

FLORENTE PRIMARY SCHOOLS OPT FOR ACTION LEARNING

It was not a coincidence that all 12 directors of Florente primary schools followed the Action Learning Coach training. For the third time, a number of schools will train their own people under the responsibility of Hans Ploeg as director, in collaboration with Twan Paes and WIAL Netherlands. Last summer, Twan and I made preparations together to provide this training in-house. Training and educating your own people requires extra thorough preparation. Hans Ploeg (director of Florente primary schools) has been active as SALC for several years and sees a lot of learning benefit for education if Action Learning is used effectively.

In education we still have to deal with staff shortages and therefore a perceived high workload. I consciously choose the word perceived because everyone experiences the workload in a different way. This raises an interesting question: Why is it that work pressure is experienced in a completely different way within the same field and even within one school? I experience too much that we share the workload (perception) without even looking at what the question behind this question is exactly.



Because the Foundations and CALC 1 and 2 are offered in-house, one immediately starts working on complex problems that transcend the individual. This ensures that during the training:

1. People get educated
2. Organizational problems get solved
3. Directors immediately start working with their own team.



You might ask, is it safe for the director to train or coach his own people? My answer is a resounding yes. As long as you are transparent and create a safe learning climate. But that is always the responsibility of the leader, regardless of whether we look at action learning or not. In addition, collaboration with other senior / master coaches is important. This way we continue to reflect together and we can support each other where necessary.

How did I prepare for this?

In recent months I found out that all 12 schools analyze and evaluate their results (student learning outcomes) in different ways. Student grades very often determine the actions of the teacher. We should ask ourselves the question: How did these results come about? Yet, most teachers follow their habitual and beaten path to find a solution.

I sometimes jokingly say: In education we know very well WHAT to do and also know how to tell each other HOW to do it. However, the question WHY do we do the things we do is asked far too little.

If we would spend a little more time in education on the why and from there talk with one another about the how and the what (the result) the approach would seem way more logical!

The time savings are therefore in a thorough analysis of the why question. But then you immediately have to deal with the biggest pitfall in education. If we think we know why, we immediately jump to the solutions. These often disappoint and then we are back to square one! So one immediately concludes: That doesn't work either!

Paying attention to the question and asking each other questions until we are sure that we agree on the issue makes the action effective and successful. Isn't that the basis of Action Learning? Of course it is, but we need to do it well!



Florente's management team recently had a session to discuss why the organization's founding principles were no longer supported. Why not? It turns out it is not very effective if 345 employees at 12 different schools have to promote a single vision that had been imposed top-down.

The school directors were surprised when, after a session, they found out for themselves that the problem was not the 345 employees, but themselves! They came to the conclusion that as school directors they were not genuine ambassadors of the mission and vision and this resulted in creating 12 separate units instead of a unit of 12 schools.



In the session it quickly became clear how easily we come up with solutions and hide solutions in our questions. After a few sessions, the school directors became profoundly aware of a number of principles:

It is pretty difficult to formulate a good problem statement!

It is pretty difficult to ask the right questions!

It is pretty difficult not to jump to solutions!

It is already very clear for the school directors that if they take more time to work out the correct problem definition and learn to ask the right questions, they will experience less work pressure. After all, they get to focus on the real problem and not on the problem they thought they had to solve.

The program will run until February 2021. This allows the participants to practice frequently in their own area of responsibility. The second group, internal supervisors, will also start in January. And the participants of the first group will complete their

certification in February. Florente primary schools will undoubtedly soon be worthy of the predicate Action Learning primary school.

The Internal Supervisors (responsible for coordination within schools) have now a similar experience. After describing a personal issue within their activities, they experienced that reformulating that issue through questions made the problem clearer, smaller, more specific, manageable and soluble!

My initial idea that Action Learning will make an effective contribution to the workload within education comes true every time.



Written by Hans Ploeg, Senior Action Learning Coach, the Netherlands
/published 2020