

A transition to Language Coach

Interview with Petr Mařák, English teacher, Czech Republic

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

Since my university studies, I have always been interested not only in pragmatics, but also in the second language acquisition. The logical next step for me after being awarded a master’s degree was to combine my background as a linguist and my abiding passion for teaching. In doing so I became a qualified ELT practitioner. After more than ten years of gaining experience in various teaching contexts and participating in numerous ELT conferences and other events, my attention was more and more drawn to the significant role played by individual differences. I also came to realize that however eclectic I may strive to be in order to tailor my teaching style



to a particular learner, there is still a vital ingredient missing in the whole process. And that ingredient resides in the hands of no one else but the learner. Whatever my learners and I do in class is just a tiny bit of what can be done by learners on their own between our sessions. Realizing that somewhat obvious thing made me change my focus completely and I decided to broaden my horizons in terms of learner autonomy, coaching and any other means of making the process of acquiring a new language as effective and as natural as it possibly can be for each and every learner. It was then that I came across LCC and was more than happy to sign up for the course.

How did you find the course?

To answer the question, three words spring to my mind: learning by doing. From day one we were thrown in at the deep end – only the end did not seem that deep. With all that help and support from Rachel, we were all finding our way to coach each other right from the very start. Being in the shoes of learners was priceless and there were countless eye-openers on the way. What I appreciated most about the course was the proportion of theory and practice. It was only after taking the course that I realized that apart from dozens of hours of meaningful hands-on experience; I also acquired a tremendous amount of immediately applicable theoretical input and knowledge.

Which highlights or insights did you gain from the LCC?

It would be easier to list highlights and insights from each session as there were so many! Doing the online course, we had sessions once or twice a week which meant sometimes a whole week to think about all that was covered in the session and that was fantastic! It felt like seeing your professional life through a pair of glasses upgraded each time to bring you another dose of expertise to use straight away. The crucial insight for me was that the transition from a language teacher to a language coach is not in any way about discarding your previous professional experience. Quite the opposite. You build on it and add the coaching element and information from the latest neuroscience research, which opens up whole new vistas for you and for your learners. For example, I have completely revised the way I approach grammar points with my learners.

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

It was a breath of fresh air. I love learning new things and believe that every single person who helps others achieve their goals should definitely work on their own professional development. It was some seemingly small changes, such as altering the way I ask questions, that had an immediate positive effect. Some of the changes were more far-reaching, such as jamming on the brakes and letting the learner be in the driving seat a way more than before.

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

On a personal level, the course helped me improve my own communication skills and understand better what makes some people tick and why they act the way they do. The course also reminded me of the significance of language choice, such as how modal verbs are irreplaceable in building rapport and defining roles in any given relationship.

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How was your professional development after the course?

After the course I still keep up to date with the latest developments in the ELT industry by engaging in various activities from attending webinars to reading methodology-focused books and online posts. However, I am currently reading up on anything to do with the brain, memory and learning, driven by a deep desire to obtain and absorb most of what has been scientifically proven in these areas. What is more, I have turned myself into a “guinea pig” and taken up yet another language to study to see what works for me and what doesn’t as I progress through the individual CEFR levels. I carefully note down each success and failure, as what has seemed ineffective or inefficient for me may do wonders for one of my learners.

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

The course was a game changer for me. I had always known that teaching does not equal learning. I had always designed my lessons to be as personalized and learner-centered as possible. I had always tried to give my students useful tips how to learn better. But it was only after taking this course that I finally gained confidence to make the shift from “I am here to tell you what to do” to “I am here to help you explore what you may like to do”. This shift has changed everything. It is no longer about me tailoring the course to suit learners’ needs but rather about giving the learners absolute freedom to have their say in the “what and how” of their course.

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

I would like to thank Rachel and the whole LCC team for their outstanding support before and during the course. The best thing is that this support did not end with the final session of the course. There are follow-up courses to deepen your knowledge and you can regularly meet the other participants online to share your professional ideas and experience or just to keep in touch.

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