

Case 4: Den Haag, The Netherlands

Case:

- One coach, a group of learners; special attention and some one-to-one coaching with two individual learners. Course focusing on language learning (L2-learners with no or a limited amount of previous education).
- Coach plans to pay more attention to learner autonomy during group work. Also, she intends to coach two individual learners while other learners are working teacher independently.
- Coach and learners already know each other. Coach teaches the groups since a few weeks.
- Background info of the learners:
 - The group consists of 16 L2 learners from different countries with low literacy skills and no or limited education in their birth countries. Literacy level in L1 varies from no to limited, literacy level in L2 around A1. Learners learned how to read and write in the Netherlands. Oral skills were around A2. Most learners need the language in daily life, to support their children and to understand the world in which they live. Some hope for jobs or job training. A few learners still have to meet their civic integration obligations.
 - Learner 1: Woman, about 28 years old, born in Iraq, in NL since 6 years, no education in birth country. Did a literacy course in the Netherlands, learned a bit of reading and writing. She has difficulties with speaking, her level is around A1. Learner has had a volunteer language coach¹/ conversation partner, but this coach ended the sessions because of the low language level of the learner. The learner wishes to receive coaching again, but needs the A2 level before the school will mediate in finding a volunteer coach again. Coaching process of coach 1 & learner 1 focuses on supporting the learner in developing her oral skills to an extent that she is entitled to work with a volunteer conversation partner again.
 - Learner 2: Man, 25 years old, from Somalia, born in NL but grew up in Somalia. Did not go to school. Came back to NL at the age of 18. Wishes to go to job training, but has to work on both oral and written skills. Coach decided to offer individual coaching to this learner because he seems motivated and she wants to get a clearer picture of his skills and possibilities.
- The coaching sessions were offered to the learner along the normal weekly group sessions. There have been a limited number of coach conversations with the learner, sometimes only very short in the margin of the class room teaching.

Background of coach: Coach is trained as a drama teacher. She feels that being a drama teacher is more about coaching than about teaching. She sees herself as a coach rather than a teacher.

¹ The word *language coach* or *language partner* in NL usually refers to someone to practice conversation with.

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. To try out to focus on developing learner autonomy while working with a group.

Coach training: Half a day training, with a bit of theory on autonomous learning and role plays to train coaching skills. Coaches in the training 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 her, during a number of face-to-face and telephone conversations.

Pilot site: Community college, providing different kinds of adult education and job related education and training.

Findings:

- In order to promote learner autonomy in class room teaching, Coach 1 increased the amount of group work. She made learners work in teams more often and tried not to answer their questions, but instead coaching them to find an answer with help of resources and other group members. This showed learners that there are other ways of learning than through asking the teacher. The coach felt this worked and it increased learner autonomy.
- The coach addressed the use of learning strategies, related to how to do your homework or how to learn new words, in order to make learners aware of their strategies and may be get inspired by class mates and try out new strategies. She feels, this needs a lot of time and attention. She could not find enough time to make this work.
- Stronger learners seem to benefit more from an approach focusing on autonomy than weaker learners. The stronger ones felt proud when they were capable to able to help others. Weaker learners tend to insist more on receiving the teacher's support.
- Regarding the learners who received individual coaching: In the process with Learner 1 the coach found out that Learner 1 did several things at home to improve her language skills. This convinced the coach of Learner 1 being motivated for language learning and because of this, she moderated between the learner and the staff member in the organization who decides about who can receive additional language coaching by a volunteer, and who can't. The result was that the learner now has a volunteer coach again, according to her wishes. However, this coach also found it hard to communicate with the learner. Coach 1 has shifted her focus and coached the volunteer coach on how to practice conversation with a low level second language speaker.
- Learner 2 focused in the individual coaching on finding out what course he would like to take after his language course, what it needs to be accepted and where exactly he is now, regarding to his language level. Learner 2 has a volunteer coach as well. Coach 1 coached the volunteer coach to support learner 2 in going to information meetings of job training centres, to find out more about where and what he would like to study and what language level and other skills he must develop to be accepted. The result was that learner 2 developed a clearer picture of his future and the steps he would have to take.
- Both learners receiving individual support feel more 'seen' and appreciated. Also, the coach says that her understanding of these learners has increased.

- The coach also noticed changes in her own attitude towards the learners, it is easier to accept behaviors that she might feel to be ineffective. She does not feel irritated now, she recognizes that it might be part of the learning process.

Lessons learned

- Talking to people and ask them what they need, increases mutual understanding and improves the quality of the relationship between coach and coachee or teacher and student;
- There seem to be possibilities to include focus on learner autonomy in class room teaching; more extensive piloting would be good;
- The workload of language teachers in NL seems to be so though, that there is hardly time left for reflection, for individual attention to learners or for experiments. You can't ask people to contribute to a project like this without time for reflection. If we had been fully aware of this, we might have taken different measures regarding the project budget.