

# The *Wheel of Life* as a Classroom Coaching Tool

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This paper examines the use of a classic coaching tool, *the Wheel of Life*, in a classroom setting. Students' academic success takes place within the framework of all areas of their life, including relationships, work, health, and much more. *The Wheel of Life* is helpful to recognize the interrelationship and mutual influence of the areas in a person's life and to begin to coach self or others to achieve greater success in every area. In this study, students were taught how to use the tool and the results are discussed. The paper identifies the areas of highest and lowest satisfaction and shares student voices.

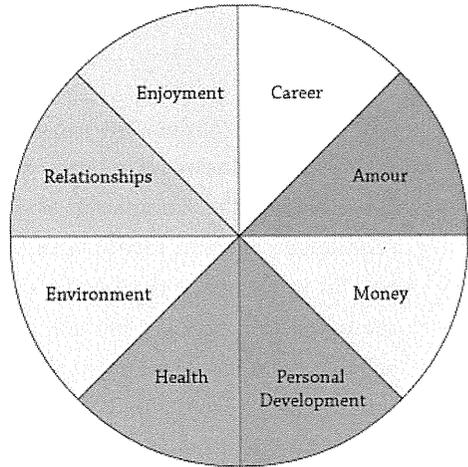
## 1. The Background to Academic Success

Academic success does not take place in a vacuum, but rather is influenced by all of the other factors which affect a learner's life. Obviously, having a part-time job or busy club leaves less time for study, but this is not a simple equation. As Moriana (2006) and others have shown, students who engage in extra-curricular activities actually perform better academically. In other words, academic performance is dependent on much more than simply the amount of time available for studying, and it is useful to consider the overall balance of life when considering academic performance. Some other major factors which influence academic performance are health, environment, expectations about future career, financial status, and so on. In the classroom, as teachers we naturally focus on the narrow subject area that we are teaching, but it can be beneficial to gain a deeper understanding of every area of students' life, so that we can understand and respond to the challenges that they are faced with. This paper aims to offer one approach

to this kind of deeper understanding through a tool called the *Wheel of Life*.

## 2. Utilizing the Wheel of Life

The Wheel of Life is a classic coaching tool which is used in life coaching, executive coaching, and other types of coaching to provide a systematic way of looking at the whole picture of a person's life. A circle is divided into eight areas. In the version of the *Wheel of Life* used in this study, the life areas are as shown in Figure 1. Each area of the *Wheel of Life* is explained briefly in Table 1. The initial letters of this version of the



Wheel of Life spell out the easy to remember **Figure 1. *The Wheel of Life*** mnemonic: CAMP HERE.

Career	Are you preparing adequately for your future career? Have you decided what kind of career you would like to have?
Amour	Do you have/want a romantic partner? Are you satisfied with this relationship?
Money	Do you have enough money to buy what you want/need? Do you have/want a good part-time job?

Personal Development	Are you learning things that help you develop? Examples might include language learning, skills, spiritual development, or anything else that seems appropriate for you.
Health	Are you healthy? Are you doing enough exercise, eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep etc.?
Environment	Are you satisfied with the place where you live—your bedroom, your home, the city where you live etc.?
Relationships	Are you satisfied with your non-romantic relationships, e.g. friends, family, co-workers, etc.
Enjoyment	Are you enjoying life and having fun?

**Table 1. Explanation of the areas of the Wheel of Life**

In this study, the *Wheel of Life* activity was carried out in groups of students, one taking the role of *coach* and the other taking the role of *client*. The primary responsibility of the *coach* is to ask appropriate questions and to take notes while listening attentively to the responses. One of the goals of the activity is to have students internalize the *Wheel of Life* so that they can self-coach, and the work with a *coach* is simply the first step is moving towards that. The *coach* and the *client* carry out relatively simple and structured conversations similar to this example.

Coach: How satisfied are you in the area of *Career*?

Client: I'm fairly satisfied, although I think that I need to improve my English and to do more Internet research about companies that suit me.

Coach: If you gave it a percentage, how satisfied are you?

Client: Probably about 70%.

Through these simple questions, a student is able to quickly get an indication of satisfaction in the major areas of life. An example is shown in the radar chart in Figure 2.

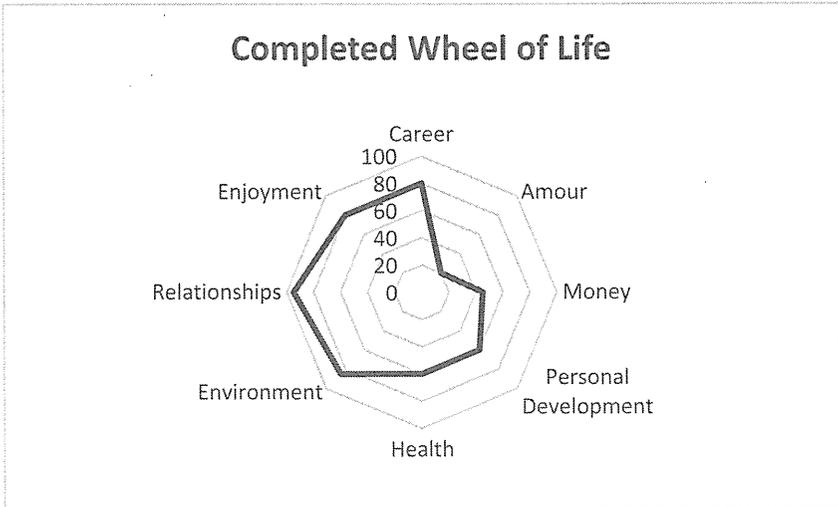


Figure 2. Completed Figure of Life

A useful metaphor is to think of this ‘wheel’ as a wheel on a bicycle and car. Students were encouraged to use the question: “If this were a wheel on your bicycle, how would it be?” Naturally, such a wheel would cause a very bumpy ride, and one of the key lessons from the *Wheel of Life* is that a low level of satisfaction in one area of life can produce negative impact on other areas of life. For example, poor health can lead to low academic performance.

This kind of coaching activity lends itself to the language classroom for several reasons:

- It provides controlled conversation practice.
- It is personalized and thus intrinsically motivating for the students.  
It is a great way to bring the real world and student concerns into

the classroom in a meaningful way.

- It allows development of language skills through motivated engagement as well as development of life skills which promote academic success.
- It allows the teacher and the students to get to know each other and themselves better.
- It helps students and teachers to recognize the effect on learning of factors outside the classrooms.
- It helps both the teacher and the students to recognize imbalances in their lives and then move towards correcting them.

The *Wheel of Life* activity can naturally lead into goalsetting activities in each area. In this course, the activity in the following week did exactly this by providing another coaching tool which supports goalsetting and achievement. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, results of a similar study are shared in Cullen & Backwell (forthcoming).

In this study, the *Wheel of Life* was used as one of the first learning activities in a university course. The course was taught to two groups of students (n=20 and n=31). The students were majoring in intercultural studies and had an intermediate level of English.

The students were able to carry out the activity orally without any difficulty and were clearly engaged in the task. They spent about 10 minutes carrying out the activity and then switched roles. Afterwards, they wrote a report explaining the areas of their *Wheel of Life* in more detail and some comments are extracted from these reports later in this paper. They also included the numbers representing the level of satisfaction in each area. These were analyzed and some basic results are provided below.

### **3. Most Satisfied and Least Satisfied**

Tables 2 and 3 below show the areas of life in which students were most and least satisfied.

Area	No. of Students
<i>Relationships</i>	16
<i>Career</i>	8
<i>Health</i>	8
<i>Environment</i>	8
<i>Enjoyment</i>	7
<i>Amour</i>	5
<i>Money</i>	3
<i>Personal Development</i>	2

**Table 2. Most Satisfied Areas**

The highest satisfaction area reported by students was *Relationships*. This was more than twice the number of students who selected *Career* or *Health* or *Environment* as their area of most satisfaction.

Least Satisfied	No. of Students
<i>Money</i>	18
<i>Health</i>	9
<i>Amour</i>	8
<i>Career</i>	7
<i>Enjoyment</i>	7
<i>Personal Development</i>	5
<i>Environment</i>	2
<i>Relationships</i>	0

**Table 3. Least Satisfied Areas**

The lowest satisfaction area was *Money*, and again this is almost twice as large as the next area of low satisfaction, *Health*.

To summarize these figures, the students are satisfied with their relationships (particularly with their friends) and dissatisfied with the amount of money that they have. In the section below, student comments

from each area of the *Wheel of Life* are given to provide a richer picture of the data and the students' lives.

#### 4. Student Voices

##### *Career*

Balancing all the requirements of life and study can be a struggle, and problems do arise.

"I dropped one unit in the class in the previous term, so I don't do much hard work now as a student. So the item *Career* is low."

Like students around the world, these students are attempting to define their own identity and to choose the best future path for themselves.

"I don't decide my dream. I try to find interesting things."

"In Career area, I am 60% satisfied. Actually, I have not decided what I will do in the future clearly, but recently I searched the Internet to try Internship. I want to act for my future more."

##### *Amour*

The students were second year university students with an average age of 20 years old, and naturally many of them have an interest in having a romantic relationship. Only a small number reported actually having a girlfriend or boyfriend, but many expressed the wish to find someone special.

"I have no one with whom fall in love. I can't feel any happiness related to Amour these days....By improving the area of Amour, my *Wheel of Life* can be smoother. In order to improve that, I will try my best to make a girlfriend. At first, I want to change myself to be attractive. I will be kind to everyone and I will go for whatever I try. After finding the girl who I fall in love, I will take action actively."

## *Money*

Students are rarely visibly lacking in money, but most express a desire to have more money. The majority of students work at a part-time job for at least a few hours per week, and some work up to 20 hours per week. Those who don't work so much have or at least perceive themselves as having insufficient money.

“I have little work meaning I don't have enough money.”

However, even for those who work, they do not necessarily receive much money.

“The area which I least satisfied in is money because the payment by the hour is very inexpensive. It is 820, this is the minimum wage of the Aichi prefecture.”

Japan is a relatively wealthy country, and most students receive an allowance from their parents and are not short of money for basic lifestyle needs like clothes, food, and accommodation, but rather because they have specific goals which require money.

“I need money because I will go to abroad to study next year. Then I will do a part-time job twice a week and earn 200 thousand yen in the next 5 months.”

## *Personal Development*

Only a few students gave specific comments in this area.

“I'm most satisfied with *Personal Development* area. I'm in a third grade in this university, and I have job hunting coming up from early in the new year... I study English every day and do self-analysis. In addition, on weekends, I often go to seminars and internship in order to create good careers in the future.”

From a language learning perspective, the *Wheel of Life* activity was useful for reminding students of how English is a useful tool outside the classroom.

“I have some things that I want to do for my personal development, for example reading newspapers, cooking, or restudying world history. However, I cannot do them without studying English.

Some students used the activity to identify specific skills that they needed to work on.

“My goal is to do time management in my daily life, and finish homework three days earlier than the deadline.”

### *Health*

The following quote illustrates the interconnectedness between different areas of the *Wheel of Life*, in this case specifically recognizing the impact of negative health on relationships.

“I’ll give the lowest percentage to my health, about 40%. Because, recently I often catch a cold. If I catch a cold, I had to cancel all plans. Last week, I cancelled my part-time job and an appointment of friend. I bothered many people. So I was to keep my health good for people around me.”

Another notices the effect of having no free time and too much stress and makes a cry for help in her assignment. It is useful for teachers to be always aware that this kind of situation may potentially be the cause of a student’s poor performance in class or homework.

“I cannot satisfied with my health at all. As mentioned above, it is hectic for me. Therefore, however I sleep, I cannot feel that I have had enough rest. Moreover, I hardly have free time, so I have no way to reduce stress. I hope to get rid of my stress easily. If you know good countermeasures, please tell me.”

And this rather vivid description came from one of the higher-level students who had studied overseas:

“Next my least satisfied area—*Health*. This is because I was on a strict diet this year and it resulted in the worst health conditions ever in my life (it

was supposed to straighten up my health). I couldn't sleep because I didn't feel the sleepiness in my body, my eyes were glittering in the dark like a cat. My body was feeling so languid and my hair was falling off all over the place. I also feel that my hormones were completely going crazy as well. I got to cry more and now that I stopped I feel much more peaceful now."

Many students are living away from home for the first time, and naturally they are not eating the same healthy food that their mothers used to prepare for them, with detrimental effects on health.

"The percentage of this area is 20%. In my daily life, I ate unhealthy food, for example, instant noodles, frozen foods, and so on. In addition to that, my eating habit is very unbalanced. I don't have enough vegetables but I often eat sweets and snacks.... since this year I became more susceptible to sickness... therefore I have to change my life-style. I have to take care of my eating habit and having more vegetables, sleep a little longer time, and exercise regularly to become healthier."

This kind of health problem clearly has detrimental effects on academic performance and it is useful for teachers to be aware of how health issues may be affecting students.

### *Environment*

Students generally seemed happy about the city that they are living in. Some expressed frustration at the small size of their home, but most were more worried about the untidiness of their own room.

"My environment about those who surround me, university, and my house is pretty good, but lately my room is a little messy and full of goods, so I must keep tidy room."

"I am least satisfied in *Environment*. It has only 40%. I am unsatisfied with especially the environment of my room. I have a lot of things in my room. I am terrible at throwing away even if it is unneeded things. Now my room is flood with goods like clothes, accessories, and magazines."

### *Relationships*

*Relationships* was the highest ranked area and this is primarily related to friendships. Students spend all day near their friends and are in constant contact by social media when they are not at school.

“First, I have many good friends. I always talk with my friends in this university. We talk about our homework, our hobbies at lunch. It is very fun for me. Thanks to my friends I can spend my time happily. Everyone around me has a wonderful personality. I love them and I also respect them. In return, I want to give a lot of kindness.”

Others discussed positive relationships with their family.

“I’ll give high percentage to my relationships, about 90%. This is the highest. Because I have good friends and family who help me anytime.”

“Especially, I respect my mother because she is always my ideal mother. I talk about a lot of things with her every day... However busy she is with her work, she spares time for talking with me.”

### *Enjoyment*

Many students are enjoying the freedom of living away from home for the first time.

“I am most satisfied in enjoyment, about 90%. Because I am live alone, so everyday I can do anything I would like to do without parent’s permission. For example, if I want to see an Idol’s concert. Maybe my mother will not let me go to see it, because she thinks it’s a waste of time, I should do more meaningful things. Or she will let me go to see it, but maybe I will die in her nagging...I am freedom...To launch from parental nest is not a bad thing.”

Enjoyment can of course run through every area of the *Wheel of Life*. For example, the next comment shows its interaction with *Personal Development*.

“My goal is to read 100 books in this year. I have read 70 books, so I achieve this goal if I read 15 books per month from November to December.”

Overall, students seem to have a high level of *Enjoyment* despite stress due to study, part-time jobs, and lack of sleep. The main source of this enjoyment was seen above in the *Relationships* area where they are seen to be enjoying life with their friends.

In addition to the individual areas listed above, many students also mentioned how the *Wheel of Life* is a useful tool for balancing their lives.

“I think that the every area of this *Wheel of Life* has to do with each other. If I can't be satisfied with an area, that will have a something bad effect on the other areas, which won't make my life satisfied. So, it is important that I make a clear goal of each area and thsat know what is enough and what is not so.”

More than anything else in this paper, comments like this are clear evidence that students find coaching tools like the *Wheel of Life* to be useful.

## 5. Improvements for Future Studies

This research is a work-in-progress, and it is useful to consider how future studies can be improved. Some suggestions are given below.

- The use of *Career* is a little ambiguous for university students and there may have been some confusion between future job, part-time job, and their current studies. In future research, it may be better to provide a specific area in the wheel to represent current studies.
- In retrospect, it would have been easy to add the desired level of satisfaction in each area. For example, if a *client* reported a satisfaction level of 25% in the area of *Health*, the coach could follow up with the question, “What is your target level of satisfaction in this area?” To lead into a realistic goalsetting

activity, this target level could be time-delineated, for example, “What is your target level of satisfaction in this area by next year?”

- The absolute figures give insight into the person’s overall satisfaction with their life. Without further data, it is not necessarily possible to tell whether consistently low figures across the whole wheel indicate actual problems in a person’s life or whether the person simply has higher expectations. The figure for *Enjoyment* could potentially be used as a way of determining overall life satisfaction.
- Out of the 58 students, 13 submissions had incomplete data (22%). Some students did not include the numerical figures for the *Wheel of Life* activity. Others mistakenly used the graph function of Excel to turn the *Wheel of Life* figures into a pie chart rather than the more appropriate radar chart. In future studies, incomplete data submissions could be easily avoided by providing a standard sheet for students to fill in their figures, or preferably having students enter the numbers directly into the form of an online spreadsheet such as Google Sheets.
- Despite explanation in class, some students seemed unclear about the meaning of certain areas. For example, although it was intended that study should be included in the *Career* area, some students only thought of *Career* as a future concept and hence gave it a very low satisfaction rating. In the area of *Environment*, some students seemed to think that it referred to the general meaning of ‘the natural world’ rather than their own personal environment (e.g. home, city where they are living etc.). Clearer written and oral explanations are required in future.

## 6. Conclusion

The majority of students have some degree of worry or struggle about adapting to the changes in their lives which have taken place in the transition between high school and university, and in the upcoming

transition as they move into the workforce. The *Wheel of Life* has shown itself to be a useful tool for helping to students to identify imbalances in their lives and to begin to rectify them. Students very quickly understood the purpose of the *Wheel of Life*, and they could easily see it as a tool for looking at each area of their lives in a systematic way. In addition, it is a powerful way for teachers and students to get to know each other. Furthermore, it is a personalized and intrinsically motivating language learning activity which has proven very useful in conversation practice and vocabulary development.

### **References**

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