

The COACH Wheel as a Practical Framework for Coaching-Integrated Teaching in the 21st Century

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[Abstract] Contemporary education systems worldwide remain anchored in an industrial-era model of top-down, lecture-based instruction despite abundant evidence that student engagement, ownership, and long-term learning outcomes improve dramatically when coaching principles are integrated into classroom practice. This article advances the argument — introduced in the authors' prior work on language-coaching integration (McDaniel & McDaniel, 2025) that a coaching orientation is not a niche pedagogical supplement but a universal paradigm shift applicable across disciplines, educational levels, and cultural contexts. Drawing on Frederic Laloux's organizational evolution framework (Teal model), Whitmore's coaching philosophy, self-determination theory, constructivism, psychoanalytic perspective, and the authors' own COACH Wheel model (Content, Organization, Active Communication, Coaching Tools, Habitat), the article charts the historical evolution of teaching from directive transmission to co-creative facilitation. It argues that the COACH Wheel offers educators practical, research-grounded, and discipline-agnostic architecture for transforming classrooms into high-engagement learning environments. Preliminary data from 112 university students comparing traditional and coaching-integrated classrooms are cited, and implications for teacher education, institutional policy, and future research are discussed.

[Keywords] coaching-integrated teaching, COACH Wheel, educational evolution, self-determination theory, active learning, teal education, student ownership, universal pedagogy, teacher well-being

1. Introduction

Larry Cuban (1984) observed that if a surgeon from the 1880s were transported to a modern operating room, they would be overwhelmed by advances in technology, knowledge, and protocol. Yet a schoolteacher from the same era, transported to a contemporary university lecture hall, would feel entirely at home with the teaching methodology. We live in an age of extraordinary intellectual and technological transformation. However, the primary method of formal instruction has remained largely unchanged for over a Century: the teacher stands at the front, students sit in rows, knowledge flows in one direction, and an examination determines whether it was absorbed. While administratively convenient, this arrangement was designed for a world that no longer exists, one in which teachers are now "required to adapt to evolving classroom dynamics where artificial intelligence plays a significant role in content creation, personalized learning, and student engagement" (Zhai, 2024, p. 1), rendering the traditional model "far from adequate" (Kovacs, 2022, p. 22). The industrial-age classroom was designed to produce compliant workers who could follow instructions and accept authority. That age has passed, but most classrooms and corporate training environments continue to operate in the same manner.

The challenge today is not information transmission. Artificial intelligence now performs this function faster, cheaper, and in greater detail than any lecturer. What cannot be automated and what remains irreducibly human is the activation of potential: critical thinking, soft skills, self-direction, and finding meaning in one's work. These are precisely the dimensions a coaching orientation offers by enriching the classroom "with personalized support, accountability, constructive feedback ... empowering learners to unlock their potential, reach their goals, and lead more fulfilling lives" (McDaniel & McDaniel, 2025, p. 37).

This article argues that coaching-integrated teaching is a natural expression of Frederic Laloux's Evolutionary-Teal paradigm in education, grounded in self-management, wholeness, evolutionary purpose, and deep trust in learners' capacity for self-directed growth. Building on these values, the article presents the COACH Wheel, a five-dimensional, evidence-based framework (McDaniel & McDaniel, 2025) that offers educators across disciplines a coherent and implementable architecture for this transformation. It situates the framework within the history of pedagogical thought and the science of motivation, learning, psychoanalytic thinking, and neuroscience, together constituting a solid case for a fundamental shift in how we understand the teacher's role today.

2. The Challenge of Student Engagement

The practical case against the traditional teaching mode is overwhelming. Gallup research reveals what Busted (2013, p. 1) calls "the school cliff," in which student engagement declines steadily across the school years, so that by high school "only four in 10 students qualify as engaged." More recent data intensify the concern: a 2024 Gallup report on Gen Z finds that fewer than one in three students strongly agree they are having meaningful, engaging experiences in school, and nearly half (46%) report no engaging experiences at all (Gallup & Walton Family Foundation, 2024, p. 2).

The soft skills crisis documented by Pearson (2022), the Society for Human Resource Management (Wilke, 2019), and numerous employer surveys tell a consistent story: graduates entering the workforce lack the self-direction, collaborative intelligence, and communicative flexibility that employers require. As Kovacs (2022) maintains, "education in preparation for life in the 21st century has to incorporate a wider range of skills and not merely polish cognitive skills" (p. 62). These cannot be transmitted in a lecture but must be developed through repeated experience of setting goals, navigating uncertainty, and working collaboratively.

A third dimension is teacher well-being. Maslach and Leiter's (1997) work on burnout identifies loss of autonomy, erosion of meaningful relationships, and a sense of purposelessness as primary drivers of professional exhaustion, conditions that the traditional "sage on the stage" format produces in both teachers and students alike. By positioning the teacher as the sole authority and the student as a passive recipient, the conventional lecture format creates precisely these conditions. Teachers who lack opportunities for meaningful dialogue with students, experience low student engagement, and rarely witness student growth or insight may be at greater risk of burnout, while positive teacher–student relationships and genuine engagement serve as protective resources (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Pérez-Salas et al., 2025; Shen et al., 2015). We argue that the coaching classroom is as engaging for the teacher as it is transformative for the student.

3. Laloux and the Evolution of Organizational Worldview

John Dewey argued that every epoch demands a new kind of school, one that takes a "broader, or social, view" of education as "part and parcel of the whole social evolution" (Dewey, 1915, p. 4). Frederic Laloux's *Reinventing Organizations* (2014) offers a generative framework for mapping this trajectory. While focused on business organizations, Laloux's insight that human collectives evolve through successive paradigms, each with its own logic and relationship to authority, translates with remarkable precision to the history of formal education.

Laloux identifies five major developmental stages. In the Red paradigm, authority is maintained by force and fear; "Impulsive Red calls for predatory leaders" (Laloux, 2014, p. 29). The Amber paradigm achieves stability through rigid roles and deference to hierarchy, with "paternalistic authoritarianism" (p. 29) securing conformity in the traditional classroom in its most recognizable form. The Orange paradigm introduces meritocracy and efficiency, producing the student-centered reforms of the twentieth Century: learner outcomes, performance indicators, and differentiated instruction, but retaining a fundamentally managerial relationship to learning. The Green stage emphasizes consensus, inclusion, and collaborative classrooms, values vividly exemplified in Sir Ken Robinson's advocacy for a diverse, individualized curriculum (Kovacs, 2022, p. 59). Yet it falls short of the deeper structural transformation needed to fundamentally shift the power dynamic.

Laloux's most evolved stage, the Teal paradigm, is characterized by three breakthroughs: self-management, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose (Laloux, 2014, p. 56). Teal organizations replace "fear and scarcity with trust and abundance" (p. 44) and trust that individuals, given the right conditions, will manage themselves effectively. The coaching classroom, as we conceive it, is Teal education. It welcomes the whole student, including their values, emotions, dreams, and struggles. It aligns with Kovacs's view of coaching as the unification of learners' psychological competence with their eagerness to take an active role in the learning process (Kovacs, 2022, p. 8).

Most corporate training programs, universities, and secondary classrooms still sit at Amber or Orange stages. The syllabus is mandated by institutional authority, the educator is viewed as possessing superior knowledge, and assessment determines compliance with predetermined standards. Group work, well-being support, and inclusivity policies are increasingly present but rarely transform the hierarchical teacher–student relationship. Corporations and universities proclaim their belief in and commitment to critical thinking, creativity, and student engagement while maintaining the "sage on stage" format that undermines all three. The contradiction requires not policy adjustment but a paradigm shift in how we view and enact effective learning.

Laloux describes shifts in conscious worldview; psychoanalysis addresses what persists beneath them. Sigmund Freud wrote little about schooling but observed that pupils transfer onto teachers the ambivalence — reverence, rivalry, resentment — first attached to the omniscient father of childhood (S. Freud, 1914/1955). The Amber classroom is thus not merely an inefficient information channel; it freezes an archaic authority relation that consoles both parties: certainty for the student, indispensability for the teacher. Bion (1961) sharpens this: groups under anxiety regress to what he termed basic-assumption dependency, an unconscious expectation that the leader will supply whatever is needed, in exchange for which members suspend thinking; tiered

seating and an examination certifying receipt are its architecture. Laloux's self-management corresponds to Bion's work group—a collective able to tolerate not-yet-knowing long enough to think. One caution belongs alongside any developmental scheme: S. Freud ranked educating with governing and healing among the professions whose results may be predicted to disappoint (S. Freud, 1937/1964). Teal is a more honest relation to that difficulty, not its dissolution.

The costs of staying at Amber or Orange are measurable. Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation (2024) documented the level of global student disengagement. Pearson (2022) traces the employability cost in terms of interpersonal and work skills that graduates cannot demonstrate on the job. Moreover, a growing body of research on academic anxiety, learned helplessness, and what Ryan and Deci (2000) call "amotivation," the complete withdrawal of motivational investment from an activity, traces the psychological cost in terms of mental health and long-term relationship with learning. What is often overlooked is that both teachers and students bear the cost. A teacher who spends decades lecturing to rows of students who have learned not to ask questions, who grades by rubric because relationship-based feedback is too time-consuming, and who begins each academic year with declining hope that this cohort will be different, is paying the price of an Amber system.

The coaching shift, as Schön (1983) argues in his account of the reflective practitioner and as Wise and Sundstrom (2011) demonstrate in their study of coaching for teachers, reconnects the teacher with the living core of what effective education is. When the teacher becomes a facilitator rather than simply a transmitter of learning, every lesson becomes an act of genuine discovery for both teacher and student.

4. Why Coaching Works

A paradigm shift requires a foundation powerful enough to withstand scrutiny and specific enough to guide practice. The case for coaching-integrated teaching rests on four converging theoretical pillars, each independently well-established and mutually reinforcing.

Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's self-determination theory (SDT) identifies three basic psychological needs whose satisfaction is necessary for authentic motivation, psychological well-being, and sustained engagement: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Spence and Oades (2011) argue that SDT grounds coaching in "a theoretically coherent, empirically valid account of human functioning and well-being" (p. 37), with coaching conversations satisfying all three needs through "active listening, expressing empathy, exploring successes, [and] identifying personal strengths" (p. 43). They identify autonomy as primary, noting that "once people are volitionally engaged... they are then most apt to learn and apply new strategies and competencies" (p. 44). This supports the COACH Wheel's emphasis on student-driven goal setting over directive instruction, and mirrors Laloux's shift from Amber control to Teal self-management: human beings flourish not when directed but when trusted to direct themselves.

Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) repositions the teacher not as a transmitter of information but as a responsive guide attuned to each learner's emerging capacities. The ZPD is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult

guidance or in collaboration with a more capable peer" (as cited in Shabani et al., 2010, p. 238). Coaching similarly emphasizes working at the edge of a learner's current competence. Crucially, the coaching relationship is prospective: Vygotsky insisted that teachers "must orient their work 'not on yesterday's development in the child but on tomorrow's'" (as cited in Shabani et al., 2010, p. 244). The scaffolding that emerges from teacher-learner dialogue is productive; as Lave and Wenger note, ZPD "emphasizes teacher-learner collaboration and negotiation as a bilateral process" (as cited in Shabani et al., 2010, p. 241), making coaching in the ZPD a co-constructed practice rather than a top-down intervention.

Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory demonstrates that positive emotions such as joy, interest, and contentment, "share the ability to broaden people's momentary thought-action repertoires" (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 219), expanding attention and cognition. Negative states such as fear, shame, and anxiety narrow attention and restrict the learner to well-worn cognitive paths. The implications are clear: a classroom characterized by evaluation pressure, public exposure of ignorance, and competitive comparison generates precisely the negative emotional states that impair the learning it claims to promote. A coaching classroom characterized by psychological safety and collaborative inquiry generates positive states that "build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological" ones (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 218). This convergence between positive psychology and pedagogy finds a natural reflection in the Teal paradigm, which honors "love and connection, authentic positive behavior... care, service, and gratitude" (Laloux, 2014, p. 231).

The neuroscientific pillar is perhaps the most striking. Eisenberger et al. (2003) demonstrated that "a pattern of activations very similar to those found in studies of physical pain emerged during social exclusion, providing evidence that the experience and regulation of social and physical pain share a common neuroanatomical basis" (p. 291), an evolutionary design feature because "the social attachment system may have piggybacked onto the physical pain system to promote survival" (p. 290). Critically for education, "even the mildest forms of social exclusion can generate social pain" (p. 290). The ordinary conditions of the traditional classroom being ignored, not called upon, and publicly corrected are neurologically sufficient to trigger a threat response that suppresses the very reasoning and creative thought that education is designed to develop.

The coaching classroom responds with what Eisenberger et al. (2003) call "restorative measures" (p. 292): belonging rituals, non-directive questioning, and Hamburger-model feedback that signal safety rather than threat to every nervous system in the room. This connection between neuroscience and pedagogy finds a striking parallel in Laloux's (2014) observation that Red, Amber, and Orange paradigms "predispose leaders and employees, through the fear-based nature of ego, to see the world as a dangerous place... with survival as fixation" (p. 194) a dynamic that the traditional classroom reproduces, positioning students as competitors in a permanent audition for the teacher's approval.

Paling (2022), whose neuro-language coaching framework applies this evidence directly to the classroom, describes the ideal learning state as calm, positive arousal: curious but not anxious, energized but not threatened. She outlines the most important potential triggers of the fight-or-flight response in a learning setting among them uncertainty, traditional teacher-student hierarchy, and group dynamics and proposes coaching strategies to "calm the trigger" and restore a calm brain

state, including a step-by-step approach, "chunking the language down," positive feedback, introducing group goals, and "an extremely non-directive communication style" (Paling, 2022, pp. 32–37). Non-directive questions remove the social threat of wrong answers; Hamburger-model feedback separates the evaluation of performance from the development of the person; and the teacher's warmth and genuine curiosity signal to every student that this is a safe space to think, to be wrong, and to grow.

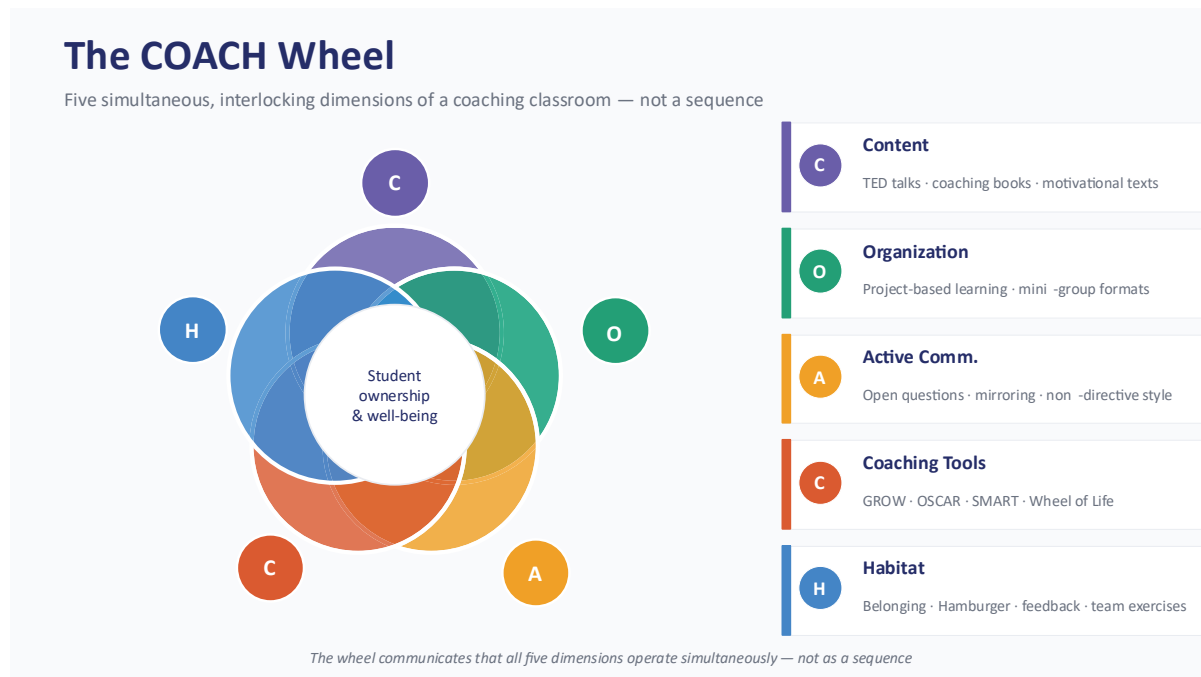
A fifth and older body of theory describes what the learner does in the face of such threat. A. Freud (1936/1966) supplies the mechanism that intervenes between threat and behavior: the ego meets anxiety by deploying defenses, and defense is expensive. Capacity spent on repression, denial, or intellectualization is unavailable for learning. Her account of ego restriction is especially apt. A child anticipating unfavorable comparison does not merely perform poorly but abandons the domain before it can produce displeasure, and without conscious distress — appearing not anxious but indifferent. What Ryan and Deci (2000) call amotivation may therefore be an inhibition rather than an absence: curiosity defended against rather than never present. The distinction matters: absent motivation calls for stimulation, defended motivation for safety. Two further defenses recur. Isolation of affect allows a student to handle material competently while remaining unaffected by it. Identification with the aggressor accounts for the durability of the pedagogy this article contests: the student shamed for not knowing may manage the humiliation by taking the shamer's position, occupying it decades later at the front of a room.

Bion's (1962) concept of containment describes what an alternative requires. Learning that matters begins in genuine not-knowing and proceeds only if that discomfort can be borne. The container receives what is not yet thinkable, holds it without collapsing, and returns it in a form that can be thought — what a well-formed coaching question does, and red-pen correction does not. Bion also distinguished knowledge as an emotional link between persons from knowledge as possession: a severed link leaves information stripped of meaning — one reading of the negligible effect size Hattie (2009) reports for rote memorization. S. Freud (1933/1964) put it comparably: education must steer between the Scylla of non-interference and the Charybdis of frustration, an early statement of the calibration of challenge against support that coaching attempts.

5. The COACH Wheel

John Whitmore, author of *Coaching for Performance* (2009), observed: "The underlying intent of every coaching interaction is to build the coachee's self-belief for them to realize that their success is due to their own efforts" (p. 18). The COACH Wheel (McDaniel & McDaniel, 2025) identifies five dimensions of coaching-integrated teaching that operate simultaneously and mutually reinforce one another (Figure 1). Unlike linear frameworks with prescribed sequences, hierarchies, or developmental ladders, the COACH Wheel is a systems model and represents the five conditions that must be present together for a coaching classroom to function fully. Each dimension strengthens the others. Remove one, and the whole system is weakened. Tend to all five, and something qualitatively different from a conventional classroom becomes possible.

The acronym Content, Organization, Active Communication, Coaching Tools, and Habitat names a distinct, practically implementable dimension that a teacher can consciously develop, and that, collectively, constitute a comprehensive architecture for human-centered teaching. Each is discussed in greater detail below.

Figure 1*The Coach Wheel*

5.1 Content — Igniting the 'Why'

The Content dimension addresses the most fundamental question a learner can ask: why does this topic matter? While traditional curricula are designed around what students must know, the coaching classroom asks: why would a student want to know this? The answer is often very personal and must be discovered by the student rather than announced by the teacher.

The Content dimension does not require replacing the syllabus; rather, it requires augmenting it with purpose-activating material. Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk on creativity and education (2006) does not teach creativity directly. However, it addresses what education is for, changing the student's relationship to everything that follows. Brené Brown's (2010) research on vulnerability speaks directly to the fear of failure underlying academic anxiety. James Clear's Atomic Habits (2018) offers a framework for habit formation that applies to language learning, exam preparation, and professional development across almost any discipline. Importantly, the Content dimension is the only one of the five that requires additional preparation time; all other dimensions can be achieved through changes in instructional approach alone, meaning a teacher who cannot immediately enrich their content can begin implementing the remaining four dimensions in the very next class, with no additional resources.

5.2 Organization — Providing Structure

How a classroom is physically organized communicates a great deal before a single word is spoken. Chairs in rows facing a screen signal that knowledge flows one way; chairs in clusters, as in Jim Scrivener's (2012) mini-classes-within-a-class, signal that knowledge is constructed here,

among us, and that every person is both a learner and a resource. The Organization dimension encompasses all structural decisions about how learning activities are arranged: the physical organization of space, the composition of groups, the assignment of roles, and the nature of the outputs students are asked to produce. Project-based learning, in which students design, execute, and present a project that produces a real outcome, most fully realizes the coaching philosophy, placing students as genuine agents of learning rather than performers of pre-specified tasks.

Vygotsky's collaborative ZPD is visible through this dimension. When students work in carefully designed small groups on a task that exceeds what any individual could accomplish alone, the group itself becomes the "more knowledgeable other." The Organization dimension also addresses the practical challenge of large class sizes. Scrivener's mini-group architecture is specifically designed for this context: a class of forty can be organized into eight groups of five, each pursuing the same task from different angles, with the teacher spending four to five minutes with each group in turn. The teacher, rather than performing as sage on the stage for forty students, is now a coach for eight smaller groups, a fundamentally different and, for most teachers who try it, more energizing relationship with their work.

5.3 Active Communication

If Content and Organization restructure what happens in a classroom, Active Communication reorganizes the teacher's moment-to-moment relationship with students. It is, in the authors' experience and in the literature on effective teaching, the highest-leverage of the five dimensions: it can be implemented immediately, requires no additional resources, and has a direct and measurable effect on students' psychological safety and engagement.

The shift is from telling to asking; from evaluating to exploring; from correcting to coaching. John Whitmore (2009) offers a set of coaching questions that can be used directly in the classroom. "What else?" typically produces more and deeper responses than any follow-up question, because it signals that the first answer is valued, and more is expected. "If you knew the answer, what would it be?" bypasses the blockage of "I do not know" by inviting speculation rather than requiring certainty. "What advice would you give a friend in your situation?" activates a less defensive, more generous perspective. "What would you gain or lose by doing that?" invites genuine intellectual reflection.

Strategic silence is perhaps the most counterintuitive element of coaching communication. The impulse to fill silence to answer before the student has had time to think is deeply embedded in teacher training and institutional culture. However, silence is often the space where genuine thinking happens. A teacher who can hold silence for ten, fifteen, or thirty seconds after a question gives students something profoundly valuable: the experience of their own thinking. Wise and Sundstrom (2011) documented that communication style is not a personality variable but a teachable, learnable method of professional practice, identifying specific communicative acts such as specific praise, questions requiring synthesis rather than recall, and academic pacing that challenges without overwhelming as demonstrably associated with student learning.

5.4 Integrating Coaching Tools

The Coaching Tools dimension provides students with cognitive and reflective frameworks enabling self-directed learning and creating what Harvard developmental psychologist Robert

Kegan (1994) calls the "self-authoring mind," the developmental stage at which individuals take genuine ownership of their values, goals, and direction, rather than deriving them entirely from the authority of others.

The GROW model, Goals, Reality, Options, Will, is applicable far beyond its origins in executive coaching. A student using GROW for a language-learning goal might ask: What do I want to achieve and by when? What is my current level of competence? What options do I have for moving from here to there? Which of those options will I commit to? Personal development tools such as the Wheel of Life, Letter from Future Self, Habit Tracker, Personal Iceberg, and Journaling invite students into a relationship with their values, patterns of behavior, and aspirations. Used in classroom settings, these tools yield genuine insight precisely because students are thinking critically about something that genuinely matters to them, cultivating the self-awareness that Goleman (1995) demonstrated is the single most important predictor of effective functioning in adult life.

5.5 Habitat

The Habitat dimension addresses whether students feel safe enough to take the intellectual and personal risks that genuine learning requires. Gregory Walton and Geoffrey Cohen's (2011) research demonstrates that a brief, well-designed belonging intervention can reduce the racial achievement gap by half over three years, because the sense of being genuinely part of a community determines whether students seek help when they struggle, persist when they fail, and invest fully in the learning environment. Hagerty et al.'s (1992) work establishes that belonging is not a nicety but a fundamental human need whose absence leads to measurable psychological deterioration.

The Hamburger feedback model provides a concrete alternative to red-pen correction. It begins with observing what worked, not as social lubricant before "real" feedback, but as a genuine and specific acknowledgment of what the student did well. The critical feedback follows: specific, developmental, and framed as a question wherever possible ("What might you try differently here?") rather than simply as a negative critique. The feedback closes with an affirmation of the student's capacity and progress, not empty praise, but the belief in the student's potential that Whitmore (2009) identifies as the deepest purpose of any coaching interaction.

Team-coaching exercises such as the Crystal Ball, the Four C's of Teams, and the Team Effectiveness Reality Check build trust, empathy, and shared purpose, without which collaborative learning remains superficial. Used at the beginning of a semester, they establish social conditions that make everything else possible; used throughout, they maintain and deepen those conditions as students face the challenges of sustained collaborative work. Simply stated: belonging is a neurological precondition for learning. A student who does not feel safe to ask questions, to be wrong, or not to know the answer yet, cannot access the cognitive resources that learning requires, regardless of the quality of instruction.

Each dimension has a psychodynamic counterpart, worth naming because it identifies what the dimension protects or releases. Content addresses what S. Freud (1905/1953) called the drive to know, the epistemophilic curiosity he traced to the child's earliest researches and regarded as readily inhibited when inquiry meets rebuke; purpose-activating material works by reconnecting a syllabus with desire rather than by supplying motivation from outside. Organization moves a group

from Bion's (1961) dependency mode toward work-group functioning, making small-group formats structurally harder to delegate thinking to the front of the room. Active Communication approximates an analytic stance more than a didactic one, and strategic silence registers as containment rather than abandonment only because the other four conditions hold it.

Coaching Tools cultivate what psychoanalysis calls the observing ego and what contemporary theory calls reflective functioning, or mentalization — the capacity to treat one's own mental states as objects of thought (Fonagy & Target, 1997); the Personal Iceberg is a direct descendant of the Freudian topographic model and can be taught as such. Habitat corresponds most closely to Winnicott's (1971) holding environment and potential space, the conditions under which play, and therefore originality, becomes possible. It is not incidental that Kegan (1982), whose self-authoring mind the Coaching Tools dimension aims at, took the term holding environment from Winnicott. Bowlby's (1988) secure base has been developed for classrooms by Geddes (2006), whose Learning Triangle of pupil, teacher, and task offers a compact companion to the Wheel: when the relational link is insecure, the task itself becomes the site where anxiety is discharged.

Figure 2

COACH Wheel in Action

Dimension	Practical Tools & Approaches	Learning Outcomes
C — Content	Motivational texts, TED talks, coaching books, purpose-driven inquiry topics; material selected to activate 'the why' of learning	Intrinsic motivation, personal relevance, and discovery of the deeper purpose behind academic content
O — Organization	Project-based learning, mini-group 'islands' (Scrivener, 2012), student-led presentations, collaborative inquiry	Teamwork & leadership; peer learning; accountability; real-world skill transfer
A — Active Comm.	Coaching questions (Whitmore, 2009); non-directive style; mirroring; open-ended prompts; strategic silence; 'What else?' technique	Student voice; reduced fear of mistakes; deeper metacognitive processing; classroom safety
C — Coaching Tools	GROW, OSCAR, SMART; Wheel of Life; Letter from Future Self; Habit Tracker; Personal Iceberg; journaling; SWOT analysis	Goal ownership; self-regulation; critical thinking; analytical and reflective capacity
H — Habitat	Team-building exercises (Crystal Ball, Four C's); Hamburger feedback; sense of belonging rituals; inclusive classroom culture	Psychological safety; peer trust; belonging; motivation to participate and take risks

6. Coaching versus Lecturing: The Evidence

John Hattie's Visible Learning project (2009), the largest synthesis of educational research ever conducted covering more than 800 meta-analyses representing the learning outcomes of approximately 250 million students, provides a solid foundation for claims about what works in education. The interventions with the highest effect sizes correspond closely to the COACH Wheel dimensions: teacher–student relationship quality yields $d = 0.72$, more than double the typical year of schooling ($d \approx 0.35$); feedback quality produces $d = 0.73$; student self-efficacy yields $d = 0.92$, among the highest of any factor studied; classroom discussion and Socratic questioning produced $d = 0.82$; and goal-setting yields $d = 0.50$ (p. 245). By contrast, direct instruction or lecturing yields $d = 0.59$, and rote memorization produces $d = 0.09$, barely distinguishable from zero.

Freeman and colleagues' 2014 meta-analysis of active learning in STEM disciplines, examining 225 studies, found that students in traditional lecture formats were 1.5 times more likely to fail than those in active-learning environments (p. 8410). The authors concluded that "if the experiments revealed that a new drug was as effective as active learning, we would be pushing to make it the standard of care" (Freeman et al., 2014, pp. 8410–8415).

6.1 Authors' Preliminary Research

In the authors' prior study (McDaniel & McDaniel, 2025), 112 English Philology students at WSB University in Wrocław, Poland, completed a survey rating the effectiveness of traditional versus coaching-integrated approaches across fifteen key competencies, using a five-point Likert scale. The coaching approach was rated higher across all competencies. The largest differences were observed in enhancing emotional intelligence (coaching rated 4.7 versus traditional 2.9), creative and innovative thinking (4.6 versus 2.8), active learning and self-motivation (4.5 versus 2.7), conflict resolution (4.3 versus 2.8), and leadership (4.2 versus 2.9). Coaching was also rated higher on traditional language competencies of written language, conversational fluency, and presentation skills, suggesting the coaching approach does not sacrifice academic outcomes in the service of personal development but enhances both simultaneously.

The qualitative dimension was equally revealing. Students described their experience in the traditional classroom in terms of invisibility ("I try to stay below the radar"), anxiety ("I am afraid to ask questions because the teacher makes me feel stupid"), and alienation ("I am there to get a grade, not to learn"). In the coaching classroom, the same students described recognition ("I feel that the teacher genuinely sees me"), safety ("I can make mistakes here without being judged"), and ownership ("I feel responsible for my own progress and not just for passing"). These responses speak directly to SDT: the presence or absence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is felt, named, and experienced as a qualitative difference in what it means to be a learner. When students use phrases such as "below the radar," "afraid to ask," and "feel stupid," they are describing the psychological experience of a threat-activated nervous system.

The study has limitations the authors acknowledge. The sample is drawn from a single institution, a single discipline, and a particular cultural context. The design is quasi-experimental rather than randomized, and the outcome measure is student self-report rather than objective assessment. These limitations motivate the multi-site, multi-disciplinary randomized controlled study proposed as the next phase of research.

Read psychodynamically, these responses form an inventory of defensive operations rather than complaints: staying below the radar is ego restriction; attending for a grade rather than for learning is isolation of affect; fear of asking is anticipation of the shaming object. What changes in the coaching classroom are less about technique than about what students must defend against. The reading also carries a methodological caution: self-report is precisely the instrument defense distorts. A student who has withdrawn from a subject reports indifference rather than suffering, and may rate a coaching classroom no higher because the domain has already been evacuated. Such constructs are not exempt from evidentiary demands — Shedler (2010) has tested them against outcome data — but they argue for supplementing the proposed trial with observational measures: question-asking and help-seeking, tolerance of error, and persistence after failure, none of which depend on self-report.

6.2 Cross-Disciplinary Support

Broader literature provides convergent evidence across fields. In STEM education, problem-based learning — in which students work in small groups on complex, real-world problems has led to gains in conceptual understanding, self-directed learning, and clinical reasoning compared to lecture-based instruction (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). Inquiry-based science teaching, in which students design and conduct experiments rather than following prescribed procedures, shows similar advantages for conceptual understanding and scientific thinking (Minner et al., 2010). In medical education, the problem-based learning curriculum pioneered at McMaster University. Subsequently, it has produced graduates worldwide who are more self-directed and more capable of integrating new information than their lecture-trained counterparts (Barrows, 1996). In business education, the case-based seminar format pioneered by Harvard Business School embodies many coaching classroom principles: student preparation and active engagement, the teacher as Socratic facilitator, collaborative sense-making under genuine uncertainty, and its half-century of institutional success provides evidence that the facilitative model is compatible with high academic standards and high-stakes professional preparation.

7. Challenges to the Coaching Approach

We identify four categories of barriers that educators and institutions face: examination-focused curricula, large class sizes, insufficient time allocation, and departmental expectations for content coverage. Coaching integration begins with a communication style that requires no curriculum change and no additional time. The Hamburger feedback model does not require abandoning grades; it is a layer of developmental dialogue applied alongside existing assessment systems. Mini-group formats do not require restructuring the timetable but are a different use of time that already exists.

The deeper institutional constraint is cultural. Universities are, in Laloux's terms, Amber or Orange organizations that reward research productivity rather than pedagogical innovation and measure student satisfaction in ways that often incentivize performance-lecturing (Shmelev, 2022). Changing these incentive structures is beyond the scope of any individual teacher. However, individual teachers can and do create pockets of Teal within Amber institutions. The cumulative effect of those pockets is the gradual cultural change that eventually produces systemic transformation.

Systems psychodynamics suggests why such constraints outlast their stated rationales. Menzies's (1960) study of a hospital nursing service showed that institutional routines — rigid task lists, depersonalizing procedure, the diffusion of responsibility — persisted despite manifest inefficiency because they operated as a social defense system against the anxiety intrinsic to the work; Obholzer and Roberts (1994) extended the analysis to schools. On this reading, the lecture, the fixed syllabus, the rubric, and the anonymized examination are not only administrative conveniences but structures that bind the anxieties teaching provokes: not knowing, being found wanting, unpredictable contact with thirty other minds. Two consequences follow. Evidence alone will not dislodge such structures, since evidence never held them in place; and any coaching initiative that removes a defense without supplying containment in its stead will raise anxiety and be abandoned.

In many educational cultures, including several East Asian, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern contexts, teacher authority and student deference are genuinely valued, and the shift toward student agency may be read as a weakening of academic rigor or as culturally inappropriate. Chirkov and colleagues (2003) demonstrated across multiple cultural contexts, including South Korea and Russia, that the three basic psychological needs identified by SDT are universal: students in high-authority-distance cultures also benefit from autonomy support, need to feel competent, and flourish when they experience genuine relatedness with their teachers. The coaching shift does not impose Western individualism but addresses universal human needs in culturally appropriate ways. Moreover, coaching integration does not require eliminating teacher authority but transforming its quality from the authority of institutional position to what Laloux calls "natural authority": wisdom, genuine curiosity, and the capacity to draw out the best in others.

The deepest barrier is psychological. Many experienced teachers have built their professional identity around being the person responsible for ensuring that students learn. The coaching shift requires a fundamental revision of this identity. The teacher is no longer the source of knowledge but the activator of students' capacity to generate their own knowledge, a revision many experience as a loss of authority, of certainty, of professional identity. It is important to acknowledge this loss with genuine respect. However, it is equally important to point toward what is gained.

That loss is better understood as a task of mourning than as resistance to be overcome. What the teacher relinquishes is not a technique but an ego ideal — the omniscient figure S. Freud (1914/1955) described pupils as installing in their teachers, and which teachers may, for their own reasons, need pupils to go on installing. Mourning proceeds unevenly, takes longer than institutions allow, and cannot be shortened by persuasion (S. Freud, 1917/1957). A. Freud's (1936/1966) identification with the aggressor is visible here too: a teacher who survived a shaming apprenticeship may hold to the lecture format with an attachment disproportionate to its results. Initiatives that treat the coaching shift as skill acquisition underestimate both, which is one reason a well-received training day so often fails to alter Monday morning.

The teacher who has made the coaching shift typically reports not a diminishment of professional authority but an amplification of professional meaning. When a student discovers something through a question the teacher asked, or when the teacher watches a shy student articulate, for the first time, a genuinely original idea, the satisfaction is qualitatively different from the satisfaction of a well-delivered lecture. It is the satisfaction of having contributed to the growth of another

human being, a source of professional fulfillment, that the "sage on stage" format structurally forecloses. Dweck's (2006) growth mindset research applies not only to students. Teachers who approach their own pedagogical practice with a growth orientation, who treat every class as an experiment, every failure as information, and every student response as feedback on their own practice are teachers who continue to develop professionally rather than stagnating in the routines of established expertise. The coaching classroom is, for such teachers, as much a site of their own growth as of their students'.

8. Implications for Teacher Education and Policy

The empirical foundation for coaching-integrated teaching, while substantial overall, remains thin in several important respects. The authors' own data are preliminary and suggestive rather than definitive. The cross-disciplinary literature, while consistent in direction, is heterogeneous in method and frequently limited in sample size and geographic scope. A rigorous research agenda is urgently needed. The most valuable single study would be a multi-site, multi-disciplinary randomized controlled trial comparing coaching-integrated and traditional classrooms on a comprehensive set of outcomes: academic achievement, intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, well-being, and long-term career outcomes, with follow-up at 1, 3, and 5 years. Such a study would provide the kind of evidence that institutional leaders, policymakers, and skeptical colleagues require before committing to substantive change. Cultural adaptation studies examining how COACH Wheel dimensions manifest in radically different educational contexts would address the universality claim central to this article's argument. Neuroimaging studies building on Paling's (2022) framework could, in principle, provide biological evidence for the mechanisms through which coaching integration affects learning: evidence that would be compelling to audiences for whom behavioral and self-report data are insufficient.

An important implication of this article's argument concerns teacher preparation. If a coaching orientation is as important as the evidence suggests, and if communication style, goal-setting practice, and the cultivation of psychological safety are as powerful as feedback quality in predicting student outcomes, then coaching skills should be included in pre-service teacher education as a core competency. This would require a fundamental revision of teacher preparation programs, which in most countries remain heavily focused on subject knowledge, curriculum planning, and assessment design, with limited attention to the relational and communicative dimensions of teaching. For in-service teachers, instructional coaching, as documented by Wise and Sundstrom (2011) and increasingly promoted internationally by school systems, offers the most effective available mechanism for professional development in coaching-integrated practice. A teacher coached by a skilled instructional coach experiences exactly the conditions they are being asked to create for their students: goal-clarity, developmental feedback, genuine dialogue, and the experience of being genuinely seen and supported by someone who believes in their potential.

Psychoanalytic pedagogy offers both precedent and method. A. Freud (1930/1935) lectured to teachers and nursery workers on the premise that adults working with children need a working knowledge of defense and development, not clinical training. The Tavistock work discussion model (Rustin & Bradley, 2008) provides a tested vehicle: small groups of practitioners meet regularly to present observational accounts of ordinary episodes and discuss them together, without rushing toward recommendations. Its relevance is structural rather than doctrinal. A teacher cannot

reliably contain a student's anxiety about not-knowing while their own remains uncontained; supplying questions to ask without a forum in which to metabolize what they elicit assigns teachers the harder half of the task. Work discussion, instructional coaching, and clinical supervision are variants of a single provision.

One boundary requires explicit statement in policy. Introducing Aichhorn's work with delinquent adolescents, S. Freud (1925/1961) cautioned that the educator's use of psychoanalytic understanding is not analysis. The coaching classroom shares that limit. Tools such as the Personal Iceberg and the Letter from Future Self can surface material belonging in a consulting room, not a seminar; teachers need training to recognize that threshold, a referral pathway, and permission to decline the therapeutic role. Coaching-integrated teaching enlarges the pedagogical relationship; it does not make it clinical.

At the policy level, assessment systems should broaden beyond knowledge recall to include self-regulatory capacity, collaborative problem-solving, and reflective practice the very competencies that coaching-integrated teaching develops and that employers most urgently seek. Curriculum frameworks should mandate student agency and co-construction alongside content coverage, rather than treating student voice as an add-on to an otherwise fixed syllabus. Furthermore, quality assurance systems for education inspection frameworks, teaching excellence schemes, and promotion criteria should assess the quality of teacher–student dialogue, rather than merely curriculum coverage rates or student satisfaction scores. None of these policy changes are simple to implement. All require a willingness to reconsider and revise assumptions about what education is for and how it is conducted. However, the pressures are building from employers who cannot find graduates with the capabilities they need, from students who report epidemic rates of anxiety and disengagement, from teachers burning out at rates that represent a crisis for the profession, and from a world that increasingly demands the kinds of adaptive, collaborative, self-directed human capability that the lecture format was never designed to produce.

9. Conclusion

We began with a paradox: we live in a world transformed beyond recognition, yet the classroom is largely unchanged. We end with a proposition: the transformation of the classroom is not merely possible but necessary, not merely desirable but urgent, and not merely achievable but already underway in every classroom where a teacher has chosen to ask rather than tell, to listen rather than evaluate, to witness rather than judge.

The COACH Wheel does not describe an idealized future but a recognition that a growing number of teachers are already inhabiting — often without the language or theoretical framework to name what they are doing. This article has attempted to provide both. The five dimensions — Content that ignites purpose, Organization that enacts collaboration, Active Communication that creates space for thinking, Coaching Tools that support self-direction, and Habitat that ensures psychological safety — are not innovations. They clarify what the best teachers have always known in a framework that any teacher can use.

Whitmore wrote that the underlying intent of every coaching interaction is to build the coachee's self-belief and to help them realize that their success is due to their own efforts. We suggest that the same is true of every act of teaching. The teacher's role is not simply to transmit knowledge

and manage behavior, but to build in every student who passes through the classroom the conviction that they are capable of genuine thought, genuine growth, and genuine contribution to the world they are entering. That is a coaching act, and we believe it is one of the most important things a teacher can do.

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