education teacher and process support IT person, which relieves the teachers and contributes to an effective implementation.

In developing the way of working with Reading Progress, we investigated the background to the launch of Reading Progress and saw that Microsoft mentioned Professor Tim Rasinski as a partner. Tim is a prominent professor of reading development, so we reached out to him. In a Zoom meeting, we could get to know each other and share experiences.

Tim encouraged us to get back to him with an article when we were ready to share our experiences, so here we are now.

The discussion with Professor Rasinski has touched on the importance of repeated reading and **prosody (reading with fluency and expression),** which has influenced how Reading Progress is used at school. The focus on poetry as reading material is also in line with Rasinski's research. The collaboration with Tim Rasinski has contributed with theoretical support and inspiration in Valla School's work to strengthen students' reading skills through digital tools.

Originally, Reading Progress was introduced with the primary purpose of getting decoding training started in the students. Over time, its use has evolved to also include training of reading comprehension, vocabulary and reading fluency.

An important prerequisite was the technical and pedagogical support that can be provided by our process support Leif, who has been responsible for preparing the assignments in Reading Progress and who provides technical and content-related feedback, for example by going through the students' returned readings so that the teacher Johanna could get an overview of which students need to be reminded to submit the assignments. Leif and the special needs teacher Marie have collaborated throughout the period, both on the use of Reading Progress, and to support the teachers at the regularly recurring screening sessions with Legilexia and magma.

Practical implementation

The implementation took started gradually with a pilot group of students with reading difficulties

The students were introduced to the tool through reading groups at school to practice using the tool. Parents were informed early on about the work with Teams and Reading Progress and received instructions on how the tools could be installed on the families' digital devices, so that students could do their homework at home.

At Vallaskolan, the implementation has meant that the teachers have chosen texts, often poems, for the class to work on during the week. The texts are reviewed in class beforehand to discuss words and content and to practice reading

At the end, the students are given the task of recording themselves reading the text, usually with an iPad or mobile phone.

A calm reading environment is important and you also need to be careful in a choice of text that is relevant to the teaching.

After submission, Leif usually goes through the texts and "washes" them, i.e. checked technical function, disturbances and in some cases corrected the AI assessment.

We assess that Reading Progress in its current form is primarily suitable for middle school (grades 4–6), while younger students in the early stages of reading development may need other methods.

Benefits for students

- They get a recipient for their reading, which is perceived positively. Their own development becomes visible, which can increase motivation and ownership of their own learning. It reduces the nervousness associated with reading aloud in front of others, as the reading is done for an AI.
- They can practice reading fluency and pronunciation.
- Helps students to see their own learning, which increases their awareness and responsibility for their own learning. Since reading can otherwise be perceived as subtle, "Reading Progress" makes progress more tangible and observable for the student.
- The tool allows them to hear their own voice, which can be a first step towards becoming more comfortable reading aloud. "Reading Progress" has helped to create a safer environment for joint reading in the whole class. By working more together with reading, more students have been included and now dare to read different types of texts aloud in front of their classmates. This, in turn, can boost their confidence and reading comfort.

Benefits for teachers

- Teachers get access to data about students' reading, which can be used for analysis and to identify students' needs. The formative assessment is facilitated and can be integrated into the results from the screening tools LegiLexi[i] and Magma[ii] , with which we carry out testing 3 times per academic year.
- The work with "Reading Progress" has shown the importance of having a clear purpose for teaching. If the purpose is not clear, the use of the tool risks becoming just an activity without real learning. A clear purpose helps teachers focus and evaluate work more effectively

Summary

The school strives to create a common thread in the development of reading from primary school to middle school

The use of Reading Progress at Valla School is part of a conscious strategy to systematize reading training and work more data-driven.

The use of poems has proven to be an effective way to differentiate the teaching as the same text can challenge students with different reading abilities at different levels. (decoding for weaker readers, analysis for stronger)

The results from Reading Progress are analysed together with data from other tools to get an overall picture of the pupils' reading development and to be able to adapt the teaching to their needs.

Digital tools such as Learning Progress are building blocks of a larger educational strategy that aims to improve teaching and student learning based on data and insights into their needs.

Leif & Johanna

Marie

Contact

Class Teacher:	Johanna.Groth@skolasodertalje.se
Special Needs Teachers:	Marie.Nyberg@skolasodertalje.se
IT Process Support:	Leif.Josefsson@skolasodertalje.se

Example

Student reading poem in Reading Progress (LINK)

Poem by Karin Boye
In springtime, in sprouting time,
when seed husks burst,
and rye turns rye and pine turns pine
in freedom without choice.

A thrill of delight
runs through soul and body -
that I am I, necessarily I -
a sprout that has found its way up,

a spring shoot, whose growth force
I scarcely sense yet,
but the trunk's sap with bitter taste
I feel with pleasure.

So away, all my cowardice!
I belong to my future.
I take the right to grow now
as the root's powers will.

AI-generated Podcast that discusses Reading work at Valla School (LINK)

Digitalization at our school always aims to facilitate learning and teaching. We have exploratory work with AI, for example to compile, summarize and analyze.

One method we have started to apply is to record a summary conversation that we then transcribe and let an AI summarize, which often results in a high-quality documentation.

The podcast in the link is AI-generated based on material and conversations we uploaded to Google's NotebookLM.

In other words, it is not two people talking to each other, but an AI that generates two voices in conversations with each other.

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[i] Legilexi is a digital screening tool, developed in collaboration with Swedish reading researchers, that aims to map and follow students' reading development from preschool class to middle school. The tool offers digital tests, an analysis portal and an exercise bank to support teachers in adapting teaching and promoting students' reading skills. It is free of charge for schools and focuses on early identification of reading difficulties.

[ii] Magma is a digital learning tool that can serve as a screening tool, especially for grade diagnoses in number sense, by enabling a detailed and digital analysis of students' mathematical skills. The platform empowers teachers to quickly identify individual and class-wide strengths and weaknesses in the field of speech understanding. By having the students report their calculations digitally, Magma provides:
Detailed Overview and Automatic Correction