Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

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Author(s)
Smeenk, Anouk

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Creating Tomorrow

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Case study Amsterdam: MyCoach

By Anouk Smeenk

"Most people have known someone in their life who helped them, at just the right moment, to realize their goals or have given them the confidence, which they lacked, to get to the next step in their life." (Joost van Rossum, 2012)

Introduction MyCoach project

MyCoach is a coaching project for pupils from vocational education *(UK: GCSE's at C level/US: 10th grade)*, who are coached by volunteer coaches. These group of coaches are (ex) professionals who work or live in the neighbourhood, teachers or students from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and municipal officials from district of East. The project was initiated in 2012 by Joost van Rossum, a very involved resident of Amsterdam East who is a professional coach in The Hague. In collaboration with Amsterdam District of East, the project was launched at 'Wibautcollege', a school for vocational education level 1 and 2. In September 2012 10 coaches (all municipal officials) were matched to pupils for a coaching program of approximately three months. Today, there are 43 coaches actively participating in MyCoach. Six months after the launch of the project, BOOT got involved by means of students participating as coaches and assisting with intervision meetings. In 2013 Urban Practice (BOOT), City of Amsterdam district of East, the Wibautcollege and Joost van Rossum signed an official collaboration declaration.

The project fits in well within the context of the development of the 'welfare state' to a 'holding company', the idea that concerned citizens/companies are responsible for a part of the development of children from their social surroundings – who may lack opportunities - fits perfectly. This reduces

the pressure on the social institutions, which already suffer from cuts and the retreating government in general (Jeuken, 2014).

Aims and Objectives

Several academic reports show that coaching (by external coaches) with pupils within vocational educational institutes has a positive effect on the functioning and performances of this group (Ellfers, 2011, Enthoven & de Bruin, 2009, 2011). These thoughts and conclusion support the aims and objectives of the MyCoach project. The main objective is to develop and enhance the future perspectives of the coachees. A substantial number of pupils at the Wibautcollege deal with a complex social (home) situations and is not always fully supported by family or friends. Besides that notion, youngsters experience the transition from high school education to the vocational system as rather difficult. Consequently, the number of dropouts are still growing in these schools (Ministerie van Onderwijs, cultuur en wetenschap, 2013) or alumni are having troubles finding a placement or a job.

Within MyCoach the focus is entirely on the youngsters. It is important that the pupils participate fully voluntary with a coach-question, only then the motivation to develop is intrinsic. In the first meeting with their coach, they agree on the coach question and sign their 'coach contract'. The coach will be in good contact with the school mentor in all times. The period of the coaching program is 5 months, so that the coach will be stimulated to only empower the pupil instead of supporting them long term and becoming more of a mentor.

Training and peer-to-peer intervision

MyCoach trainer Jasper Erkens, a senior teacher at pedagogy HvA, offers the coaches 2 training meetings each semester. During these meetings the coaches are getting more information about different types of coaching methods, how to apply these and time to practice together in role-play forms. In the first training for beginning coaches, Naomi Rijke, teacher and placement coordinator of the Wibautcollege, informs the group about street culture and how to connect with the youngsters and what the coaches can expect while working with them.

Next to these meetings, there are peer-to-peer intervision possibilities where coaches get the opportunity to exchange their experiences, thoughts and questions with each other. Coaches feel that these meetings are very important to the process to share stories and reflect on their own process.

BOOT: Students are coaches

Since 2014 BOOT has started with connecting several HvA minors to MyCoach on a more structural basis. The minors 'Psychology of educational choice and career guidance' and 'Career Coaching' made the MyCoach project part of their practice part of the minor course. 12 (3th and 4th year) students have successfully participated in the project as coach. Within the MyCoach project these students can immediately apply their new obtained knowledge to the real urban challenges in their coaching programs. Also MyCoach thinks the students are a valuable addition because they can probably identify more easily with the youngsters then a 40 year old bank worker can because they are literally closer to their world of experiences.

Experiences of coaches and coachees

At the start of a coaching process the coach and pupil are matched. These matches are general based on shared interests, preferenced gender or specific knowledge of the coach. The first meeting, the matching-meeting, is set up by the MyCoach coordinator and the mentor of the pupil is also invited. This first meeting is essential for the rest of the coaching meeting as it is a first impression of both parties. They have the chance to get to know about each other and to discuss the coaching question. At the end of the matching-meeting the coach and pupil decide together whether it is 'a match' or not. The next coaching meetings are set up by the coach and coachee themselves and can take place in or outside of school for instance in a library, a coffee café or another inspiring environment. After approximately five or six meetings the coach and coachee will fill in the midterm evaluation together, to see whether they are on the right track or they have to adjust the coach questions or goals. At the end of the coaching process they will also evaluate together to make some conclusions about their learning time together.

In the last 2 years, there were 120 matches made between coaches and pupils. How do they think about the MyCoach project? What do coaches learn in the process? And what do the pupils get out of it?

First of all, during these last two years all the teachers and mentors at the Wibautcollege mention really interesting observations. They claim that a lot of pupils who participate in the MyCoach project have personally grown, show more self-confidence and have a more positive view towards school and the near future.

A number of 70 coaches have been involved in the project over the last 2,5 years and their reactions are mostly overwhelming. The coaches have told that it is a great learning process where they obtain new knowledge and also experiences in how to work with youngsters and maybe even important

who are you in that process? There are numerous reasons for coaches to participate in the project. In interviews a couple of coaches (A, 2014) (A C. , 2014) (C., 2014) have clarified this further, for example;

"*I'm working as a career coach myself as well and when I was just finished with my degree I thought it was time to give back something to the society. At least, that is the bigger thought behind it all for me. I also like the fact that it is focused on this neighbourhood and the I also find the target group very interesting*" (B, 2014).

Of course the experiences of the pupils are at least as interesting as the reaction given above. In the interviews which have been held with some of the pupils, one can read various responses and experiences. Most of them think it is good to have someone to talk to about their difficulties in school (work) but also about more personal matters. For instance this coachee explains:

"*I feel comfortable with her because I can always ask her anything about school. During classes I usually don't ask that much because the teacher is very busy but in the end I don't really understand the material. My coach explains it very well and she says it's a good thing that I ask so many questions. That's why I feel it is ok to ask all my questions*." (C, 2014).

Some of them also can reflect on the more long term objectives of the coaching process, as this pupil puts it:

"*I want to go through with the coaching project because I want to make some progress in life*." (C, 2014).

These reflections and inner-observations give an insight in what kind of effects the MyCoach project has had and moreover motivates to continue with coaching and learning.

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For more information:

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https://www.facebook.com/MyCoachOost

http://www.ditissterkteam.nl/successen/coaching/joost-coacht-mbo-leerlingen