Teaching and Coaching


“Creativity is intelligence having fun”
Albert Einstein

When I first saw this quote on a notebook in a paper store in a Hell’s Kitchen, New York City, my brain made a ‘click’. Being creative in my way of teaching would help my student to be motivated, I want to learn English. However, three hours a week are not enough to enhance their language skills and this can make them feel very frustrated. They often come to my office to ask me what they have to do to improve their English because they struggle to find their way to success. So, he comes my challenge: How can I teach and coach the perfect learner?

Every language students want to know the secret of making the most progress in the shortest time. What should the perfect learner do to excel in acquiring a foreign language?

1. KEEP THEM MOTIVATED

Remind them of their goal. Tell them to keep in mind their objective. They are learning because they want to achieve something. They may want to study abroad, or work there, get a job, understand the lyrics of a song, etc. when they get there, their life will be better. They must always remember that, even when it’s tough. Motivation is the key.

2. TIME IS THE ESSENCE

Even when they are really tired, they should do some learning, even if it's only five or ten minutes (which doesn’t mean, it'd be enough but it's better than nothing!). They should never miss a chance to increase their knowledge. ‘Use it or lose it!’ They can practice English even by going to a pub quiz or even by going to a language exchange meetings organised by many cafés in town.
3. ENCOURAGE THEM TO BE BRAVE

Repeat to them that they mustn't worry about small mistakes! No-one minds! When they learn new vocabulary or grammar, they must use it as soon as possible. If they are not completely accurate, someone will correct them sooner or later but they mustn't be ashamed of it. If they never try, they'll never know! Challenge them!

4. VOCABULARY RECORD

Recent studies have shown that 86% of the students were successful in remembering new vocabulary by writing it in a vocabulary book, 74% by typing it in their mobile phone devices, 67% by creating flashcards and only 21% of them succeed by using no written record. In fact, to really learn a new word, students have to remind themselves of it at least six times over hours and weeks. They should write down all their new vocabulary in a little fancy book that they can always carry around with them. If they more techie than you and me, they can keep a record in their mobile - they have got it always with them, don't they? They've got plenty of apps to keep record and even create tests which take into account the vocabulary they add.

5. TECHNOLOGY USE

Support them to listen podcasts of native speakers (British, English, Australia, etc.), there are plenty of them available for subscription. They can do online tests checking their levels and knowledge (I personally use the Moodle virtual educational platform with my students, they have three or four assignment to do each week as homework). Propose them to read the news in their target language (here social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr are very helpful). They can watch videos in English on youtube.com or vimeo.com. DVD's of films or series in English with subtitles in the same language are also very appealing. It's also highly recommended to comment on articles and interact with blog authors. You might want to make your own flashcards with online flashcard generators or apps, play quiz games online, or to keep a permanent record of their new vocabulary in Google Drive, for example and make them share it with their mates.

6. READ, READ, READ

Encourage them to read (in English, of course) things that they like, not boring stuff. Highlight new grammar patterns and key vocabulary. The more they read, the quicker they progress. It's as simple as that. Magazines like 'Catalonia Today' might be very interesting for older students.

All these pieces of advices will make you an 'enabler', the kind of teacher who is confident enough to share control with the learners or perhaps to hand it over to them entirely. Learning shouldn't be confined inside of the four walls of a classroom. The teacher must coach their student to be autonomous learners in the near future. Sometimes this will involve him or her in less traditional teaching, and become a guide or a counsellor or a resource of information when needed. Sometimes, when the class is working well under its own steam, when a lot of autonomous learning is going on, we, teachers, may be hardly visible, and that’s the point. ●

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