

Description of pilot case: Leipzig

Case

- 13 learners and 3 coaches took part in this pilot. Learners and coaches worked together in 1 to 1 sessions.
- Each learner was offered to take part in 6 up to 12 sessions maximum. With each learner, the actual number of taken sessions varied.
- The sessions lasted between 45 and 80 minutes.
- The teachers initiated the contact to the German classes, so the coaches could present the program to the whole class. Interested learners were asked to a preparatory meeting, where they received further information about the coaching. The first appointments were made within these meetings. Once a week, the coach and the learner met in the classroom after the last lesson had ended. Depending on the school's capacities, coaches sometimes had to find a different room in the school, particularly in the second half of the pilot. The coaches all worked in different jobs, such as teacher and researcher, and joined the project team for coaching within the pilots.
- Background of the learners:
The learner's language levels varied between A1 and B1 (estimated).
Most of the participants were refugees between 18 and 27 years old, some found themselves to be in the condition of constant danger to be deported back into their country of origin.

Learner 1: Male, Somali, in his early 20s, refugee, 12 years in school in Somalia, is able to read and write in L1 and L2.

Learner 2: Male, Kosovar, in his early 20s, in Germany for 3 years, finished high school in Kosovo, wants to study, came to Germany with his family for health care reasons, speaks Albanian, English and German.

Learner 3: Male, Kurd, 25 years old, refugee from Iraq, 9 months in Germany with his little brother, speaks Arabic, Kurdish, English and some German.

Learner 4: Female, 19/20 years old, Albanian, 12 years of school in Albania, wanted to study but came to Germany instead with her family in the summer of 2015.

Learner 5: Male, Kosovar, 19 years old, finished high school in Kosovo, sufficient reading skills in L1, he came to Germany with his parents and 6 brothers and sisters and is responsible for one of the brothers who is chronically ill.

Learner 6: Male, Afghan, 23 years old, L1 is Dari, went to high school in Afghanistan, 1,5 years in Germany, Martial Arts are important to him, went to several championships with his Afghan team in Europe before.

Learner 7: Male, Syrian refugee, 19/20 years old, in Germany since 1 year and 4 months with his little brother, went to a vocational school (for medical technology) in Syria for 3 years, interested in further education, especially regarding the medical sector.

Learner 8: Female, Albanian, 21 years old, 9 months in Germany (without family), came to Germany for personal reasons, residential status is unsafe.

Learner 9: Male, Somali, around 20 years old, went to school for 11 years, learned how to read and write, but has problems in phoneme-grapheme-correspondence. In the beginning of the coaching, he had lived in Germany for about 16 months.

Learner 10: Male, Afghan refugee, 19 years old, no family in Germany, has lived in Germany for around 2 years, went to school in Iran for 4 years.

Learner 11: Male, Kurd from Syria, in his mid 20s, studied 3 years in Syria, married but came to Germany alone in June 2015.

Learner 12: Male, Syrian, in his early 20s, 9 years of school in Syria, in Germany since February 2015, lives here without family, worked as a car mechanic in Syria.

Learner 13: Male, Somali, 20 years old, went to school for 5 years, worked as salesman on a market in Somalia, came without family to Germany in 9/2014.

Background of coach:

Coach 1 is an experienced teacher for adult education. She attended several trainings for conversational techniques. She has no experience regarding second language learning, but has a degree in health science and logopaedics. During the pilot she attended an extern coach training and used the knowledge she gained there within the pilots.

Coach 2 is a teacher for language (GSL) and literacy courses (L2) and is experienced regarding adult education and teacher training. She studied social pedagogy and German as Foreign Language and has an accredited Mediator.

Coach 3 has studied German as foreign language and worked for different research projects dealing with literacy and second language learning. He gained some experience in non-directive counselling from previous projects.

What was the coach asked to do?

The coaches were asked to support learners in 1 to 1 coaching sessions, following the ALL-SR (non-directive) coaching methodology. They were asked to be sensitive for the learners needs and to develop and use coaching materials, when necessary.

Coach training: The coaches attended a two half-day ALL-SR coach training in Leipzig. Furthermore, they were counseling each other. In addition, the project team in Leipzig provided the coaches with supervision by an experienced language coach.

Pilot site

The pilot took place in a vocational training college for printing and book trade in Leipzig, located near Leipzig's city center. Most of the students are young adults between 16 and 19 years, speaking German. In addition to a full study program for vocational education, the school offers German courses with a vocational component. Courses start on a level of A0 and have a duration of all in all 1200 hours (about 1 school year). Language courses are preparatory and not part of a vocational education and training.

Findings

The first thing that has to be said, is that the coaches in this pilot worked mostly non-directive. Depending on the requirements of the learners (i.e. whenever a learner needed to learn reading strategies to understand text books in school), one of the coaches offered counselling/ strategy training. The used methodology made an important difference:

- Coaching (non-directive, focus on learning) helped learners to reflect on learning and metacognitive strategies. It made the learners recognize their personal resources, goals and helped them to plan their next steps in order to achieve their goals and to connect personal traits with the learning process (transfer resources to the area of language learning). The methodology helped the learners gain self-confidence and to take over responsibility.

- Strategy training (teaching, advising, making suggestions) led to a focus on cognitive strategy acquisition. The coach took the responsibility for successful learning. However, learner autonomy has been supported in terms of handing over a collection of strategies to choose from, in order to make learners less dependent from classes and be more-self-directed.

It would be reasonable to assume that a development of learner autonomy and self-awareness is a mid- or long-term process. A fundamental reason for believing this assumption is that reflection on actual results of the learning process was mentioned late or even after the coaching. For example, one of the learners reflected on the results of coaching and found it very helpful to see that he made progress in planning, even though metacognitive reflections were rare within the sessions. This observation merits closer examination in the future.

A very practical issue in this pilot was a comparably high number of dropouts. We believe that the major issue was a misunderstanding of the coaching concept by the learners. Expectations diverged from the actual support. One way of dealing with it, was to offer an alternative (strategy training) or an adaptation of the approach, as recapitulated by coach 3:

Coaching methodology, in terms of cycling coaching phases in order to support personal development of learners, demands variations. Sometimes learners do not have clear requests or goals, or aren't able to communicate them clearly.

The second way to deal with the discrepancies was to make clear during the first session what learners can expect from coaching. We assume that the learner's demands are closely connected to their learning history. However, further research is needed in this field.

Another important observation in this pilot was that methods and coaching tools (materials) that focused on the learner's resources as well as visualizations appeared to be very helpful for the process of reflection and increasing awareness of the learners.

Finally, learning how to coach needs time and effort as well. Coaches in this pilot found collegial counselling and supervision markedly helpful to reflect on their own learning process. More input was indicated to be useful.

Lessons learned

- Coaching needs to be voluntary for learners. To make a good decision and prevent frustration on both sides, coaches have to communicate clearly, what coaching is. To provide one provisional session is useful, to let the learners experience the approach and to help both, learner and coach to decide if a continuation is productive.
- Coaching is particularly helpful to raise awareness for personal resources, goals and learning behavior. It can build up self-confidence and helps to evoke learner autonomy. The outcome significantly depends on the methodology and emphasis of the coach. However, depending on the learner's expectations, coaching might be an inappropriate solution for their requirements.
- What is quite certain, is that supervision and collegial counselling were very helpful to discuss practical issues and to develop coaching competences.
- The use of materials and visualizations were very helpful to encourage learners to speak and think.