

Finland: Yle Etäkoulu (Yle Distant School)

Type of intervention: governmental (public service company)

Website: <https://areena.yle.fi/tv/ohjelmat/57-6AXjXXPdI>

General description

When the COVID-19 crisis started and schools in Finland closed, YLE, the Finnish National Broadcasting Company immediately acted to help local educators, teachers, parents and students. YLE already had its own online platform, Yle Areena, which has thousands of hours of content including: TV, radio, podcasts and articles. Yle set up a small in-house -team to select the material that could be useful for distant learning, mindful of both the content and length. Within days they opened up a special service Yle Etäkoulu (Yle Distant School) where the curated material was organized and distributed. They engaged “forerunners” teachers to work with them on the curation of the materials and had an ongoing consultation with them. As a result, Yle selected shorter versions of some of the clips and opened a slot in their programming schedule between 11:00-12:00 devoted to these videos, which they changed daily.

Main problems addressed

The main problem was to provide all teachers, families and students in Finland with quality resources for school-age students’ learning during the covid-related lockdown.

A second problem was to give some access to people with no internet connection and to make the selected resources relevant to teaching and learning.

A third problem was to support teachers in using some of those media materials in their teaching.

This initiative from a public service media company supplements other initiatives by the national and regional education authorities and mainly aims to provide curated existing media materials for learning purposes.

Mobilising and developing resources

Yle already could mobilise on its existing Yle Areena platform, which already include a collection of TV, radio, podcast and article content. It could also mobilise in-house resources to propose an initial curation. The originality of its approach was to identify lead teachers on Facebook as beta testers.

The initiative did develop some new features: it curated and selected some of its resources, revamped its website to make the content visible, and communicated about the availability of the resources. The crisis

also made its pre-existing Triplet service about turning news materials into teaching materials more relevant.

Fostering effective use and learning

One key aspect of the initiative was to ensure the relevance and usability of the media materials for learning. The engagement of the teacher community in this was essential.

Yle opened a closed Facebook group for “forerunner” teachers, whom they identified and invited by visiting the most popular Finnish Facebook groups for teachers. In this group, they asked teachers to test and improve the service. The teachers provided instant feedback on what they understood and what they did not, what material was useful and what was lacking. Based on their feedback, Yle keeps on improving the service daily.

In this Facebook group, teachers also brainstorm on how to use the material that is available and share ideas. Besides the feedback regarding the content, two key wishes emerged from the teachers: 1) more variety on the length of lessons; 2) reach out to people who do not have access to the Internet.

Based on this feedback, Yle decided to open a slot in their programming schedule between 11-12 which devoted to these videos, changed daily.

Two things Yle decided *not* to do was: 1) identifying the age groups for resources available because teachers didn’t think it was necessary; and 2) providing live programming, for example teachers giving lessons on air, even though it was asked by some teachers.

A second aspect to foster use of materials was to get the existence of the service better known. After the beta-testing phase, Yle asked teachers to recommend the service to those in their network. Yle also marketed the service through their own channels.

A final dimension was to ensure that teachers could better use media materials as a learning resource. Yle could use another service it already provided called Yle Triplet (<https://yle.triplet.io/>). In this service, a small team of teachers turns evening news into education material overnight. They select interesting news clips, some of them Covid 19 related and add ideas to the clips on how to use these as part of the education. This material is accessible through a mobile (app) and on desktop (webpage) and is free for Finnish teachers.

Implementation challenges

Monitoring success

The existing Yle Distant school service has been very well received and thanked for its user friendly simplicity.

Almost 30% of Finnish teachers (13 000) used Triplet weekly before the crisis. Its usage rate has skyrocketed to 50% of teachers (22 000) since the crisis began.

Adaptability to new contexts

This approach could potentially work in any country where public (or private) radio channels already have a well-organised online collection of media clips, videos and articles. Media companies usually have enough resources to set up a task force to curate relevant resources, with two objectives in mind: providing online materials for learning as well as aired content to access people with no online connection.

The above strategy works best where there is a predominantly good connectivity in the country and a community of teachers who can competently use the provided materials and guide the broadcast company – but the balance between live broadcasting and online could be shifted. Examples of use of the resources could also be provided where there is less habit in using media resources in teaching.

Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Select a local broadcasting partner. In many countries the national public broadcasting company is the obvious choice.
2. Most likely they already have an archive and online service. If so, select content that might be immediately useful during the crises and create a simple, curated service around this (tv, radio, podcasts, articles). Go for simplicity.
3. Start an open dialogue with teachers (for example in a closed social media group) to understand their needs.
4. Promote the service using broadcaster's channels and teacher networks.
5. Since many people don't have an online connection, open slots in broadcaster's schedules for daily programming – either using existing material that or creating new live content (eg live lessons) with teachers.

Author: Saku Tuominen, HundrED

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Yle Oppiminen.