

**Pilot project Distancelearning
with
two schools in Åboland archipelago
with a distance of 100 km between the schools.**



1. Preface

This is a result of a long process thanks to the amount of various opportunities that our project has been able to offer. We will describe and set this as a good example of a eLearning-process in our region, because every eLearning-project is preceding by a similar process. To make a simple case work it is very important that you have all the parts and they match together.

Thanks to the success and the good publicity of the pilot project many interesting eLearning cases have started. A direct result of the pilot project is that 2 new distance courses will start this year (forms 7-9).

A Finnish speaking school in Pargas (forms 5-6) has had a history project with a class in Halikko (form 6). They used our platform for communication, chat discussion and archive. They will continue the collaboration this year, and of course develop the course now being wiser after the first project. These are just examples from a big amount of ongoing pilot activities in our region.

It has taken us and the schools many years to come this far. It is a long process to introduce IT in education, but when the time is right, you have the tools, the technique is functioning and, most important, you can have as much support as you wish, then it is time to act and begin implementing IT into your teaching.

The result, "the reward", of our work is now obvious.

Subject: world religions, basic education forms 7-9

Target group in this case study: pupils in Sarlinska school, Pargas (form 7) and pupils in Iniö school (forms 7-9)

Technique/tools used: FirstClass ED eLearning platform, videoconference

Tandberg, broadband, Wimax-Broadband

2. Summary

It was the first distance course in our region on basic education level. And it was overall a great success! Even though there was some technical problems in the beginning nothing could stop the eagerness that we experienced in both schools. They chose to use both an e-learning platform and videoconference, which helped the pupils to feel that they worked "in the same class". They could hear and see each other and at the same time work with their tasks.

Now thinking of it afterwards, the pupils had to get used to a lot of new things: at the same time when the course started they also started in a new school, they came from several different schools so they didn't know everyone in the class, their teacher was not in the same room as them (Iniö) and their IT skills varied a lot. But this only confirmed that young people have the ability to adapt to new things if they are interested.

Because of the success, 2 new distance courses will start this year with the same class in. This year the range of courses will increase by a biology course.

3. Background/Conditions

- Geographic: Finnish archipelago, lot of islands, 100 km between the schools

- Social: The principals in both schools knew each other from earlier, they are the same age.
- Political: It is a challenge to implement new ways of learning at the same time when the municipalities goes through structural changes. The competition about school subjects is increasing in a community which is geographically divided.
- Attitude: positiv
- Availability of knowledge:

4. How decisions are taken?

- Decision makers: The decision was taken between the principals in Sarlinska skolan (Bernt Klockars) and Iniö skola (Birgitta Svarvar-Hult) after approval from the head of education in Pargas (Ulrika Lundberg).
- Why was the decision taken: Iniö school with only 3 pupils in forms 7-9 had not a competent teacher for this subject. And when the principal in Pargas was competent and also keen on creating a distance course the decision was easily taken. Bernt Klockars had studied about distance learning and created test courses, but this was his first real course. And when the platform was well-known and also our personnel, it was easy to make the decision.
- What was the main impact for the region: It proved that we have good possibilities to create and carry out distance courses. When the course was a success it has lead to 2 new courses.
- What are/were problems: In the beginning there was some technical problems, for example Wimax-connections, server-problems, firewalls and ICT-knowledge.
- Which kind of decision makers with which interest implemented the case:
Heads of education, principals
Public demands on finding new solutions for learning environment.

5. Work process (implementation)

Both principals had been interested in IT for several years. Bernt Klockars had taking part in a course about distance learning and had also created a test course. He had also been a religions teacher for many years, he had a lot of material and a clear structure for a religions course. He is an experienced teacher.

After discussions between the both principals involved and with our organisation, they decided to try it. Thanks to the fact that we all had been working long together, the system was known to everyone, it was easy to discuss different possibilities and after that make decisions. Everyone had an important role. Without our support and help this may never had been accomplished but most important, it was the principals positive attitude and good spirit that kept this project going. We were aware that there may accure problems in the beginning.

After the decision Klockars started creating the course by using his "old" material. It took him only 1,5 days to create it, he transfered his material to the computer. And now he also could use all the useful links on the internet. The religions book was of course in use all the time. He could create everything in advance, all the tasks and resources, and gradually publish them to the students. During the lessons he had now time to help the students, correct their tasks and give everyone personal feedback via the platform.

In Iniö, 100 km from Pargas, principal Svarvar-Hult acted as supervisor for the pupils there, but it was Klockars who was the teacher in charge. The course needed only one teacher.

6. Highlights /other interesting things not direct linked

Students that usually are loud and noisy in the classroom where now more quiet and worked very concentrated with their tasks. And students that you usually don't "see" in a normal classroom situation could now electronically bring out the best of them. Even if the pupils worked individually they now helped each other to find answers, recommended links and so on.

Religion is not such a popular subject in school and students in forms 7-9 find school more or less boring, but using computers in the education the interest for religion rise and many said afterwards that it was the best subject in school. And everyone wanted to do this again.

Unfortunately we noticed first afterwards that the parents where not as much involved as we thought. The information to them had not been good enough. If the parents had been involved from the beginning they could have supported and helped their children more. In this case almost none of the pupils had worked with their tasks at home and many of them hadn't even told their parents about it. The pupils said that they couldn't work at home because their parents wouldn't allow them to install FirstClass on their home computer. This was because of lack of information from school.

7. Numbers

We administrate our own FirstClass server. And the licences for using the platform, are owned by Region Åboland. We have today 300 regular user licenses and 34 remote user licences. We bought them in 2005 and the cost for them was 10 570€. We pay yearly for support 6339,12€.

7. Recommendations (steps and process you have to be aware of)

- Involve teachers who are intrested in new things and are willing to develop their IT skills.
- Start projects by involving small settled groups.
- Make sure that the pupils have enough knowledge about, and also understand, the project. Also check their IT knowledge.
- Make sure that also the parents are involved, they need information.
- Even if you plan everything in detail, always have plan B in mind.
- Never underestimate the need of sufficient IT support, problems will certainly accure but with support they are solved as soon as possible.
- Be open to different IT solutions, don't get fixed to just known programs.

9. Attachements: flow charts, grafics, pictures, tables





Bernt

Klockars, principal and teacher in Sarlinska school, Pargas

Pupils from Sarlinska in Pargas visiting Iniö school in september. For many of the pupils this was their first visit to Iniö.

