A TEACHING METHOD BASED ON DIALOGICAL COACHING FOR DEVELOPING THE SELF-LEARNING COMPETENCE

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Abstract

This paper presents a new method for developing the competence of self-learning based on dialogical coaching. Coaching is a practice for training people in using their own resources, knowledge and expertise to achieve goals or increase performance. Self-learning means using self-resources to learn so coaching is a good approach to develop this competence. Particularly, our proposal is based on the principles, skills and procedures of dialogical coaching, a new model of coaching based on dialogical philosophy.

Keywords: self-learning, coaching, tutoring, competence development.

1 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE), as it is defined in the Bologna Declaration, implies important changes in the organizational, pedagogical and methodological aspects of knowledge transmission. Traditional methods based on teaching must be replaced by new methods based on learning and competences' development.

The implementation of this new educational model has required, among other adjustments, a significant increase in autonomous work in relation to traditional face-to-face instruction activities. This adjustment provides more time for personal tutoring and mentoring in order to really promote a student-based education paradigm.

The success of the new Higher Education paradigm relies on the development of students' self-learning skill, that is, the ability to motivate themselves, grow their self-confidence, define objectives, search for information and select good references, organize and schedule their work and apply self-assessment to their learning outcomes as well as to the process. Self-learning is also called self-directed learning, autonomous learning or self-regulated learning.

This paper presents a new method for developing the competence of self-learning based on dialogical coaching. Next section describes briefly what coaching is and shows several examples of successful applications in the educational context. Section 3 explains or conception of self-learning and the abilities needed to be able to self-learn. Section 4 presents the proposed method. Finally some conclusions are presented.

2 COACHING AND LEARNING

Coaching is a training process in which an individual gets support while learning to achieve a specific personal or professional goal. The coaching process is focused on increasing individuals' awareness, on generating responsibility and on moving people to action, because action is the change driver, and change is essential in coaching. Without change, there is no coaching.

Coaching is an old discipline that is gaining popularity and relevance every day. In fact, we could say that Socrates initiated the coaching with his teaching method (the Socratic method). The origin of "modern" coaching can be found in sports [1]. The Inner Game became a revolutionary and very powerful methodology to achieve resounding results in tennis and the method was soon transferred to other sports and other fields, like business and education.

There are three main schools of coaching: the European school, with the model proposed by Sir John Whitmore [2] and Timothy Gallwey; the North-American model founded by Thomas Leonard, who also founded the International Coach Federation (the most important coach association in the world): and

the Chilean school created by Fernando Flores [3] and developed by Julio Olalla and Rafael Echeverria [4], with a model called Ontological Model.

The dialogical model is a new model created in the IDDI (a leadership training institute) at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria. It is based on solid anthropological and psychological fundamentals that provide an integral vision of the person. This model emphasizes the creation of a relation of meeting between coach and coachee, because human beings are conceived as beings that grow and develop in relations of meeting with other people and with reality.

There are two different approaches to the use of coaching in education. The first one, known as educational coaching, is focused on applying coaching process to teachers to increase their performance and results. This approach has been widely developed in the United States where we can find different validated models, such as cognitive coaching [5], instructional coaching [6] or peer coaching [7].

The other approach is training teachers to use some competences and methods from coaching in their relations with the students. With these new abilities teachers can improved their teaching strategies and methodologies, favouring new more effective teaching and learning models. Although we can find a lot of initiatives in this line, no research has been carried out to validate them. Our proposal follows this approach.

3 OUR VISION OF SELF-LEARNING

3.1 Description of the competence of self-learning

Self-learning means acquiring *in an autonomous way* knowledge and skills in some specific area or subject. And it is also the ability to self-analyze and self-evaluate our way of learning, that is, *learn to learn* and improve our learning strategies and outcomes.

Self-learning requires three main categories of skills.

- **Self-motivation**. It is the ability to motivate ourselves to perform a task or tackle a new learning project. The elements involved in motivation are

    o *Reason*: The purpose of the task (the answer to the *why* question).

    o *Optimism*: Believing the task is achievable.

    o *Self-confidence*: Trusting in our resources to successfully complete the task.

    o *Enthusiasm*: The initial energy required to undertake actions which will lead us to the goal.

    o *Persistence*: The ability to maintain action regardless of our feelings.

    o *Resistance*: The ability to face adversity and overcome obstacles.

- **Learning organization.** This ability implies

    o *Selection of good references: S*earching for information in different sources and using own criteria to select appropriate information.

    o *Objectives setting:* There should be at least one general goal and some specific ones. The more detailed the objectives are, the easier and motivating to achieve them, because concrete actions will be more easily identified.

    o *Scheduling:* Defining an action plan, assigning dates to the objectives and establishing the tasks or actions that should be carried out to achieve the goals.

- **Self-assessment.** The ability to assess our learning based on different criteria of quality. The evaluation should include two different aspects: learning outcomes and learning process.

    o *Learning outcomes:* Assess the performance degree according to the initial objectives and the quality of the results, drawing conclusions. The student should develop its own standards of quality. It means also to be aware of the progression of learning.

    o *Learning process:* Asses both the quality of the initial scheduling and our own performance in the plan execution.

Self-assessment must be continuous; partial results should be revised to realize whether we are reasonably approaching the goals. On the contrary, some adjustments must be carried out on the initial plan.

3.2 Dimensions and evidences of self-learning

According to the previous description of self-learning, the dimensions, evidences and criteria to analyze the level and progress of the competence development are:

Table 1. Dimensions and evidences of self-learning

DIMENSION: SELF-MOTIVATION		Evidences
SELF-MOTIVATION	**Interest and motivation**	• None • Shows extrinsic motivation • Shows intrinsic motivation
	Self-confidence	• Considers the objectives unachievable • Finds the objectives achievable, but thinks he cannot achieve them • Shows self-confidence • Shows persistence and resistance
DIMENSION: LEARNING ORGANIZATION		**Evidences**
SELECTION OF REFERENCES AND INFORMATION	**Search for complementary information**	• None • Search only in one source • Search in more than one source • Discuss with experts
	Information selection	• Selected information is not useful nor reliable • Selected information is useful and reliable, but insufficient • Selected information is useful, reliable, and enough • Selected information is useful, reliable, and complete (covers 100% of the objectives)
LEARNING GOALS	**Objectives setting**	• None • Defines a global learning objective • Defines specific objectives
	Quality of objectives	• Unsuitable • Suitable but no measurable • Suitable and measurable • Scheduled in time
SCHEDULING	**Definition of an action plan**	• None • Identifies actions or task for every objective • Prioritize and assigns time to tasks • Defines a correct schedule
DIMENSION: SELF-ASSESSMENT		**Evidences**
SELF-ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES	**Assessment according to criteria**	• None • Self-assessment according to given criteria • Self-assessment according to own criteria
	Learning after assessment (conclusions)	• None • Make conclusions after receiving feedback • Becomes aware of own learning progress
SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PROCESS	**Schedule assessment**	• None • Becomes aware of some scheduling mistakes • Adjust the schedule during the process
	Performance assessment	• None • Becomes aware of errors and successes • Introduces changes in the performance

The previous table shows the evidences related to the learning process. To assess learning outcomes, many different strategies may be used (test, essays, interviews, portfolios, classroom presentations, etc.)

4 COACHING TO DEVELOP THE COMPETENCE OF SELF-LEARNING

4.1 Dialogical coaching principles and competences

The proposed method is based in some principles, attitudes and competences of the dialogical coaching model.

One of the most important contributions of dialogical coaching to our method is the conception of students:

- Students have all the resources required to meet the challenges. The teacher should help them to discover and bring into play all those resources.

- Students may develop their resources in relations of meeting with teachers and peers. The teacher must promote relations of meeting between them, with the attitudes of confidence, respect, responsibility and generosity.

- Students search for sense in everything they do. The teacher should help them to find the reason of the tasks or the learning objectives.

The essential coaching competences needed for applying the method are:

- *Dialogical listening:* The ability to focus completely on what the other person is saying and not saying but expressing through her non-verbal language. It reveals the student's concerns, values and beliefs about what is and is not possible, and provides more information about students' learning progress and difficulties.

- *Powerful questions*: The ability to ask questions that evoke discovery, insight, commitment or action (e.g., those that challenge the student's assumptions). Powerful questions are open-ended questions that create greater clarity, possibility or new learning for students.

- Acknowledgement: The ability to see and name the valuable aspects of students: attitudes, strengths, resources, etc. This competence provides more self-confidence and increases students' motivation.

- *Self-management*: The ability to manage our emotional responses and our tendency to impose our own pace and way of working, as well as our points of view. This competence is crucial in the method, because students must develop the ability to find the answers, resources and solutions by themselves. The teacher must not provide the answers, but make students discover them by means of powerful questions.

4.2 The process

The method for the development of the competence of self-learning requires the meeting of the teacher and the student. The number of meetings will depend on the type and complexity of the task or learning objectives, as well as on the student's performance.

The basic tool for the development of these meetings is the question. This paper includes some powerful questions for every aspect to be treated, although they are not the only valid ones, obviously. Take them just as a suggestion.

The main aspects to deal with in those sessions are:

- Clarifying the reasons and sense of the task

- Defining expected results and establishing commitment to them

- Setting objectives and scheduling task and actions

- Identifying student's inner resources and stimulating confidence to accomplish the task.

- Identifying and manage obstacles and difficulties (emotions, beliefs, ...)

- Stimulating self-awareness and self-assessment

While flexible in the contents, duration, frequency and location (that are organized depending on the students' demand), the meetings must have a fixed structure

1. Objective

   First of all, the objective of the meeting must be defined, according to the student's requirements and needs. In the first session, the objective may be defined by the teacher.

2. Development

   Using the competences explained above the teacher has a coaching conversation with the student. This conversation will provide more awareness and the student will be able to find answers and resources to make progress in his learning project.

3. Conclusion

   The student must be aware of all the things his has learned during the session about the task he is working on but also (and more important) about himself, his resources and way of thinking and learning. Some questions to help in this conclusion step may be

   o What you have you noticed during this session?

   o What is the most important thing you've learned in this session?

   o How can be this learning or conclusion useful in the future?

4.2.1 Working on the motivation and interest of the student

This phase is focused on helping students to relate the task or learning project to their personal interests. Besides, students will learn how to self-motivate in the future, being able to find those relations by themselves.

The teacher should guide the conversation with questions such as:

- What motivates you to do things?

- Which subjects or aspects of your studies do you like most? How can the task contribute to these aspects?

- What kind of job would you like to have when after graduating? How can the task contribute to the development of the skills needed for that job?

- How can you relate this work to your personal interests?

- Remember one moment that you enjoyed learning. When did it happen? What made you enjoy? How can you bring that to this task?

- How can you find the motivation required to carry out and conclude this task successfully?

- Which is the level of your motivation (from 0 to 10) to undertake this task? What do you need to have a level of 10?

4.2.2 Defining expected outcomes and commitments

Before starting to organize and schedule the actions needed to complete the task, it is very important to define and visualize the desired result. When the result is clearly defined it is easier to identify actions and milestones. The emphasis should be in *visualizing* the expected result, because it allows students to connect emotionally with the success, and increases the motivation.

To explore the desired result, some useful questions are:

- When you successfully complete this task, how will you feel?

- What would it be a "complete success" in this learning project? Describe it with details.

- Which properties should the result have so you can consider it a complete success?

- Imagine that the task ends and has been a resounding success. What has happened?

- What level of success would you like to achieve?

- What level of success do you commit to achieve? (This question allows students to position with regard to their own expectations)

- When you achieve this successful outcome, who are you going to share it with? How are you going to celebrate?

4.2.3 Working with confidence and limitations

It is important that students become aware of their possibilities and inner resources to complete the task. We really belief that students have these possibilities, what we have to do is just help them to discover them and so increase their levels of self-confidence.

Some questions in this field may be:

- What are your strengths in relation to learning?

- Which inner resources do you already have to achieve the expected result? What else? (The question *What else?* is very powerful in coaching, because it causes a reflection and a much deeper exploration to find new options. These new options offer new possibilities, new actions, and new results, and provide a greater change and learning).

- Which new resources do you need? How can you acquire these resources?

- Think of other similar situations. How did you succeed? What did you do? Which knowledge and abilities did you use? What else?

- What are the main obstacles you can expect to appear? (This question makes the student to anticipate problems, such as laziness, lack of time, etc)

- How are you going to deal with these obstacles if they occur? (Makes the student think about the things that have been listed before and start to design possible solutions). What resources can you apply in each case to overcome the obstacle? What would someone that you admire do in these situations?

The main obstacles and limitations will appear later in the process, when the student has actions to complete. When students fail in their commitments, some exploration is needed to find the internal or external handicaps that are hindering the process.

- What did you need to complete your actions that you don't have? What was wrong with your commitment?

Depending on the answers, we have to go back to questions related to motivation, interest, confidence, etc. If the problem is the planning or something specific in the learning process, explore the problems with the student and make them seek for solutions and new options. This will contribute to develop the self-awareness and self-assessment skills. Some questions may be:

- What has prevented you to do the tasks? What do you need to overcome these handicaps? What else?

- How can you obtain what you need? What else?

4.2.4 Setting objectives and scheduling actions

This phase is focused on reveal the need to set learning objectives to students. We don't ask them to define goals, but try with our powerful questions to make them discover this need.

Some questions for this purpose may be:

- Once you have defined your desired outcome, how do you start the work?

- What are some things you can do? Which is the next action?

Next questions depend on student's answers. For example, if the next action identified is "search for information", some questions could be:

- What information do you have to search?

- How do you know that the information found is what you need?

- When you already have the information, what will you do? How will you know which information to select and which to discard?

With this sequence of questions we try to make them aware of the importance of setting goals. If they define at least one global objective, we try to make them to break this objective down into more specific sub-goals. Some questions for this are:

- How does this goal help you to get closer to the expected results?

- How could it be more useful in the sense of guiding your steps towards the desired result?

- What can you do to achieve this objective?

If at least one global objective is defined, we can work with dates and temporal scheduling as well as with the student's commitment.

- When will you achieve this objective?

- For what is it important to set a deadline for that objective?

- How do you know that the deadline is suitable? (This question may reveal if the deadline is realistic and suitable for the learning project).

- Which is your level of commitment to this deadline (from 0 to 10)? What do you need to go to 10? (To check self-confidence). If the deadline is suitable but the student cannot commit to it, ask questions to reveal the problem: What do you need to commit to that date? Which resources can you use? What has to happen for you to commit with this date? What are the obstacles you are seeing? What else?

Once some objectives are defined and scheduled we can work with a plan. Students should identify things and actions that can move them towards the expected results. Some questions here are:

- What thing can you do next?

- Until the next session (or class or week) how many actions will you carry out?

- From 0 to 10, what is the level of your commitment to these actions?

- If it is not a 10, what do you need to be able to commit to a 10? How does this 10 bring you closer to your objectives? How does this (the number the student said before) move you away from the expected results?

4.2.5 *Stimulating self-awareness and self-assessment*

These aspects are dealt with along the whole process. But it could be quite effective to go back to them in the final session, to make some final conclusions.

- Which are the differences between the desired results and the actual results obtained?

- If you could define the desired result in this moment, how would it be? What will be the similarities between this result and the one defined at the beginning? And what the differences? (These questions make students analyze their initial expectations, that perhaps were unrealistic or perhaps below their potential, make them raise their own expectations).

- What have you learned during this process?

- What already known resources have you used?

- What new resources that you didn't know you have emerged during this process?

- What things did not work?

- What could you have done better?

5   CONCLUSIONS

We have presented a new method for developing the competence of self-learning based on dialogical coaching. The method requires some basic coaching competences and attitudes such as responsibility, generosity, respect, confidence, dialogical listening, powerful questions, self-

management and acknowledgment. The teacher with these basic competences may have powerful conversations with the students that will facilitate the increase of awareness, responsibility and results in relation to the learning outcomes and process. Place, duration, frequency and contents of these conversations are totally flexible in this method, and should be agreed between teacher and students, mainly based on students' requirements. The method may be applied in autonomous individual tasks as well as in collaborative other cooperative projects.

We are now testing the method in different courses at Universidad Francisco de Vitoria to validate the method and evaluate its effectiveness in the development of the competence of self-learning.

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