

Citizens' Curriculum guide to  
**Non-directive  
coaching**

Written by Alexander Braddell

### Acknowledgements

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*Autonomous Literacy Learners – Sustainable Results*

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# Who is this guide for?

This guide is for learning providers delivering Citizens' Curriculum programmes.

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## What's in this guide?

### 1. Coaching and the Citizens' Curriculum approach

*Something to think about*

How should responsibility for learning be shared?

### 2. What is non-directive coaching?

### 3. Non-directive coaching for Citizens' Curriculum programmes

*Something to think about*

What is the role of teaching in learning?

### 4. Non-directive coaching for low-level ESOL learners

*Something to think about*

How can we best help ESOL learners?

### 5. How to get started

# 1. Coaching and the Citizens' Curriculum approach

This resource offers practical guidance on how to use **non-directive coaching** techniques to support and add value to the **Citizens' Curriculum approach**.

## The Citizens' Curriculum

Learning and Work Institute's **Citizens' Curriculum** promotes learning which

- is locally-led, responding to local community and/or economic priorities, or meeting the needs of identified local cohorts
- is developed with the active participation of learners
- interlinks the life skills of literacy, English language, numeracy, civic, digital, health and financial capabilities.

Find out more about the [Citizens' Curriculum](#)

## Learner involvement

The Citizens' Curriculum approach prioritises learner involvement at every stage of the learning process, from programme design to evaluation. This is consistent with what we know from research about learning in general and adult learning in particular.

## Adult learning

Research<sup>1</sup> tells us that

- Learning arises out of the learner's own experience and is unique to the learner.
- As learners, we build on our existing knowledge and experience.
- Adults have their own motivations to learn.
- Adults tend towards self-direction and autonomy as learners. They are able to think about how they learn and so can become more effective as learners.
- Most adult learning occurs in response to real-life problems and issues. Learning arises through a combination of action and reflection.

- Reflection can enable people to arrive at new understandings of their experience and their potential.
- There are things that can be done to encourage reflective learning (e.g. types of discussion).

## Support for providers

During the pilot phases, Learning and Work Institute identified that providers and practitioners enjoyed the flexibility offered by the Citizens' Curriculum to work responsively to learners' needs, but some would like further support to adopt these approaches.

Learning and Work therefore commissioned two resources to inspire and help practitioners and providers co-design the curriculum with learners.

- A participatory learning activity pack, which focuses on participatory approaches in ESOL and literacy learning, but can be used to inspire teaching and learning relating to other capabilities.
- This guide to non-directive coaching, which can be used to complement classroom approaches, but will be particularly useful in other settings such as the workplace. It can be used in relation to all Citizens' Curriculum capabilities, and includes specific guidance for working with ESOL learners.

## Non-directive coaching

Non-directive coaching is a well-established approach to adult learning. The next section of this guide reviews how it works, but first...

<sup>1</sup> For more see Tusting, K., and Barton, D. (2003), *Models of adult learning: a literature review*. London: NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy).

## Something to think about

### How should responsibility for learning be shared?

Most approaches to adult learning encourage learners to take as much **responsibility** as possible for their own learning. At the same time, however, the teacher\* is expected to **structure** the learning process (i.e. assess learning needs, set learning goals, identify resources, plan and then supervise the learning programme, evaluate/assess the learner’s progress) – often in ways specified by funding and quality assurance agencies.

This raises an interesting question: If the teacher is responsible for structuring the learning process, what is the learner responsible for?

With reference to your own experience as a learner and/or teacher, consider how you believe responsibility for the learning process should be shared (or not) between teacher and learner.

#### X marks the spot

In the table below, place an 'X' to indicate how you think responsibility for the different elements of the learning process should be shared. If you think the teacher is fully responsible for an element, place your 'X' in the 100% box at the teacher end, on the left. If you think the learner has some part to play, place your 'X' further to the right.

	Teacher ←————→ Learner										
Who is best qualified to...	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Identify learning needs											
Set learning goals											
Identify learning resources											
Plan the learning programme											
Supervise the learning programme											
Evaluate/assess learning progress											

\* Or tutor, lecturer, etc.

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## 2. What is non-directive coaching?

Coaching is a way of helping an individual or group to improve their performance in a specific area.

There are two main forms of coaching, directive and non-directive.

### Directive coaching

In directive coaching, the coach sets goals for the individual or group, suggests strategies to achieve those goals, identifies resources, monitors the performance of the individual or group and gives them evaluative feedback. The coach is the expert and tells the individual or group what to do.

Directive coaching is **instructional**. It is another form of **teaching** or **training**. The coach requires expert knowledge of performance in the given context (e.g. a fitness coach needs to know about fitness).

### Non-directive coaching

In non-directive coaching, the individual or group is the expert and they set the agenda. The coach helps them to think through that agenda and then apply their own expertise to achieve the outcomes they want.

Non-directive coaching is **facilitative**. It is based on **reflective learning** and structured **problem-solving**. The coach requires knowledge only of how to help people learn and problem-solve **for themselves**.

### Why non-directive?

Non-directive coaching aims to help people develop the confidence and strategies they need to take charge of their own learning and development.

By refraining from telling the client\* what to do, the coach

- Gives the client time to think things through for themselves
- Shows faith in the client's ability to arrive at satisfactory solutions of their own
- Helps the client to take ownership of and responsibility for their own learning.

*\*In coaching, the person being coached is usually referred to as the client or coachee.*

### How does non-directive coaching work?

Non-directive coaching follows a simple procedure.

- The client explains their objective to the coach.
- The coach helps the client to reframe their objective as a practical problem, e.g. 'How can I achieve X by date Y?'
- With the help of the coach, the client then develops an action plan to achieve their objective. This plan becomes, in effect, a **self-directed learning project** for the client.
- The client then puts this plan into action and reports back to the coach on what happens.
- The coach helps the client review the outcomes of their actions and make any appropriate adjustments to their action plan and/or their objective.

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## What sort of 'help' does the coach provide?

The coach uses

- Purposeful, but non-directive (and non-judgemental) questioning, e.g. 'What makes you say that?' – to help the client gain clarity, perspective and understanding
- Constructive challenge, e.g. 'Could you do more?' – to help the client dig deeper and follow through
- Confidence-building reassurance and affirmation, e.g. 'I believe you can do it!' – to sustain the client's self-belief.

At all times the coach treats the client as a resourceful adult, fully capable of developing their own solutions – even when the client doubts their own ability.

By taking a close, supportive interest in the client's progress, the coach builds the client's confidence and helps the client to persist in the face of difficulty.

## What does non-directive coaching demand from the client?

The client needs only an objective, a willingness to take action and a willingness to reflect on their learning.

## What skills, attitudes and behaviours does non-directive coaching develop?

Non-directive coaching is a form of learning-to-learn. It helps people develop their ability to

- Identify their own learning needs
- Set realistic learning goals
- Identify learning resources (human and material)
- Plan and apply appropriate learning strategies
- Monitor and evaluate learning outcomes.

It also helps people to understand and develop the **attitudes, personal behaviours** and **social supports** that underpin sustainable, resilient learning,

- Being purposeful, pro-active, realistically optimistic, creative, collaborative, attentive, curious and reflective
- Committing the time and energy learning demands
- Building networks of support, taking a problem-solving approach

and, above all

- Accepting personal responsibility for one's own learning and development.

## How non-directive coaching works

Help for an individual or group to develop the confidence and strategies they need to learn and problem-solve **for themselves**

### What the client is doing

Identifies objective

With help of coach, reframes objective as practical problem, e.g. *'How can I achieve X by date Y?'*

With help of coach, thinks problem through, reviews options, identifies resources and develops action plan

Undertakes actions (outside of coaching session)

Reports back to coach on experience of taking action, reflects on outcomes of action

Makes appropriate adjustments to action plan and/or objective on basis of outcomes and reflection

### What the client is doing

Goal setting  
Problem-framing  
Problem-solving  
Action-planning  
Experimenting  
Reflecting

### What the coach is doing

Helps client clarify objective then reframe objective as practical problem, e.g. *'How can I achieve X by date Y?'*

Helps coachee to think problem through, review options, identify resources and develop action plan

Holds client to account for carrying out action plan, i.e. requires client to report on progress and reflect on outcomes of actions

Helps client to review progress and identify any appropriate adjustments to client's action plan and/or objective

Monitors client's perception of benefit from the coaching process

### What the coach is doing

Listening attentively  
Asking questions  
Offering affirmation, reassurance, encouragement and constructive challenge



## What's the difference between non-directive coaching and...

### Directive coaching

Tailored instruction to help an individual or group improve their performance in a specific area. The coach understands how to perform well in that specific area and has expertise in tailoring their instruction to the individual or group. Answers come from the coach.

### Teaching

Instruction to help an individual or group develop knowledge and skills in a specific area. Teachers understand their subject and can explain it to other people. They manage the learning process and are responsible for its outcomes. Objectives and learning content is often pre-set, e.g. as a qualification. Answers come from the teacher.

### Mentoring

Informal guidance from someone with more expertise. A mentor shares their expertise to support the development of someone with less expertise. There is no specific goal, but answers come from the mentor.

### Counselling

Guidance to help an individual, couple or group understand and resolve specific personal or psychological issues. May focus on the past to understand how the issue arose. (Note that non-directive coaching never dwells on the past, particularly not the emotional past – its focus is on practical problem-solving to move forward.) In counselling, there may be a specific client-set goal, but answers come from the counsellor.

### Befriending

Informal social support, including companionship, for individuals in need. Befrienders show personal interest to provide affirming, supportive social contact. There is no specific goal, but the befriender is the answer – or part of it, at least.

### Non-directive coaching

Facilitation to help an individual or group improve their performance in a specific area. The coach has expertise in helping people to reflect and problem-solve for themselves. Answers come from the client, because that helps them to develop the confidence and strategies they need to take charge of their own learning and development.

## Why do we call it 'coaching'?

The English word *coach* dates back to the 1500s, when it meant a large, horse-drawn carriage. It comes originally from the Hungarian *kocsi*, short for *kocsi szekér*, a carriage made in the Hungarian town of Kocs. Other countries adopted the word too. In Spain, for example, *kosci* became *coche*. By the 19th century, *coach* (or *coacher*) had become English university slang for a private tutor or sports trainer, hired to 'carry' their pupils to success.

## Fostering a positive mindset

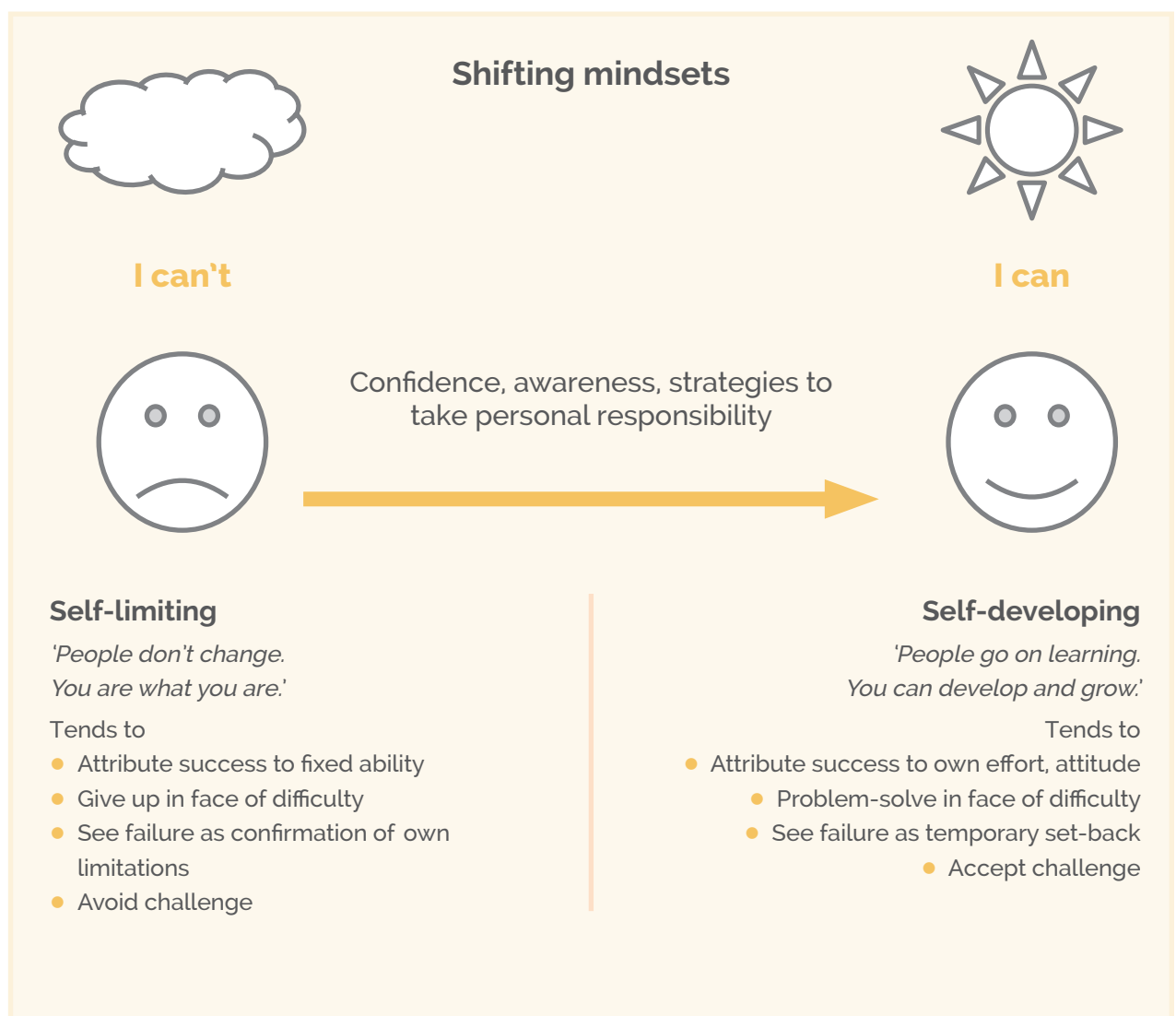
Non-directive coaching has a strong focus on helping people to overcome self-limiting attitudes and assumptions. It does this by questioning those attitudes and assumptions in the context of practical problem-solving.

### Non-directive coaching uses practical problem-solving to foster growth

When a client presents a self-limiting assumption, e.g. 'They would never help me', non-directive coaching responds, 'Have you tried asking them?'

Without dwelling on **why** the client has made the assumption, non-directive coaching helps the client to recognise it as an assumption (rather than a fact) and see beyond it. Showing a person that they are capable of problem-solving provides concrete evidence of their capacity to learn and develop.

*Non-directive coaching helps people move towards a positive mindset<sup>2</sup>*



<sup>2</sup> For more on the concept of mindsets see the work of psychologist Carol Dweck, e.g. Dweck, C. (2000), *Self-Theories: their Role in Motivation, Personality and Development*. Hove: Psychology Press. Also, <http://mindsetonline.com/>

## GROW model of non-directive coaching

GROW stands for *Goal, Reality, Options* and *Will*.

(In some versions, the O also stands for *Obstacles* and the W for *Way forward* or *Wrap up*.)

Developed in the UK in the 1980s, the GROW model is a loosely sequential, problem-solving model. It focuses on building confidence and raising awareness (including self-awareness) in order to enable the client to take full personal responsibility for their own learning and development.

The model is intended to be used flexibly and iteratively, across and within sessions. For example, reflection on the outcomes of an action might lead the client to adjust their goal.

*GROW model*



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## Key techniques of non-directive coaching

The techniques of non-directive coaching work together and reinforce each other.

### 1. Attentive listening

To be helpful, the coach needs to understand the client. The coach gains that understanding by paying close attention to what the client is saying, how they are saying it and what they are not saying. Attentive listening requires the coach to suspend judgement, put aside any agendas, including 'helping' agendas, and question their own assumptions. As well as clarifying and summarising by the coach to confirm their understanding, it includes giving the client time and acknowledging their feelings, i.e. the emotional content of what the client is saying. It is the key skill and foundational technique of non-directive coaching.

### 2. Purposeful, non-directive, non-judgemental questioning

Questioning in non-directive coaching is both an extension and a development of active listening. It is non-directive and non-judgemental, but always purposeful: its single aim is to help the client achieve their objective. To that end, questioning focuses closely on what the client needs to do, how they are going to do it, when they are going to do it. The coach's only goal is to understand what the client says.

Questioning helps the client by giving them the opportunity to talk through what they are trying to do to someone who takes a genuine interest in their success, believes in their ability, knows how to keep them on track and never tries to tell them what to do.

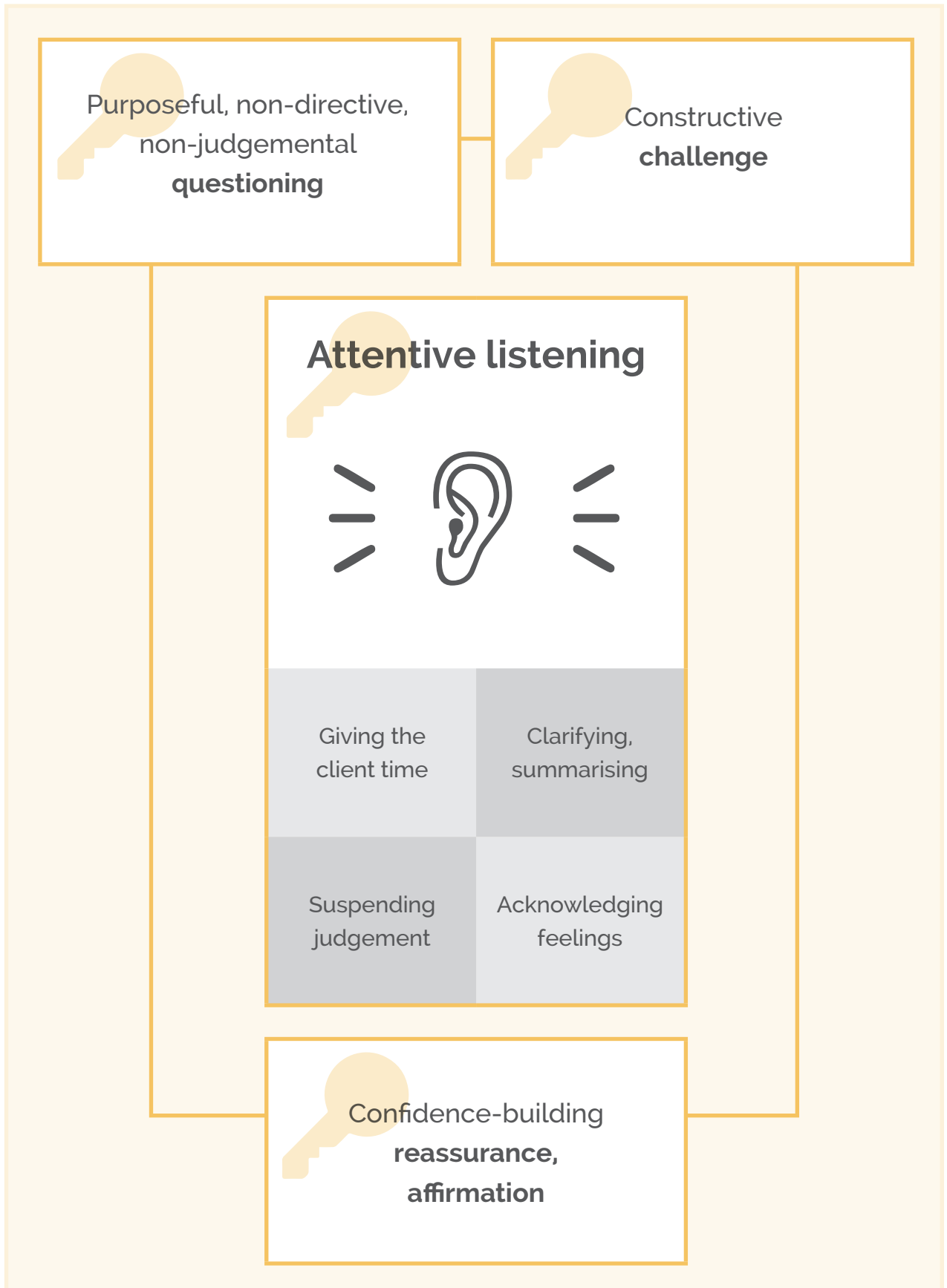
### 3. Constructive challenge

Constructive challenge supports the client to move forward. It can range from asking the client to identify more options or reconsider the meaning of an experience, to refocusing the client on their objective or holding them to account for a commitment they have made. It helps the client develop awareness and take responsibility, but always supportively and on the client's own terms.

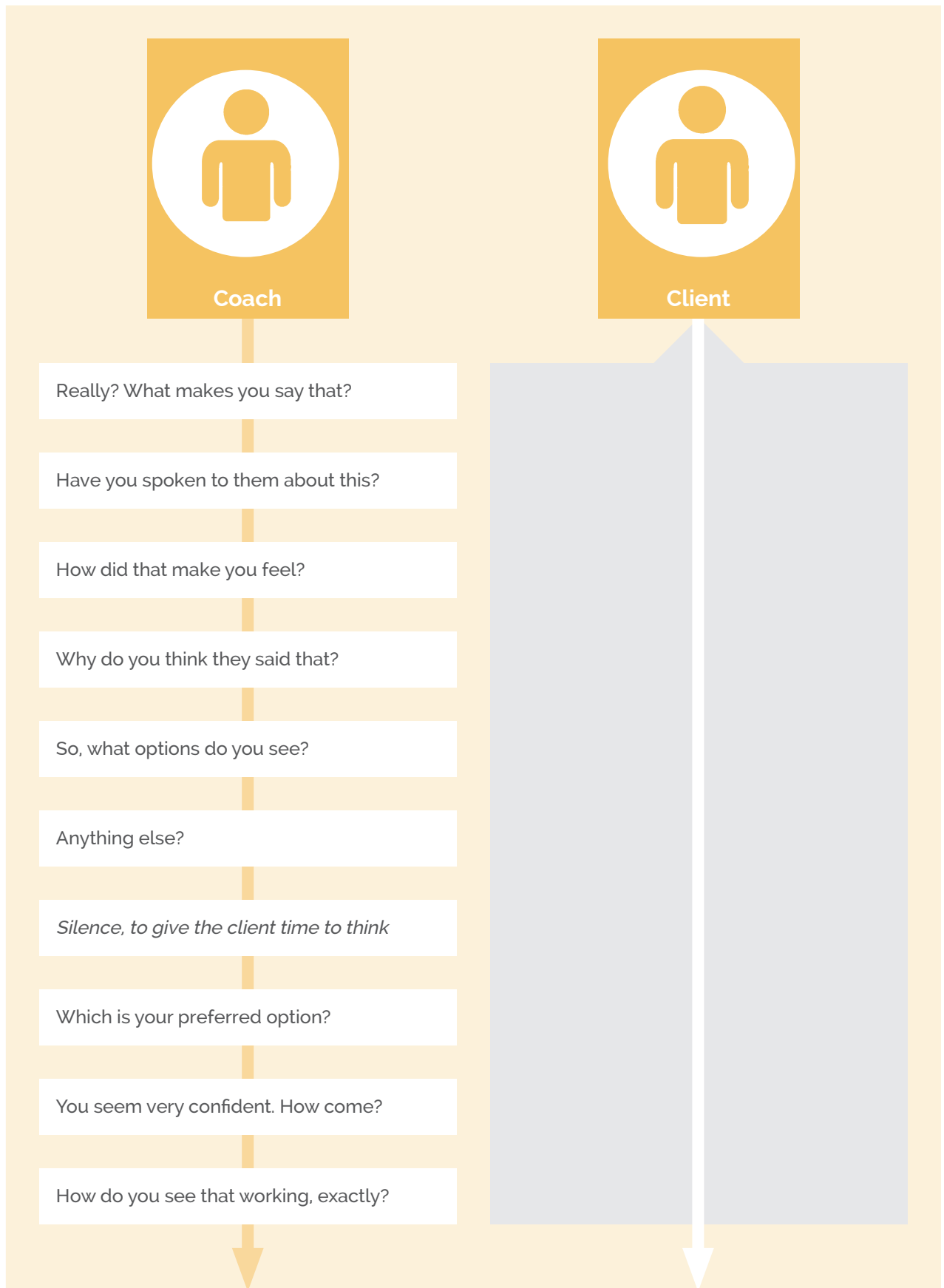
### 4. Confidence-building reassurance and affirmation

By combining attentive listening and purposeful, non-directive, non-judgemental questioning with constructive challenge, non-directive coaching reassures and affirms to the client that they have it within them to achieve their objective. When the client expresses self-doubt, the coach offers reassurance, explicitly stating their confidence in the client's capability. When the client makes progress (however minor), the coach points this out and helps the client to connect it to their own efforts.

Key techniques of non-directive coaching



Example of a coaching conversation



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## Non-directive coaching checklist

### Non-directive coaching

- Recognises that people are capable of more than they show
- Looks at the client in light of their potential
- Is forward-looking, purposeful and action-oriented: 'What do you need to do to achieve your goal?'
- Respects the client as an adult, expert in and responsible for their own life
- Starts from and sticks to the client's agenda
- Stays with the client's language, thinking and learning preferences (the client is responsible for creating their own solution and needs to do so on their own terms)
- Works from the client's strengths to help the client discover what works for the client
- Is self-effacing, resists the temptation to parade its own cleverness by stepping in with knowledge, strategies or solutions – it never tells the client what to do or how to do it
- Elicits feedback from the client and critically reflects on and evaluates itself.

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### 3. Non-directive coaching for Citizens' Curriculum programmes

We can use non-directive coaching and its techniques to enhance the impact and value of Citizens' Curriculum programmes for learners, teachers and volunteers.

#### Five ways to incorporate non-directive coaching

- **Teacher repertoires**

Where the teacher uses the techniques of non-directive coaching to support reflective learning and learner involvement in the learning process

- **Learning partnerships**

Where teachers and/or volunteers, including returning learners, use attentive listening to offer learners one-to-one (or one-to-two) motivational support

- **Personal coaching**

Where teachers and/or volunteers, including returning learners, offer learners one-to-one (or one-to-two) non-directive coaching

- **Peer coaching**

Where learners, facilitated by a teacher, coach each other to build confidence, raise awareness and share strategies via reflective group discussions and/or pair work

- **Self-directed learning projects**

Where learners develop and carry out their own self-directed directed learning project (individually or as a group), supported by non-directive coaching



## Teacher repertoires

Non-directive coaching reframes learning as practical problem-solving and then uses four key techniques – attentive listening, purposeful, non-directive, non-judgemental questioning, constructive challenge and confidence-building reassurance and affirmation – to help the learner arrive at their own solution.

Teachers can use this approach in the classroom to help learners explore both the learning process and their own attitudes and behaviours as learners in ways that are constructive, affirming and empowering.

### How can teachers use non-directive coaching techniques?

1. Start by asking learners to reflect on learning. To what extent do they recognise that
  - Learning is a real-world activity, not just a formal, classroom process led by a teacher?
  - They are themselves experienced and successful real-life learners, with strategies of their own and access to a wide range of real-life resources and supports?
  - They are capable of overcoming barriers and persisting in the face of difficulty, when motivated?
  - Taking personal responsibility is key to successful learning?

*For prompt to support this discussion, see below.*

2. Frame the Citizens' Curriculum programme (and its teachers) as a learning resource available to help learners achieve real-life goals. Use reflective discussion to help learners explore how they can use the programme to help them achieve their real-life goals.

*For prompt to support this discussion, see below.*

3. Give learners the lead in planning the learning programme by asking them how they wish to proceed – and then giving them time and non-directive support to develop their ideas. Help them plan a realistically achievable learning programme.
4. Use the techniques of non-directive coaching at each subsequent stage of the learning process to help learners
  - Recognise the full range of resources and sources of help available to them, including in their daily lives and personal networks
  - Investigate and develop new learning strategies
  - Address misconceptions, false assumptions and other 'thinking traps'
  - Develop the resilience to persist through dips in confidence and/or motivation.

## Prompts for reflective discussion

Suggested procedure: Give learners the prompt, allow them a few moments to reflect then pair them to discuss their views and feelings. Pairs then feed key ideas back to the group.

### Prompts for discussion about learning

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#### Five of you in a room

Imagine this: you enter a room and find four other people there.

These four people are not just anyone – they are younger versions of you.

- That baby gurgling on the couch is you, aged just six months – what a sweet baby!
- And that child playing with a toy nearby is you as well, six or seven-years-old now.
- Then over there by the window, looking a bit moody, that's you in your teens.
- And here you are again, grown up now, but a few years ago, judging by the phone you've got.

Each one of those people is you, but you're not exactly them anymore. How did that happen?

#### Discussion questions

How do we learn to be who we are in life? What barriers do we encounter? How do we overcome those barriers?

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#### A time when something really interested you

Think of a time when you wanted to find out more about something that really interested you.

It could be when you were a child, a teenager, a young adult or right now.

What was it that interested you? How did you find out more about it?

#### Discussion questions

When something really interests you, what do you do to learn more about it? Why? What makes you effective as a learner? What barriers to learning do you encounter? How do you overcome those barriers?

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#### A time when you solved a problem

Think of a time when you solved a problem.

It could be when you were a child, a teenager, a young adult or right now.

What was the problem? How did you solve it?

#### Discussion questions

When you have a problem to solve, how do you approach it? Why? What makes you effective as a problem-solver? What barriers to problem-solving do you encounter? How do you overcome those barriers?

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## A time when you surprised yourself

Think of a time when you did something that you did not think you were capable of doing.

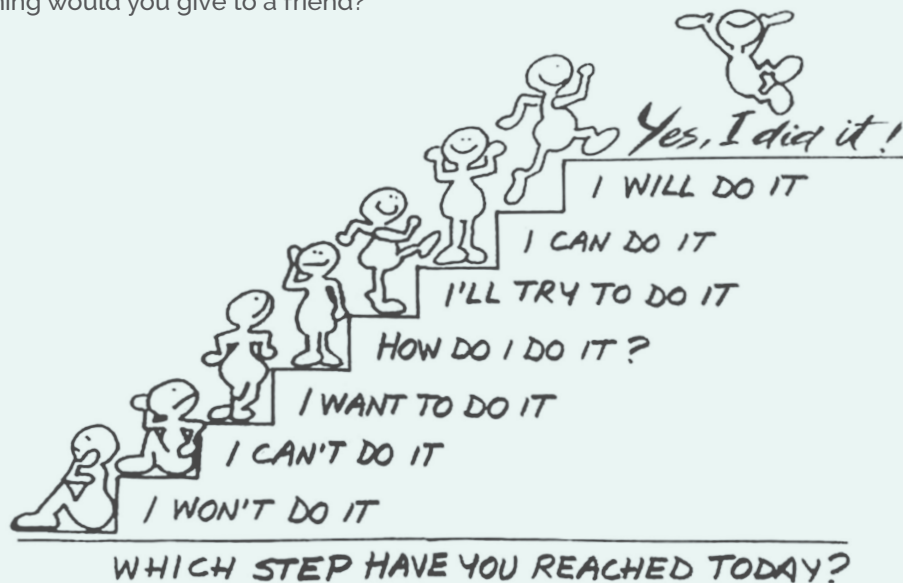
What was it? How did you manage to do it?

What barriers did you encounter? How did you overcome those barriers?

Use the picture to help you explain what happened and how you felt at different points.

### Discussion questions

What did that experience teach you about learning? Based on that experience, what advice about learning would you give to a friend?



Acknowledgement: Helen Hindle, <http://www.growthmindsetmaths.com/>

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## Prompt for discussion on goal setting

Discussion questions to help learners consider how they can use their Citizens' Curriculum programme to help them achieve their real-life goals:

1. What goals do you have in your life at the moment? Or What changes would improve your life?
  2. How do you plan to achieve your goals?  
Or How would those changes happen?
  3. What learning (i.e. new knowledge, skills or qualifications) would help you achieve your goals/make those changes happen?
  4. Looking at your learning and development priorities, what do you think is realistically achievable for you in our time together?
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## Learning partnerships

Learning partnerships are a simplified form of non-directive coaching. They offer learners

- Confidence-building reassurance and affirmation
- Motivational attention
- Loosely structured opportunities for reflection and self-discovery.

They also offer opportunity for teachers and volunteers, including returning learners, to try out non-directive coaching by taking on the role of a non-directive learning partner.

### How does a non-directive learning partnership work?

The learner is paired with a learning partner, e.g. a teacher or volunteer, for the duration of the learning programme. The learner and learning partner agree a schedule of regular meetings, e.g. weekly, each meeting lasting from 20 minutes to an hour (the pair decide). The purpose of each meeting is simply to give the learner a chance to discuss their learning.

At the first meeting, the learner explains their learning goal, why they have chosen it and how

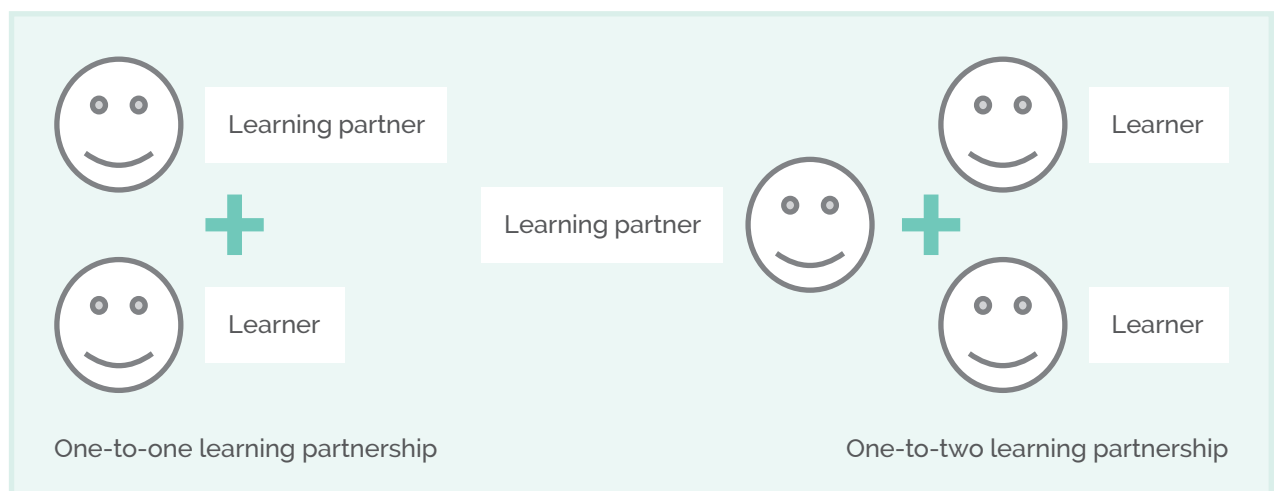
they plan to achieve it. At subsequent meetings, the learner

- Describes their experience of, views on and feelings about the learning they have done so far
- Explains what learning they are intending to do in the week ahead, and why.

The learning partner takes the role of a non-judgemental, non-directive 'friend' – in other words, someone who takes a genuine, supportive interest in the learner, but who does not presume to offer the learner advice or guidance. The learning partner's single goal is to understand the learner's experience of their learning as clearly and fully as possible. To do this, they listen attentively and ask the learner to clarify or explain further, as required. The only restriction is that the learner cannot ask for guidance of any kind and the learning partner must not offer it, in any guise.

In some circumstances, learners may benefit from working in pairs with a learning partner. Two learners is probably the maximum, because the learning partner needs time to listen to each learner.

### Non-directive learning partnerships



## Personal coaching

Personal coaching can be organised in a similar way to the learning partnership, but is identified as coaching and takes a more structured, problem-solving approach.

Coach and learner agree objectives for the coaching at the outset.

The main objective for the coach is to help the learner become more confident and capable as a learner, by helping them identify the attitudes, behaviours and social supports that enable learning.

### *Problem-solving model of learning*



## Non-directive coaching contract

Coaching 'contracts' – whether formal or informal – help ensure a shared understanding between coach and learner. Start by explaining that non-directive coaching aims to help the learner develop their own strategies. It has one basic rule: they cannot ask you for advice and you cannot offer it. Instead, you will help them come up with their own solutions.

What else goes into the contract depends on local circumstances, but may include

- Goals for learner and coach
- Mutual expectations – i.e. what the learner expects from the coach and what the coach expects from the learner (another opportunity to address what 'non-directive' means)
- Confidentiality
- Note taking
- Meeting arrangements
- Evaluating outcomes (for both learner and coach)
- What happens if there is a problem (from the trivial to the serious)
- Evaluating the process itself (for both learner and coach)
- What happens at the end of the coaching

See also, 'How to explain non-directive coaching to the learner' in section 4, *Non-directive coaching for low-level ESOL learners*.

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## Peer coaching

Non-directive peer coaching enables learners to explore together the

- Process of learning
- Attitudes and personal behaviours that support learning
- Range of resources accessible to them and
- Different strategies available to them.

It helps learners to recognise that they are not alone, that they can learn from and support each other. At the same time, it offers learners constructive challenge and a different perspective on both learning and themselves as learners. It enhances group cohesion, learner involvement and personal development.

### How does non-directive peer coaching work?

Non-directive peer coaching follows a simple procedure and can easily be incorporated into a range of differently structured learning programmes.

It includes two basic components,

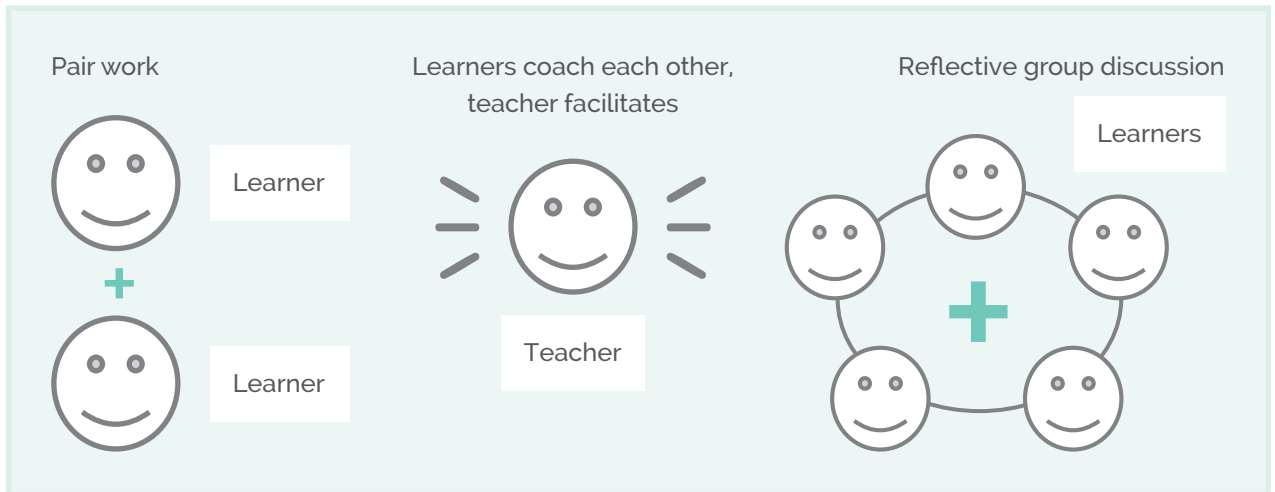
- Reflective group discussion
- Pair work

Group discussion allows learners to discuss and compare goals, strategies, learning resources, experiences and feelings about learning.

Pair work offers opportunity for a more focused exchange between two learners, who take it in turns to act as each other's non-directive peer coach. The objective is similar to that of the learning partnership: to help the learner articulate, reflect on and expand their experience as a learner.

At the first meeting, each learner asks the other to explain their learning goal, their reason for choosing it and how they plan to achieve it. At subsequent meetings, they ask each other about progress with their plan since the previous meeting and what they intend to do in the week ahead.

### Non-directive peer coaching



As in the learning partnership, the aim of the learner acting as coach is simply to understand, as fully and concretely as possible, what their colleague is saying. To do this, they listen attentively, asking for whatever clarification or further explanation they require. They do not offer the learner guidance or instruction of any kind, nor does the learner ask for it.

In both pair work and reflective discussion, learners help each other using non-directive problem-solving questions, e.g. What do you see as the real issue? What solutions can you see? Who could help you?

### What does the facilitator do?

To facilitate these interactions

- Ensure participants understand what they are doing and why
- Offer questions and suggest lines of enquiry where this is helpful to participants, but intervene only to ensure discussion remains purposeful and supportive – give participants time and space to grow into their roles as peer coaches
- Help participants reflect on the activity and their learning from it.

## Self-directed learning projects

Self-directed learning projects give the learner full responsibility for a defined piece of learning – from goal setting to outcome evaluation – with support from a non-directive coach.

### How does a self-directed learning project work?

Learners, either individually or as a group, work with a non-directive coach to develop and carry out a time-limited learning project.

With non-directive support from their coach, the learners

1. Agree and specify their learning goal – to ensure it offers a measurable outcome that is realistically achievable within the timespan of the project
2. Reformulate the goal as a practical problem, e.g. 'How can we achieve our goal by date Y?'
3. Review the resources (human and material) available to them, including how much time learners are able to commit, knowledge and skills they can apply, financial resources, friends and other people who might help etc.
4. Develop an action plan to achieve their learning goal
5. Carry out their action plan, step by step, monitoring progress and making adjustments as appropriate (including adjustments to their goal)
6. Evaluate their learning outcomes.

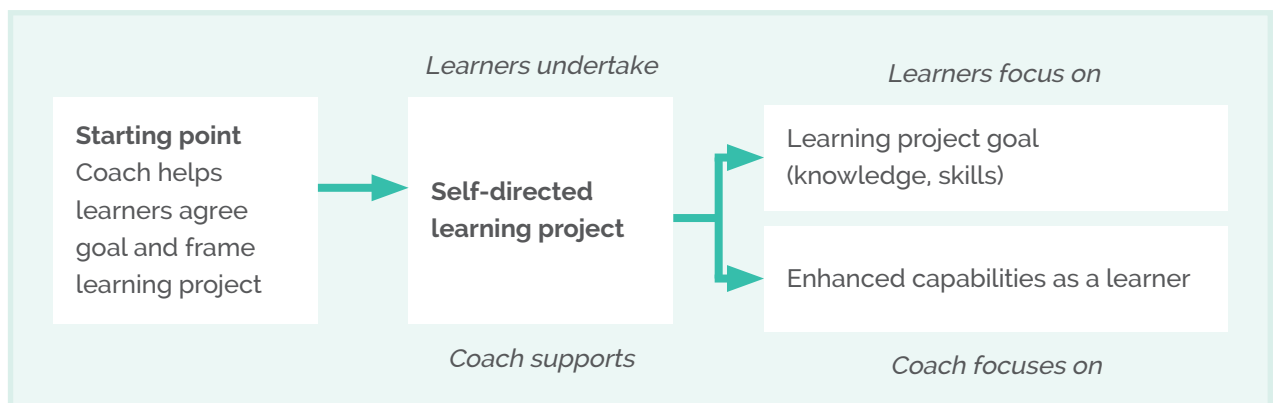
Note that learners carry out their action-plan **on their own, away** from their coach.

The time that learners spend **with** their coach is dedicated to goal-setting, project planning, progress monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

**Learners** focus on completing their project.

Their **coach** focuses on enhancing their capabilities as learners.

*How self-directed learning projects work*





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## Setting up the learning project

Self-directed learning projects work best when

- Learner and coach share a clear understanding of what a self-directed learning project is, how it works and what it aims to achieve (i.e. help the learner become more effective as a learner)
- The project's goal is clearly specified, realistically achievable and directly contributes to the learner's larger life plan (e.g. *learner's life plan is to start own business. Needs driving licence. Learning project goal = pass theory test by specified date*)
- The project's action plan has well-defined, time-referenced steps
- The project has a clear beginning, middle and end. Projects need to last long enough for learner and coach to get to grips with the approach and also for the learner to undertake a meaningful piece of learning; but they also need to be short enough for the learner to stay focused and motivated
- Learner and coach meet regularly and consistently, at least fortnightly and preferably weekly.

*Just to be clear*

### Self-directed learning is a social activity

Self-directed learning is done with other people. Self-directed learners seek out people – including teachers – who can help them to achieve their learning goals. Self-directed learning is **not** something you do alone, without help.

Learning, after all, only happens when you interact with the world.

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## How self-directed learning projects help learners

The Citizens' Curriculum aims to meet the needs of adults who face barriers to learning, including limited confidence in their own ability to learn in formal settings – whether due to negative previous experiences, low skills or limited English.

Self-directed learning projects offer learners a **different perspective** on learning and on themselves as learners. They do this by putting the learner in charge and redefining learning as real-life problem-solving in whatever way works best for the learner.

Redefining learning as a real-life problem to solve and asking the learner to decide how to proceed

- Affirms the learner's competence and capability as a learner
- Ensures that learners are learning something meaningful in a way and at a pace that suits them
- Helps the learner understand that learning is essentially real-life problem-solving and that there are no 'right' or 'wrong' ways to learn
- Helps the learner recognise that they have strengths and preferred strategies developed over many years that they can apply
- Helps the learner recognise that they can develop new strengths and strategies.

### Everyday learners

The Citizens' Curriculum focuses on the capabilities that adults need in everyday life – in other words, on the knowledge, skills and behaviours they must apply in the real world.

These demands on adults are not fixed. They change as technology advances and society develops. They change also at a personal level as individuals move through the lifespan and as their specific circumstances change.

To cope, adults need constantly to refresh and develop their skills. Effective learners do this mostly through informal, self-directed learning and problem-solving, supported by friends, colleagues at work, YouTube guidance etc.

Self-directed learning projects help learners to

- Recognise the opportunities for self-directed learning available to them
- Develop the confidence and strategies to take advantage of those opportunities.

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## Learners at work

At work, employers often find it difficult to release staff for classroom learning, particularly in groups. At the same time, work activity presents many opportunities and supports for learning. Self-directed learning projects (with flexible, non-directive coaching support) enable staff to undertake significant pieces of learning without making unrealistic demands on the employer to release staff.

## ESOL learners

The activities of daily living (including work) present a myriad of opportunities for ESOL learners to develop their English. Learners who recognise these opportunities and possess the confidence and personal learning strategies to take advantage of them make fast progress. Self-directed learning projects can help these learners accelerate that progress.

ESOL learners who struggle to progress are often those not yet taking advantage of informal learning opportunities. Self-directed learning projects are an ideal way to help these learners develop the confidence, personal learning strategies and awareness they need to progress.

For more see next section, *Non-directive coaching for low-level ESOL learners*.

## Teacher development

Self-directed learning projects offer teachers professional and personal development, including insight into

- Learning as real-life problem-solving
- Learner perspectives on learning
- Strategies learners adopt
- Barriers learners encounter
- Behaviours that facilitate the learning of others
- Difference between a teaching strategy and a learning strategy\*
- Opportunities and supports for learning beyond the classroom

And more!

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\* Teaching strategies are what instructors use to transmit knowledge, skills and behaviours. Learning strategies are what learners use to acquire knowledge, skills and behaviours.

## Something to think about

### What is the role of teaching in learning?

The psychologist Carl Rogers, author of *Freedom to learn*, said that we cannot teach another person directly, only facilitate their learning.

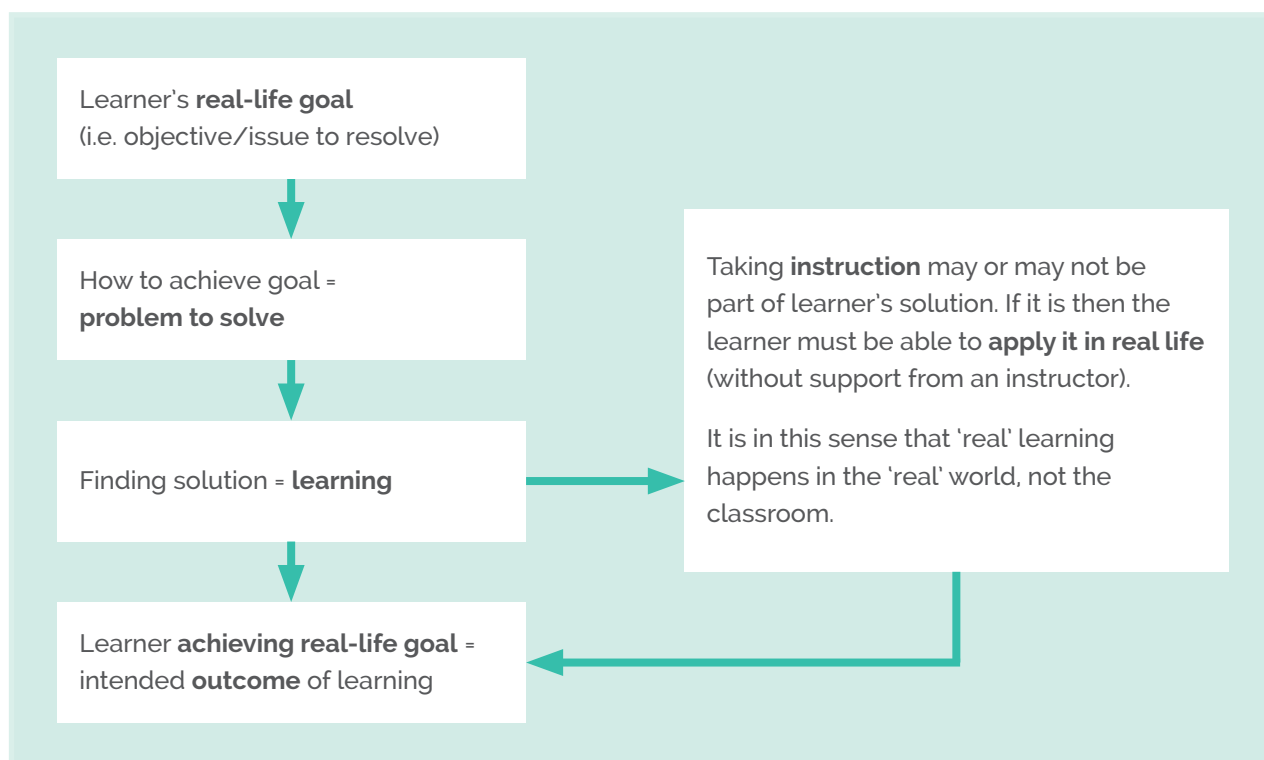
For Rogers, attending a class, receiving instruction, did not, in and of itself, equate to learning. Learning, Rogers believed, was an active process, initiated by the learner. Moreover, it required a person's full engagement, emotional as well as intellectual.

Rogers was quite clear that people only engage fully with learning that is personally meaningful to them. Approaches to learning that dictate what people should learn and how they should learn it were, in Rogers' view, unhelpful and at best misguided.<sup>3</sup>

That is not to say that teaching is necessarily unhelpful, just that it can only ever be a learning resource – something identified as useful by the learner (and therefore meaningful) in relation to their larger life goal – and the teacher a facilitator, rather than a director, of learning.

What are the implications of this for Citizens' Curriculum programmes?

#### *Learning as real-life problem-solving*



3 Rogers, C. (1969), *Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Become*. (1st ed.) Columbus, Ohio: Charles Merrill.

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## 4. Non-directive coaching for low-level ESOL learners

Non-directive coaching is based on dialogue and asks the learner to take as much responsibility as possible for their own learning. Is it appropriate for low-level ESOL learners – particularly learners unused to reflective practice who look to their teacher for 'real teaching'?

The short answer is, Yes. Non-directive coaching offers low-level ESOL learners invaluable insight into

- How language learning really works
- Opportunities and support for language learning available to them outside the classroom
- How they personally can make the most of those opportunities and that support.

Non-directive support from a coach, peer coach or learning partner also provides essential affirmation, reassurance and encouragement, helping low-level ESOL learners develop and sustain the confidence they need to progress and persist as a language learner.

### What if their language level is really low?

Keep it really simple – they will soon develop the language they need for the coaching.

It is also possible to offer the learner coaching in a language they do have, but they may actually prefer an opportunity to be with a proficient English speaker.

### Does the coach have to be a language teacher?

No – the coach is there to offer non-directive support, **not** to teach the learner English. All they need to know about language learning are the basics.

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## How non-directive coaching supports language learning

To learn another language, adults need

- **Exposure** to how that language is really used, in both its spoken and its written forms
- **Opportunity** to interact in the language (orally and in writing)
- **Confidence** to interact – particularly when you are likely to make mistakes and look/feel foolish
- Effective personal learning **strategies**
- **Persistence** (because language learning takes time).

Adults are likely to benefit from

- Help to notice (i.e. pay attention to) language forms, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.
- Safe places to practise
- Personalised corrective feedback
- Motivational support.

Non-directive language coaching focuses on helping the learner to

- **Identify opportunities to interact in English with proficient speakers**

This is probably the single most useful thing a learner can do. Coaching should aim to help the learner to identify and take advantage of as many opportunities to interact in English as possible.

- **Maintain and develop confidence**

Confidence is widely acknowledged as an important factor in all learning – not only the confidence to interact with other people, but also confidence and self-belief in yourself as someone who can learn another language. Coaching should aim to build the learner's confidence by acknowledging all progress.

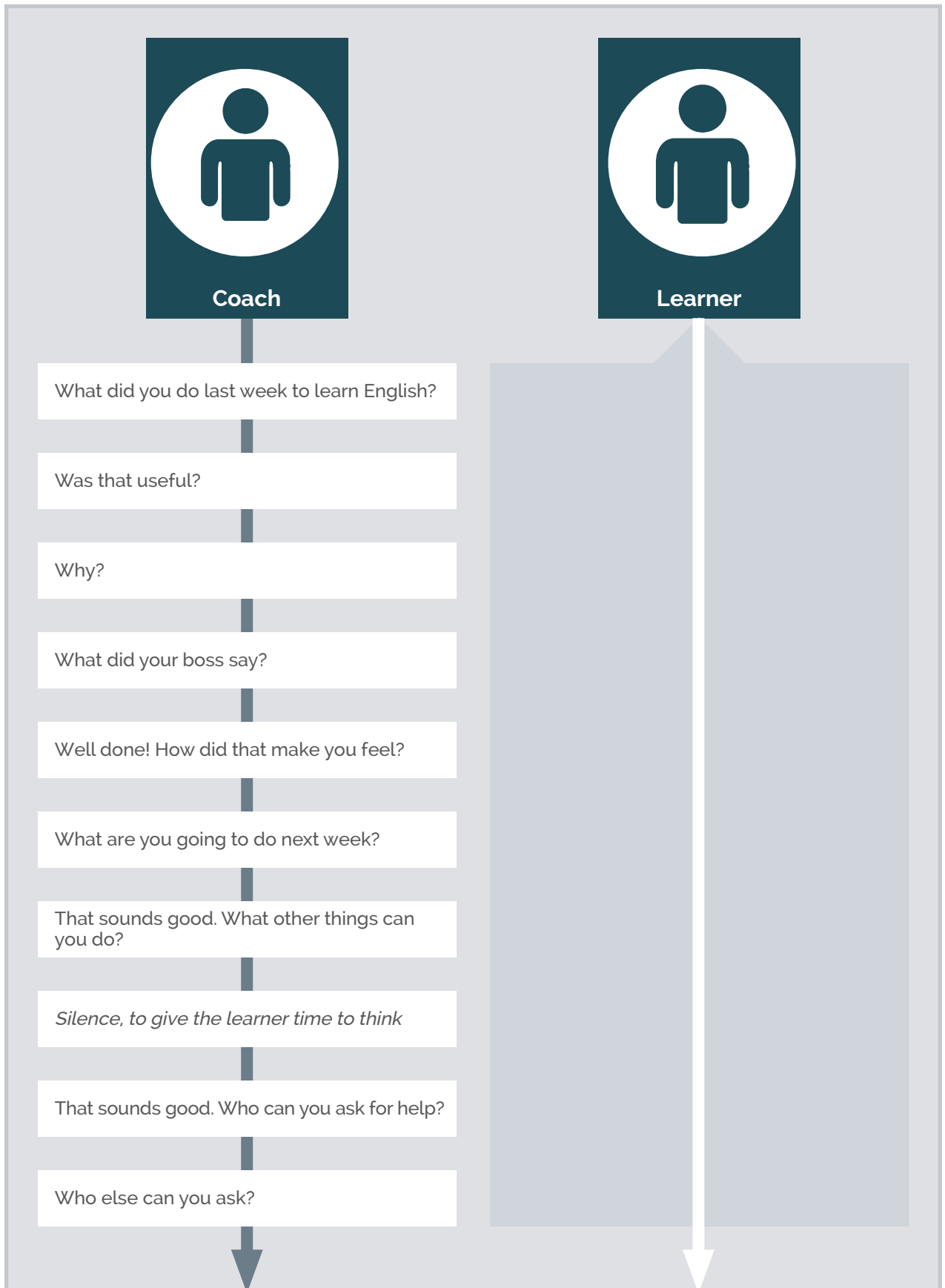
- **Develop effective personal learning strategies**

People who are good at learning languages succeed partly because they have an **aptitude** for language learning – i.e. they enjoy interacting and they have a 'good ear' – and partly because they develop effective **personal learning strategies**, e.g. finding opportunities to interact in English, creating studying routines, identifying useful resources and sources of help, including constructive, personalised corrective feedback. Non-directive language coaching is an ideal way to help learners develop their strategies.

### **Tip for language coaches: Don't get sucked into teaching the learner!**

Your job as a coach is to help the learner take responsibility for their learning. If you start teaching them, even at their urgent request, you undermine that. Answering their occasional language question or offering them the correct pronunciation of a word is one thing and – in small measure – OK, but telling them what and how to learn is quite another thing and definitely **not** OK! Focus instead on helping them to identify learning resources other than you.

Example of simple coaching conversation with low-level ESOL learner



## Something to think about

### How can we best help ESOL learners?

ESOL learners are surrounded by English.



How can we best help them to

- Make **productive use** of their **exposure** to English?
- Develop the **confidence** they need to **interact** in English?
- Take full advantage of the **opportunities** available to them to **interact** with proficient English speakers?
- Develop effective **personal learning strategies**?
- Find **safe places to practise**?
- Find sources of **personalised corrective feedback** to help them to **notice the form of the language**, i.e. its grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.?
- **Persist** over time?



## Two non-directive coaching approaches for low-level ESOL learners

Here are two ways to introduce non-directive coaching to low-level ESOL learners.

### My Plan approach: teacher-facilitated peer coaching in the classroom

This approach<sup>4</sup> uses group discussion and pair work, based on three short sets of questions.

The first set of questions focuses on long-term goals and learning strategies.

1. What is your life plan?
2. How much time do you need to reach your goal?
3. How will learning English help you reach your goal?
4. How are you trying to learn English?
5. Who is helping you to learn English?

The teacher introduces the questions to the group and helps learners understand what the questions mean. Each learner prepares then shares their answers with the group. The teacher asks another learner to summarise that individual's plan – encouraging listeners to pay attention to each other and reinforcing shared understanding. The teacher then asks the group to list the ways that learners have said they are learning English and to suggest any other possible ways. The teacher then invites learners to list opportunities to use English in their daily lives. (Note that the teacher offers no input. The aim of the exercise is to raise the question, not answer it, so that learners start thinking about it.)

After this discussion, the teacher introduces the second and third question sets. The second set structures an affirmative review of progress and includes three questions:

1. How did your plan go?
2. What went well last week? Followed by, So you ... Great! (to ensure a positive focus that emphasises progress, no matter how minor)
3. What will you do differently this coming week? (to encourage the development of strategies)

The third set focuses on concrete action-planning for the week ahead.

1. What are you going to do this week to learn English [outside of class]?
2. Where are you going to this?
3. When are you going to this?
4. Who can you ask for help?
5. May I ask you next week how your plan went?

The teacher follows the same procedure, helping learners to understand what each question means and then to prepare, share and discuss their answers.

These second and third sets are then used at every session, supplemented on occasion with a review of long-term goals and strategies using the first set of questions.

As learners grow familiar with the questions and the concepts they touch on, the teacher steps back and lets the learners peer coach each other, including putting the learners in pairs to ask each other the questions in the second and third question sets.

<sup>4</sup> Acknowledgement: Based on My Plan approach developed in the Netherlands by Annemarie Nuwenhoud for use with contract cleaners learning Dutch at work in Amsterdam.

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## Learning project approach: personal coaching outside the classroom

This approach pairs one or at most two learners with someone who acts as a non-directive coach or learning partner. Learner(s) and coach/learning partner meet regularly (e.g. weekly) for a specified time period (e.g. 12 weeks) – although since this approach lends itself to repeated cycles, shorter periods can work equally well.

The first meeting focuses on goal-setting and action-planning. The coach uses the first five questions from the My Plan approach (see above) to get to know the learner(s) and also explores how they use English in their daily lives and what learning strategies they prefer.

The coach then asks the learner(s) to identify as many things as possible that they can realistically do outside of the coaching sessions to improve their English.

The coach finishes this first meeting by using the second set of My Plan questions to help the learner(s) develop and commit to a plan of learning activity for the week ahead.

At subsequent meetings, the coach helps the learner(s) review their activity, consider its outcomes and their implications for the learner and plan next week's activity.

This approach focuses on helping the learner to develop the confidence and awareness to take advantage of the language development opportunities available to them in daily life, consistent with what we know about language learning.

## Language learning opportunities in daily life

Language learning opportunities in daily life include all the communicative opportunities arising from the activities of daily life – e.g. shopping, accessing public services, interacting at work and in the community – as well as all the language around us, from signs, posters and free newspapers to websites and smartphone apps.

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## How to explain non-directive coaching to a low-level ESOL learner

### What is coaching?

Coaching is where someone helps you plan and carry out a learning project of your choice.

### How is coaching different from teaching?

With teaching, a teacher tells you what to learn and how to learn it. The teacher is in charge of your learning. With coaching, you choose what to learn and how to learn it. The coach helps you to think about how to do this, but you make the decisions. You are in charge of your learning.

### How does the coaching work?

You choose a learning project to help you develop your English. You then get [*X number of*] sessions with your coach to help you plan and carry out your learning project.

The aim of the coaching is to help you find ways to improve your English that really work for you.

Each session, you sit down with your coach and talk about how you are getting on with your learning project. Your coach listens, asks helpful questions and encourages you.

### Important point

Your coach will **not** be teaching you English!

The job of the coach is to help **you** find the ways to learn that are best for you. The coach helps you by asking you questions.

You are an adult. You have a lot of experience. You know what is good for you. The coach's questions help you find ways to learn that are good for you.

Anyhow, that is the plan!

Do you have any questions?

Shall we try the coaching and see how it goes?

*Note: The explanation can be given in the learner's own language.*

### Why can't the coach tell you how to learn?

Only you know what is good for you.

What the coach thinks is a good way to learn might not be good for you.

So the coach asks you questions and that helps you to find the way that works best for you.

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## 5. How to get started

Non-directive coaching is a skill that can be developed to a high level, but it is also something that, in modified ways and with just a little guidance and support, anyone – including Citizens' Curriculum learners themselves – can do to good effect.

If you are new to coaching, the best way to learn is to try it out. Practise with colleagues then, when working with learners, explain what you doing and why, so they can make allowances and help you out if you occasionally get stuck.

It may take you a few weeks to get the hang of it, but providing what you do is consistent with the core objectives of non-directive coaching, you can only do good!

### Core objectives of non-directive coaching

1. Build the learner's confidence
2. Raise the learner's awareness
3. Give the learner full responsibility for their own learning

Most important, of course, is to build the learner's confidence.

## Useful questions for non-directive coaching

What makes you say that? | What do you mean?

How do you feel about that?

Can you tell me more, to help me understand?

What is the real issue here? | Why is that important to you?

What might be *[person X's]* reason for doing that? | What would *[person X]* say if they were here now? Is there any justification for what *[person X]* said/did?

What makes you so sure about that? | Have you asked them? | What if you're wrong?

Is that connected to anything?

What else? *[This is one of the most useful coaching questions. Use it to encourage/challenge the learner to dig deeper, e.g. to think more about an issue or to come up with more ideas.]*

How will that help?

What might be a problem? | What makes that a problem? | What can you do about that?

What's the worst that could happen?

What will you need to do? *[Follow up with e.g.*

What other things could you do?]

What do you think you should do first/next/after that? | What might you need to do before that?

When will you do it? | How long will that take?

Is that realistic? *[Another very important question! Follow up with e.g. What makes you say/think that?]*

Are you 100% sure you will do that? Why not 100% sure? *[This question is about how much the learner is willing to commit to doing what they say they intend to do – i.e. it is about taking responsibility.]*

Last week you told me... What happened? | How did it go? Why?

What stopped you from doing more?

Can you think of a time in the past when you had a problem like this? How did you solve it?

Does your goal/plan still make sense to you? | Do you need to think about your goal/plan again?

What could I do to support you?

Is there anything else you want to talk about now or are we finished?

## Reflective prompts for coach and learner

### Useful for the coach to reflect on

#### *Before the coaching session*

- What is the learner trying to achieve? What progress have they made to date? What remains for them to do to achieve their objective?
- To what extent and in what ways has the learner found the coaching helpful so far? Why do I think this?
- Has the learner found anything unhelpful? Why do I think this?
- What are the priorities for this session? (Why?)
- Am I looking forward to the session? (Why?)

#### *After the coaching session*

- How – concretely – did the session help the learner make progress towards their objective?
- To what extent and in what ways did the session
  - Build the learner's confidence?
  - Help the learner develop more effective strategies?
  - Help the learner take full responsibility for their own learning?
- To what extent and in what ways did I
  - Listen attentively?
  - Ask purposeful, non-directive, non-judgemental questions?
  - Give the learner time to think?
  - Make constructive challenges?
  - Offer the learner reassurance and affirmation?
- What might I have done differently? (Why?)
- What are the priorities for our next session? (Why?)

### Useful for the learner to reflect on\*

#### *Before the coaching session*

- Am I looking forward to this session? (Why?)
- What have I succeeded in doing since our last session?
- What do I want from this session? How will that help me achieve my overall learning goal?
- What help do I want from my coach?
- What will I need to explain to the coach in order for them to give me the help I want?

#### *After the coaching session*

- Did I get what I wanted from the session? (Why?)
- Did I give the coach enough information for the coach to help me?
- What did I learn from the session?
- What do I need to do between now and my next session?
- Am I looking forward to the next session? (Why?)

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\* Questions should be reformulated to suit the individual learner.

## Tips for non-directive coaching

### Follow the learner

In non-directive coaching, you are there to help the learner develop effective personal learning strategies and the confidence to apply them, particularly in the face of difficulty. The learner needs to do this **for themselves, at their own pace** (however slow).

### Ask questions only to understand the learner

The purpose of questioning is to understand the learner, not to direct or manipulate them. Questions that help you understand the learner help the learner understand themselves. That helps them move forward.

Never ask questions to make a point, or lead the learner to a particular conclusion. Such questions take responsibility away from the learner without enhancing their or your understanding.

### Be careful with 'why' questions – they can sound judgemental

When asked directly why they have said or done something, a learner (particularly if they lack confidence) may think you are asking them to justify themselves to you, leading them to become defensive and suspicious of you. Say instead, 'What makes you say that?' Or 'Tell me more about that...'

### Focus on the learner's solutions

The whole point of non-directive coaching is to help the learner develop their own strategies and solutions. You help by putting the learner in charge and supporting them to develop, test and adjust their **own** strategies. Again, this is something they must do for themselves, at their own pace.

### Resist offering the learner your strategies – even if they ask you to

For the learner, these are shortcuts to nowhere. Instead of offering the learner advice, guidance, suggestions, etc., ask yourself, 'What problem am I trying to solve for the learner?' Then find out more about the problem from the learner's perspective, e.g. 'Tell me more about this problem.' You and your learner will benefit.

### Understand the difference between a learning strategy and a teaching strategy

Learning strategies are anything a learner does to acquire knowledge, skills and behaviours. Learning resources are anything that helps them to learn (including a teacher). Teaching strategies are anything a teacher does to transmit knowledge, skills and behaviours to learners. Teaching resources are anything that helps them do this.

### Keep in mind that responsibility is a zero-sum game

Any responsibility you take for the learner's learning is responsibility that the learner cannot take.

### Trust the process

Worried about not being helpful enough? Trust the process of non-directive coaching. It offers a lot to the learner.

## Non-directive coaching role plays (to help you practise)

You will need two or more colleagues.

### Preparation

- Non-directive coach: Plan how you will approach the task
- Learner: Identify two or three life goals and some associated learning needs.
- Observer: Decide what behaviours you want to monitor during this role play and why

### Role play 1: Explain how it works to a learner

**Roles:** Non-directive coach, learner and observer

#### Role play task

- Non-directive coach: Explain coaching to the learner
- Learner: You have been offered 'coaching', but what is that? Find out.
- Observer: Observe, note behaviours

### Role play 2: Helping the learner identify their needs and set a goal

#### Role play task

- Non-directive coach: Investigate the learner's needs and help them set a learning goal
- Learner: Respond as you choose
- Observer: Observe, note behaviours

### Role play 3: Helping the learner develop a learning plan

#### Role play task

- Non-directive coach: Help the learner develop a learning plan
- Learner: Respond as you choose
- Observer: Observe, note behaviours

*Note: You may wish to repeat role plays and/or swap roles.*

### Debrief

After each role play, discuss together:

- How did it feel?
- What were the positives?
- What were the negatives?
- What questions did it leave you with?



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## Find out more

In addition to many books on non-directive coaching, there is a wealth of material online. Much of it is oriented towards management coaching, but many of the techniques described can be adjusted to support adult learners.

Other areas of practice that may offer useful insights and practical resources include

- Autonomous or self-directed learning and learner autonomy
- Cognitive behavioural therapy
- Facilitation
- Mindset – particularly work around the concept of growth mindset
- Positive psychology
- Reflective learning practice.

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## In a nutshell

**Non-directive coaching** aims to help people develop the **confidence** and **strategies** they need to **take charge** of their **own learning**.

Non-directive coaching is based on **problem-solving**. It is **forward-looking** and **action-oriented**.

The coach uses

- Attentive **listening**
- Purposeful, non-directive, non-judgemental **questioning**
- Constructive **challenge**
- Confidence-building **affirmation** and **reassurance** to help people develop their **own** solutions.

Non-directive coaching focuses on **capability** and **potential**.

'People are capable of more than they show.'

'Look at people in light of their potential.'

'Help people discover their potential for themselves.'





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