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**DIGITAL MEDIA IN BLENDED COACHING**

**Interaction and distance presence in adult education**

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>In this study were studied the dimensions and advantages of the digital media in the adult education and distance presence. The point of view and limiting of the study was coaching and the significance of face-to-face interaction in it. The study was partly based on my three earlier reports about the digital media in the direction of teaching training. Main question of the three reports was would the digital media supply some new dimensions and benefits for teaching training guidance? It was seen, in the reports, as the biggest disadvantage that the distance presence is not a genuine situation because there is lack of (quick) interactivity. The need for a flexible two-way communication channel rose forth in the answers.</p> <p>In this study it was proved that blended coaching would be a suitable method in the adult education. This study showed that blended coaching responds to the hectic needs of the present business and working life. It allows flexibility to the contemporary adult studying and it answers to the economical function. In the study many free and suitable e-tools (mediums) for coaching were analyzed and found. The e-tools (mediums) are a resource that has been too little utilised yet. The study showed that only the digital generation brings varied and flexible use of e-tools into coaching more widely. With the help of the study solutions for the improvement of the face-to-face interaction of the teacher practice guidance were also obtained.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Opinnäytetyössä tutkittiin mitä etuja ja uusia ulottuvuuksia digitaalinen media tuo etäopiskeluun aikuiskoulutuksessa. Tämä tutkimus pohjautuu kolmeen aikaisempaan raporttiin digitaalisen median soveltuvuudesta opetusharjoittelun seuraamisessa. Suurimmaksi epäkohdaksi todettiin joustavan, kahdenkeskisen vuorovaikutuksen puute ohjaustilanteessa opettajan ja opiskelijan välillä. Virtuaalinen malli täydentää, mutta ei kokonaan korvaa kahdenkeskistä vuorovaikutusta opetusharjoittelun ohjauksessa. Joustavia, kaksisuuntaisia vuorovaikutteisia menetelmiä jäätettiin kaipaamaan digitaalisessa sovelluksessa.</p> <p>Tämä tutkimus käsitteli kasvokkaisen vuorovaikutuksen merkitystä aikuisopiskelussa sekä sitä, mitä etuja erilaisten menetelmien samanaikainen käyttö tuo aikuisopiskelun ohjaukseen ja vuorovaikutukseen. Raportissa esiteltiin ja analysoitiin myös virtuaaliseen valmennukseen sopivia työkaluja ja niiden sovellusalueita. Samalla saatiin tietoa myös vuorovaikutteisempien ratkaisujen kehittämiseen opetusharjoittelun seuraamisessa.</p> <p>Tämä raportti osoitti että erilaisten, sekoitettujen, menetelmien ja/tai työkalujen samanaikainen käyttö vastaa parhaiten aikuiskoulutuksen tarpeisiin. Menetelmä vastaa myös työelämän, myös globaaleihin, tarpeisiin sekä on taloudellinen. Tutkimuksessa löydettiin, kuvattiin ja analysoitiin useita ilmaisia ja sopivia työkaluja. Mahdollisuuksia olisi tehokkaampaan virtuaalisten työkalujen käyttöön. Tutkimus osoitti, että vasta niin sanottu digitaalinen sukupolvi tuo näiden menetelmien saumattoman ja joustavan käytön aikuiskoulutuksen valmennukseen ja etäoppimiseen. Tämä tutkimus antoi ratkaisuja ja vinkkejä myös opetusharjoittelun seuraamiseen digitaalisesti.</p>	
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# 1 Background

During the last few years digital media through the internet has created new dimensions for distance learning as well as for distance coaching and mentoring. E-learning spaces, such as Optima and Moodle, have been several years in active use in the universities. Via e-learning spaces teachers can share materials and students in turn can return tasks more easily. Recently, the use of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Wikis and Facebook, in teaching has been a target of pedagogical research. Also the video and video conversations such as Skype and Connect Pro have been increasingly used in learning and student guidance.

## ***1.1 Reports of Digital Media in Teaching Training Guidance***

This report is partly based on my three earlier reports about the digital media in the direction of teaching training. Employer of the three-report series was the Teacher Education College of Jyväskylä Applied Sciences<sup>1</sup>. The main question of the reports was, would digital media supply some new dimensions and benefits for teaching training guidance? The context was partly economical. The study dealt with the suitability of the video for the following of the teaching training. The first report dealt with the technological solutions, the second dealt with the user experience and usability and the third processed the pedagogical suitability of the technological method. Research was qualitative, method which was used was empiric and research strategy was phenomenological.

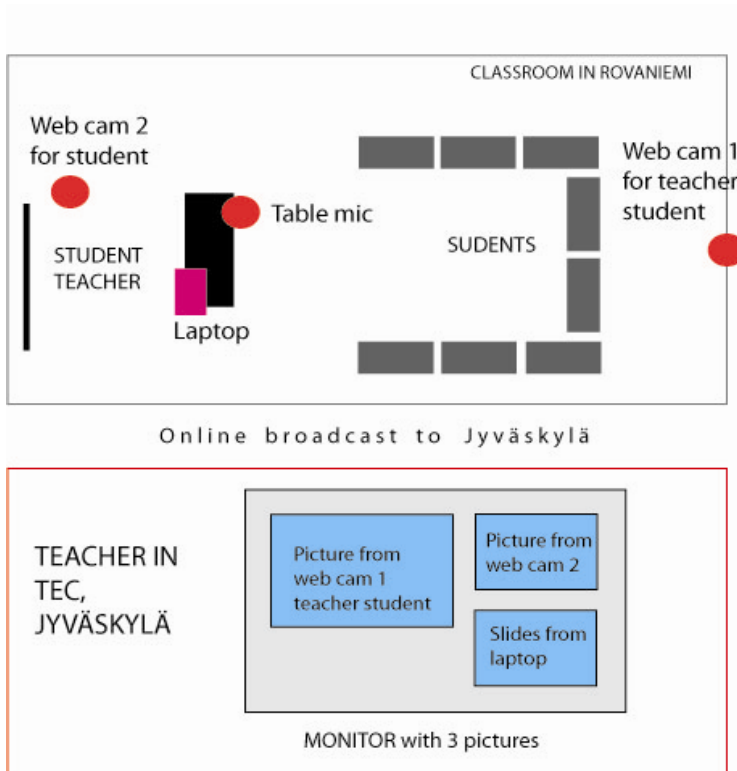
The college educates adults, who are mostly at work and live in other localities. The college has also international student groups and an accessible technological operation mode would be a useful and economical help for evaluating their teaching practicum

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<sup>1</sup> The Vocational Teacher Education College educates vocational teachers in Finland. Education offers basics of pedagogy for the different branches of the professionals.

occasions. For example, if the student teacher has a teaching practice occasion in Rovaniemi, the teacher has to travel there and a one-way trip from Jyväskylä to Rovaniemi takes one day. Because the college's resources are increasingly decreasing, they wanted to research whether digital media could offer some practical and economical operation models for the problem.

Noteworthy is that the reflection object was not any graphical interface; instead, it was a video broadcasting (online) system and its environment. There are two systems: installing the system in the classroom and the system of watching the broadcast in the studio room of the college. Figure 1 describes the system in practice. Broadcasting elements include two web cameras, a microphone and a laptop. The cameras and the microphone are connected to the laptop with USB-cables and the laptop is connected to the computer of the studio of the college. The broadcast is looked at from the monitor in the college.



(Figure 1). Operation model. The graph describes an example from the digital teaching training situation.

### **1.1.1 Technological and Economical Results**

The first report clarified the technological limits and possibilities and tried to find answers to the question how does digital media fit in the teaching practice? The assumption and starting point of the project was that all needed elements such as web cameras and microphones already exist. The technical question was, do these media elements work together, so that the distance teaching-practice direction is possible? Whether the solution is high-quality enough will be solved and evaluated. The report did not explain the technique of the media elements profoundly; instead, the paper explained the aptitude of the technique for teaching practice. Also the economical function of the method was a target of the study. The results were obtained by questionnaire, dialog and informal interviews.

Most important was to see that the system can be built technically and the use of this technique will save time and travelling and money. The biggest risk is the reliability of data connections. The system requires technical resources, but when the wholeness is estimated, it saves money and teacher's time in the long run. Further questions are such as how to communicate online and interactively with the student?

### **1.1.2 User Experience and Usability**

The second report's goal was to study and evaluate the usability and user experience of the model. How easily can the users, teachers and teacher students, work with technological devices, how do they perceive a new technological environment, how well is it understood and how do they feel about it? The assumption was that it is not self-evident to perceive the system.

This study gave some answers about the usability and user experience. Most important was to see, that even with light technological experience it was easy to perceive and

understand the system, even if the testers saw the system for the first time. The report gave information about the importance of user experience of digital learning environments. The user does not want to spend time learning how to use the system and usability would bring joy and pleasure to its users (Roto, 2007, p. 4). Otherwise they do not want to use the system or the interface.

### **1.1.3 Pedagogical Suitability**

The third study surveyed pedagogical suitability, usefulness and acceptability. It was concluded that with the help of the virtual model the teaching training evaluation can become more complete, but it does not replace the present face-to-face method totally. Virtual model supports the wholeness and brings new dimensions to teaching training guidance. For example, recording/saving the sessions and returning to them later was seen as a useful method.

It was seen as the biggest disadvantage that it is not a genuine situation, there is lack of interactivity and sensing the atmosphere of the class is not well conveyed.

The need for a two-way communicational channel rose forth in the answers. It is especially worth additional examination to study the use of some quick-message alternatives such as chat or Twitter for the connections between the teacher and teacher student.

## **2 Research**

As my study proved, distance learning saves time, money and travelling costs and it is “a more green way” to operate. But wordless communication, such as expressions, feelings and body language, are still important elements in learning, teaching training guidance



as well as in coaching. Doing things just virtually is not the best possible trend. One significant disadvantage emerged, namely that “direct human contact has disappeared from the learning process” (Maquire, 2007, p. 1). For example in my study many teachers claimed that distance or remote presence will never replace totally face-to-face interaction. Have we given too little attention to face-to-face communication on conditions of economy (Begley, 2004, p. 4) and in the name of effectiveness? Fortunately, many organizations have returned to the face-to-face model after frustrated experiences with e-learning, as Maquire (2007, p. 2) writes. Moore (1983, p. 11) has written that it is still pedagogically important to have face-to-face interaction with learners, and my report<sup>2</sup> also showed the significance of the same.

My study showed that internet-based e-learning tools can complement the wholeness. Virtual tools together with face-to-face interaction will bring more creative, efficient, multidimensional and flexible dimensions to learning. In the blended method the strengths of both e-learning and face-to-face interaction are used. Hence the blended model will be “the most predominant” teaching model in the future as Watson (2008, p. 3) maintained.

Non-verbal communication is still an important element in learning. For example, referring to my study<sup>3</sup>, expressions were difficult to sense through the videoed situation. Also the videoed situation requires the support of more flexible, interactive and instant two-way communication media (element). Hence this report examines the advantages of the blended model of coaching and the significance of face-to-face interaction in it. The context of the study is adult education. For example vocational teacher education involves mostly distance learning and a lot of distance coaching, mentoring and supervising is needed there. It is also exclusively adult education. This study examines what kinds of new elements e-tools and social media services would bring to that context.

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<sup>2</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

<sup>3</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

Coaching combines such interactive elements as observing, listening, questioning and nonverbal communication. The primary goals of coaching are partly different than in mentoring, supervising or teaching training guidance, but the used e-tools and technologies are the same. With the help of the blended and distance coaching, useful hints for the distance mentoring and supervising and teaching training guidance are also obtained.

I see that the social media tools are close to what e.g. Koskimaa (2005, p. 104) aptly claims, namely that in interaction between human beings it is necessary to support the natural communication methods (gestures, expressions, speech etc.) seamlessly with the technical tools. Koskimaa (2005, p. 104) gives an example of this: it means e.g. presenting and revising the video fragment easily during a chat discussion. In my study it was precisely these interactive elements that were missing. Furthermore, the user experience must be positive when the tools of the digital media are used.

## ***2.1 Contemporary Challenges***

In many places the education system is old-fashioned, considering ‘the net generation’ which has grown up in the digital environment (Tapscott, 2010). One-way communication in teaching does not deliver contemporary digital economy anymore, as Tapscott (2010, p. 122) argues. Furthermore, I see that coaching and virtual coaching are going to increase as a teaching method. Teacher or adult educator will act as a coach, mentor or supervisor rather than “traditional” teacher. Hence teachers are no longer just “omniscient” transferors of the information. The adult education involves more and more self-directing studying. But this studying needs support and guidance also in the future.

Adult education must answer to the contemporary education challenges, inter alia to the challenges of lifelong learning. Global economy and the digital age require continuously new abilities (Tapscott, 2010, p. 127). The ability to learn new things promptly is in the key position in the business world. There is not time to send workers for retraining to the school anymore. Tapscott (2010, p. 127) continues that what you know no longer counts; instead, it is more important what you can learn, because jobs and things are changing so fast. Hence the distance guidance is needed more and more in learning. Also the students of the net generation want to use technology and e-tools in learning, because they can use many tools flexibly at the same time (Tapscott, 2010 and Lehtonen, 2010). Today people know a lot, but they need support in the studying and learning process. Instead of (traditional) lecturing, teachers should interact with the students and help them discover themselves, and schools should adjust to each student's individual way of learning (Tapscott, p. 122). This concerns the flexible e-tools, and I see that coaching will be a good "tool" (or method) in the guidance of studying. As Tapscott (2010) writes, mass lectures may save resources, but they do not deliver for challenges of the digital economy or for the net generation mind.

## ***2.2 Earlier Studies***

About the blended learning and e-learning have been made many books and plenty of scientific researches, and also about the nonverbal communication a lot of studies and books were found. About coaching many books and studies were found too, but instead surprisingly little research has been done on the effectiveness of virtual or blended coaching (Bloom p. 3 2009). Hence it was difficult to find profound scientific research results about this matter.

## **2.3 Methods**

The results of this theoretical study were obtained from my three reports<sup>4</sup>, from theoretical articles and writings, earlier studies, informal interviews of two coaches and by drawing conclusions. In this study were analyzed the potential e-tools and social media services which could be suitable for blended coaching. Research was qualitative and research strategies were hermeneutical and partly phenomenological. This study hardly produces new ideas professionally to the coaching or blended coaching context, but at least it supports my own vocational development. The study may give some suggestions and/or ideas to adult educators about the suitability of the e-tools in the distance coaching, teaching training guidance and/or distance learning.

## **2.3 Definitions**

In this chapter are defined some concepts which are related to the blended coaching and distance presence in the adult education context.

**Distance Learning** according to Moore (1996, p. 1) means simply that “students and teachers are separated by distance and sometimes by time. They are not together in same place at the same time”. Distance learning means also, as Aarenieni-Jokipelto (2006, p. 13) has defined, that “students do not need to be in attendance at lectures. Former methods of distance education were correspondence courses and television programmes. Distance learning can be a combination of different media or it can be combined with traditional lectures”. Distance education system includes at least the elements of content, design, communication, interaction, learner environment and management (Moore, 1996, p 1).

**E-learning (Online learning)** “covers all forms of ICT, information communication technologies (Clarke, 2004, p. 1-3), like the internet and videoconferencing, to facilitate

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<sup>4</sup> Digital media in teaching training guidance.

learning”. E-learning is an educational system (Catherall, 2005, p. 3) where technology is used for serving the learning process and education (Aaarreniemi-Jokipelto, 2006, p. 13). Stockley (2003) has defined e-learning saying that “it involves the use of a computer or electronic device (e.g. a mobile phone) in some way to provide training, educational or learning material”. Most of the e-learning technologies are internet based and delivered by a web browser (Catherall, 2007, p. 2). Internet based e-learning environments include e.g. e-mail, Skype, Connect Pro, different e-learning platforms such as Moodle and all social media solutions like Facebook, Twitter, Wikis and Second Life. “E-learning facilitates and enhances both formal and informal learning and knowledge sharing at any time, at any place, and at any pace, and it is a current and important form of distance learning” (Maquire, 2007, p. 19).

**Social media** is a process, in which the individuals and the communities build common significances with the help of the contents, the communities and the network technologies (Kalliala, 2009, p. 18). Social media tools include e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Second Life and Wiki.

**Blend:** In the coaching and learning context blend means that several ingredients are mixed together to provide the desired results (Maquire, 2007, p. 20). Virtual ICT-based and physical “face to face” environments are used together, so that they supplement each other. This will offer the best possible learning results (Preceel, 2009, p. 1).

Sanakirja.org (2011) defines the word blend meaning that it is of two or more things.

**Blended learning** is also called hybrid learning (Stockley, 2011) or it is referred to as both blended and hybrid learning (Watson, 2008, p. 3). Blended learning is a combination of the best elements of online and face-to-face learning and it is used both in virtual and physical resources of teaching (Watson, 2008, p. 4). Maquire defines blended learning that it refers to the optimal mix of different delivery technologies or modes of face-to-face and e-learning and distance learning models in the same course (Maquire, 2007, p. 20).

**Usability and user experience (UI) of interface** is an important element in the success of blended coaching and learning. A clear definition by Spool (2007) is that usability

answers the question, “Can the user accomplish their goal?” and user experience answers the question, “Did the user have as delightful an experience as possible?” Owen, R.J. (2010) explains that “the user experience refers to the way a user perceives his or her interaction with a system and it often focuses more on the psychological impact of interacting with the system than pure usability does”. It can be concluded that usability is more a product attribute whereas user experience is more personal, a subjective feeling (Roto, 2007, pp. 1-2).

**Supervising/supervisor** is the person who has the vision and mission and is also the director. A supervisor clarifies the goals and objectives and usually calls together meetings, sets agendas and directs the meetings. In contrast, the coach’s role is not usually to set the vision, goals or agenda. The coached person does this. The coach is called to come and help the coachee / someone else (Slater, 2009). So it is the supervisor who usually holds the purse strings. The supervisor is an experienced coach/mentor and he has a good working knowledge of the supervision process (Bluckert, 2003-2007).

**Mentoring/Mentor** can be understood so that the mentor comes inside the organization and is an expert who supports the novice. Role of the mentor is to be a guide and/or supporter (Carnell, 2009, p. 2). A mentor transforms direct information into knowledge, work or thinking to the novice (Clutterbuck, 1999, p. 3). Coach needs abilities of mentoring. Mentoring is a significant part of coaching (Brounstein, 2000, p. 3).

**Dialogue** means the thinking and studying which is based on people's equal participation some matter or operation together (Aarnio & Enqvist, 2003), where they alternately express something (Bohm, 1996). Two or more participants can take part in the dialogue (Bohm, 1996). Bohm (1996) has defined that dialogue can be specified as “the free flow of significances between people”.

### 3 Coaching

In this chapter the nature of coaching is shortly examined. First it deals with coaching generally and then brings up the significance of nonverbal, face-to-face communication. When we understand better the significance of nonverbal communication, the challenges and possibilities of the virtual and distance coaching can be better perceived.

Types of coaching, according to Lawson (2009, p. 32), are team coaching, performance coaching, skills coaching, career coaching, business coaching, executive coaching and distance coaching. Coaching will help in every business aspect such as personal careers, transitions and change, mergers and start-ups, entrepreneurship and leadership and groups and teams (Renton, 2009, p. 8). For example in adult education students are coming from different branches of life, their motivation varies and they have individual needs. Furthermore their working environments and working cultures are different. In my opinion, coaching meets this challenge very well. Coaching is a tool of personal development. The teacher however cannot be an expert of every branch or subject as Lawson (2009, p. 29) wrote. I agree with Bloom (2005, p. 4) who writes that it is enough, if the coach (teacher) has the ability to see the contexts rather than supplying the content. Coaching is a tool which directs towards the right goal (Bloom, 2005, p. 1) and/or solution of the problem. A coach does not usually give ready solutions (Lawson, 2009, p. 29). Hence I see that for example in the project guidance coaching would be a good tool. In the future the student projects are done increasingly in another locality and also in virtual team groups and therefore distance coaching tools and methods will be needed. Also I believe that inter alia in the student's vocational development or in entrepreneurship studies coaching will be a suitable tool.

Even though the coach is an instructive person (Lawson, 2009, p. 14), it is not teaching or tutoring or mentoring. Giving feedback is an important skill of the coach (Bloom, 2005, p. 25). I think that in many cases this is more important to the student than just

mass lectures. I do not mean that lectures are no longer needed. I propose that the blended model should be used more, also in universities.

Many times coaching involves more emotional support, encouragement and maintaining the focus (Bloom, 2005. p. 9). For example in the projects or master's thesis programs this kind of guidance is needed. The coach can support the students also in other ways: highlight strengths, point out flaws, push into giving a little more than one's best effort, and hold them accountable for the growth of success.

Rossett (2005) defines that *“coaching is purposeful interactions between a coach and the person or persons being coached”*.

### **3.2 Non-Verbal Communication in Coaching**

*“Communication is the art of passing information and ideas from one person to another so that they can be received in the manner they were meant”* (Lawson, 2009, p. 66).

Communication is both verbal and non-verbal (Lawson, 2009, p. 66). About 93% of our communication is nonverbal and has nothing to do with verbal communication, and the nonverbal "channels" seem to be more powerful than what people actually say (Goman, 2008). As Mehrabian wrote, only 7% of the meaning of messages is communicated through the words, 38% is communicated by vocal intonation and 55% is expressed through gestures, posture, facial expressions and other physical cues (Bloom, 2005, p. 37).

*“You communicate non verbally when you gesture, smile or frown, widen your eyes, move your chair closer to someone, wear jewellery, touch someone, or raise your vocal volume—and when someone receives these signals”* (DeVito, 2002).



Usually, as Bloom (2005, p. 34) writes, we think that communication is transferring and receiving information and data which can be done easily digitally, but “humans are not however as the hard disk. “All communication is filtered through our listening and it is shaped by our biases, experiences, intentions and interpretations” Bloom (2005, p. 34). In face- to-face communication we use also our eyes and ears to receive and understand complete messages, and it is important to see visual signals as well when we are listening to the words (Lawson, 2009, p. 77).

Coaching is grounded in the basic skills of observing, listening and asking questions (Bloom, 33). The main skill of the coach is presenting questions and especially leading questions, so that the coached person (learner) will understand and solve the problem “himself” (Lawson, 2009, p. 194). A good listener also sees what is not said (Lawson, 2009, p. 154). Emphatic listening skill is important when trying to understand the message from the perspective of the speaker (Lawson, 2009, p. 157) and evaluative listening where it is necessary to identify with the other person’s strengths and weaknesses (Lawson, 2009, p. 156).

Many times it is more important how the information is said than what is said (Bloom, 2005, p. 27). Vocal inflections (monotone, tense) or speech (rapid, calm, hesitant) will give additional clues, as well as the body position (relaxed or closed) (Bloom, 2005, p. 37). In face-to-face communication people can observe expressions, hear the tone of voice and listen to the words (Clarke, 2004, p. 3). As the experienced coaches mentioned through the wordless communication feelings can be sensed better (Hämäläinen, T & Kivistö, R. Personal interview 2011). Many times things can be read between the lines and it can be seen if the coached person is sure about the matter (Hämäläinen, T. Personal interview, 2011). For example the expressions can later emerge to one’s mind (Kivistö, R. Personal interview, 2011). The coach can sense the coached person’s mood, for example, if there is something weighing on his mind or he

does not dare to bring it out. I think these are among the reasons why face-to-face communication is still needed.

Observing, listening and questioning are multidimensional processes in themselves, thus coaching is a complex art and it is sometimes difficult to say what is right and what is wrong, Bloom (2009, p. 54). In my opinion, coaching is a sensitive process. A coach needs humane and empathic abilities but he must however be able to be objective enough.

Cultural understanding is an important aspect in the teaching training guidance<sup>5</sup> as well as in coaching. I believe that if the teacher (coach) understands well the background (needs and cultural environment) of the learner (coached), then the teacher is able to guide the learner better in the right direction.

These above-mentioned things are creating big challenges to the virtual coaching and technology. How can the wholeness be observed via the net? For example, how to listen to the tones of voice or sense the physical culture? Asking questions by words may be easiest virtually but the coach cannot see how the coached person reacts to the question or for example if the coached person is unsure when he/she is answering a question. For example, in the report of Rosset (2005) an experienced coach was interviewed who believed that coaching by email leads to misunderstandings. Just as in the text communication a lot of emotion is missed, so it is important to “hear” what is said (Rosset, 2005, p. 4). Also my report showed this challenge clearly. For example, people’s expressions and wordless communication were not seen properly through the videoed situation<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

<sup>6</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

## 4 Technology

Technological development is a crucial factor in the development of virtual non-verbal communication. I see that the reliability of the technique<sup>7</sup>, the user friendly interfaces<sup>8</sup> and data security are playing a big role in the virtual model of coaching.

The functionality of the technology is today reliable. Very infrequently it has been complained that the technology, for example data connections, did not work. Particularly, if just the data based on text files or picture files have been sent or loaded. Instead, the videos, as my study<sup>9</sup> showed, may still cause some technological challenges. Mostly it has been a question of the data transfer rate. The quick development of the data transfer rates and decrease in the prices will bring, in the future, the high quality online video and voice accessible to everybody.

Data protection is an important element as well as storage and backups and retrieval of the data (Hussain, 2010, p. 53-54). All important measures must be stored in a place where they are safe from the hackers (Hussain, 2010, p. 54). This may cause challenges particularly if the relation between the coach and the coached person is temporary, and/or various kinds of e-tools, such as e-mail, chat and Facebook are used. How can the information be kept secret from the outsiders? Can the information be destroyed afterwards? Secondly, for example Facebook conversations stay in the Facebook and the email conversations stay in the emails. Does the student/coachee want this kind of scattered data when reusing of information is challenging? The problem is how to collect the information into the same place. This may cause stress and at least unsure feelings about the data security.

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<sup>7</sup> Report 1. Technological solutions.

<sup>8</sup> Report 2. User interface and usability.

<sup>9</sup> Report 1. Technological solutions.

## ***4.1 User Experience and Usability***

As my reports showed<sup>10</sup>, the crucial element today is usability and user experience of the interface. Ardito (2005) has written about the significance of usability of the technology claiming that “for the people who need to use any interactive software system usability is the most important aspect of the system”. I would like to argue that it can be compared to good service. If the service works, the customers, in other words the users, are satisfied. If the service does not work, or isn’t usable, the customer reacts negatively to it. So the usability is a necessary condition for survival (Nielsen, 2003). For example, if a web site or a system is difficult to use, people leave. Weak usability of an application has been many times a significant reason why a (busy) user has forsaken the system, even if the application’s content would have been beneficial. If the first reaction has been unsatisfactory, the risk not to reuse the system is high. The users do not want to spend time learning how to use the software or system, they want rather to learn (or use) the contents. Furthermore, I think, bad usability is not economical anymore and/or not worth it.

The coach should understand the essential point that the student wants more preferably to go directly to the matter than to spend his (valuable) time in order to learn to operate the user interface or the e-tool. The technical skills of the adult students (users) still vary greatly, as my report stated<sup>11</sup>. Also the motivation to learn to use the e-tools and different kinds of mediums may vary. Hence attention must be paid also to this. Especially, I think that among older students learning to use the technology may be difficult or even impossible, or at least it will cause a lot of stress.

When evaluating user experience the tasks, the context and the goals should be known, as Petrie (2009, p. 3) says. All this contributes to an initial understanding of what the system should do for users and how it should be designed (Petrie, 2009). To these

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<sup>10</sup> Report 2. User interface and usability.

<sup>11</sup> Report 2. User interface and usability.

problems more attention was paid in my first report<sup>12</sup>. One essential aspect in my opinion is that the target groups must be known when designing technological solutions. When measuring and designing usability, it is important to know something about the end users' background, because they decide when the product is easy to use (Dumas, 1999, p. 5). For example, it would be useful to know their different characteristics, technical experience and physical and cognitive abilities (Ardito, 2005, p. 2). Therefore the system should be very easy to perceive, easy to use and/or install.

## 5 E- Coaching

Observing, listening, questioning, giving feedback and building relationships - how could these things work equally well virtually without misunderstandings? Digital communication is mostly text-based written communication conducted by email, chat, Facebook or by text messages. How about the lack of nonverbal communication, body language and expressions? Some would say that a real contact will not be created if things are not discussed face to face. This chapter forages the reasons for the development of virtual coaching.

**E-coaching** is the process for connecting distance coaches to clients through technology and distance communication methods (Marino, 2004). Boyce (2010, p. 143) writes that e-coaching supports just in time the performance requirement, when the coach and the coached person/s are geographically separated.

**Distance coaching** instead describes coaching received at a distance, via telephone, email, instant messaging or video conferencing (Lawson, 2009, p. 35). It can be applied to an individual or a group. I would add social media and mobile phones to the list. It can be compared to Moore's (1983) definition about the

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<sup>12</sup> Report n:o 1. Technological solutions.

theory of transactional distance that there is “a distance between learner (coachee) and teacher (coach) which is geographical as well as educational and psychological” and it is a distance in the relationship of the two partners in the educational enterprise (Moore, 1983, p. 155).

The digital world is changing the needs and the nature of coaching but also the way to operate, as Rosset (2005) writes. Learning is more and more virtualized. Rosset (2005) writes, ‘Coaching is becoming more integrated into work and life through the laptop and the mobile systems.’ Virtual coaching cannot be directly compared to face-to-face coaching. Thus I think that these matters must be looked at in a new way, and the new way requires new tricks.

## ***5.1 Synchronous and asynchronous communication***

There are two general strategies for communicating over a physical circuit. It is either asynchronous or synchronous (InetDaemon).

**Synchronous communication** is time-dependent or it enables real-time communication, where people take part online at the same time in different places (Ashley, 2003). Synchronous tools are, among others, interactive video, chat, video conferencing or audio conferencing tools (Clarke, 2004. p. 199). Audio conferencing tools are e.g. Connect Pro and Skype, which are the most useful tools for discussions or dialogue. Face-to-face coaching involves synchronous interaction between the coach and coached person (Crisp Coaching & Consultancy).

**Asynchronous communication** is time-independent communication, where people can read and send messages in different ways anytime and anyplace (Clarke, 2004. p. 197). Asynchronous tools are for example e-mail, taped or digital video recordings, discussion boards, blogs and streaming video and audio

(Ashley, 2003). For example e-coaches can work asynchronously with clients who may be across the world (Marino, 2004).

## **5.2 E-tools**

In this chapter are shortly examined some e-tools which would be useful in a virtual and blended coaching situation. Also the usability of the tools is shortly evaluated. The criterion was that the tools must be easily available and their use cheap or/and free. There exist several e-tools for several purposes. Some tools and methods are incompatible with certain subjects and results, as Lawson (2009, p. 18) writes, and the coach/teacher must perceive and understand this. For example, in distance coaching it is the common decision of teacher and learner what method is used in certain situations. The method by which the message is sent must be suitable for both the message and the person receiving it (Lawson, 2009, p. 18). In my study<sup>13</sup> I suggested that if for example some learner/student has difficulties using the e-tools, instructions or a manual should be provided or an education session arranged beforehand. The web-based user interfaces are ready applications. Thus the coach cannot impact the usability of these applications.

### **5.2.1 Connect Pro**

Adobe Connect Pro software is used for web audio conferencing, e-learning and web seminars (Adobe Systems, 2011). It can be used as a group tool for example in distance coaching. In Connect Pro the opportunity to the chat<sup>14</sup> communication exists. Connect Pro is also a useful tool for image sharing and exchanging files. According to my own experience Connect Pro is relatively easy to learn to use. It is noteworthy that in the group discussions getting the whole group to the same discussion required sometimes a

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<sup>13</sup> Report 1. Technological solutions.

<sup>14</sup> Chat is text-based synchronous quick communication.

technical support. There was often something wrong in the settings of the student's computer. Most of the problems are with voice.

Connect Pro is quite an expensive tool. Sometimes technical remote support is needed, especially if the coached person has poor computer skills. I would see that Connect Pro is a versatile and flexible tool for the needs of distance coaching.

### **5.2.2 Skype**

Skype is a free quick media, audio conference tool, and unlike Connect Pro, it is suitable only for bilateral calls. It is free and easily available. In a telephone conversation the tone of voice helps to understand better the coached person (Kalliala, 2009, p. 81) and also the expressions on people's faces can be seen (as in the Connect Pro calls). In Skype the opportunity to the chat communication is possible at the same time. Furthermore, the (traditional) telephone or mobile phone calls cost more, so that in this respect the Skype calls are more functional.

Experiences of the use of Skype by the experienced worklife coach:

“If the devices (such as web cameras and microphones) are of high quality and the connections are quick enough, coaching with Skype can compare with the contact teaching. If there are no disturbing outside factors, quite an intensive education moment will be achieved” (Hämäläinen, 2011, email conversation).

### **5.2.3 E-mail**

I believe that E-mail is the most generally used media in the adult education. By the email the sending of pictures and links succeeds easily. But the email requires from the coached person written know-how (Hussain, 2010, p. 55) and good articulating abilities. For example, if a coached person is not involved with the computer every day, the



articulacy challenges can emerge and/or the writing may be regarded as too slow a process. In that case, I would argue, the danger of misunderstandings and frustration increases. Clutterbuck (2010, p. 25) states, that from emails have been found more negative than positive cues. The coach can get deeper emotional information about the email texts by asking. The coach can ask for example, 'how do you feel today?' or 'Do you think it is good or bad?' etc. It is worth consideration for what kind of communication the email is used, because among other things in the email conversation the dialogue is slow. Today other tools exist to enable the quick communication, like Twitter or Facebook. Furthermore, I see it as a big shortcoming that the information can be scattered in different e-mail messages. Then returning to the old e-mail or putting together all the information from different e-mails can seem frustrating.

#### **5.2.4 Telephone Calls**

Telephone calling has been used for a long time in coaching, and as Hussain (2010, p. 56) writes, people are comfortable with using it. Although some nonverbal cues are missing in the telephone conversations, things like silences, speed of speech and tonal variations can impart messages (Hussain, 2010, p. 56). For example, experience brings know-how to hear and intuition teaches to understand voice tone (Clutterbuck, 2010, p. 18). The exchange of thoughts is as quick and spontaneous as it is in face-to-face conversations. But as Chapman (2004-2009) writes, without the visual channel the meaning can only be a maximum of 45% complete. An advantage of telephone calls is that some people like to walk when thinking and talking on the phone, whereas this may be disturbing in face-to-face discussions (Clutterbuck, 2010, p. 18). Instead, for example in Skype calls one must sit still so far.

### **5.2.5 Facebook**

Facebook is a community service in which a closed community can be founded (Kalliala, 2009, p. 134). Facebook is a free social media service.

The entrepreneurship coach's experiences about the Facebook coaching are:

”Fluency and ease of use are the clear advantages of Facebook. The interaction is free and spontaneous. The coached persons ask questions and bring out their own things more sensitively than in the discussion board of learning bases. In Facebook it is ventured to be more open to the criticism. It is used interactively and communally for the filling of people’s own needs.

On the other hand all people do not want to use Facebook, because they feel that it is “froth”. Furthermore, the control of the settings takes time and requires learning, so that discussions will be inside the group. Teaching and explaining this to everyone separately may double the working hours of coach and coachee” (Kivistö, 2011, email conversation).

I see Facebook as a very promising tool in coaching. Especially in the group coaching it would be a useful tool.

### **5.2.6 Twitter**

Twitter is an instant message channel and a micro-blog service in which fewer than 146-word messages can be sent by computer or on the mobile phone (Kalliala, 2009, p. 146). The coach and the coachee can communicate in their own Twitter group, so that others cannot read the discussions. In Twitter can be sent among other things links to the videos, to the web pages and to the text documents. With the help of Twitter people

can get ideas, exchange opinions and/or ask questions quickly. Twitter can for example replace short email discussions.

Twitter can be also used worldwide. In that case everyone can see the messages and be, in principle, “coach”. When opinions are exchanged with unknown people I would see the excessive openness and publicity as a risk too. People should be careful what is told about the company and what information is shared there. It is also worth noting as Joyella (2009) writes that writings, tweets, may never disappear from the Twitter or blogs. I would also consider the missing of human vicinity as a disadvantage. Furthermore, the reliability of the information must be estimated by oneself.

However, I would recommend the study possibilities of Twitter as a bilateral or group coaching relationships tool. On the other hand, from the point of view of students, it would be worth while to think also what positive things the worldwide “coaching” may bring?

### **5.2.7 Google Docs**

By Google Docs the users can edit and comment on the same text file simultaneously. The big advantage of the Google Docs is that during the process the text file needs not to be sent back and forth by e-mail. As a final result a ready output that has been processed together by the coach and the coached person is obtained (Kalliala, p. 136).

I myself have been developing a text-based communication service platform where coach and coached person updated the same document. The principle was the same as in Google Docs. It proved an effective channel. The experiences of the coach and coached person were positive. This model would be an effective way to operate and to process things. The big obstacle and a barrier to the use of the service has been the discomfort of learning the new way of doing things.

How would this work between the teacher and the student or students? This method will replace at least back-and-forth sent emails. Especially for the adult students learning to use the Google Docs may be slow and take time.

### **5.2.8 E-learning spaces**

Optima and Moodle are the most commonly used e-learning platforms in education. Moodle is a free open-source e-learning platform and Optima a commercial product. The e-learning environments are suited best for text-based interaction. Inside the platforms exists a discussion board providing possibilities to participate in the chat discussions. I see that the e-learning platforms are suited best for the distribution of materials, text, pictures and links. If a coach has many documents, the use of e-learning platform could then be justified. It can function as a material bank, where the information, text documents, (recorded) videos and pictures have been gathered to the same place. The e-learning platform is a secure place too. I think there could be more potential than has been shown.

As a big disadvantage of Moodle I see a weak and scrappy interface. This, I would argue, has been a restricting factor in the use of Moodle. Instead, Optima is easier to use, but it would also be more user friendly.

### **5.2.9 Wiki**

Wiki is a web site that allows anyone, who has access to it, freely to create and edit its content: make changes, contributions or corrections (The Free Dictionary, 2011). I see Wiki as a good processing tool. By Wiki the same document can be updated

simultaneously as in Google docs. The information will stay thus in the same place in one website. In the same Wiki site separate thematic entities can be created.

A contemporary problem of Wiki, as I see it, is that the use of the method has not been learned widely. It is a new way to operate and to process the matters. Wiki is an interactive and open communication tool however.

### **5.2.10 Video and videoconference**

The assumption is that the wordless communication, such as faces, expressions and gestures and speech seen spoken will be conveyed through the video. But for example, as my reports<sup>15</sup> showed, according to the teachers/trainers it was argued that the video will never replace face-to-face interaction totally. Also it was found that in the videoed situation it is difficult to sense the (cultural) atmosphere. Also the functionality of the technology aroused fear among both teachers and students. Nevertheless, the videoed situation complements the wholeness. Especially the saving element was seen as a great opportunity. For example it could be an instrument of reflection when the recorded situations can be watched later. As a disadvantage interactive and quick communication elements were missing.

I agree with Rosset (2005, p. 4) who claims that the effective coaching requires at least an initial videoconference or face-to-face meeting. But for example the technical know-how has been a restricting factor in some of the schools. Furthermore, in view of the adult education, all the students do not necessarily have quick enough data connections so far.

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<sup>15</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

### **5.2.11 Mobile Phone / Mobile Technology**

The mobile phone, mobile technology, will be the tool which is used multi-dimensionally in the future also in the learning and the guidance. Anssi Vanjoki<sup>16</sup> has envisaged that mobile phone will replace the computer and the depth dimension becomes an ordinary part of the mobile operating system (Lehtonen, 2010, p. 8). In mobile phones there are cameras, it is connected to the internet, and flexible interactive e-tools such as Twitter, Facebook, email and chat can be used by it. Vanjoki predicts that to us a virtual sense develops through the new mobile technology and we will have 'a virtual double' (Lehtonen, 2010, p. 9). As a future advantage of the mobile phones I see the development of the user friendly touch-screens.

### **5.3 Blended Coaching Strategies**

**Blended coaching** is the combination of face-to-face coaching and on-line coaching (Sophia Learning Environment, 2011). Blended can also be understood so that two or more e-tools will be used without face-to-face contact.

Many coaches and many clients are finding that the distant coaching or e-coaching can work as well as face-to-face coaching with a wide range of applications as Berg (2009) writes. I find that the use of different combinations of e-tools brings advantages and new dimensions to learning and education. In the blended model the teacher must have a variety of coaching strategies which are suitable for the context and the learner's needs (Bloom, 2005, p. 8). Hence the teacher must have so-called virtual didactic skills and at least a little understanding of the technological possibilities. For example, the depth of conversation, how frequent and flexible interaction is desired and how much time is wanted to invest (Clutterbuck, p.10) all affect the choice of methods.

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<sup>16</sup> Former Nokia mobile solutions head and a vision brim.

Furthermore attention must be paid to what devices the learner can use and/or wants to operate.

Clutterbuck (2010, p. 231) gives an example that the combined use of Skype (or telephone) discussions and emails provided a richness that can sometimes be missing from face to face discussions: via email the clients agree and confirm the goals, identify issues to be covered in the telephone or Skype sessions and ask questions between telephone or Skype sessions (Clutterbuck 2010, p. 230). Instead of this, the coach can forward diagnostic questionnaires and other material to the coachee by email.

Clutterbuck (2010) gives a good example of the advantage of the blended model. Virtual tools are making the communication possible between the face-to-face meetings and this makes the relationships between coach and coachee deeper (Clutterbuck, 2010, p. xi).

Social media brings new dimensions for coaching. I agree with Salavuo who believes that the potential of the social media has not yet been totally understood (Salavuo, 2011). According to Salavuo (2011) social media “inspires at best, it spurs, it motivates, it is asking, it argues, it searches, it divides, it echoes, it directs”. I think this is true, just as the experiment of Facebook coaching showed in this report. Using social media tools, such as Twitter may be a road to the surprising two-way communication, bringing insights also to the adult education.

#### ***5.4 Challenges of expressions***

E-tools are mostly based on written communication. I believe that Clutterbuck (2010, p. 13) brings up an essential point in the use of technology, namely people’s experience of expressing themselves to bring colour and tone to the language e.g. in email discussion. For example ICT-persons or literary people can express themselves well via the net (Clutterbuck, p. 13). How about for example a shoemaker with bad literary skills? Can

he/she express himself by written words? Learning to use emotional language would be an important question of success in virtual coaching. Clutterbuck (2010) writes that in women's e-mail messages there exist more emotional messages/cues than in the e-mail of men. The older the man is the less emotional messages or cues email writing contains (Clutterbuck, 2010, p. 25-26).

I think that another important question is, as Vanjoki envisages, that children and teenagers of age of 10-15 will come to internalise technology quite easily (Lehtonen, J. 2010. p. 8). Can it mean that they can read and express feelings via the net better too, because they have learned to communicate this way virtually from children? Can for example misunderstandings be avoided even though the expressions are not sensed in reality? Thus I believe that in the future expressing feelings by written words is a valuable skill.

## **6 Conclusions**

In this report the advantages of blended coaching in adult education and the significance of face-to-face interaction in it were studied. This study showed that e-tools are a resource that has been too little utilised so far. The reasons for the slowness of the e-development are old habits and the learning of new ways of doing has been regarded as too laborious. In some cases the weak usability has been an obstacle or a drag. The use of social media has been minor so far, but I think that its use will increase considerably. The change takes time, and as Tapscott (2009, p. 127) writes it is difficult to make old ways fast anew. Therefore I believe that only the digital generation will adopt the varied and flexible use of e-tools in coaching more widely.

It was studied what added values e-methods bring, besides saving of costs and time. Blended coaching responds to the hectic needs of the present business and working life,



education can be more global and it is economical. Hence the blended model is socially accepted<sup>17</sup>.

In the study many free and suitable e-tools for coaching were analyzed and found. Use of the e-tools requires practice, good planning and so-called virtual didactical skills and understanding, as well as some technological abilities. Also the students must have technological abilities and motivation to use them. In education there must still be opportunities for face-to-face interaction. How about if learning/coaching occurred just virtually, there could be just a virtual student at other end of the media! An important question is also, is it possible for everybody to use digital devices in the future? The fragmentation of the information is one of the biggest disadvantages of using text-based e-tools. For example, when using chat, Facebook, Twitter and email at the same time, written information stays in the used media.

I see that the social media tools are close to what for example Koskimaa (2004, p. 104) maintains that in the interaction between human beings it is necessary that the technical tools support the natural communication methods seamlessly. This is possible technically, but two-way communication requires the ability to use e-tools flexibly simultaneously. This has been the problem so far, but the net generation will change this challenge, as it has been stated before. Furthermore, it requires an ability to indicate expressions virtually. It also requires good methodicalness to execute distance guidance or coaching, as my report<sup>18</sup> showed.

I see it as a danger that teaching is performed more and more virtually, even though the initial enthusiasm for it has subsided. But the net generation brings the flexible use of media with it and moves towards the virtual distance learning or coaching again. Especially the use of mobile technology will change the practice. I think an essential question is, will only the virtual person then become understood? Does the teacher

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<sup>17</sup> More in Report 3.

<sup>18</sup> Report 3. Pedagogical suitability.

direct just the virtual person or the right person? I see that the human closeness disappears along with digital tools. Human vicinity in education should not be allowed to become totally forgotten. Or would the digital tools provide enough human vicinity and could they respond to the needs of education without face-to-face communication?

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