

Enhancing Language Learning through NeuroLanguage Coaching®

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Abstract

NeuroLanguage Coaching® incorporates the latest findings in neuroscience as well as principles and tools from coaching into the traditional process of language teaching with practical steps to facilitate learning. Through neuroscience we know that every brain is unique, so neurolanguage coaching® is tailor-made learning to clients' needs, without books, but with clear and structured targets to achieve in defined periods of time. This method and approach potentially creates the perfect learning conditions for the brain leading to faster, more efficient, sustainable and cost-effective results. It is essential as an educator to fully understand how the brain is impacted and affected while learning and for us to engage and empower our learner to their full potential. When we create brain friendly interactive conversations, in a non-directive style, provoking brain connections whenever possible, then we come into a perfect learning state.

NL Coaching is new and unique, going one step beyond "language coaching" adding the practical application of "neuroscientific principles". Teachers are introduced to the 7 underlying principles of neuroscience pervasive in NL coaching, highlighted in the book NeuroLanguage Coaching – Brain friendly Language Learning. Delegates will understand also how coaching principles greatly influence how we act and react as educators and will be provoked into reflecting on own behaviours and practices to really make them more learner focused and develop a more learner centric process. Goal setting becomes an integral part of a progressive learning process, as well as conversations centering upon motivation and commitment, understanding how to get a learner to take ownership and responsibility throughout.

Keywords: NeuroLanguage Coaching, Language Coaching, Coaching, Neuroscience, Neuroeducators

Teaching, Coaching and Language Coaching

If we look at the traditional picture behind teaching we have a teacher transmitting language knowledge, fully portrayed as the active player who is responsible for all the transmission and then the learner receiving this knowledge, portrayed as the passive player when listening and taking in all the information, becoming active when he/she speaks or writes. In this respect, the teacher is the key, the central focus and the controller. Through directional and instructive means, he/she guides the learner through the learning material. This is sometimes hampered by the fact that even though the teacher transfers his/her knowledge, the learner knows the language but is unable to actually put it into practical use, so the gap from passive intake of the knowledge to the actual active usage may often be extremely wide. Normally the teaching process revolves around particular books or a certain set of materials, which are followed in a strict order; the style is, as already mentioned directive, demonstrative, instructive and often mandatory. It can also involve quite a formal or formalized approach, where the relationship between teacher and learner can be distant and impersonal, with the teacher portraying the superior status and may totally ignore the socio-cultural character of the learner, therefore the learner may sometimes find it hard to relate to the learning. Finally the question of cost-effectiveness is often never raised.

Having explored language teaching, it is now a question of asking what language coaching is. Firstly, looking at "coaching", we see a phenomenal development of this profession over the last ten years, progressing from the sports arena into the business arena of corporates and enterprises. In this day and age we can find coaching for almost anything ranging from "life coaching" to "business coaching" even to "health coaching". The attempts of non-profit federations and organizations, (like the International Coaching Federation) to bring professional standards and ethics into this growing business area are justified in the fact that clients and customers need to know that the people who declare themselves to be a "coach" are in fact developed, trained and certified by recognized training organizations.

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One of the real problems at present is the lack of understanding and the confusion about what language coaching really is. Certainly language coaching must start from the basis of a sound transmission of language knowledge, thus the person imparting the knowledge should have a background in the grammatical, theoretical side of the target language to be learnt. However, then in addition, the traditional principles of “coaching” are incorporated into the knowledge transfer process. So, in theory, language coaching in the broad sense, is a blend of language teaching/training background together with principles, tools and ethics of “traditional coaching practices”.

Then, what are the traditional principles of coaching that pervade the language transmission process? Firstly the goal setting process is key: the ability of the coach and coachee to set goals and targets which are then worked on over a set period of time, in which the coachee commits him/herself to reach those goals. A language coach must have the experience of going through a goal setting process with the coachee to fully comprehend what it is the coachee wants and/or rather needs to learn and in what time period. After the goals are set, both coach and coachee go through the necessary strategies and actions which will facilitate the coachee to best achieve these desired and set goals. The art of having coaching style conversations is also a requirement and art belonging to “coaching” as well as the understanding regarding the motivation and commitment of the coachee. Coaching sessions are then structured towards the accomplishment of the goals and when the time period matures, the coach and coachee then check in together to see whether the goals really have been achieved; if not, what would be needed for the full accomplishment of the existing goals is further explored, but if so, then a new set of goals are then established. Coaching acronyms, tools and models are sometimes used at various stages of the coaching process, either to bring awareness to the coachee or to bring emotional recognition or insights. Also the coaching contract itself, ethical guidelines such as confidentiality and coaching principles such as those laid down by the International Coaching Federation in the USA like “trust and intimacy” or “coaching presence” all become integral parts to “Language coaching” in its broadest sense.

So what could be described as the inherent characteristics of language coaching? The coaching style already signifies a more active role for the coachee and more active learning. The empathy of the coach towards the coachee is essential, as well as the ability of the coach to adapt to the coachee and the coachee’s way of learning, tailor-making and suiting everything to the coachee. Continuous feedback and acknowledgement create an excellent learning environment and keeping the coachee motivated and committed also falls on the coach. Normally no books are needed and information is transmitted via free and open coaching conversations, which are stimulating and arouse reflexion. The coach and coachee both have equal status, but in this case the coachee really assumes ownership of his/her learning and the learning process, as well as taking the responsibility to learn. Finally, cost-effectiveness is essential in language coaching as goals have to be achieved within a particular timeframe and this then gives a real cost awareness to the entire learning process.

“Neurolanguage Coaching” – Adding the Dimension of Neuroscience to Language Coaching

The new method/approach of “Neurolanguage coaching” has been introduced by Rachel Marie Paling, the writer of this article. This is a hybrid of both method and approach, whereby it not only encompasses the traditional principles of coaching within the language knowledge transmission process, but it also incorporates aspects of neuroscience and the ideal learning state according to neuroscience, in which this ideal learning state of the brain is explored through knowledge of the limbic system and how the brain works. By fully understanding and acknowledging that no two brains are alike, the neurolanguage coach then is able to adapt to the individual coachee in front of him/her and is able to recognize how that coachee can relate to, learn and commit to long term memory the information that the language coach is transmitting. Perhaps this is the first time in the pedagogy of language that the learning process really focuses learner-centrally on the individual’s capacity for learning, recognizing that all brains are different and the neuroscientific principles underlying this process. The neurolanguage coach is trained to deliver a constant brain friendly approach which is non-directive, non-threatening, abundantly empathetic, but provocative in the sense that he/she will constantly be stimulating the learner’s brain into language connections and insights throughout the process. There may also be conversations to discover how the learner learns best, and how he/she can connect language learning to real life and to personal situations. The neurolanguage coach is skilled in the technique of chunking language down, providing a safe learning environment and developing spacing techniques for learning. Additionally, he/she is skilled in getting the coachee to set own goals and actions for the process, ensuring maximum ownership from the learner. Motivation and commitment conversations are essential, as well as the awareness of “emotional triggers” which could

hamper learning and progress, so there are continuous coaching conversations that keep the brain in a calm learning state, whereby even grammar is delivered through calm step by step coaching conversations, so that the learner can quickly “normalise” the language.

In summary, Neurolanguage Coaching not only goes beyond language teaching, it also goes one step beyond language coaching, to provide a unique, potentially faster and more efficient, language learning process.

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