RETHINKING LANGUAGE TEACHING

Why language development, communication and coaching belong together

Teach the language.
Develop the communicator.

Barnaby Griffiths

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATORS

Rethinking Language Teaching

Why language development, communication and coaching belong together

A practical introduction to Language and Communication Coaching for language educators

Teach the language. Develop the communicator.

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www.bglc.es

Introduction: “Hoy no es mi día”

“Hoy no es mi día.”

Today just isn't my day.

If you teach languages, you have probably heard some version of this.

A learner is struggling. Words are not coming. Their sentences are hesitant. They cannot express something they feel they ought to be able to express and eventually they offer an explanation.

Today is just not their day.

The interesting word is *today*.

It suggests that what we are witnessing is an exception. Normally, the learner believes, their English is much better.

Sometimes that is true. We all have good and bad days. Tiredness, stress, nerves and the pressure of a particular situation affect communication.

But after more than 30 years working in language education, I have heard versions of this phrase too often simply to accept it at face value.

Sometimes “Hoy no es mi día” conceals a more uncomfortable possibility.

Perhaps this **is** roughly what the learner's English sounds like when they genuinely have to communicate.

Perhaps the performance they remember as their “normal” English occurred after preparation, on a familiar subject, with a supportive interlocutor or in a predictable classroom activity.

Perhaps they know considerably more English than they can reliably use.

Or perhaps they genuinely do not yet have the language they need.

Maybe the problem is vocabulary. Maybe it is grammar or pronunciation. Perhaps they cannot follow the other speaker quickly enough. Perhaps they panic when interrupted, speak too quickly, fail to ask for clarification or become so concerned with being correct that they lose the thread of what they wanted to say.

Usually, several things are happening at once.

And that is where I believe language education needs to become more ambitious.

Our job is not simply to help learners know more about a language.

Nor is it simply to help them retrieve language they have already learnt.

We need to **teach language and develop communicators**.

That means teaching vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. It means developing listening and speaking. It means helping learners become clearer, more fluent, more accurate and more responsive. It means improving their ability to interact, repair misunderstandings, organise ideas and notice the effect they are having on another person.

It also means giving them the tools to continue developing without us.

That broader conception of language education is what led me to develop **Language and Communication Coaching (LCC)**.

And I believe it is becoming increasingly relevant to the future of our profession.

LCC is not designed for one kind of teacher or one kind of teaching context. Whether you teach English or another language, whatever your own linguistic background, and whether you work independently or in a school, university or training organisation, the underlying challenge is the same: helping learners develop the language and communication they need in the situations that matter to them.

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1. The knowledge trap

There is something reassuring about knowledge.

It can be organised.

A grammar rule can be explained. A vocabulary list can be learnt. A worksheet can be completed. A tense can be named. An exercise can be marked.

Knowledge gives both teachers and learners visible evidence that something has happened.

And none of this is inherently wrong.

Learners need vocabulary. They need grammar. They need pronunciation. They need exposure to language and opportunities to understand how it works.

But there is a trap.

We can start to confuse **evidence that something has been explained, studied or understood with evidence that somebody can use it**.

A learner may explain a grammatical distinction perfectly and still be unable to tell a story clearly.

They may recognise twenty new words in an exercise and access none of them when they need to speak.

They may score highly on a listening comprehension task but struggle when a real person speaks unexpectedly, changes direction or uses an unfamiliar accent.

They may produce an accurate sentence when given time to construct it but lose that accuracy when they also have to listen, think, react and maintain a relationship with another human being.

Being able to talk about language is not the same as being able to use it.

Metalanguage has its place, but we should not confuse the map with the territory.

One teacher who completed my online LCC course, Nataliia Lytvynenko, expressed the realisation beautifully:

“For many years, I’ve been asking myself the same questions: ‘Why don’t my students understand some points?’ ‘Aren’t my explanations clear enough?’ And now I realise that I haven’t provided them with the necessary tools and support.”

That shift in question is crucial.

Instead of asking:

How can I explain this better?

we can also ask:

What does this learner need in order to do something with it?

Sometimes the answer may be a better explanation.

But very often it will be something else.

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2. Learners can hide behind knowledge

Learners are not foolish for doing this. In many cases, education has taught them to.

Knowledge-based tasks feel safe.

Learning vocabulary creates visible progress.

Doing a grammar exercise provides control.

Preparing every sentence before speaking reduces uncertainty.

Talking *about* the language allows the learner to demonstrate intelligence without exposing themselves to all the risks of actually communicating through it.

And communication is risky.

The other person may not understand.

They may interrupt.

They may ask an unexpected question.

The learner may forget the word they wanted.

They may discover that something they thought they understood is much harder to use than to recognise.

This is one reason learners can work extraordinarily hard without seeing the communicative progress they expect.

The problem is not that the work was worthless.

The problem is that **knowledge has been mistaken for the destination**.

The question must become: what happens next?

Can the learner take the language and use it to achieve something?

Can they understand it when another person uses it naturally?

Can they adapt when circumstances change?

Can they find another route when the exact expression they wanted is unavailable?

And if the resources they currently possess are not enough, can we identify what is missing and **teach them something new**?

That last point matters.

LCC is sometimes misunderstood as if it were primarily a way of helping people perform better with language they already possess.

It does that.

But it does much more.

If somebody does not have the vocabulary, we teach vocabulary.

If they need a grammatical structure, we teach it.

If pronunciation is making them difficult to understand, we work on pronunciation.

If they cannot hear a feature of connected speech, we work on listening and phonology.

If they do not know how to clarify a misunderstanding, enter a conversation or organise a complex answer, we develop those resources too.

Language development and communicative development belong together.

3. Teachers can hide behind knowledge too

This is perhaps the more uncomfortable part.

Teachers can hide behind knowledge-based teaching just as learners can hide behind knowledge-based learning.

We explain the grammar.

We present the vocabulary.

We correct the mistakes.

We complete the worksheet.

We cover the syllabus.

At the end of the lesson there is plenty of evidence that teaching activity has occurred.

But what happened to the learner's ability to communicate?

During many years observing teachers on advanced teacher-training courses, I repeatedly saw a curious division of responsibility.

The teacher's job was perceived as teaching the language.

What learners subsequently did with it was largely their problem.

I no longer think that is sufficient.

If our stated purpose is to help people learn a language so that they can communicate through it, then communicative development has to be part of our responsibility too.

That does not diminish the role of the skilled language teacher.

It makes the role more demanding.

An effective Language and Communication Coach needs enough linguistic expertise to hear what a learner is attempting, identify what is limiting them and provide better options.

That might mean supplying a verb, reformulating a sentence, clarifying a grammar point, modelling a sound or helping the learner notice a stress pattern.

At the same time, the LC coach[1] may be considering pace, clarity, interaction, listening, confidence, organisation or the impression the speaker is making.

Language is not removed from the picture.

It is put to work.

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4. So what is different about LCC?

I describe Language and Communication Coaching as **a mindset and an approach, supported by a method**.

It brings together four broad areas:

- effective language teaching techniques
- effective language acquisition techniques
- techniques for developing communication skills
- coaching techniques that support awareness, agency and growth

I would not claim that every individual element of LCC has never existed elsewhere.

That would be neither credible nor useful.

Its distinctiveness lies in **how those elements are brought together**.

Language education has often separated things which, in real communication, happen simultaneously.

Grammar may belong in one lesson.

Pronunciation in another.

Listening in another.

Speaking somewhere else.

Coaching may be treated as an entirely different profession.

Communication skills may be associated with business training rather than language teaching.

Real life is not organised into those compartments.

[1] In this guide, "LC coach" refers to a teacher or coach working from the LCC approach. Teachers can also incorporate individual LCC principles and techniques without changing their professional title.

When somebody explains a difficult idea in a meeting, they are selecting vocabulary, constructing grammar, producing sounds, listening to reactions, organising information, managing pace, interpreting the other person's response and deciding what to say next.

All at the same time.

LCC starts with that reality.

The central question becomes:

What does this learner need in order to communicate more effectively in the situation that matters to them?

The answer might be a new phrase.

It might be better pronunciation.

It might involve listening.

It could be confidence, pausing, emphasis, vocabulary, reformulation, rehearsal, active listening or a clearer structure for the message.

Usually, it is a combination.

That is why I see LCC not simply as a specialist form of coaching, but as a broader model of **language education**.

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5. Real learner language becomes the curriculum

One of the biggest shifts involves where useful teaching material comes from.

A conventional syllabus necessarily predicts what learners are likely to need.

LCC pays particular attention to what learners reveal that they need when they actually try to communicate.

Their language becomes evidence.

A sentence that does not quite work is not simply an error to correct.

It may show us:

- language that is missing
- language that has been partially learnt
- a pronunciation problem
- an organisational problem
- an interactional difficulty

- an ineffective communication habit
- a useful new area for development

As course participant Keyla Gerardine Acosta Avellaneda put it:

“Every learner’s utterance is treated as valuable data for learning.”

That does not mean abandoning planning or sitting back and hoping something interesting emerges.

In fact, several of the LCC course participants have commented on how **structured** the process is.

Olha Zhlobnytska described the session structure as practical and helpful for maintaining clarity and focus, while also appreciating the emphasis on authentic communication rather than pre-planned content.

Those two things are not opposites.

Structure does not require rigidity.

The skill lies in having enough structure to know what you are doing while remaining responsive enough to work with what the learner actually gives you.

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6. Speaking more is not the same as getting better at speaking

Once we recognise the limitations of knowledge-based teaching, the obvious response is:

Get learners speaking more.

That is certainly better than not allowing them to speak.

But there is another trap here.

More speaking does not necessarily produce better speaking.

A learner can repeat the same habits for years.

They can take part in discussion after discussion using the same safe vocabulary.

They can speak quickly without becoming easier to understand.

They can give presentation after presentation and receive little more than “Very good”.

They can dominate a conversation without becoming a better listener.

Activity is not the same as development.

The question I find much more interesting is:

What happens between one performance and the next?

Was somebody really observing?

Did we identify what worked?

Did we identify what limited the communication?

Was new language needed?

Did the learner need help with their pronunciation, pace, listening or organisation?

Did they receive feedback specific enough to act on?

Did they have an opportunity to rehearse the change?

That is:

Did they try again?

That second attempt can be transformative.

The learner is no longer merely repeating an activity.

Something has happened between performance one and performance two.

Perhaps a new expression has been taught.

Perhaps the opening has been reorganised.

Perhaps a pronunciation problem has been addressed.

Perhaps the learner has discovered that slowing down actually makes them sound more confident.

That is deliberate development, not accumulated speaking time.

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7. PROOF: turning good intentions into development

I created the **PROOF method** to provide a coherent way of thinking about this process:

Performance
Rehearsal

Observation
Organisation
Feedback

These are not five rigid stages that every lesson has to follow in sequence.

They are a lens.

Performance gives the language a purpose. The learner is doing something: explaining, persuading, responding, presenting, clarifying, negotiating or connecting.

Rehearsal allows that performance to develop. The learner can try language, adapt it and strengthen it rather than assuming the first attempt is the final one.

Observation asks us to pay attention. Not just to errors, but to meaning, language, interaction, listening, pace, effect and what happens to the learner under real communicative demands.

Organisation helps us make both the message and the learning manageable.

Feedback turns observation into useful action.

The important point is not remembering five words.

It is changing the question from:

Did the learner complete the activity?

to:

What developed as a result of doing it?

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8. Speaking and listening cannot be separated

Language courses understandably divide language into skills.

We have speaking lessons and listening lessons.

But communication itself is messier.

While speaking, I am watching you.

I am deciding whether you understand me.

I may change my language because of your expression.

I may slow down, clarify or emphasise something.

While listening, I am not merely decoding words.

I am interpreting intention, predicting what might come next, deciding what matters and preparing a response.

An interaction can break down because I do not know a word.

It can also break down because I fail to recognise an accent, misunderstand a speaker's intention, speak over them, do not know how to ask for clarification or become convinced that good listening means understanding every word.

LCC therefore treats listening as an **active, developable skill**.

That idea has clearly resonated with LCC course participants.

English teacher Kate Barchy highlighted the importance of authentic tasks that develop both clear expression and active, responsive listening.

Keyla commented on the value of teaching learners to ask for repetition, clarification or slower speech rather than leaving them helpless when comprehension breaks down.

And the same breadth appears in responses to the speaking and pronunciation work.

Participants have commented specifically on work with speed, emphasis, pausing, pronunciation patterns, cultural context and communicative delivery.

These are not decorative extras once the “real language” has been taught.

They are part of whether language succeeds between people.

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9. The practical question: what does this actually look like?

Educational ideas become much less interesting if nobody can imagine what to do with them on Monday morning.

That has always mattered to me.

LCC grew out of classrooms, coaching sessions and years of observing teachers. My online LCC course was designed on the same principle.

It does not simply tell teachers what a Language and Communication Coach might do.

They watch me doing it.

Across the course, participants see recordings of real work with learners.

They see me listening while taking notes on language.

They see correction handled without destroying communication.

They see pronunciation being coached.

They see learner-generated sentences becoming material for further work.

They see rehearsal being built around communication the learner genuinely needs.

They see active listening, motivation, modelling, feedback and moments when a learner needs something different from what might originally have been planned.

And because these are real interactions rather than idealised demonstration lessons, they also see something important that polished theory can hide:

judgement.

When do I intervene?

When do I wait?

What do I correct?

What do I leave alone?

When does the learner need a better word?

When do they need encouragement rather than another explanation?

When should they try again?

That practical dimension is one of the things participants mention repeatedly.

Tetiana Kharitonova described seeing recordings of sessions with clients as “insightful and inspiring”.

Anna Policheva wrote:

“I like real examples of your work… I love writing down the sentences and then correcting or improving them with my students.”

And Keyla Gerardine Acosta Avellaneda summarised the experience like this:

“What stood out most for me was that it goes beyond theory: the videos don’t just explain concepts, but also show real-life coaching sessions, which brings the learning to life.”

She went on to say that the clarity made the approach easy to understand and apply and described the training as a complete, well-designed structure for educators wanting to confidently integrate coaching techniques into their teaching.

For me, that matters enormously.

A teacher-development course should not leave you merely agreeing with its philosophy.

You should be able to see how the philosophy affects what **you do**.

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10. Small changes can alter a lesson immediately

You do not have to abandon your current teaching or suddenly rename yourself a coach. Many language teachers have incorporated LCC principles into their teaching simply by making a few specific and highly effective changes to their approach.

Nor does applying LCC depend on a particular qualification, job title or teaching context. You can begin with the lesson you already teach and the learners already in front of you.

Some of the most useful changes begin very simply.

The next time a learner gives you an extended answer, try listening to the meaning before jumping in to correct the language.

Notice the language, certainly.

But also ask yourself:

What is this person actually trying to achieve?

If something is missing, teach it.

If part of the message is difficult to follow, identify why.

If a useful sentence emerges, work with it rather than automatically returning to the next item on the plan.

And once you have helped the learner improve something, give them the chance to **use the improvement**.

That last step is surprisingly easy to omit.

We explain.

We correct.

The learner nods.

Then we move on.

But understanding the correction is not the same as incorporating it into communication.

This is the point at which rehearsal and another attempt become so useful.

It is also why one participant's comment on grammar stayed with me:

“The fact that you encourage the student to use grammar rather than learn it is a very unexpected twist.”

I would phrase it slightly differently.

We need learners to **learn grammar and use it**.

The mistake is assuming that one automatically guarantees the other.

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11. A coaching mindset changes the relationship

Techniques matter, but LCC is not just a collection of techniques.

There is also a shift in stance.

An LC coach listens differently.

They work collaboratively with the learner.

They pay attention to goals.

They notice emotional state and confidence.

They resist the temptation to make themselves the permanent centre of the learning process.

They gradually help learners become less dependent.

This was another recurring theme in participant feedback.

Tetiana Kharitonova wrote:

“I love the part of learners owning their learning. That’s what made me look beyond traditional language teaching.”

Viktoriia Naumova described wanting to “listen better and guide clients without putting myself to the spotlight”.

Olha Zhlobnytska noticed that when lessons were more flexible, goal-focused and based on real communication, her students became more engaged.

And Kateryna Filatova said the course helped her formulate why she had already felt more like a coach than a teacher and how she could become better at it.

This interests me because it suggests that LCC sometimes gives teachers a framework for instincts they already have.

Many experienced teachers already know that a great lesson involves much more than delivering content.

They listen.

They improvise.

They encourage.

They teach emergent language.

They respond to the human being in front of them.

LCC does not tell those teachers they have been doing everything wrong.

It gives greater definition, structure and purpose to that broader work.

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12. Why this matters even more in the age of AI

There is another reason this conversation has become urgent.

Learners now have access to language support on a scale that would have seemed extraordinary not long ago.

AI can explain grammar.

It can translate.

It can generate examples.

It can create vocabulary exercises.

It can correct writing.

It can simulate conversations.

It can answer questions about the language instantly and patiently.

That does **not** mean there is no future for language teachers.

But it should make us ask a serious question.

If information about language is becoming abundant, what is the distinctive value of excellent language education?

It cannot simply be that the teacher possesses the answer to a grammar question.

That expertise remains important, but access to information is no longer scarce.

I think the value of the skilled educator increasingly lies in a richer combination of abilities.

Teaching language well.

Listening closely.

Observing performance.

Understanding the learner across time.

Creating meaningful situations for communication.

Diagnosing what is actually limiting somebody.

Knowing when to explain and when not to.

Giving feedback with technical accuracy and human tact.

Helping learners rehearse change.

Developing speaking and listening.

Building autonomy.

Creating relationships in which people are prepared to take risks and learn.

AI can become an excellent tool within this environment.

But a more powerful tool does not make a narrow model of education more valuable.

It makes the need for a broader model harder to ignore.

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13. A richer role for the language teacher

I sometimes hear the future of language teaching discussed as though teachers face a choice.

Either we remain traditional teachers or we surrender our expertise and become vague facilitators standing at the edge of the room.

I reject that choice.

The language teacher of the future needs **more expertise, not less**.

They need to know language.

They need to know how people learn language.

They need to understand speaking and listening.

They need to observe.

They need to communicate well themselves.

They need to give sophisticated feedback.

They need enough confidence to work with what emerges rather than clinging to a lesson plan simply because it feels safe.

They need enough humility to know that explaining something beautifully does not guarantee that anybody has learnt it.

They need enough restraint not to fill every silence.

And increasingly, I believe they benefit from coaching skills which help learners develop awareness, autonomy and responsibility for their own growth.

This is a demanding professional identity.

I also think it is an exciting one.

Duncan Foord, Director of Oxford TEFL and author of *The Developing Teacher*, wrote in the foreword to my first LCC book that it was:

“the clearest and most grounded articulation I've read of how a humanistic approach to language teaching can be put into practice”.

The word **grounded** matters to me.

LCC was not developed as a theory and then taken into a classroom to see whether it might work.

It grew from thousands of hours of teaching, coaching, observing teachers and dealing with the messy reality of human communication.

That is also why its principles can be used in very different contexts.

One-to-one coaching.

Language classes.

Schools.

University teaching.

Business training.

Groups and workshops.

Different contexts require different decisions, but the underlying question remains remarkably stable:

What do these learners need in order to develop their language and become more effective communicators?

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14. Back to “Hoy no es mi día”

So let us return to our learner.

“Hoy no es mi día.”

Perhaps they really are having a bad day.

But we can be more curious than that.

What exactly made communication difficult?

Was language missing?

Could they not access something familiar?

Did they misunderstand what they heard?

Were they trying to construct sentences that were too complicated for their level?

Did their pronunciation get in the way?

Did anxiety change their pace?

Could they have clarified, simplified or tried another route?

What can we teach?

What can we observe?

What can they rehearse?

What could they try again?

That, for me, is the shift.

Language education cannot be satisfied merely because something has been taught.

Nor should it be satisfied merely because learners have been given opportunities to speak.

We need to be interested in **development**.

The development of language.

The development of speaking.

The development of listening.

The development of confidence, awareness and independence.

And the development of the ability to bring all of these things together when another human being is waiting for a response.

That is why I believe Language and Communication Coaching points towards the future of language education.

Not because language teaching is obsolete.

Quite the opposite.

Because knowledge of a language is not the destination.

The ability to communicate through it is.

Explore Language and Communication Coaching

This guide has introduced some of the central thinking behind LCC. If you would like to explore the approach in greater depth, there are five ways to continue.

READ

Language and Communication Coaching: The Essential Guide for Language Teachers and Trainers

My first book introduces the foundations of LCC, the coaching stance and the PROOF method, with practical techniques and examples for teachers who want to rethink the relationship between language teaching and communicative development.

Language and Communication Coaching for Groups: A Practical Guide for Language Teachers

The second book takes LCC into the contexts where most educators actually work: classrooms, workshops and groups.

It explores how to balance individual and group needs, develop language and communication through learner-generated material, use rehearsal and feedback effectively and create visible progress rather than simply completing activities.

Explore the LCC books → www.bglc.es/lcc-ebooks

The LCC Clinic Collection

WATCH

Seven recorded Language and Communication Coaching clinics built around real questions from practising language teachers.

Across almost six hours of practical teacher development, you will explore speaking, listening, pronunciation, vocabulary, learner autonomy, feedback, needs analysis and more.

Each clinic includes Key Ideas & Consolidation notes and Reflect & Apply activities, so you can connect the discussion directly with your own teaching.

7 recorded clinics | Almost 6 hours | Self-paced | No time limit | €30

Explore the LCC Clinic Collection -> www.bglc.es/language-coaching-courses-info

Be the best language teacher you can be.

Take LCC into your teaching

TRAIN

The Complete BGLC Language and Communication Coaching Course

The Complete Course is for teachers and trainers who want the full LCC programme, including the practical methodology, coaching skills and additional modules on developing an independent language service as an LC coach.

The course takes a different route from a book because you do not just read or hear about the approach.

You watch it happening.

Alongside the explanations and practical tools, you see recordings of real coaching with real learners and can observe how language, pronunciation, listening, communication, rehearsal, feedback, motivation and coaching skills come together in practice.

As course participant Keyla Gerardine Acosta Avellaneda put it:

> *"The videos don't just explain concepts, but also show real-life coaching sessions, which brings the learning to life."*

Explore the Complete LCC Course →

The BGLC LCC Core Techniques Course

For teachers who want practical professional development they can apply immediately, the Core Techniques Course contains the six technique-focused modules from the Complete Course.

It shows how to work with learner-generated language, language acquisition, speaking, listening, pronunciation, rehearsal, feedback and coaching skills to create visible communicative development.

It is particularly suited to teachers who want to bring LCC into the work they already do, without following the additional pathway towards developing an independent Language and Communication Coaching service.

You do not need a career change to benefit from LCC. You can use these techniques to become a better-equipped language teacher.

Explore the Core Techniques Course →

The aim is not to replace the teacher you already are.

It is to expand what you can notice, what you can respond to and what you can help your learners become.

Teaching language. Developing communicators.

That is the work.

www.bglc.es