



Pedagogy of Multinational Realtime Online Trainings (Webinars) for Blended Learnings

Hungarian Educational Research Journal
2016, Vol. 6(3) 107–123
© The Author(s) 2016
<http://herj.lib.unideb.hu>
Debrecen University Press



DOI: 10.14413/HERJ.2016.03.11.

Ruth Schmelzer¹, Matthias Gessler², Irma Kanova³, Ing. Martin Pokorný⁴, Zoltan Kovacs⁵, Gabor Kohlrusz⁶, Katalin Szalaine-Szeili⁷, Annamaria Castellan⁸, Giuliana Corbatta⁹, Mary Gino¹⁰, Jose Pacifico¹¹, Marina Ramos¹², Susana Jesus¹³ & Richard Jack¹⁴

Abstract

The study aimed at the development of a pedagogical approach for multinational online-seminars, embedded in a Blended Learning scenario. To obtain a sound databases for the approach, the teams from six different countries conducted a sequence of transnational realtime online seminars during one year. All sessions were evaluated from the participants and from the trainers. Based on this empirical database they worked out an educational approach for the conduction of webinars. As Zoumenou (Zoumenou et al., 2015, 67) and also Slåtto, T. (Slåtto, T. et al., 2016, p. 98) already stated, articles and academic studies about interactive webinars are quite rare in peer-reviewed journals. Included in an international Blended Learning scenario the webinars turned out to be a highly efficient tool for the transnational cooperative learning and institutional cooperation. Nevertheless, a webinar takes careful planning and content creation to make it an attractive event for the learners and to increase the participant satisfaction.

Keywords: Web Based Instruction, Electronic Learning, Blended Learning, Teaching Methods, Participant Satisfaction, Educational Technology, Computer uses in education, Cooperative Learning

¹ PhD, MbA, manager and trainer, VINC Learning UG, Rastatt, Germany, Email address: Dr.Schmelzer@art-web-design.eu

² manager, teacher and trainer, VINC Learning UG, Rastatt, Germany;

³ PhD, trainer, ALVIT, Ostrava/Czech Republic;

⁴ Manager and trainer, ALVIT, Ostrava/Czech Republic,

⁵ PhD, dean, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Pannonia, Veszprem/Hungary;

⁶ Lecturer, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Pannonia, Veszprem/Hungary;

⁷ Head of marketing, Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Pannonia, Veszprem, Hungary,

⁸ Photographer, trainer, journalist and manager, Acquamarina, Triest/Italy;

⁹ Architect, Teacher and Trainer, Liceo Artistico Polo Valboite, Cortina d'Ampezzo/Italy;

¹⁰ Teacher, Trainer and English translator Acquamarina Associazione Culturale, Cortina d'Ampezzo/Italy;

¹¹ PhD, pedagogical director, ETIC, Lisbon/Portugal;

¹² PhD, lecturer, ETIC, Lisbon/Portugal

¹³ Lecturer, ETIC, Lisbon/ Portugal;

¹⁴ Teacher, manager, CRYSTAL Ltd., United Kingdom.

Recommended citation format: Schmelzer, R. et al. (2016). Pedagogy of Multinational Realtime Online Trainings (Webinars) for Blended Learnings. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 6(3), 107-123, DOI: 10.14413/HERJ.2016.03.11.

Introduction

This paper presents a result of a two-year transnational cooperation of different education providers applying Blended Learning with the integration of webinars. The activity was part of the ERASMUS+ Project "European Blended Learning and HDR-Photography" co-financed by the European Commission. The guiding research questions were as follows:

- Are webinars an efficient tool for transnational Blended Learning?
- Are webinars easy to use?
- Which teaching concepts and online pedagogy could be applied to make a webinar an interesting and efficient learning event?

The goal was to test and to show that transnational webinars are an efficient tool for the internationalisation of the education sector, for cross-sectoral networking of different education providers and for the improvement of learning quality and learning opportunities. In one year the VIR2COPE-Teams conducted a sequence of transnational webinars with online-trainers from six different countries. The object of learning was High Dynamic Range Photography.

Similar to a face-to-face meeting in a brick-and-mortar location, the webinars require a good educational approach adapted to the needs of learners and learning content (Hermann-Ruess, 2012). Universities, education providers for adult and further education as well as companies contributed their skills and vast experiences from different educational sectors to work out a practical pedagogical guide for online-trainers presented in this essay.

The study shall contribute to the increased implementation of Blended Learning and motivate teachers and learners to use webinars. As Forgo Sandor (Forgo, 2013, p.1) already stated there is still a lack of digital relevant device systems in educational institutions and digital skills of teachers.

Definition of Terms

The term "webinar" is composed of the two words "Web" and "Seminar". It is a web-based E-Learning tool, a realtime online seminar where the group meets simultaneously in a virtual classroom through the internet. One or more online-trainers conduct the online-seminar.

Until now there is no consensus on a *definition of Blended Learning. To define it as a combination of traditional presence meetings and e-Learning is the least common denominator.*

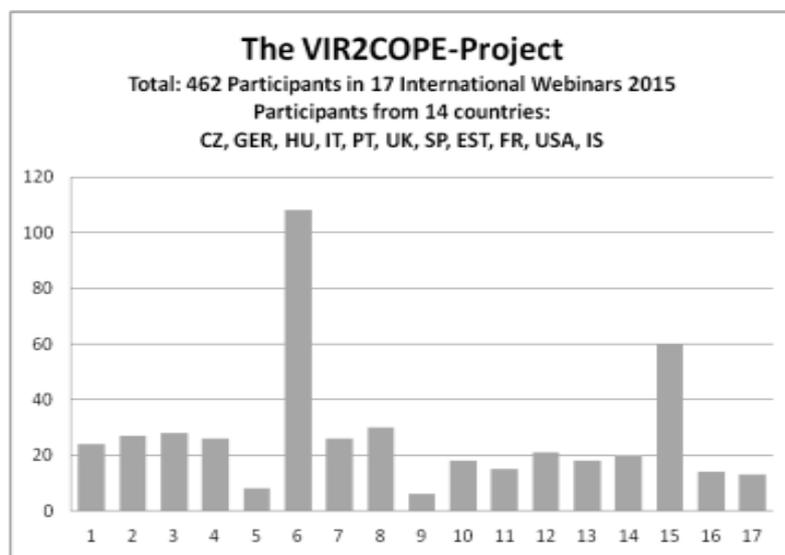
Blended Learning is the combination of direct instruction (traditional presence meetings) with elements of e-Learning, for example complete computer-based learning

environments or web-based tools like webinars, tutorials or online-collaborations. Meanwhile the range of different e-Learning tools is large. Virtual classrooms could be used as an interesting interface to work with other WBT's or CBT's.

Empirical Database

Within the Vir2Cope Project the teams involved practised cooperation as European Blended Learning. In two years four presence meetings and more than 80 webinars were conducted. At the beginning of the project the trainers and teachers of the teams met for a short-term training activity in order to learn and exchange knowledge about online-training and HDR-Photography. In the following year a series of 17 official transnational webinars was launched. Online-trainers from Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and United Kingdom alternated in each webinar. Various international guests such as persons from rural countries, disabled persons, teachers, managers, retired persons, students, pupils and political decisionmakers were invited to attend the webinars. Many of them had never participated in a webinar. Additionally a webinar with 5 deaf persons, a sign language interpreter and an online-trainer was conducted on national level. All sessions were recorded for further evaluation and documentation. The web conferencing software Adobe Connect 9 was used as virtual classroom (Online Meeting Software Review, 2016).

Figure 1: Statistics of the transnational VIR2COPE-Webinars



Finally in 17 webinars 462 attendees from 14 different countries took part. Using a big screen some teams participated as a face-to-face group in the webinar. All participants as well as trainers were invited to evaluate the webinars with an online-questionnaire. The questionnaires have been worked out from the trainers of the project-teams during a presence meeting. Beside oral feedback 116 questionnaires were sent. As a result a large majority affirmed that webinars are user-friendly and that they would be ready to

make use of webinars in their own field of activity, as learners or trainers. The majority of the participants stated, that webinars are a good way to learn.

Since the tools of the virtual classrooms are often similar, the results of the study can be applied to other virtual classrooms (Online Meeting Software Review, 2016).

Methodology and Implementation: Blended Learning

The involvement of experienced teachers and trainers from different European countries and from different educational sectors (university, vocational training, adult education, school) was an important element of the project, providing a very interesting pool of different experiences, skills and educational approaches. The systematic evaluation of the recorded webinars with the online-questionnaires, oral feedback and comments in the chat of the virtual classroom provided empirical data from the trainers and participants. Blended Learning with the inclusion of webinars was tested as a self-experience from the teams by learning together about HDR Photography.

The successful implementation of Blended Learning depends on a composition of methods adapted to the learning content, learning goal, the learners and learning situation. Blended Learning *per se* does not guarantee learning success. Thus the conception of the learning environment for the project was accordingly designed:

At first, the e-learning tools useful for the project were selected. In the present case the learning situation took place in the context of a transnational, cross-sectoral cooperation in a two-year project. The conditions of the persons involved were conceivably different, for example with respect to the knowledge of learning management systems (LMS) and other e-learning tools. The introduction of a high-quality, interactive, computer-based learning program would have been too expensive and inefficient. As an alternative, an extensive Wiki (TikiWiki) was implemented for e-collaboration of the project-teams.

Thus, for the project-cooperation shared learning tools were selected, which are well known like email, chat and login-area of a website. This composition improved the ease of use of e-learning and optimized the cooperation (Kerres, 2016).

The presence meeting of the trainers at the beginning of the project was primarily to introduce the learning topic, to allow peer-to-peer exchange, and to convey the implementation of webinars under the practical guidance of an experienced online-trainer. The instruction-led learning in a brick-and-mortar location provided possibilities for interpersonal, two-way communication, which has an important social function especially for an intercultural group. Team building, interpersonal communication, informal learning and motivation are important strengths of the presence meetings.

Individuals learn in different ways. Knowledge acquisition takes place in many ways, for example through hearing, seeing, talking about and applying. Depending on how people

can best comprehend content, they can be assigned to different types of learners. From this point of view Blended Learning offers many possibilities for the different acquisition of knowledge.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Webinars

Webinars save cost and time, for example travel and logistic cost which could be saved with an online meeting instead of a (transnational) face-to-face meeting. To attend a webinar you only need a computer with internet access. This nearly ubiquitous availability of an education offer removes barriers to participation and supports the integration of disadvantaged groups, for example, physically handicapped and elderly people, people from rural areas or those with domestic responsibilities such as caregivers or parents. Webinars are conducted without a local binding, which also supports the cross-sectoral, international cooperation of education providers. Experts from around the world can be invited as guest lecturers to a presentation or an interview via webinar. Whether in education, private life, policy or other sectors, the scope of an actor increases significantly by using webinars. Spontaneous meetings of large groups from all over the world are possible. Only one participant of a webinar needs to have the software for a virtual classroom.

Since a webinar takes place in real time and all participants meet at the same time in the virtual classroom, and since an online trainer and not an electronic voice leads the meeting, a webinar becomes an interesting social function. All participants can communicate with each other, especially using the chat tool of the virtual classroom. They are able to observe reactions from the other participants. Some people who are reluctant in presence meetings are more integrated and active in webinars. This effect was also mentioned from Zoumenou (Zoumenou et al., 2015, 64) who stated that "shy participants enjoyed the anonymity of the virtual component, prompting more lively discussions". Virtual classrooms are an ideal tool for e-collaboration of groups, for example for research, other working group meetings or even large-scale events. The recording of webinars ensures an excellent documentation as well as the opportunity to watch the records one or more times in order to deepen contents or to make up missed meetings.

The didactic design of a webinar should be adapted to the learner and the learning content. As in a presence meeting an attractive, attention-catching, for example multimedia presentation, does not necessarily bring the expected learning effects. Participants can get bored and leave the webinar unnoticed. The virtual presence of participants can be controlled only partly e.g. through their login in the VC, which is visible for the online-trainer, or by temporarily activating their webcam.

Especially for the learning of practical skills, pure e-Learning is limited. Therefore the method of Blended Learning, where webinars are combined with presence phases, provides an optimal solution. Although a kind of social interaction take place in a VC,

non-verbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact can not or can only scarcely (webcam) be integrated. This has advantages and disadvantages. Disadvantages of nonverbal communication, like the transmission of not willfully transmitted messages or - especially in the context of an intercultural exchange - faulty decoded nonverbal messages, are omitted in webinars whereas elements of para-verbal communication such as voice-level and intonation can be used. Adult learners of a one-year part-time study, where presence meetings were augmented by regular webinars felt that only a few presence meetings are necessary for the group-building process. Once they have got to know each other personally, the webinars become even more of a social function, because the participants can associate the others with their names.

The technical function of webinars entails specific risks, for example the loss of internet connection, slow network speed or technical settings of the computer preventing the trouble-free participation in the webinar. Therefore, brief technical checks before a webinar are essential.

The Qualification of an Online-Trainer

Whereas a learner could participate in a webinar without background knowledge, the conduction of a webinar as an online trainer needs at least a short introduction (text or instruction-led) and a little practice. For inexperienced online trainers, it is difficult to present content and at the same time keep an eye on the chat window or using various software applications without major time delays in the webinar. Delays and technical problems during a webinar affect the participants and have significant impact on the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of webinars.

Learning environment: The Virtual Classroom (VC)

The learning environment of a VC provides tools for different presentations, polls, groupworking and the exchange of information. Combined with face-to-face meetings in a brick-and-mortar location all kinds of learning contents can be completely transferred with webinars.

Adapted on the requirements of the learners, the learning environment of VCs can be enlarged enormously by combination with other e-Learning tools (Muller, 2012, pp.75), like complete Learning Management Systems (LMS) as MOODLE or ILIAS or with freeware tools for e-collaboration like WIKIS. VCs are group-software available as chargeable or free software on the market.

The learning environment of a webinar is different from a face-to-face meeting, where the trainer and/or organiser (education provider) of the meeting design the learning environment. There are things like whiteboard, black board, posters, beamer and pins. The room could be white or colourful, dark or bright, equipped with comfortable chairs

or not and so on. The learning environment of a webinar is composed of the graphical user interface of the VC and the learning environment of the participant who is sitting on his or her computer at home or any other location. The learning environment of the VC is designed from both the software company providing the VC and the online-trainer. But the learning environment of each participant must be designed by the participant. This is an important point, because nobody can concentrate when the learning environment provides lots of possibilities to disturb and divert the attention of the participant like other persons or other activities.

The main important Tools of a Virtual Classroom

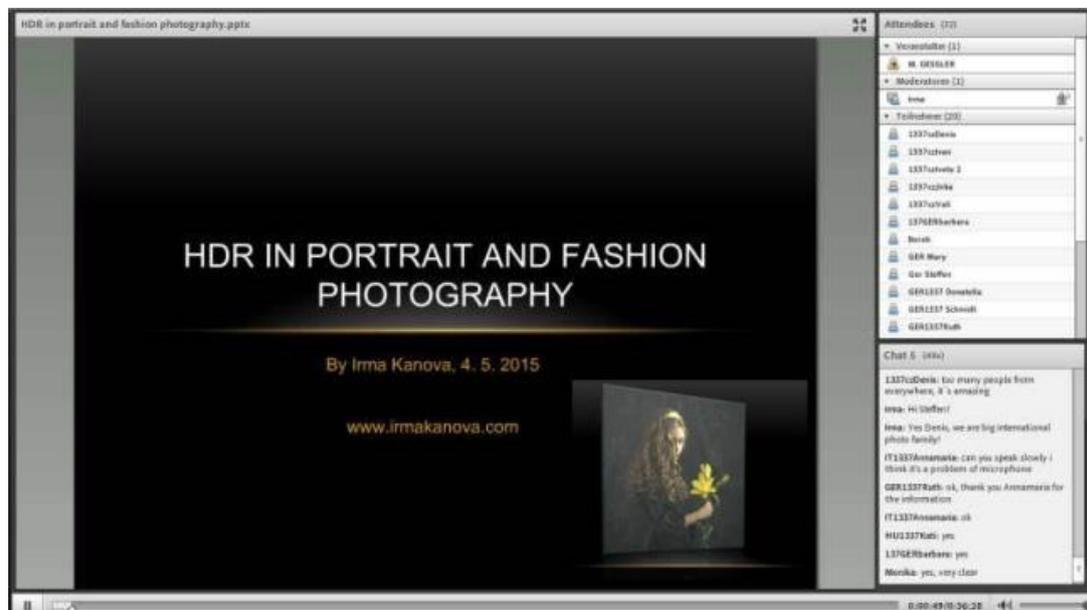
- Share my Screen

This tool enables the online-trainer to share the computer screen with all participants. That means that all applications on his computer can be shown to the participants. Individual file types could also be shared. It is like using a beamer, but instead of projecting the picture on a wall, the participants can watch it on their computers.

- Chat

VCs usually provide an integrated chat tool. It is most important for the communication of the group in the webinar.

Figure 2: Screenshot of the graphical interface of a virtual classroom. The chat tool can be seen in the lower right hand corner



It is already difficult in smaller groups of approximately ten people to give all participants the right to speak (audio function/microphone). The conduction of the webinar would become uncontrolled. It is enough if only one or two persons have an option to speak at the same time. Usually the participants should have no right to speak,

but the trainer can activate this tool temporary for single participants if it is necessary. The chat tool is continuously available for all participants and trainers. It is possible to write something at any time, like questions, answers, information, common brainstorming, feedback. Every comment in the chat is documented, which is a valuable source of information for the trainer and participants. During the webinar the trainer or co-trainer can watch the chat for questions and other comments.

– Whiteboard

Nearly all VCs offer an integrated whiteboard, which provides simple tools to paint and write in a screen window. All participants can get the right to write and paint something on the whiteboard, which enhance the integration of all in the webinar. Short own activities like painting a sign, writing a comment or gathering keywords for a new topic on the whiteboard increases the attention and integration of the participants enormously. For example, a simple activity could be to upload a map on the whiteboard and all participants can mark their location on the map. This could impressively show the catchment area of the webinar. The whiteboard is a creative tool which should be included from time to time in the webinar.

– Polls

Polls are useful for the integration of the participants and exchange of impersonal informations concerning the whole group. The trainer could formulate any question that can be answered by choosing yes or no or where different answers can be clicked.

The trainer could ask for information like: How is your knowledge about a special topic? (high, middle, low, nothing) , which could give valuable information how to proceed in the webinar. Polls need a bit of preparation time. Thus they should be prepared before the webinar starts in order to avoid waiting time for the participants. Polls are ideal for bigger groups of approximately 15 or more persons. Within smaller groups the chat facility is more practical for a poll. Whiteboards as well as polls keep the class engaged.

– Possibility to change the role between host (Online-Trainer), presenter and participant

During the webinar each participant could get the right to be the online-trainer or the presenter. Similiar to a face-to-face meeting, different persons can present contents in a session. Although it needs a bit time for a common computer-user to get acquainted with the complete range of tools of a VC, it is possible to present for example a powerpoint-presentation without training. In the transnational VIR2COPE-webinars the trainer providing the VC software opened the sessions. After it was opened, the role of the presenter was transferred to those who prepared the respective webinar, no matter in which country they were located. If there arose any technical or software problem, the presenter was provided with support from the experienced online-trainer, if necessary.

This aspect of cooperation is important for experts, who could be invited to be the presenter in a webinar, but are not experienced online-trainers.

– Record

The possibility to record webinars allows an excellent documentation opportunity. Participants and trainers can watch the record one or several times as a review, to deepen their knowledge, to analyse the pedagogical setting, to evaluate the webinar or gathering data, for example from polls or texts in the chat.

Duration of a Webinar

The duration of a webinar is based on different parameters, like the content, the participants, the trainer and the teaching method. Usually one hour is accepted by the participants. In the evaluations of the Vir2Cope webinars 94 % of the learners agreed with a duration of one hour. Nevertheless, some online-trainers stated that it is also possible to conduct an interesting webinar with a length of two hours. Several participants felt also that the webinars could last longer. The webinar could be divided into different sequences like short videos, presentations, images, brainstorming with the group, etc.

As in traditional face-to-face meetings, webinars with participants from different backgrounds or cross-cultural groups are also more demanding for teaching. The more homogeneous the group the more adapted the curriculum can be taught. For intercultural groups, an additional amount of time for questions and explanations should be planned.

The Preparation of a Webinar

Generally everything that can be shown with a computer and beamer can also be presented with a VC such as different software applications, contents from the internet, images, texts and videos. The inclusion of a co-speaker for the monitoring of the chat during the webinar is helpful, because the presentation itself requires the full attention of a trainer.

Technical trouble shooting can occur, especially at the beginning of a webinar, such as trouble with audio and/or video, computer settings, lack of installed apps required for the VC, or connectivity of the internet. The online-trainer should be able to give short support. In a sequence of webinars, possible technical problems usually disappear after one or two sessions. The screen of the VC differs slightly between online-trainer and participants. Thus it is helpful for the online-trainer to log onto the classroom with a second computer as participant. It allows the trainer to see how fast the upload of the presentation is and to control the correct display of the webinar. Concerning the technical functionality of webinars, the tolerance of the participants seems lower than in

presence meetings. Therefore it is very important to avoid technical problems (Wong Sze Ki, 2012).

Especially for intercultural groups it could be helpful to provide some learning materials for the preparation of the webinar. In the Vir2Cope project the participants received an e-book about HDR-photography in English language some weeks before the start. English language was also the language in which the webinars were conducted. This way the linguistic and content-related preparation was supported.

To avoid boring waiting time of the participants open all software programs and internet pages which will be used during the webinar before the session starts. It is much faster hide the opened programmes or sites in the taskbar and open them with a click on the respective icon in the taskbar when needed.

To find everything quickly, load images, videos and documents you want to show in special folders on your desktop. The file size of videos could be a problem for a fluent streaming during the webinar. It is necessary to reduce the size of the videos as much as possible and to upload them on the server of the VC provider before the webinar in order to enable also the audio.

Intercultural Webinars

How can webinars be influenced by cultural differences? How can an online-trainer deal with intercultural differences in a webinar? What kind of intercultural differences should be kept in mind when the trainer conducts the webinar? These are questions that arise in the context of a webinar with a multinational group.

It is quite difficult for an online-trainer to discover intercultural differences in a group of webinar-participants, much more difficult than in a presence meeting, where during personal contact, information is transferred through nonverbal communication. A precise differentiation of behaviour between personal affinities and cultural backgrounds is also problematic during the webinar.

The online-trainer can try to avoid cultural induced misunderstandings by being careful with sensitive themes such as the perception of traditions, clothing, gender-specific behavior patterns and gender roles. It is helpful to frequently ask for feedback or opinions during the webinar. The trainer could remind the participants repeatedly on the multinationality of the group, which can increase the tolerance towards difference and ideally can be seen as an opportunity to take advantage of cultural diversity. A presence meeting at the start of the cooperation is very helpful to learn about the cultural differences within the group.

On the other side in a virtual meeting many sensitive cultural areas as the different distance behavior of cultures disappear. The non-verbal communication in webinars is

considerably reduced, which reduces the unintended cause of misunderstandings due to different cultural backgrounds.

The language barrier in an intercultural group must be considered mandatory. In a multinational webinar the language of instruction is usually English. Most of the participants are inevitably non-English native speakers. It is important to make sure that the content that was communicated, was understood. Increased integration of imagery such as pictures, videos, sketches and diagrams, can support the understanding of content.

An interpreter could act as co-speaker in the webinar. During the Vir2Cope-Project a webinar with deaf people was conducted. The online-trainer, the sign language interpreter and the participants were all using their webcams and were able to follow the webinar by using sign language and partly the chat tool.

An educational approach for Webinars. The Didactical Setting.

Similar to face-to-face meetings there are different parameters in a webinar important for the educational approach like the size of the group. In a webinar with 15-20 participants, a direct communication with single persons can take place. For group sizes above 20 participants it becomes more difficult. Teacher-centred teaching in a webinar means that the participants are hardly or not at all involved in the presentation. Nevertheless, even in bigger groups, it is possible to activate the participants of a webinar for example with the chat facility, whiteboard or with polls. These tools increase the attention and motivation of the participants enormously.

To switch on the webcams in a webinar could be an attractive thing. All participants of the webinar can see each other. It is more personal and is giving the impression of a real face-to-face meeting. Several fields of non-verbal communication are available like clothes, gestures and facial expressions. Unfortunately technical problems such as weak transfer rates or limited computer display space to show all participants do not usually allow such sessions. It could be helpful if at least the online trainer welcomes the participants more personally when he switches on his webcam at the beginning of the webinar. The effect: The visible online-trainer conveys a real synchronous meeting. All participants feel a social presence and a kind of "virtual team spirit" can be generated. The feeling of a common meeting makes the participants alert and open for the following presentation. Additionally a friendly spoken word from the trainer can influence the learning climate even in a webinar. This fact should not be underestimated. In some of the VIR2COPE-webinars it was demonstrated how to generate a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere with a short video at the beginning of the webinar, where the online-trainer welcomed all participants in a friendly manner, standing in front of a garden and demonstrating briefly some tools of his digital camera. Comments like "teachers were very nice and friendly" or "The speaker was very helpful and I like his

way of teaching" proved the possibilities of an online-trainer to influence the learning climate even in a webinar.

A high percentage of communication is taking place through the voice and body language. Often the content-related communication is not as important as non-verbal communication. Also in the VC the conscious use of voice is particularly important.

Intonation, pitch of voice and speech rate influence the subjective evaluation of the webinar enormously. Most of the listeners feel comfortable when the pitch of voice is neutral. Intonation influences the content-related communication. Clear intonation of a speaker transfers self-consciousness, competence, can inspire the audience and attract attention. A monotonous voice appear negative whereas the variation of pitch has a positive effect on content-related communication and interpersonal relationship. In a multinational event intercultural differences must be taken into account. Some languages have more variability in intonation than others.

Intonation can be used to tell something about the intention behind what has been said. Voice can express emotions. You can speak loudly or softly, fast or slow, high or low pitched. Every variation of voice influence the communication. Therefore the conscious use of the voice is one of the most important tools of an online-trainer to design the webinar. The VIR2COPE webinars were conducted by different online trainers. Nearly all of them were non-native speakers. Their use of voice was a crucial point for the positive evaluation of their webinar.

As in a face-to-face-seminar, variation and creativity are also necessary in a webinar to make it an interesting and efficient learning event. To use only one application during the whole webinar could easily turn it into a boring presentation, whereas few changes in the programme increase the attention of the participants and quality of the webinar. Sequences with more ambitious learning contents should alternate with less challenging parts. For example a Powerpoint presentation could be interrupted in order to show something on the internet. Then the trainer turns back to the Powerpoint presentation. The navigation from one tool to the other should not require a long search for certain files. Besides the opportunity for the learners to watch the record of the webinars, the online-trainer could also provide one or more documents for download with important contents supplementary to the webinar. Short video clips during the webinars could substitute practical hands-on demonstrations in face-to-face meetings.

Software applications can be demonstrated very well in a webinar. The trainer can open a software programme and show step by step what can be done with this programme while the participants can follow directly on their computers. In case of questions they can ask in the chat, which is visible all the time in a separate screen window. These sequences could require high concentration from the participants. The duration of such sequences should not be too long or probably divided into single steps. Polls, brainstorming with the chat or other less demanding sequences can be interposed. Small

explanation videos enhance the attention of the participants and could show practical aspects of learning contents.

The integration of other web-based or computer-based e-Learning tools in a VC could be an enrichment for the webinar. There exist internet platforms providing short interactive or game-based learning contents about special subjects, some even for free. Using the tool "Share my screen" the online-trainer can easily include interactive e-Learning contents that match to his/her webinar. While the trainer conducts step by step through the e-Learning programme, the participants of the webinar could contribute with the chat facility or get the right to speak (activating their audio). Even YouTube-films can be used for the webinars. Technical problems with films can sometimes occur with the audio. Using a cable with two pin connectors the trainer forwards the audio signal of the video directly to the connector of the microphone in the computer. The volume control must be carefully set in order to avoid feedback of the sound.

Brainstorming using the chat facility is a useful tool to profit from the synergy of the group and include all learners into the session. However, the inclusion of non-native speakers with the chat depends on their language knowledge. Polls are reduced to a more concrete question, where the participants can easily vote. This tool is suitable for non-native speakers with less language knowledge, because no active language use is required.

Small digressions inspired by questions or remarks from the participants convey the feeling of a group meeting, where all can involve themselves in the debate. These are common activities in a face-to-face learning session. It is also possible to do it in a webinar. The influence of the learners on the course of the webinar is an important point for the integrated learning process.

If the participants are very active in the chat then the supervision of the chat, parallel to the presentation, could be a challenging task for the online-trainer during the webinar. A co-speaker for the supervision of the chat is helpful. He or she can answer questions or catch the trainer's attention for important questions in the chat. It is important that the chat doesn't become more central than the presentation. To answer questions written in the chat not continuously but during a few breaks in the presentation, or at the end of the webinar, is also a possibility to avoid a strong deviation of the planned presentation.

Summary of the comments in the questionnaires

116 questionnaires were filled out from the participants of the webinars. Not all questionnaires were filled out completely. In answer to the question which tool of the VC they like, the chat (98 %), Powerpoint-presentations (95 %), the demonstration of software applications (95%), the integration of videos (80%) and the use of polls (89%) got the highest ratings. Working with images was favored by all.

Several comments were given to the questions asked in the questionnaire. Some exemplary statements are listed as follows:

Do you think webinars are a good way to learn?

- YES. But it is important to be well prepared.

What is your main field of activity? Do you think that realtime-online-seminars could be useful in your field of activity?

- I work with youth . Webinar is a very effective way to reach teens and learn. It is an interesting educational method. There are risks of the Internet.

- I am a high energy physicist. In my field of activity, realtime online seminars are widely used and turn out to be extremely useful.

- I am a sign language interpreter for deaf persons. Webinars are really a great thing, because deaf persons have usually no opportunity to participate with their sign language interpreter.

- I am absolutely convinced that webinars are a good way to learn. It saves time since I can participate from home. No driving and no travel cost.

- My main activity is consultant in [IT-branch]. It would be certainly very helpful to conduct realtime online-seminars in this field. We test currently E-Learning in the company, but unfortunately I have never the chance to ask something :-{ And - for sure - exactly this is the point I like very much in Online-seminars!

- Same like in common face-to-face-meetings: If the seminar is prepared interesting with different pedagogical tools, it is a good way to learn. Depending also on the learning type of a person.

Could you concentrate all the time during the webinar?

- In every webinar Internet access and Audio must be checked. Problems can easily occur.

- Yes, but it is important to keep away things which could distract during the webinar. It is the best to be alone.

Should anything different in the webinar?

- NO. The Online-Trainer prepared a Powerpoint-Presentation for the Webinar. The Powerpoint was very lively and easy to follow because the trainer included a lot of pictures. She spoke clearly and slowly, well adapted to the level of no native speakers.

- NO. The participants have seen a powerpoint as introduction and for the description of the project, the online-trainers used a video. They stopped the videos from time to time in order to explain the steps within the project. Finally photos from the activities and the results of the project were shown. At the end of the webinar the participants had the opportunity to ask questions through the chat. The online-trainers answered the questions with the micro. Altogether a really good webinar!

- Simple subjects, adapted to the level of attendees is always necessary. There should be also time for discussion or questions-answers.

- It would be good to try to include some way of involving participants more - surveys etc during the presentation / interaction such as asking each person to comment in the Chat window

Which sequences or tools of the webinar did you like most?

- The level of the topic was already very high right at the beginning. It was good that in the second part of the webinar there were used a lot of impressive HDR-images in order to show the potential and possibilities. That was relaxing for the participants. The trainer switched between a Powerpoint Presentation and other programmes which increased the attention of the participants.

- If 30 persons are involved, you easily lose the overview of the chat. I did not watch the chat all the time during the webinar. But the chat is important to post questions. The topic about HDR-software was very interesting for me. The final questions at the end of the webinar was good. It was an opportunity for the participants to give a feedback.

- Professional videos of the project combined with a very good powerpoint-presentation were shown. The participants had the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the webinar. It was very good that also the social worker of CRINABEL was available for questions. That has emphasized one of the strengths of the webinars: The participants from all over the world can ask questions to a special person in Lisbon! Great opportunity for interviews!

Any other comments?

- Generally I think the possibility for further education with webinars is a great chance for those, who are living in rural areas like me, who have not so many learning possibilities or have not so many time to visit lectures or coming every week to a presence meeting in the cities.

- Concerning the technical point of view: It is clear that every start of a webinar needs a bit time in order to solve all the technical aspects like audio and video. Usually the webinars are running as a sequence of webinars. In this case the technical problems are declining very quickly and the webinars can run fluently. Technical troubles in the internet can occur. This is not avoidable.

- The short talk between the online-trainer and a participant at the end of the webinar about the importance of the combination of marketing and HDR-Photography emphasized once more the work of the online-trainer and her team.

Conclusions

The survey revealed that Webinars and Blended Learning can be applied for nearly all kinds of learning and communication events in all education sectors. Since webinars are user-friendly they can also be used for less educated people or for schoolclasses. The way in which participants experience a webinar depends on the way the webinar is conducted. For many participants of the international Vir2Cope-webinars it was the first time that they had been involved in a webinar. Nevertheless, only few technical

difficulties occurred and most of them reconfirmed the ease of use of a VC. This result coincides also with a smaller study with 50 engineers (Malik et. al., 2015, 1765).

All persons involved in the Vir2Cope project reconfirmed the advantages and efficiency of webinars and Blended Learning.

Most of the participants could imagine to use webinars as a training tool in their own field of activity and stated that webinars are a good and convenient way to learn.

During the project only a short training for an online-trainer was necessary to start with a simple webinar. This result could motivate all teachers to include webinars in their teaching activities whether they are at university or in the field of further- or adult education. Online seminars for online-trainers could be a useful tool to make more teachers familiar with VCs.

An online-pedagogy for webinars revealed that there are several approaches that should be taken into account for transnational webinars like:

- the attentive use of voice
- the use of different tools of the Virtual Classroom to increase attention of participants
- the alternation of more and less demanding learning sections
- the attentive use of images, video and audio
- how to enhance interactivity in the Virtual Classroom

The possibility of cross-sectoral national and transnational cooperation of education providers is still expandable. Ahrens (Ahrens et al., 2016,15) stated that "In higher education the transition from distance learning to online learning has started". Whereas most of the universities are already working in an international network, other education providers have less or no international cooperations. Blended Learning with the inclusion of webinars could increase such cooperations enormously in a convenient way and contribute efficiently to the European educational area.

Acknowledgments: The study was co-financed by the European Commission in the ERASMUS+ project "European Blended Learning and HDR Photography".



Disclaimer: The content of this essay does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this essay lies entirely with the author(s).

Abbreviations: The following abbreviations are used in this article:

HDR: High Dynamic Range

WBT: Web-based tools

CBT: Computer-based tools

LMS: Learning Management System

References

- Ahrens, A., Zascierinska, J., Ramar, H., Andreeva, N. (2016). Educators' Opinion on Webinars in Higher Education. SOCIETY. INTEGRATION. EDUCATION. Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference May 27th-28th, 2016 (1), 15-27.
- Forgo, S. (2013). New Media, New Media literacy, new methods in education. Educational Media (ICEM), 2013 IEEE 63rd Annual Conference International Council for, Singapore, pp. 1-9. doi: 10.1109/CICEM.2013.6820148
- Hermann-Ruess, A. (2012). Das gute Webinar, 1st ed. Munich, Germany: Addison-Wesley Verlag.
- Kerres, M. (2016). Didaktisches Design und eLearning: Zur didaktischen Transformation von Wissen in mediengestützten Lernangeboten. Retrieved from http://mediendidaktik.uni-due.de/sites/default/files/kerres4miller-final_0_0.pdf
- Malik, M., Umar, I.N., Salbani, A.M., Yahaya, W.A.J.W. (2015). The acceptance of webinars as a training tool among engineers. 7th World Conference on Educational Sciences, (WCES-2015), 05-07 February 2015, Greece. Procedia. Social and Behavioral Sciences, 197 (2015) 1759-1766.
- Muller, D. (2012). Design characteristics of virtual learning environments : a theoretical integration and empirical test of technology acceptance and its success. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer Fachmedien (pp.75-183)
- Online Meeting Software Review (2016, April 11). Retrieved from <https://webconferencing-test.com/de/>
- Slåtto, T., Creelman, A., Schneider, M., Rothler, D. (2016). Effective Interactive Webinars: Methods to facilitate learning in open collaborative learning environments. A toolbox for practitioners/facilitators. EDEN 2016 ANNUAL Conference Re-Imagining Learning Scenarios: EDEN 2016 Annual Conference Budapest, Hungary 14-17 June 2016 BOOK OF ABSTRACTS / [ed] Antonio Moreira Teixeira, Andras Szucs, Ildiko Mazar, Budapest: European Distance and E-Learning Network, 2016, 98-98 p.
- Wong Sze Ki, A. (2012). Relationship between Participation in the Webinar and Students' Behaviours and Engagement in Online Learning. Retrieved from https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/32509/1/Wong_SzeKiAgnes_201206_MA_thesis.pdf
- Zoumenou, V., Sigman-Grant, M., Coleman, G., Malekian, F., Zee, J.M.K., Fountain, B.J., Marsh, A. (2015). Identifying Best Practices for an Interactive Webinar. Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences, 107(2) 62-69