

A transition to Language Coach

Interview with Felicia Verban, English Teacher, Romania



“First of all, it was a very pleasant and enriching experience, both personally and professionally.”

Can you describe your professional career before taking the language coaching certification (LCC)?

I have been an English teacher since 2004, working both in public and private schools. This meant that I had the chance to work with students of all ages, from 3-year old to adults, although it has been mainly with school children. From 2011 I've been running my own language centre in Galati, Romania - with the mention that with the start of the pandemic I had to close my physical office and go online. My experience with school students includes preparing for all levels of the Cambridge exams, from YLE to CPE. With adults I worked mainly on general English, but I also taught a business English course in a company a few years ago. For the past 5-6 years I've been focusing mainly on school children and last year I started thinking about shifting my age focus to adults. However, given my past experience in teaching adults, I knew I had to come up with a different approach, which is why I enrolled for this course.

“A lot of the information was new to me and really stretched me to reconsider my teaching approach.”

How did you find the course?

First of all, it was a very pleasant and enriching experience, both personally and professionally. Listening to Rachel was a real delight – I really enjoyed the way she delivered the course! It was fantastic how she managed to send so much energy and make the entire process so interactive, even through a screen! Taking the course was very challenging, as I hadn't been through such a professional.

“One of the major insights it's given me is related to the idea of neuroplasticity of the brain, the brain as a 'creature of habit' and how we can change habits.”

“you can say that this course has planted the seed of change into my brain, as with it I have embarked on a new personal journey to reshape myself.”

Which highlights or insights did you gain from the LCC?

One of the major insights it's given me is related to the idea of neuroplasticity of the brain, the brain as a 'creature of habit' and how we can change habits. I have been having my own emotional issues for a long time and the information about our brain really pushed me into analysing myself, discovering my own 'bad habits' and how to change them. So, you can say that this course has planted the seed of change into my brain, as with it I have embarked on a new personal journey to reshape myself.

The entire approach has made me analyse the way I had delivered my classes with adult students and to understand what I had done wrong- I can clearly see the value of discussing motivation, of dealing with emotional triggers involved in the process of learning, of the chunking down technique. Before this course, I was reluctant to work with adults because a lot of the times, even if there had been some progress, they would be unsatisfied with it. They couldn't see their progress clear and if they saw it, they thought it was very slow. I now understand that what we were missing in this respect was setting clear goals and a clear time interval for achieving them.

Even if my adult students were motivated, I had never considered the idea of the learning process seen as never-ending, and therefore, causing emotional distress.

I can now explain much better and clearer to myself all those times when my teaching was

not successful, even if I had done it with a lot of passion and knowledge. As an adult it's easy to lose motivation when there are so many other concerns, and this is where the idea of the coach comes in. I am totally in love with this approach and I can't wait to put it into practice.

What was the immediate impact on your way of teaching after taking the course?

One mistake I used to do was to not allow students enough time to answer and finish their sentences/ ideas, always being under the pressure of time. Right after the first session of the course I started giving students more time, more freedom to say what they want, realising that, even if it might seem like we are wasting time during a lesson, really allowing them to formulate their own understanding of a topic will pay off in the long run. I started to learn how to be a better listener and to better identify those moments when there is a real need for me to step in. So now I wait more until I intervene. The second thing I did for my students was to have a discussion with each of them, right after the Christmas break, in order to tap into their motivation a little and find out how they feel about our meetings and how we can make them better. My students were really thrilled about these discussions-

I now pay more attention to my students' state of mind before starting to work. I try to get them into a more relaxed, more comfortable zone before working.

I also check with my students more often how they feel about what we are doing, about their progress.

“I now pay more attention to my students' state of mind before starting to work. I try to get them into a more relaxed, more comfortable zone before working.”

“, I am working on developing my ‘coaching’ skills with those around me, practicing how to be a better listener, how to refrain from making hasty judgements, how to empathise.”

Were there any impacts on your personal life during or after the course?

Yes, as I mentioned before, I had been dealing with some personal issues for quite some time and the information from the course- especially about parts of the brain and how each functions- has showed me where to start looking in order to solve my problems. I have started reading some of the books recommended on the course, like Daniel Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence and it is helping me a lot to start taking better control over my life and my actions.

I am also now practicing spiritual meditation on a daily level which is helping me with being more mindful and more in control of my behaviour.

At the same time, I am working on developing my ‘coaching’ skills with those around me, practicing how to be a better listener, how to refrain from making hasty judgements, how to empathise.

How would you describe your professional development after the course?

At this point I have just received the Language Coaching Certificate and I haven’t started practicing yet. I need to work out my marketing strategy. I want to start practicing as soon as possible and would very much like to start the next level training course.

“I now pay more attention to my students’ state of mind at the beginning of the course and try to get their attention as much as possible right from the beginning so that they can focus on the work.”

How has the course changed the way you deliver a language course?

I don’t have any adult students yet, so I am currently just applying some of the techniques with my young students.

I now pay more attention to my students’ state of mind at the beginning of the course and try to get their attention as much as possible right from the beginning so that they can focus on the work.

I have also reduced the amount of time spent on grammar work in favour of more functional language activities. The ‘chunking down’ technique has helped me to structure better the way I teach grammar at different levels.

I focus more on allowing students time to produce their own examples of how to use language rather than doing controlled practice from grammar books.

I am also structuring my lessons better : we set clear goals for each topic or session; I signpost what we are doing all the time so that my students can have a clearer picture of what has been done and where we are going; I summarise what has been done at the end of the session or sessions.

The ‘chunking down’ technique has helped me to structure the grammar work much better. Another thing that I started doing with the course was to set the goals of our sessions right from the beginning and then review them at the end of the session / sessions or once the topic has been dealt with.

“I can see my students a little more motivated and energetic during sessions.”

Were there any impacts on your learners?

I can see my students a little more motivated and energetic during sessions. The fact that I am involving them a lot more in deciding what to practice next, what to practice at home, and generally giving them less instructions and just allowing the session to flow more freely, is helping them take more ownership of the process and be more involved in it.

I used to have the bad habit of stepping in and finishing students' sentences or helping them with the necessary vocabulary or grammar because they took too much time to answer, but now I realise that it was a mistake because I was only doing their work for them and they didn't have much to gain from it. So now, even though my students are also worried that time is passing, I try to bring them to a relaxed state of mind and give them all the time they need to complete the task.

Is there any additional information that you would like to add?

Just that I am very grateful for what I have discovered with this course and I am really proud to be part of the network.

April 2021