

Case 3, Utrecht, The Netherlands

Case:

- One learner and one coach
- 12 sessions of about 20 minutes to half an hour
- Coach and learner already knew each other. Coach supports language training to a group of seven second language learners; does this together with another volunteer teacher.
- Background info of the learner: Woman, 35 years old, born in Bulgaria, L1 is Turkish. Went to primary school in Bulgaria. Lives in NL since about 5 years. Language level between A1 and A2. Runs together with her husband a small cleaning company. Wishes to communicate with clients properly.
- 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 / coaching¹. The coach received training in conversation techniques and active listening before.

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

Coach training: Team members of the pilot organization received 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 pilots, 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 migrants 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

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

- Learners in this pilot site were delighted to get the opportunity to work on their own learning goals. The coach had space / time to support three individual learners, more learners had wished to participate.
- Learner 2 runs a cleaning company. She formulated as her learning goal: being able to write text messages to clients. Doing this without help, making no language errors. Before, if clients wrote her a message, she waited till the end of the day and asked her 15-year-old son to write and answer.
- Goal setting was not hard for this learner. She was very clear about what she needed and how this would improve her performance and image as a cleaner. She explained how lack of language skills affected her business.
- Learner was very dedicated to her learning project, managed to find time in her busy schedule to work hard on her learning project, also she seemed to know how to study.
- Coach and coachee found out that there was a limited set of situations in which she would have to write or answer a text message (change of date, client runs out of cleaning materials, ...). They prepared a set of examples of messages. Learner wrote a concept. Coach helped her improving the text, providing feedback. Learner memorized the correct version by copying it a number of times.
- Learner reached her goal; by the end of the 12 weeks coaching, she did her written communication with clients by herself. Learner expressed being very happy about this step.
- Learner thought, she could not have learned in a group what she learned in the coaching. Being in the group the learner with the lowest level in Dutch, she found it hard to catch up in the group and did not say much. Also, her learning need was too specific to be addressed in a group.

Lessons learned

- In this case, the personal attention gave the learner the space to express learning wishes that could not be addressed in the group teaching.
- This learner combined limited previous education with well-developed autonomy. She knew what she needed and –receiving some support- she could manage her learning process. Still, she had not developed the skills she felt she needed before she got this support.