Walking, Talking, and Learning: Reflections on Five Days of “Coaching Strategies in Learning” in Prague (February 23-27, 2026)

Ikuya Takahashi
Founder, ika.異化



Welcome Board

I’ve successfully completed a course entitled “Coaching Strategies in Learning” in Prague. I’m on my way back to Berlin. Now I’m about to leave the Czech Republic. In many ways, the program has been inspiring and informative. ITC, International Training Center, is located in the center of Prague. The hotel where I stayed is called Belvedere, which was recommended by ITC. It is literally a three-minute walk from the venue and was very convenient. It was the second time for me to visit Prague, the first time dating back to the early 2010s. Prague has been as beautiful as ever. There are some cities in this world which never change. Paris and Prague are two good examples of that. I personally have a passion for literature, so I brought essays by Milan Kundera, entitled “Le Rideau” (“The Curtain”). It was such an enriching reading experience for me to immerse myself in the city of Prague and the world of Kundera at the same time.

I arrived in Prague the day before the course started. It was Sunday evening, windy and rainy. I somehow managed to find my way to the hotel, which took me about 20 minutes to reach from Praha-Holešovice Station. After checking in, I went to a Czech restaurant that was still open and ate goulash and drank Czech beer. I was really happy because restaurants are open on Sundays

in Prague (which is not usually the case in Berlin where I currently live), and they're usually open until 23:00! I enjoyed the food and beer very much and was getting ready for the training the following day.

So, finally Day 1 came. I had left the hotel early to make sure I knew the location of ITC. After checking the venue, I arrived there 15 minutes prior to the start. When I reached the training center, a member of the administrative staff was waiting for the participants downstairs and checked my name on the list that she had. Then I found out that there would be 9 participants joining my course: one Japanese and eight Romanians. I had expected the participants to be more diverse, to be honest. There was another course starting on the same date on digital education and innovation, where there were 12 people, seven of them Romanians and five Turkish.

My teacher's name is Denisa Dave, a teacher trainer as well as a psychologist. Overall, I learned tremendously from her. She substantiated her points and explanations with sufficient and extensive knowledge of psychology, a subject I myself do not have much knowledge of. She was very professional, trying to satisfy all the participants' needs, which could vary significantly depending on the individual. Two participants were English teachers, two math teachers, one French teacher, two Romanian teachers, and one engineering teacher, most of whom taught at the secondary level.

On Day 1, after some ice-breaking activities, we discussed and analyzed the roles of the expert, teacher, mentor, trainer, facilitator, and coach in terms of content and process. The expert is the highest in content and the lowest in process, the coach being the opposite. The coach really focuses on the process, on the client or the participant, rather than teaching or conferring knowledge on their students.

And we learned that competency consists of three elements: knowledge, skills, and attitude. Even if you have both knowledge and skills, they would collapse if one doesn't have the right attitude. I had an aha moment there and I agreed totally that attitude can be the determining factor. What the Japanese students of English tend to lack the most is the attitude. If you are forced to learn English by

somebody, you cannot nurture the appropriate attitude. In life, as a learner as well as a teacher, having a good attitude makes all the difference.

After that, we learned a very important formula: GROW. G: Goal; R: Reality; O: Options; and W: Will. After setting the goal, students have to know the reality, which means what they have done so far. After that they think about what kind of options (resources) they have. And finally, Will, meaning they will do the action. This is the formula that we would always revert to throughout the entire course.

After the session was over, the participants had an opportunity to join a walking tour accompanied by a local tour guide. The tour guide was very kind and informative. She showed us around the main sightseeing spots of Prague, including the famous Charles Bridge, the iconic Wenceslas Square, and many others.

On Day 2, we learned contracting, questioning, listening, and reflecting. Listening has four kinds: cosmetic; conversational; active; and deep. The difference between active and deep listening is that active listening involves understanding regarding the content while deep listening concerns understanding the real personality of the interlocutor. Good questions from the coach should be thought-provoking and make people think. As opposed to that, those from the teacher would be knowledge-based and the ones to which they could immediately give an answer. It's therefore vital for the coach to ask good questions. Why, how, what, when/where/who, yes/no questions are in that order in terms of thought-provoking nature. However, that doesn't necessarily mean when/where/who or yes/no questions are shallow. They can be quite good in that they can give some additional pictures or the reality that the students are in.

Lastly, we learned the difference between feedback and debriefing. Feedback requires two people minimum; debriefing can be done if there is one person (I/we). Feedback is the one that the receiver accepts while debriefing is extended self-reflection where the coach can play the role of facilitator. In the debriefing, you as a coach or facilitator help the students realize the points on which they couldn't do well.

Good feedback should be specific, accurate, objective, timely, usable, and desired by the receiver. You should make the receiver think about how they can do things differently. My biggest takeaway is not to use “but” in the feedback. I always start with something positive and give constructive feedback (the most important) after the “but”, which I had thought was the “common grammar”. But Denisa recommended us not to use the “but”, saying “but” being “butt”, pun intended.

When you do the debriefing, the 4F Model can be very useful: Facts; Feelings; Findings; and Future. The students just describe what happened and explain how it was for them. When they do that, it’s useful to use the sentence structure such as “when…, I felt…”.



The Kafka Museum

On Day 3, we came up with our own goals. When we set our own goals, SMART structure works quite well. S: Specific; M: Measurable; A: Achievable; R: Relevant; and T: Time-bound. When you set goals, it’s important for us to focus on something we can have control over. We shouldn’t set the goals which involve the uncontrollable. As a coach, it’s important to ask questions, reflect, and listen carefully. It’s not good to give ideas, solutions and answers or leading questions.

Because the weather was really good on Wednesday, we tried something called the “peripatetic” activity, a term of Greek origin, meaning walking and thinking. It became the most memorable activity of all we did during the week.

On Day 4, we tried something else: using picture cards to come up

with the visual image. We also learned the differences among the comfort zone, growing zone, and panic zone. I had always thought that comfort zone was something negative, where you're complacent about your surrounding environment. However, the trainer explained that it's the place where you can recharge yourself. I realized that I had pushed myself too much to grow. She explained the importance of creating a growing zone as a teacher.

Lastly, we did the scavenger hunt activities in which we competed in three groups and were asked to tackle many difficult questions. This activity involves various coaching skills: communication, exploration, getting out of your comfort zones (e.g. talking to strangers). We also learned some techniques of grouping: student choice; characteristics; convenience; levels (same & different); and random (fake random & quasi random).

On Day 5, we got certificates and had our group photos taken. The last activity was a reflection session in which we were asked to present the following three things.

1. Three things you have learned during the five-day training: (a) GROW, (b) SMART, and (c) not using "but" in the feedback
2. One favorite moment: the peripatetic activity (walking, talking, and thinking)
3. Three plans for the future using the SMART model: (a) using picture cards, (b) writing essays as a language teacher as well as a learner, and (c) opening my own learning hub

As for the cultural activities, I did five things: Kafka Museum; National Technical Museum; Military Museum; Museum of Communism; and the opera *La Traviata*.

Among all the places, I was most impressed by the National Technical Museum, which completely changed my image of the Czech Republic and its people. The exhibition was about astronomy, mining, printing, transportation, and other fields. Visitors can learn about each field thoroughly and comprehensively. I had the impression that lots of families and young people were visiting the museum, which would allow them to really understand the importance of industrialization. I had a glimpse of why the Germans wanted the Sudetenland region in 1938.

One wonderful added bonus for me was that one of the Romanian teachers recommended some contemporary Romanian writers such as Mircea Cărtărescu and Matei Vișniec. I'll try to read their works to learn more about Romania.

Once again I'm really grateful to my trainer Denisa, my colleagues, and all the organizers for everything. I learned a lot. Last but not least, I would like to thank ITC for providing me with this invaluable opportunity.



Final Day: Presentations