

## Case 1, Research Questions Answered

### Case:

- 4 learners in a group with one coach
- 20 sessions of 1,5 hours
- Coach and learners already knew each other from a language course
- Language level of all learners was under A2. All had (very) limited study skills. Background information learners:
  - Learner 1: 58 years old, Nepalese, 13 years in The Netherlands, no school in Nepal, little reading and writing in Nepalese. Learned to read and write in Dutch up to level A2 as an adult.
  - Learner 2: 62 years old, Turkish, primary school in Turkey, in Netherlands for 40 years, Turkish
  - Learner 3: 43 years old, Eritrese, 4 years of school in Eritrea, reading and writing Tigrinya, 22 years in The Netherlands.
  - Learner 4: 48 years old, Pakistani, for a long time in The Netherlands, reading and writing in Urdu.
- The coaching sessions were offered to the learners after they finished their last, more traditional L2 course – the municipality offers a limited amount of years of education. The learners happily accepted the offer.

### Collected and analysed data:

- Two observations (the first and the 12<sup>th</sup> session), for both an observation report.
- Three interviews with the coach (after three sessions, after 10 sessions and after the 19<sup>th</sup> session).
- Two individual interviews with the learners Learner 1, Learner 3 and Learner 4 (after three sessions) and one with Learner 2 (after three sessions).

### Section A. Questions concerning the coach.

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

In the first session the coach starts with open questions and keep on questioning when asking for learning goals. In other aspects she is more in the lead as a teacher would be (summarizing, writing answers on the whiteboard) and learners are focussed on her. Due to the low language level of the learners one can also doubt whether the coach fully understands what the learners mean to say. The observator later advised her to paraphrase herself and check her understanding of the learners more often.

During the 12th session the coach clearly shows more 'coaching behaviour, leaving the action to the learners, stimulating the learners to help each other and paraphrasing.

Coach hands out the goal cards and lets the learners work with the cards on their own.  
Coach: *Look carefully at the words and you can also talk with each other if you want to choose something. Then you can tell it to each other.*

Learners look at the cards. Learner 1 doesn't know what to do with the cards, Learner 3 helps her and says: *You have to pick one.* Learner 2 helps.

Learner 4 is reading the cards very concentrated. Learner 2 spreads the cards out in front of her. Learner 1 and Learner 3 don't remove the paper clip which holds the cards together and then try to read the cards. Thus they can't see the pictures on the cards in any way. Eventually Learner 3 takes a card out of the pile. Learner 1: *Do I have to write something down?* Learner 2: *No, this is not necessary.* Learner 4 tells Learner 1 what she is going to do (= learning words).

The 'goal, strategies and planning cards' enabled the coach to step back: the learners could use the cards to select their own goals and copy them in their week planning format.

The coach compliments the learners regularly and stimulates them to try out actions or strategies. She accepts the choices of the learners and gives them trust. And in the 12<sup>th</sup> session there was a nice interaction between coach and learners reflecting on the value of a strategy for the learner.

Learner 1: *I'm going to ask people I'm speaking with to speak slowly and then I'll write down new words. I'll try.*

Coach: *Yes, you can always try.*

Coach gives the turn to Learner 4: *When would you like to learn those words ?*

Learner 4 tells that according to her plan she did write the new words on Tuesday and Wednesday and read them again the following days to remember. Coach compliments her and repeats Learner 4 (in correct Dutch).

Learner 4 adds that she used to try to learn new words every day and that she forgot all these words. Her daughter, whom she turned to for help in her autonomous learning actions, then advised her to search for new words for only two days and only after she has learned those words, she should start looking for new words.

Coach then asks Learner 4 if she, now she had followed this new strategy, learned more words or not? Learner 4 replies that she can remember the words, but can't remember how to spell the words. She thinks that she has to write those words down a lot.

Coach repeats and says: *So that is good for you, to write the words down a lot.*

Learner 3: *I don't think reading a lot and not understanding is good. If that happens I stop. I want to read little pieces and understand it.*

Coach summarizes: *So it works for you to read short pieces, to repeat and then again another short piece.*

Nevertheless there was still an element of leadership in the behaviour of the coach in the midst of the pilot, like in:

Coach to Learner 2: *if you want to read faster, how can you do that?*

Learner 2: *I will look for new words in the computer.*

Coach: *And this will help you to read faster?*

Learner 2: *Yes.*

Coach: *Ok. I have also some ideas, but first I want to hear from you.*

The coach regularly used didactical techniques to start up the session, to manage the group of learners or pushing learners to feel responsible and in charge of the action (for instance by leaving the room for a while when the learners look at the goal cards). This is not necessarily undesired behaviour in relation to the learners, but can't be defined as 'coaching'.

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

The coach considered the training as a good, very informative start. But a complete training should consist of more info and exercises. She missed attention for learners with a language level under A2, like her learners.

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

The role plays.

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

More attention to dealing with learners with low (L2) language skills and low study skills.

## 3. How do the coaches feel while working with learners in the way the approach requires: do they enjoy it?

The coach enjoyed it, it was an eye-opener. She now realizes that she tends to help her students very much more and this approach is the extreme opposite. But she also expresses that every now and then during the first 10 sessions she felt the sessions as a waste of time: the learners didn't seem to grasp any idea of autonomous learning and what they were expected to do. Of course that was an unpleasant feeling.

## Section B. Questions concerning the learner

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

Three out of four learners showed little progress in autonomous learning, the fourth learner did not, nor was she available for a last interview. This learner was often ill and had severe concentration problems. (She seemed to come for the warmth of the group more than for learning language or literacy learning, but this hypothesis wasn't checked with her.)

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



Learner 4 expresses that she has become more autonomous due to the sessions. Now she dares to make an appointment with her doctor herself, she dares to go to the doctor on her own and she isn't afraid of telling him when she doesn't understand things. Learner 3 also expresses her increased autonomy, being able to make an appointment by herself. Learner 1 explains that she had to do a lot more by herself that she was used to do in traditional teaching classes: now she had to find texts she wanted to read, reading newspaper to find information she needed, asking friends for help, write down her own words and look for their meaning.

In the observation report one can see that these learners do pick goals and strategies with help of the help cards and that they are able to formulate actions, plan them and reflect on their actions and learning results, although the steps they made look small. Nevertheless they are the first and - in relation to their low study skills – respectable steps towards autonomy .

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

Help cards and learner actions plan.

Learning words by looking for unknown words, finding meaning in a dictionary or asking friends for the meaning, writing words down with meaning and repeatedly memorize the word until 'known' before collecting new words.

Consulting friends and family for learning support: learning strategies, meaning of words.

Speaking up even to 'high status people' like doctors when language isn't understood, in order to receive more comprehensible input and thus learn language by language contact.

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

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

The coaching stimulated them to select their own learning goals and reflect on them. The coach did never helped them selecting goals. The guidance came from the help cards, but there was still a lot to choose from for the learners.

Would the coach have been more experienced as a coach from the start, she might have been able to distract the learners from talking about their health problems more easily by using those health problems to investigate whether they provided the learners with a learning project, a problem in daily life for which an increased language ability could help developing a solution – or what kind of other daily hick up the learners experienced for which they came to language class in the first place.

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

-

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

For these learners with limited language and study skills, the help cards provided a very strong means of communicating the concept of autonomous learning.

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

Learner 1 thinks it works ('In regular courses I tend to forget everything. Now I learn to do it myself') and so does Learner 4.

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

The coach confirms that her teaching background interfered with her coaching role: it was hard work for her, especially in the beginning, to stay in coaching mode. This was also due to the fact that she had been the teacher of those learners in the previous period.

**Lessons learned**

- The approach can help learners developing awareness of themselves as responsible for their own learning, self confidence and autonomous learning actions.
- Language level should probably be at least A2 (especially when learners have limited learning skills).
- The coach needs a learning period for developing coaching skills just as much as learners have to learn to learn autonomously. Moreover, a coach training with only one session of half a day, seems not to be enough in the first place.
- It looks like it would be helpful if the learners have concrete 'problems' in daily life due to limited basis skills (being literacy, numeracy, digital, and/or language skills) as a motivation to learn.
- Coaching from the start, discovering the daily life situation the learner wants to improve and needs language for, might be able to help even low study and languages skilled learners to formulate their learning goal in functional terms more easily that with the assistance of help cards.