

Finnish good practice case: Mobile Distance Education to Al-Hol detention camp in Syria

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Tuija Tammelander
Ilona Taimela

● ● Introduction

Tuija Tammela, School Director, Kulkuri Distance School,
Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (Kvs)

- Background



Ilona Taimela, Educational Consultant, Ilmiömuotoilu Oy

- Pedagogics



● ● What's Al-Hol?

- Over 70 000 people were relocated to Al-Hol detention camp in northern Syria from the jihadist ISIS caliphate in 2019. In practice: a prison camp guarded by Kurdish-led forces.
- 50 % of the residents are children under 12 years. The majority of adults are women. They are mainly families of jihadist ISIS fighters.
- Conditions at the tent-filled camp are miserable: lack of food, water, sanitation and healthcare, no schools, the weather varies from +40 in summer to sandstorms and freezing in winter.
- Life in the camp is very dangerous, and hundreds of people die every year because of diseases and violence.
- There are still over 50 000 people living in Al-Hol

● ● Finnish women and children in Al-Hol

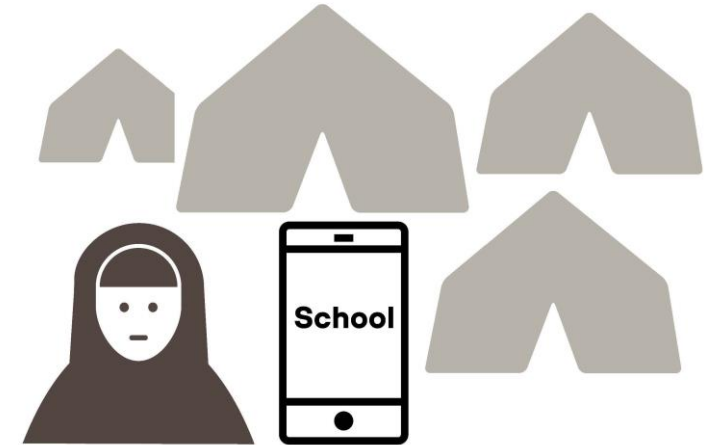
- In the spring of 2020, there were over 40 Finnish women and children living in the camp.
- The Finnish children also suffered from hunger, diarrhea and various other sicknesses.
- Before ending up in the camp, the children had lived amidst fighting and some of them were injured in the battles.
- Many of the mothers were very young when they left Finland to marry ISIS fighters – some still in school.

● ● Mobile distance education project (1)

- Finland decided to repatriate the Finnish children – with their mothers
- According to the Constitution of Finland, the Finnish authorities have a duty to safeguard fundamental and human rights of Finnish citizens -> Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland wanted to organize remote healthcare and education to the camp
- Kvs and Kulkuri Distance School was asked to try if distance education was possible
- Challenges: very poor internet connection, lack of electricity, cell phones forbidden, children hadn't been to school for years and some hardly spoke Finnish
- The only way to reach the children: WhatsApp via mothers' phones (text + emojis)

● ● Mobile distance education project (2)

- Voluntary for the mothers to enroll their children
- 23 children (2-19 years) in Mobile Distance School 2020-2021
- The aims of the project:
 - bring routines and stimuli to the daily lives of the children
 - give opportunities for the joy of learning
 - support the repatriation and integration of the children and youth back to Finland -> learn basic skills, especially Finnish language and about the way of life, society and nature of Finland



● ● Pedagogical Principles

- UN Convention on the rights of the children: Every child has the right to learn. Learning is a universal, non-negotiable, and indivisible fundamental right.
- Equality and equity
- Voluntary: The mothers and children could choose if they wanted to join the education
- Individuality: Every child has its own challenges and potential
- Flexibility: They could attend to the school tasks according to their own time
- Positivity: The joy for learning, so that the motivation to the school stays
- Interactivity: An iterative process of development, Designing of tasks with feedback from mothers and children
- Active learning: using the materials at their availability at the camp.



●● The role of mothers/ caregivers

- Received and shared WA messages with their children
- Copied tasks on paper/ notebook
- Took pictures of their children's work
- Recorded voice messages of their own and of children reading etc.
- Provided feedback
- Asked for more information to be able to explain the tasks to their children
- Started to speak Finnish to their children. Interpreting and modelling language.

● ● Planning and designing the tasks

- Learning materials arranged in a logical and pre-planned order, so no random messages except when the mothers were present, then could be spontaneous messages
- Learning tasks taking into consideration what can be found in the learners' environment.
- Contents were differentiated and individualised to suit the individual needs.
- The contents was built around phenomena and themes such as food, animals, everyday life, or school.
- Only one subject per day for the little ones (aged 4-9 yrs), older students would receive also another subject in the afternoon.
- Subjects were Finnish language, mathematics, English, Environmental studies, history and geography

● ● Objectives of learning

- Language awareness: Recognition and production of letters, sounds and syllables of Finnish language. Getting acquainted with different types of texts
- Writing, reading and speaking skills and fluency: Listening comprehension competences
- Mathematical numeracy: Understanding concepts of numbers
- Making classification and comparisons: Measuring skills
- Making observations and inquiry: Being curious and enjoying learning
- Strengthening self-appreciation
- Developing learning strategies and life-long learning skills

● ● Whatsapp as a tool for education

- Use of text, emojis and voicemail
- Only sometimes photographs (due to low bandwidth)
- Not able to send internet links, downloadable documents or use videocall.
- Different emojis used to distinguish the groups and tasks
- Collaboration of teachers: one sending the tasks, the other sending the voicemail: every other message
- Challenges in some mathematical tasks, such as sequence of numbers



●● Providing routines

- The children didn't have much to do at the prison camp
- The school provided them with routines
- Every morning at 9 am the first message explaining the tasks for the day. Also the first message always informed what is the day, its weather etc.
- The messages were divided according to the students ages
- Every afternoon some joyful messages: reading a poem or a story, providing them with photos from Finland, teaching the children new games that they can play together.
- Every Friday a feedback and checking that tasks have been suitable.

●● Trauma informed teaching

- Traumatic experiences and worries: feelings of insecurity, fears, memories and trauma from war, stressful everyday life, concerns about the fate of their relatives, lack of hope for one's future.
- Psychosomatic symptoms, insomnia, post-traumatic stress, and depression. These can appear as aggressive, hostile, hopeless, or apathetic behavior.
- Interference with and prevention of performing developmental tasks typical of age.
- Learning in the zone of one's immediate competences and having experiences of success
- Being bold enough to go low enough. No point providing too difficult task
- Checking on the child regularly that the tasks are understood, and child can execute the task. Recovering or building of basic skills of the learner.

Evaluation

- Positivity
- Collaboration with the guardians
- Continuous
- Measuring developmental stages
- Motivation and joyful learning
- Individual
- Flexible

Toivoisimme palautetta siitä, kuinka Etäkoulu on tällä viikolla sujunut. Voitte antaa palautetta vapaasti kirjoittamalla ✍️ / äänittämällä 🗣️ tai halutessanne emojiilla 😊. 12.46 ✓✓

Tehtäviä on päivässä...

- 😞 liian vähän.
- 😊 sopivasti.
- 🤦 liikaa. 12.46 ✓✓

Ovatko tehtävät olleet...

- ❤️ sopivia.
- 💚 liian helppoja.
- 🧡 liian hankalia.
- 👎 sellaisia, joita emme toivo. 12.46 ✓✓

Mikä on ollut mielestänne viikon mukavin tehtävä? 12.46 ✓✓

● ● Advantages of mobile education

- Fast organized and inexpensive
- Quick, instant messaging
- Spontaneous and informal, 24/7
- Most people have a mobile device, Easy to learn and use
- Independent of time and place: At one's own pace
- Can be individualised: More personal - > more motivating
- Can be gamified
- Learning material is always at hand, Can be used offline
- Low threshold for teacher support