# Pia Hämäläinen

# CONSIDERATIONS ON AUTISM COACHING

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### **Preface**

I have been receiving autism support since my autism diagnosis in 2000, on and off, in different forms. First at a special needs vocational institute studying electronics and IT, then at an autism rehabilitation center. On two occasions, I have received autism coaching at home. Initially, over a period of some years and most recently, over a period of some months.

My theoretical background is based on my academic studies in languages, linguistics, literature, and communication studies at the University of Helsinki and at the University of Minnesota. Hence my need to use theoretical perspectives on autism.

I have a very uneven skills profile which makes getting suitable support/assistance/coaching challenging and makes the coaching process prone to conflicts

I use Dr. Alex Durig's theory of autism and neurodivergence in this context. According to Durig (2005, 23-36), each profile consists of varying degrees and combinations of social and computer thinking. The typical NT person has even amounts of both, while the autistic person has a higher amount of

computer thinking and a lower-than-average amount of social thinking. The autistic profile results in an uneven skills profile. The opposite of the autistic profile would be the profile for someone with a learning disability. Such a profile would consist of an average amount of social thinking but a very low amount of computer thinking. I will upgrade Durig's theory by adding autism-firendly structure to it

While receiving coaching at home, I came up with a mind map depicting what I consider to be the key elements of autism-aware and autism-friendly autism coaching. In the following, I will explain and illustrate the elements of the mind map.

There must be many approaches to autismaware and autism-friendly coaching, but I will offer one approach. I hope my insights will be of some avail

I would like to thank my friends, family and autism professionals for their insights and support. A special thank you goes to Paula Moraine, M.Ed., for always challenging my thinking in constructive ways, and for correcting my grammar. All mistakes are naturally mine

March 2023, Helsinki

Pia Hämäläinen, BA, an autistic theorist

### Introduction

In this essay, I will use Alex Durig's model of neurodiversity as briefly explained in the preface. I will also upgrade Durig's theory by introducing structure that will make it even more autism-friendly.

According to Durig, human perception has two dimensions working together: social thinking and computer thinking. Social thinking has several functions, whereas computer thinking has only one: computing appropriate behavior. (Durig 2005, 38)

Durig defines the five functions of social thinking. Social thinking is used when we define a situation. Or perceive social identities. It is also used when we see the world from the other person's perspective. Finally, social thinking is involved in gauging normalcy as well as deciding on time and timing. (Durig 2005, 38)

Social thinking gives us answers to the questions who-what-where-when-why, whereas computer thinking replies to the question how to behave accordingly. Computer thinking is deductive in nature. (Durig 2005, 52)

The key idea of this essay is that the autistic person is in a state of flow, and diverse structures structure the autistic self and autistic behavior instead of or alongside the functions and structures of the upgraded Durig's definition of social and computer thinking. The mind map shows us one approach to this structuring process.

### The elements of the mind map:

### Autism by Durig, upgraded

- 1. Encounter
- 2. Flow
- 3. Structures
- 4. Thinking
- 5. Coaching
- 6. Feedback

1. The encounter (preview of the repetitive structure of the encounter and of its theme, projects to be managed; finding common ground; language)

### An example:

The structure I used was the following:

- 1. Greetings
- 2. Sharing the events of the past week
- 3. Focusing on a theme sometimes chores, sometimes exchanging and discussing phenomena, events, issues, ideas, and projects. (In general, I see life as projects: there are the health project, the chores project, the relationship project, the reserach project, the writing project etc.)
- 4. Deciding on the theme for the next visit
- 5. Making a short account of the course of the visit for the records of the care team
- 6. Thanking and saying goodbye

It may also be a good idea to try to find common ground that might facilitate

In her essay, Considerations on Autism Coaching, Pia Hämäläinen, an autistic theorist, presents a presumably autism-friendly approach to autism coaching. Hämäläinen uses both her experiences of receiving coaching as well as diverse theories to shed light on the process of autism coaching. The purpose of the mind map Hämäläinen came up with to organize her thinking on the subject is to offer ways to manage autistic processes with diverse structures in more autism-friendly ways.

