

Latvia: Tava klase (Your class)

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Type of intervention: governmental, public-private partnership

Website: <https://www.tavaklase.lv/>

General description

Tava klase is a project that provides additional education to students in primary and secondary education by offering educational television (TV) broadcasts, which are also available online. The project was launched on 6 April 2020, three weeks after schools were closed and the idea was first pitched.

Tava klase used the air-time of two TV channels to broadcast educational video lessons daily between 9 AM and 2 PM until the end of the school year on 29 May 2020. The lessons were recorded in advance with the help of a select group of teachers who shared their lessons in front of the camera, sometimes with a group of children ‘acting’ as students. The broadcasts intended to support teachers by providing educational video lessons in addition to their own teaching. For that reason, the broadcasts are relatively short: each lesson lasts twenty minutes. (Lessons in Latvia normally last forty minutes.) A broadcast schedule was published in advance, and materials were available online as well, so teachers could integrate them in their teaching in any way they wished.

The broadcast schedule and focus of the lessons was based on the national curriculum. At the start of the project, the Ministry of Education took into account the different subjects and themes that are part of the curriculum for the period from March until May. The curriculum contents were then further developed for broadcasting in cooperation with parental associations and the National Centre for Education. Teachers were recruited and selected on the basis of the subject and grade they normally teach. Even though the project assigns a specific theme to each video lesson, teachers have a great amount of autonomy to share their

The coronavirus crisis led schools and universities to rapidly transition to a distance-learning mode, via the Internet, television or radio. This series documents some country initiatives that ensured education continuity for all using technology and provided support to teachers, students, and their families.



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lesson and use their materials. In general, a video lesson consists of an introduction, a demonstration or lecture, and sometimes homework for the student. It is up to the teacher to fill in the content. The contents include for example multi-language subjects, ICT and robotics, animation, media literacy, sport, theatre, dance and singing opportunities. Some of these subjects, like robotics, are normally taught in only a handful of schools. The broadcasts make these subjects available to every child.

The project was initiated and funded by the Ministry of Education, and made possible with the support of two private TV broadcasting companies and a private telecommunications company. Most of the ministry's subsidy was spent on the compensation of teachers, who participated besides their regular job. A parental association took care of the recruitment of teachers. Finally the project also attracted volunteers, who helped with the broadcasts in different ways. A few famous singers appeared in the broadcasts, making the TV channels more popular.

Main problems addressed

The project addressed three problems:

- Not all children have sufficient access to digital devices;
- Children in primary education in particular have more difficulties to learn on their own;
- Teachers experience more difficulties to reach out to their students online.

Immediately after lockdown measures were announced, the ministry set out a survey among parents to get an understanding of the availability of digital devices. According to the survey results, about 5 000 children (approximately 3 percent of the student population) did not have sufficient access to digital devices, either because there were no devices available at all, or because devices had to be shared with other family members, like teleworking parents. Despite efforts from the government and private companies to provide as much digital devices to those children as possible, the ministry quickly recognised that these efforts would not be enough.

Especially in the case of younger children in primary education (grades 1 to 6 in Latvia), the government was worried about the quality of education during the lockdown. Children in this age group are not or less accustomed to learn on their own, and thus need more attention from their teachers and parents.

Finally, teachers often encountered problems with remote learning. In general, online learning makes it more difficult to reach out to students. In particular, it is harder to keep young children occupied. In addition, some teachers did not have the right set of digital skills for online learning.

Mobilising and developing resources

To address these problems, the ministry sought for a specific solution for primary and secondary school students. The idea for the current project erupted two days after schools were closed. As about 97 percent of households in Latvia have a TV connection, and often more than one TV, setting up a TV channel for education seemed an appropriate solution to the problems above.

The idea did not come out of the blue. A plan for a similar project for remote rural areas had already been considered, as it is difficult for schools there to find good teachers for certain subjects, for example STEM education. The plan was never carried out however. The school closure appeared as the right time to revive this plan. Due to the crisis situation, certain steps in the formal procedures could be skipped. Acting quickly was therefore possible.

Three private companies came to the ministry's aid. A telecommunications company offered its experience with packaging a TV channel and delivering digital content. Two broadcasting companies offered their slots between 9 AM and 2 PM for free. One of these companies broadcasts a popular sports channel. As sports events got cancelled because of the lockdown, the project could benefit from the availability of this channel.

An advantage of the broadcasting companies' offer was that the ministry did not have to set up a new TV channel. A second advantage was that employees from the broadcasting companies could keep their work. Instead of filming football matches (for example), they switched to filming educational lessons.

A cooperation with popular news sites also made it possible to include the content in other portals. Social media were used for the online promotion of the lessons, although the website remains the place to watch materials online.

Fostering effective use and learning

The educational broadcasts were offered as a supplement to regular teaching by teachers. The main purpose was knowledge transmission and providing teachers with supplementary materials: if teachers feared that they could not fully reach out to their students online, or wished to get support for some aspects of their teaching, they were free to use – or not to use – the video lessons and to integrate them in their own teaching in any way they wish.

The recruitment of the teachers was done by a parental association. Only professional teachers could be recruited to ensure the quality of the video lessons. Lessons were also not broadcast live, and a professional crew was used to film the lessons, here again to ensure the quality and use of the final video lessons. This also allowed for occasional problems to be solved with more speed.

Implementation challenges

The main challenge related to the time pressure, which dictated the terms for implementing the project. The project was set up in an "agile" way, as there was no time to think through every detail. Adjustments were made along the way, often based on feedback by users. For example, it is after teachers asked for the possibility to anticipate the broadcasts that a broadcast schedule was published in advance. This gave teachers the opportunity to integrate the broadcasts in their teaching. Another example is the addition of sign language for the deaf and hard of hearing. Even though not many children need sign language, and the method is expensive, the ministry found it important to follow up on this feedback. The website is constantly improved as well. An online archive of video lessons was created; a better search function is under construction.

At the start of the project, a large number of video lessons was filmed in a relatively short time. Much depended on the quality of the teaching performance of teachers; some were more successful than others. There was no time to check every video lesson; instead, recruited teachers were checked on their capacity to share their lessons on camera, for example by making a demonstration video. Under normal circumstances, more time would have been spent on the preparation and selection process, and on the filming and broadcasting

Monitoring success

After the first two weeks, more than 370 000 people watched the TV channel at least once. (Latvia has a population of almost 2 million people.) At least 400 000 unique watchers were on the TV channel at the end of May 2020.

The website is also visited by Latvians outside the country, who for example might wish to keep a bond with Latvia. In this sense, the project turns out to be a means to promote the Latvian language abroad, and could thus be used as an inspiration for future projects with regard to language and cultural heritage.

Adaptability to new contexts

The Tava klase project could be adapted to other contexts. Many of the available video lessons are relevant for future use, and will be edited and archived on a digital learning platform. Schools may use these video lessons as additional materials to their own teaching.

The success of the story is however partly due to the circumstances of the crisis, which led to an increased amount of volunteers and offers by private companies. For example, the offer of the broadcasting companies to use their air-time would probably not have been available outside a crisis situation. For that reason, under normal circumstances a new TV channel would have to be set up, or the project should focus on online activities only. Outside a crisis situation, it should also be taken into account that setting up a project like Tava klase can be subject to more formal procedures.

Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Select the group of students for which you want to create educational materials, and decide whether those materials should be broadcast on TV and/or could be made available online. For children in primary education, TV broadcasts may be an efficient way to deliver education.
2. Work closely together with telecommunications and broadcasting companies to set up and organise the broadcasts.
3. Gather a network of organisations and volunteers to help with the broadcasts, from the recruitment of teachers for broadcasts to the promotion of the project on other news portals and social media.
4. Guarantee the quality of education by making use of professionals to create the materials.
5. Stay open for feedback, and try to adjust as much as possible based on the feedback.

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