From Language Teacher to Language Coach With Goal Setting
by Jacqueline Foster

The profession of coaching, originally developed by Thomas Leonard, has flourished since its inception in the 1990s (International Coaching Federation, 2015b), and today it is not uncommon to find coaching for business and career advancement as well as for personal and lifestyle enhancement. Although coaching is not new, I had never considered the possibility of language coaching. This notion quickly captured my attention several years ago when I attended a presentation at a national conference. It was an exciting prospect, and my associate dean at that time, who was also at the conference, decided to implement a modified version at our English Language Center. As a result, I participated in a training program and have since enjoyed many opportunities to coach English as a second language (ESL) students.

When the term *language coaching* is mentioned, it is often assumed to mean tutoring or mini-ESL lessons, but the coaching relationship is truly not a teacher-student one. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as "partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential" (ICF, 2015a). With language coaching, a teacher trained as a language coach partners with students in a coach (teacher)–coachee (student) relationship that seeks to facilitate second language learning. Through regular meetings, coaches assist coachees in articulating their language aspirations by helping them identify, achieve, and then reflect on goals. The ICF website states that coaching "helps people tap into their potential, unlocking sources of creativity and productivity" (ICF, 2015a). The coach essentially acts as the wind in the coachee's sail, but it is the coachee who determines the direction and steers the ship.

The Importance of Goal Setting for English Learners

After observing the many successes of my coachees, I wanted to share some of these strategies with my ESL learners. I could not be both language coach and teacher, but I could introduce the notion of goal setting with a few activities—something any language teacher can do. My intention was to whet the students' appetite so they might consider exploring goal setting on their own. Although the concept of goal setting is easy to grasp, many students are not adept at articulating the tangible steps necessary to achieve a goal. A quote by the French writer de Saint-Exupery sums up some of the challenges many people encounter with formulating goals: "A goal without a plan is just a wish" (The Quotations Page, 2015). The teaching of SMART (specific,

measureable, attainable, relevant, and time-sensitive) goals can help transform the wish into an articulated and concrete plan (Tracy, 2017, p. 1).

With a busy curriculum to cover as an ESL teacher of university-bound students, I do not have the time to teach extensive goal setting, but I wanted to create opportunities for the students in my classes to reflect on their language learning and to encourage them to consider the differences between being a passive and an active learner. Students may want to improve their essay writing, but what exactly are they going to do to achieve this goal? The following four activities are ones that I have used to invite students to contemplate and assess their learning. Depending on the time available in a classroom setting, an instructor can use one or multiple activities.

Activities for Student Reflection

Activity 1: Postcards

I learned about this activity at a conference session several years ago. It involves buying or making postcards and distributing one to each student at the beginning of the semester. Then, the students write their address on the postcard and write a goal for where they want their learning to be by midsemester. This is a good time to introduce SMART goals.

Collect the postcards and mail them prior to midterm, or returns them to the students at midterm in class. This becomes a catalyst for reflection. Did the students achieve their goals? Why or why not? The postcards present an opportunity for rich discussion and much reflection.

Activity 2: Journaling

Journaling differs from the previous activity because it creates an opportunity for ongoing reflection and teacher feedback. After introducing SMART goals at the beginning of the semester, students can write their goals and the steps necessary to attain them in their journals. Each week or every 2 weeks, learners can contemplate and respond in their journals about their progress. Are they succeeding? Your comments and questions can support, encourage, and guide students through regular feedback. The journal can act as a mirror encouraging learners to reflect on their progress and consider their role in achieving or not achieving their intended outcomes.

Activity 3: Vision Boards

Vision boards offer a creative and visual approach to goal setting that may be more appealing to some students. They can identify their goal through images from magazines, newspapers, photographs, and other personal or sources. (Be sure to discuss fair use with your students). Once the vision board has been created, students will need to formulate a concrete plan that will outline the steps to achieve their visual goal. The steps can be placed on or behind the board. Students may want to keep their vision board in their binder as a reminder. They could also take a snapshot of their vision board and upload the picture as the desktop image or screen saver image on their laptops, tablets, or cell phones. The vision board offers a powerful tool, but

without a concrete plan the vision board is still an unarticulated desire, so learners will need assistance with formulating the tangible steps for attaining their goal.

Activity 4: Partner Reflection

A final activity is to schedule a little time each week or every 2 weeks for students to discuss and reflect on their goals with a partner or in small groups. At the beginning of the semester, students can, alone or with the help of a partner, formulate their SMART goals and articulate the steps necessary to attain them. They can record their goals in student planners or on a teacher-created handout and then share them with partners.

A partner reflection time creates an opportunity for learners to contemplate and discuss their progress. Although journaling allows for teacher feedback, students may feel less inhibited reflecting on their goals with a partner. Prior to any discussion, students need an opportunity to review the language structures for discussion and to review the guidelines for positive and supportive partner talk. Students should be encouraged to ask open-ended questions and to share only what they feel comfortable sharing. You can put a few sample questions on a board or on a handout as a guide.

Conclusion

Although some learners will achieve their goals, many students will not achieve them easily, and some may not achieve them at all. Some learners may naturally believe that writing a goal is tantamount to achieving it and may feel disappointed and discouraged when they fall short of their intended aim. Regardless of the outcome, goal setting provides students with an opportunity to learn about themselves and to be encouraged to make decisions about their learning. It is the reflection, discussion and revision of the goals that can increase students' awareness about their learning and can also create opportunities for increased learner engagement. Goal setting is not only a tool that students can continue employing throughout their studies, it can also be a tool for transformation and empowerment as a second language learner.

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