

## Case 2, Utrecht, The Netherlands

### Case:

- One learner and one coach
- 12 sessions of about 20 minutes- half an hour
- Coach and learner already knew each other. Coach supports language training to a group of seven second language learners, he does this together with another volunteer teacher.
- Background info of the learner: Man, 36 years old, born in Morocco, moved to the Netherlands (NL) at the age of 11. Went to secondary school in NL. Finished secondary school at a lower level. Worked in a technical job but is unemployed since one and a half year. Level of oral skills near native, although learner experiences problems with speaking. Level of written skills unclear, learner says he has difficulties with writing.
- The coaching sessions were offered to the learner along the normal weekly group sessions. Because there were two volunteers working on this group, one could have a separate moment (15-30 minutes) with an individual learner for a coach conversation.

**Background of coach:** Coach is trained as a teacher in primary schools, did a PhD in Educational Research, fulfilled different management jobs in educational organizations. Is now retired and since his retirement, since four years, he is active as a volunteer in L2-language teaching / coaching<sup>1</sup>. The coach received training in conversation techniques and active listening in the past.

**What was the coach asked to do?** To help the learner work on an individual learning project and develop his autonomous learning skills by using coaching techniques.

**Coach training:** Team members of the pilot organization received a half a day training, with a bit of theory on autonomous learning and role-play to train their coaching skills. Coach 1 could not attend the training but really wished to attend the pilot, he received a shorter version of the training on a later moment, leaving out the role plays. He received the Dutch *Manual for coaches*, in which some theoretical background and tips and tricks for coaching. During the pilot the project team kept in touch with the coach to support him.

**Pilot site:** Organization mainly focusing on language support for L2 learners, doing so by matching volunteers to small groups of learners or individual learners. The coaching took place at the local library, which provided the space for the learning activities.

### Findings:

The coach process

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<sup>1</sup> The organization for which the coach works, uses the word 'coaching' for activities we in our project refer to as teaching.

- Learners on this pilot site were delighted to get the opportunity to work on their individual learning goals. The coach had space and time to support three individual learners, more learners had wished to participate.
- L1 set a literacy related goal first: he wanted to write a letter of objection. He worked on this for the first three sessions. Then a new goal took form in the coach conversations: although the learner is apparently fluent in Dutch, he feels he can't communicate with people, he feels he lacks the skills for small talk. He doesn't know what to say and feels isolated as a result.
- Learner and coach and spent the rest of the sessions on this issue. During an observation, the project team notices that the style of the coach is more directive than we would wish. There is a lot of advising. Also, the coach speaks much more than the coachee (who's learning goal is to become more talkative). The project team gave this as feedback to the coach.
- The learner is very happy about his progress. By forcing himself to chat to people, he finds out that people like talking to him. He searches for web sites with advices on small talk. He prepares several ways of starting a conversation. He observes the chatting of people around him. He discusses his progress with his coach on a weekly basis.
- In one of his attempts to practice his chatting skills, he talks to an old friend. In the end the friend offers him a job as a caretaker in a school. His tasks are both technical and communicative: in order to make students behave properly, he needs to do a lot of chatting. He tells he is praised by his communicative skills by his new boss.

In this case, the coaching happened to be life changing. The learner did seem to have all language skills he needed, but he lacked to confidence to perform. By addressing this issue, he managed to change and as he result, he found a new job after having been unemployed for more than a year.

### Lessons learned

- If we define competence as skills, knowledge and attitudes, this case show the importance of the last. The learner in this case had of lot of skills but lacked the confidence to perform;
- In this case, only a little bit of attention and support made a big difference;
- The learner would not have received this kind of support in his regular language group. Being the one with the highest language level in his group, his role in the group was entirely different;
- Although the coach did not deliver 'perfect', non-directive coaching, the coaching had a huge impact on the learner and the learner reached his goals.