



The My Plan approach

Peer coaching can help newcomers improve work-related language skills, by fostering their awareness and autonomy as learners



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Target groups:
language-for-work teachers,
second/foreign language teachers,
employers, project coordinators,
integration policymakers

Summary:
My Plan uses a non-directive, peer coaching approach to help newcomers develop host-country language skills, especially in work-related language.

Creator of the model:
Annemarie Nuwenhoud, programme developer and teacher, member of the European Language for Work Network.

Further literature:
A. Nuwenhoud (2018). "The My Plan Approach", available on the website: languageforwork.ecml.at

A. Braddell (2017). Citizens' Curriculum guide to Non-directive coaching. Leicester: L&W Learning and Work Institute



Netherlands

Population (2018): 17.18 million

Population with a migration background (first and second generation): 3.97 million

Unemployment rate for population with non-western migration background (2016): 13.2% (vs. 4.9% for people with native Dutch background)

Source: CBS – Statistics Netherlands

Starting position/challenge

In recent years, with Germany and other countries admitting larger numbers of newcomers, a lot of experimentation has gone into making integration support more flexible, individualised, and sustainable. Against this backdrop, the limitations of traditional approaches to language training have become evident. Classroom teaching alone can hardly do justice to the increasing heterogeneity of newcomers' profiles, needs and aspirations. Moreover, language courses may at times stand in conflict with work-related goals, as employers find it difficult to release staff for classroom learning.

Classic language courses are a crucial pillar of integration support. But they may benefit from being flanked with more individualised approaches—especially ones that can convey to the learner a sense of ownership and responsibility. The activities of daily life, and of work in particular, present myriad informal chances for newcomers to learn the host country language. But not everyone is immediately able to identify and seize these opportunities: people with low levels of formal education, for example, often lack the awareness and tools to take control of their own learning.

Non-directive coaching and "My Plan"

In 2016, Annemarie Nuwenhoud, a programme developer, teacher trainer and teacher in the Netherlands, was hired by a Dutch private language training company to deliver a language course to a group of migrants, who at the time worked as cleaners in the Amsterdam area. Participants had a very basic level of Dutch, and the course, which focussed on language for work-related use, had a relatively short duration of 60 hours over four months. Concerned that this would be too little time for language learners to reach their goals, Annemarie decided to add coaching to the recipe. This is how "My Plan" took off.



My Plan is based on non-directive coaching. Unlike classic teaching or directive coaching, where the teacher/coach structures and controls the learning process, a non-directive coach is mainly a facilitator who helps the learners reformulate their objectives into concrete practical problems to solve, so they are able to draw up a suitable action plan. The centrepiece of non-directive coaching is a conversation structured around a set of questions about the learners' starting position, their desired goals, and the best options to achieve them. Through these conversations, the learners reflect on their strategies and progress, thus gaining awareness and autonomy.

In developing My Plan, Annemarie Nuwenhoud made some important choices to adapt classic non-directive coaching to the needs of low-level language learners—for example, making it less abstract and more pragmatic. This resulted in three sets of questions: on a weekly basis, the coach and the participants would discuss questions about learning goals for the upcoming week and about the progress achieved so far; additionally, once every few months,

questions about long-term plans would guide the conversation. For example, a Nigerian immigrant who was working as a cleaner decided he wanted to become a bus driver; he then recognised that, to get there, the first step was to improve his Dutch language skills in his then-job, and the second step was to study for a driver certificate.

Another key feature of My Plan is peer coaching. Initially, a coach supports the learners, but over time this hierarchy fades, as participants begin to coach each other. This transfer of coaching skills plays on a learning strategy that humans acquire very early in their life, and that cuts across education levels or cultural backgrounds: learning through observation. A key advantage of peer coaching when working with newcomers is that it allows participants to bring their own values, norms, orientations and approaches into the process, thus making coaching (a very Western methodology) more interculturally sensitive and accessible.

My Plan led to an increase of confidence and awareness and fostered a sense of solidarity among participants. Compared to groups that took part in language courses without any coaching element, the

learners developed more realistic ideas of what it takes to learn the language and began to more actively seek out learning opportunities outside the classroom. The interactive character of peer coaching was also beneficial: for the learners, having real conversations about things that mattered to them proved to be a simple yet strikingly effective way to learn the target language.

Summary

For newcomers, learning the language needed for a profession in the host country is crucial for their participation in the labour market—but courses are often not enough. As a complementary element to classroom teaching, My Plan and similar coaching approaches can make learners more aware of when, where and with whom they can practise the language at work. By cultivating autonomy and learning-to-learn skills, non-directive coaching can make newcomers more resilient and adaptive. At the same time, peer coaching helps generate a sense of solidarity and creates a safe space in which learners from different cultural backgrounds can become more confident about their strengths, motivations, and goals.

Three questions for Annemarie Nuwenhoud, developer of My Plan

Linking language learning to newcomers' life goals



What is the main innovation of this approach? What promise does it hold?

My Plan gives teachers and learners an easy-to-follow structure to connect classroom learning to the life goals of the learners, including employment objectives. My learners all have long-term goals. They are motivated and often want to practice more in their own time and at work, but they don't really know how. Giving them time to make a plan for the week helps them to

develop the strategies they need for self-directed learning—for example, listening intently to what more proficient colleagues say at work. The idea is that they can rely on those strategies after the course is over, so the learning continues.

Are there common implementation challenges? If so, what is the best way to overcome them?

Probably, the hardest part of coaching in a classroom setting is for the teacher to adopt a coaching attitude. Non-directive coaching is

no child's play. It all starts with how you regard the learner: you have to consider the migrants you work with as competent adults. Another common challenge for teachers is to talk less and listen more intently. When a team is enthusiastic about coaching and wants to start a training course, they will need time and opportunity to study and practice. The Erasmus+ project ALL-SR has developed some excellent materials to help learners get acquainted with coaching (available on the website of the ITTA Institute Amsterdam).

What should be considered when transferring the approach to other countries and contexts?

In my opinion, approaches should always be adapted creatively to the needs of the learners and the context. This also goes for My Plan: as long as you are true to the essence of non-directive coaching, there is room for experimentation. It is certainly possible to use My Plan outside of a classroom context, for example in support groups or as part of employability training. Another interesting variation is using the learners' mother tongue instead of the target language. I have heard that the Network IQ project "Deutsch für den Beruf", led by the AWO Bielefeld, is currently testing the My Plan approach in this mother tongue version, with a group of Yezidi women.

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Network IQ

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