

## Research questions answered: Leipzig 2

### Case:

- 1 Learner
- Amount of sessions: 10
- Duration of the sessions: 30-60 min
- Coach and learner didn't know each other before.
- The learner is in her early twenties. She arrived from Eritrea a few months before the coaching and attended German classes at a vocational school. In Eritrea she went to a regular school and worked after that. The learner knows how to read and write, also in Latin alphabet, but has grapheme-phoneme-correspondence problems. It is her main goal to continue the work, she has done in Eritrea.
- German classes in this school were leading to a A2 to B1 Level. The class had new entries permanently, what made teaching for the teacher very difficult. The learner intended to change into another more stable group which is also on a higher level. She attended the coaching on her own will after the teacher told her about the extra support, without being very explicit about the kind of support.

### Collected and analysed data:

- Audio recordings of 9 sessions.
- Transcript of the audio recordings of two of these sessions.
- Two interviews with the coach (after the first five sessions and after the last session).
- Two interviews with the learner (after the first three sessions and after the last session).
- Coach reports of all sessions.

### Section A. Questions concerning the coach

#### 1. Do the coaches deliver the appropriate, relevant coaching behaviour<sup>1</sup> during the pilot?

The coach quickly established a good relationship with the learner. She focused on her language learning behaviour (not on language issues). The coach showed a very positive attitude towards coaching and worked with coaching methodology, using various techniques to support the learner to develop self-confidence and self-awareness. Furthermore, she tried to encourage her to further learning. Frequently used techniques were:

- Asking coaching questions (open questions, dealing with learning and learning conditions, scaled questions)
- Paraphrasing and interpreting (L: "Same thing I want to change class" C:"You don't make progress there".)
- Encouraging the learner to speak, without necessarily asking her to ("You talked about your class last time we met. Tell me more about it.")
- Giving feedback ("Well that is good. Could you imagine to do this more frequently?")

Being in a learning process herself, she was constantly trying to improve her methods and techniques to raise the consciousness of the coachee(s). She focussed on her goals, resources, and the self-believe to make her a “better” learner in general (not only within a specific learning project).

The coach worked mostly non-directive. This worked as long as the learner understood her. Whenever the learner did not understand the questions, the coach changed into a more directive mode. In many situations, the language level of the learner was so low that she could not express herself in the way she wanted to, therefore the coach could not understand what she intended to say. In order to ensure the learner’s comprehension and to encourage the learner to speak about specific aspects, the coach paraphrased and interpreted very often.

**Coach:** Think about the German course here in school. You’ve told me, you are not too happy about it. You want to change the course (1s). Last week you’ve said that.  
**Learner:** Change, okay.  
**Coach:** You want to change into an alternative course. You’ve said that, right?  
**Learner:** Ahh..! Other class?  
**Coach:** Yes, other class. //Yes// /ehm/ What do you dislike in the class at the moment?  
**Learner:** (3s) One this (2s) how what repeating. That is big problem.  
**Coach:** The biggest problem for you is the repetition.  
**Learner:** Yes yes! That my class all say new come new come. All say new come: my name is..., where do you come from?, How old are you? – all this big problem.  
**Coach:** So, the biggest problem is, that you are bored. It is boring for you. You don’t learn anything new.

Obviously comprehension is a major issue in this conversation. It becomes even clearer in the following extract:

**Coach:** In your life now: what works well? What are you able to do? With what are you satisfied?  
**Learner:** /ehm/ I hope now I go for home calling one person for office in my asylum.

As illustrated by the example, in some cases, the learner was not able to give an appropriate answer to the question that had been asked. This can be taken as an evidence, that a basic language level is required for the coaching. Otherwise coach and coachee will spent a large amount of the coaching’s time on trying to express what they want to express and to understand each other, instead of focussing on specific coaching issues. The coach was not always able to steer the attention back to the main question. This might has caused some confusion of the learner as the overall topic became blurry.

## 2. Did the coach-training help the coaches to deliver relevant coach behaviour?

The coach training was helpful, but it was far too short to make the trainees feel self-confident in the forehead of and during the pilots.

### a. Which aspects of the training were particularly helpful/unhelpful and why?

- a briefing on coaching in general to get a broad idea of how coaching can work in practice with the target group
- learning about coaching methodology
- materials used in the training (such as cards with coaching techniques, coaching questions)
- video analysis; more videos, especially videos linked directly to the context, should be developed
- learning about different phases of coaching
- tools for resource-oriented coaching
- what was missing, is a tool box (helpful materials, tools to extend the opportunities of action, like a drawing of a bridge) and regular and permanent supervision

**b. Which elements of the training are most likely to be helpful to prepare coaches for coaching low literate learners in specific settings (i.e. workplace, further education or community settings?)**

- videos and role-plays regarding the context
- the topic “goals” needs more time in the training, as the coach found it very difficult to develop goals with her learners in practice
- clear guideline for conversational techniques (do’s and don’ts)

**3. How did the coaches feel while working with learners in the way the approach required: did they enjoy it?**

Yes, the coach expressed that she enjoyed that both, the learner and the coach, find themselves in a learning process; an interesting investigation. She also enjoyed working closely together with other coaches in the same project, what made it possible to reflect on issues and challenges of the coaching practice.

**Section B. Questions concerning the learner**

**1. Do the learners show increased autonomy in literacy learning?**

Yes. The learner reflected on his goals, resources and learning conditions. In the sessions the coach and the learner were able to make a link between different aspects (a, b and c) of learning:

- a) the overall goals (working as an accountant, finding another job, if working as an accountant is too difficult due to language difficulties, and being independent from interpreters/ being autonomous),
- b) language goals (reading, writing, vocabulary),
- c) learning conditions (learning material, learning at school in an appropriate class/ course, an own flat as a quiet place to learn in, with little distraction from other people).

That involved a wish for a change:

- finding a flat for herself
- buying learning material (exercise books)
- changing classes

- making contact with German speaking people

Her awareness for this connection initiated changes and autonomous language learning. If it has been coaching primarily that has led to this awareness cannot be verified, but it is most likely that it had a share in the process of examining aims, resources and learning conditions and initiating changes.

**a. What behaviour can be taken as evidence for increased autonomy?**

The learner was actively looking for a flat and explored the opportunities of changing the class/course. She made contact with German speaking teachers in her asylum. In the second interview she said, she changed the school. After the second session she bought additional learning material, which she couldn't before due to a lack of financial resources.

**b. Which strategies were attributed to increased autonomy?**

- Metacognitive strategies, such as thinking about learning conditions and identifying learning material (building up awareness)
- Effective use of resources like a strong will to learn (motivation/ volition), reliability, financial resources, independence/ autonomy
- Focus on learning
- Social resources (stable contact to German speaking people)

**2. Where there was increase in autonomy,...**

**a. what role did coaching play?**

We assume that coaching partly supported the learners' awareness and encouraged her to make certain decisions and to take certain steps.

**b. did any literacy learning strategies respond to coaching more? (Which ones, evidence)**

- Metacognitive strategies.

**c. what resources are appropriate to develop autonomous literacy learning behaviour?**

- Cards to note and to structure key words

**3. What did the learners think about coaching as an approach to develop autonomy? (do they think it works, do they like it)**

The learner expressed she wanted to be trained in verbal correspondence and enquired information (about schools, further education). She was therefore provided with a support, she did not really ask for. She was aware of the responsibility of the teacher/ coach and she made the impression that it was not her intention to change this, in order to gain a self-responsibility in terms of learning. On the other hand, she was already a very self-directed learner and used a range of material, learnt regularly and so on. According to the learner, her talking skills improved by answering the questions and she changed her learning behaviour a little. In the interview she made clear that sometimes she even felt stressed through the questions, when she did not know, what to answer and only in the end she got what she longed for: information. She concluded,



Erasmus+



that coaching for her was not too important, but also not bad and that it would have been more helpful, if her language skills would have been better. She did not recognize the progress she made in coaching (awareness).

**4. Did the background of the coaches influence their approach? i.e. if they were teachers**

It was rather the interest for coaching as a methodology to raise awareness as an alternative to teaching, which attracted the coach. Her own experiences as a coachee made her curious for trying out the approach herself.