

ELT Ireland bulletin



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Editor: Peter Lahiff

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From EFL Teacher to EFL Coach

by Aoife McLoughlin (ATC Bray)

In recent years, we have seen an emerging trend within the ELT industry amongst teaching professionals who, in addition to teaching, are taking on the role of coach outside the classroom, adapting the techniques and tools used by life coaches and applying them to ELT coaching. This article introduces teachers to the concept and benefits of language coaching and explores how we as teachers can use coaching tools to support our students in reaching their desired goals.

The International Coach Federation defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential. According to the ICF, the coach's responsibility is to:

- Discover, clarify, and align with what the client wants to achieve
- Encourage client self-discovery
- Elicit client-generated solutions and strategies
- Hold the client responsible and accountable

Learners commonly reach a wall in their language learning. As Richards (2008) states 'Some may feel they have arrived at a plateau and making further progress seems elusive, despite the amount of time and effort they devote to it.' An ELT coach can encourage learners to move beyond this plateau by drawing on the learner's own feelings towards their language learning, stimulating self-reflection and learner autonomy.

Asking open questions, activating high-level listening skills and giving continuous feedback and positive reinforcement help create an environment where the learner feels confident in setting realistic language learning goals and with a coach's support, make commitments to take action to achieve those goals.

“a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential”

Coaching is not an alternative to, but rather an extension of the role of a teacher. Teachers are experts within the classroom whereas in coaching, the client [learner] is the expert, taking on the responsibility and ownership of the direction that their language learning will follow. The coach listens, challenges and motivates the learner to take action to meet their desired goals as the learner feels a certain empowerment when accomplishing planned goals.

There are many useful and commonly known tools coaches use with their clients. One of them is 'The Wheel of Life', designed by Paul J. Meyer, founder of Success Motivation Institute in 1977, for the purpose of Life Coaching. Meyer noticed how if the spokes on a bike were not aligned, the bike tyre would not roll evenly and felt that a person's life was the same. ELT coaches can use this wheel, adapting the headings for language learning and encouraging students to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses in different areas, for example, listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Once learners mark the wheel on a scale of 1 to 10, areas of language imbalance are highlighted, giving a visual representation for the learner and coach to analyze and discuss.

The student may feel that in 'spoken production', they are a 5/10 but would like to be an 8/10 before the end of their course. With this information, the coach can work with the learner to identify what actions are required to achieve that goal within a set timeframe, decided by the student. Together, the learner and coach work out a plan, lead by the learner, in order to reach that goal.

Once the learner has set a desired goal and realistic timeframe, the coach introduces The Grow Model, developed by Sir John Whitmore and a group of performance consultants in the 1980s. The learner sets GOALS, looks at the REALITY, considers their OPTIONS and then plans their next steps and WAY FORWARD. (See table 1)



Not an AFL coach like Kevin Smulin of Texas A&M, but an EFL coach - helping students find the motivation and the means to overcome their language learning challenges.

Pic by Diane McDonald

According to Rivers and Wilga (1983), learners have to change their passive attitude to a more active attitude, to become less dependent on the teacher and take charge of their own learning. Through EFL coaching, learners are supported to achieve their personal targets while holding complete accountability for their actions.

Many teachers already support learners outside the classroom, however by approaching these sessions as an EFL coach using coaching tools and techniques, these sessions can fast become measurably more effective.

The Grow Model

GOALS	REALITY	OPTIONS	WAY-FORWARD
to develop level of spoken production at B2 level to an 8/10 by end of course (6 weeks time)	5/10, having difficulty 'developing clear arguments' and 'summarising information'	1) Take extra communicative lessons 2) 1 hr extra self study per evening 3) read news and summarise after	Each evening - Commit to 1 hr extra self-study, read a news report and produce an oral summary for host family.

Table 1

References

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