

## Case 6: Leeds, United Kingdom

### Case:

- Two coaches (Coach 1 -ESOL teacher and Coach 2- ex-ESOL teacher), four learners (all female, L1s-Arabic, Polish, Portuguese). Two learners per coach though coaching sessions were one to one. Learners' literacy in their first language was of varying levels – one had been a teacher in her country. Coach 1, Learner 1 and Learner 2 knew each other from the language course.
- Learners were around A2 in English at beginning of the programme but with spikey profiles and huge variation within A2.
  - Learner 1: female, Syrian, in her 30s. Married with three school going children. Could read and write in Arabic, had been a teacher in Syria. Learner 1 had been taught English in Syria but said that had not been useful in the UK. Solid A2 in English. She had been living in the UK for 18 months and said she needed to improve her speaking and listening more than her reading and writing. Wants to improve English to communicate better with her children about their school work.
  - Learner 2: female, Kurdish, 2 years in the UK, had been living in Sweden before coming to UK and Iraq before that. Could read and write in Arabic, spoke Kurdish and Arabic as first languages, had been a nurse in Iraq. Could speak and read Swedish, level not known. Solid A2 in English. In her mid to late 40s. Had several children at school, most at primary level.
  - Learner 3: female, first language Portuguese, had lived in the UK for 10 years. Had children, one child at the college nursery while she attended language course and coaching sessions. Had four to five years' schooling in own country. A1 in English, said her first language got in the way of learning English as both languages were similar.
  - Learner 4: female, Polish, in her twenties. Highly literate in Polish and knew some French. A2 in spoken English. Married with two primary school age children.

It was difficult to get information about the background of some learners. This is understandable as their previous experience of being asked for such information could have been for gatekeeping – whether they would be given access to benefits, language courses etc. Learners were happy to talk about their learning experiences.

Coaching took place at a Further Education college. Learner group taught by Coach 1 were offered the sessions in addition to their English lessons. Learners were selected on voluntary basis – they put themselves forward and those likely to see project to conclusion were selected. It was planned as a 12 week coaching programme – 1 session per week. Coaching sessions took place in the break between English and Maths class (Coach 2, Learner 3 and Learner 4), after the English class (Coach 1, Learner 1 and Learner 2). Sessions were one to one.

Coach 1 had 12 sessions with Learner 1, 9 sessions with Learner 2, sessions lasted 15 to 30 minutes. Coach 2 had 11 sessions with Learner 3 and 4 sessions with Learner 4, sessions lasted 12 to 15 minutes.

**Background of coaches:**

Coach 1 was trained to teach English as a foreign and second language. At the time of the pilot she was working as an English as a second language lecturer at a further education college. Coach 1's interest in the ALL-SR project came from experiences of tutorial work & brief staff development on coaching in her current workplace.

Coach 2 was trained and had taught, to teach English as a second language to immigrants. Currently a teacher educator and project team member, Coach 2 was also teaching English for academic purposes (EAP).

**What were coaches asked to do?** To help the learners develop their autonomous learning skills by using the coaching approach developed during this project. Coaches were asked to keep records of sessions using the session record form and audio-record the sessions if they and the learners were happy to do this. By the end of the pilot there were more audio recordings of sessions rather than written session records, especially for Coach 1.

**Coach training:**

Two pre-reading texts to prepare trainees for concepts around autonomous learning and coaching which they would come across in the training and a page about how the project could work in practice.

Three-hour workshop which included

- rationale for project
- theory behind autonomous learning and coaching
- a short video of a coaching session
- exploring coaching and teaching
- role plays to practice and reflect on coaching in small groups
- coach competences/ qualities

For use during the pilot, coaches were given booklets 'Coach Guidance Pack' which had the pre-readings, strategies and language to help with coaching sessions, competency list for autonomous learning and session record forms. Coaches were also provided with a published practical guide for coaching with a companion website of videos of coaching sessions. The project team kept in touch to support the coach during the pilot.

Learners had a similar booklet which gave an overview of the coaching process and pilot as well as session record forms. Learners used session record forms for a couple of sessions.

**Pilot site:** State funded further education college with language, maths, literacy and vocational courses for migrants, refugees and home students who needed extra help with literacy, maths or were doing a vocational course.

**Findings:**

It took learners three to four sessions to grasp the idea that these were not extra language sessions but sessions for them to think about how could they find resources and strategies themselves. Coach 1 was in coaching mode from session one, perhaps due to the practice of completing Individual Learner Plans in the English lessons where learners were required to identify language goals and progress towards these. Coach 2 took a few sessions to develop her questioning skills and to manage the session more productively. Goal setting and persisting with the same goal took longer for Coach 2, Learners 3 and 4. Reasons could be that Coach 2 was still developing her coaching skills. Learner 3 was at a lower level of English and also a less experienced learner compared to Learners 1 and 2. Learners 1, 2 and 3 were all motivated to improve their English and soon took responsibility for their learning through identifying resources and using these to work on their English.

Initially learners felt that responsibility for their learning lay with their teachers and with themselves. The coaching seemed to open a reflective space for the learners where they became aware of resources they could access by themselves and began to self-monitor what they could do in English. They used what they learnt from self-monitoring to practice those areas further and to find and use resources in a more focused way.

Learners reported a sense of responsibility to come up with what they had done each week towards improving their English and showed increased confidence in immersing themselves in English speaking situations. Learners report coaching to have played a role- 'pushed me to ....' 'I wanted to show .....

Analysis of session recordings shows learners speaking more in later sessions. They also identified resources and strategies with less prompting and were able to talk in more detail about resources, how they used these and what difference it made to their English. This suggests increased levels of confidence, awareness and autonomy.

### Lessons learned

- The approach can help learners develop awareness of themselves as learners. This leads to increased self-confidence, taking responsibility for their own learning and increased autonomy in their learning.
- For coaching sessions to work, learners' language needs to be at least A2+ especially for those with less experience of learning.
- Ideally the coaching sessions could take place in a language common to the coach and learner.
- Coaching skills need time and practice to develop
- Similarly, learners need time to build confidence in their autonomous learning skills
- The coach training needs to consist of at least three sessions
  - an initial session to introduce and begin practicing skills and language
  - second session to do further role-plays and receive feedback as well as share early experiences of coaching
  - A third session for trouble shooting/ consolidation

- A coach community, perhaps online, where coaches could talk with each other. One of the most useful things about the training session for the pilot was reported as doing role plays in groups and discussion with other trainees.
- Coaching sessions need to have some continuity – weekly perhaps and be long enough to develop stages of a successful coaching session. Initial sessions need to be at least 15 – 30 minutes especially where the coach and learner are meeting for the first time.
- Add some suggestions for resources and strategies to coach and learner manuals, these could be pictures of resources and simple descriptions of strategies