



POWER SWINGS: FROM AUTHORITARIAN TO COLLABORATIVE TEACHING ASSESSMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article, aimed at both the observer and the observed, presents the need for compassionate collaborative assessment strategies. By building rapport between teachers and observers, assessments are viewed positively and genuine changes in teaching can occur. Compassionate observations also help teachers to meet standards while inspiring them to excel in their profession. As the approach discussed in this article involves the assessor and the assessed, K-12 teachers, ESL instructors in IEPs, and administrator/assessors working with ESL teachers will benefit from reading this article. Part One offers a theoretical framework by examining the philosophical issues of vision and ethics as foundations for establishing an inspirational environment that enhances expertise and collaboration between supervisors, teachers, and their peers. Part Two describes ways in which expertise and collaboration can be nurtured among educators. Part Three explains how vision, ethics, expertise, and collaboration apply holistically to collaborative teacher assessment. We offer an assessment example to highlight our method.

KEYWORDS

Teacher Professional Development, Intensive English Programs, Assessment

No one likes to be criticized about how they do their jobs. Yet in all kinds of enterprises, performance evaluations are routine occurrences and often standardized to save time. Supervisors working in the English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching field—both private and public—must observe and assess their teachers at least once a semester. Many K-12 educators receive evaluations from administrators using mandated state standards, along with the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SI-OP).¹ Intensive English Programs are guided by specialized accrediting agencies, such as the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) certification standards. Such standards and

protocols are meant to “reflect what is considered good practice in the field of English language teaching and administration” (CEA, n.d.).

We must evaluate teaching practices to support teacher excellence. Yet impersonal assessment aimed at compliance to achieve externally defined standards may not achieve lasting results, as the teacher may view the procedure as a threat (Boyatzis, Smith & Beveridge, 2012). We therefore advocate humanizing the assessment process. Administrators can do this by creating workshops and sessions for instructors aimed at reflective teaching practices. A key subject to reflect upon collaboratively is vision, with the aim being to align teacher vision with the program’s vision. While each person expresses unique thoughts, a global vision will likely be defined as serving and supporting student learning, and treating everyone at

¹ For details, please refer to <https://www.pearsonhighered.com/mediaproducts/siop/>

school with respect and compassion. This was our global vision; it generated rapport centered on positive feedback and aimed toward teaching excellence (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2003).

To create a positive learning climate for assessment, the observer who assesses should be competent, not only in terms of assessment, but also in regard to leadership. We define leadership using two categories: vision and ethics, and expertise and collaborative skills. Moreover, assessment must become collaborative and foster a positive environment for everyone involved. This emphasis is crucial, as assessment, like any other exchange between humans, is more than passing information—it is an emotional exchange as well. Research indicates that compassionate assessment triggers a psychophysiological state allowing a teacher to be open to change, new methods, and personal growth. In contrast, when teachers are assessed for compliance (i.e., impersonally, to meet the mandated standards) this deficiency-based interaction invokes a negative state of mind. The teacher becomes defensive, and cognitive functioning is reduced, which lowers the chances for any learning or change to take place (Boyatzis et al., 2012).

VISION AND ETHICS

A vision statement and a mission statement are fundamental to the success of any organization (Lucas, 1998). The Task Force on Developing Research in Educational Leadership (2003) states: “Effective educational leaders help their schools to develop or endorse visions that embody the best thinking about teaching and learning. School leaders inspire others to reach for ambitious goals” (p. 3). Mission and vision statements define an organization, as well as its clientele and services (Lucas, 1998). These statements should be future oriented and aspirational, motivating everyone involved. Educational institutions desperately need vision statements (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). Yet while our university had a broad

mission statement, our IEP had no specific vision statement.

To alleviate this deficit, as the new coordinator, I called a series of teacher staff meetings. I wanted the teachers to get in the mindset of collaborating—with me and with each other—not only to enhance the program but also to build a sense of community and to broaden how teachers communicated and exchanged ideas about their own teaching practices (Darling-Hammond, 2013). During the initial meeting and many others, we talked about ethics, drafted an IEP vision statement to include in our lesson plan templates, and agreed upon an assessment rubric and a statement of responsibility for those who conducted observations.

Before each semester began, I held a four-hour teacher professional development day. We began by reiterating our IEP vision and discussing how each individual’s teacher vision supported the broader IEP vision. Teachers then brainstormed and presented on various topics to support their vision of teaching excellence: for instance, how to improve their teaching, how to improve relationships with other departments, which books and software they thought were most effective, and classroom management techniques. During our meetings I often distributed questionnaires related to teaching practices. For example, one questionnaire focused on teacher perceptions of competence (see Appendix). We discussed this topic in relation to our teaching standards for the upcoming semester. We also watched educational teaching videos together and discussed how to collectively use teaching strategies, ranging from technology to classroom management techniques.

Developing a common vision via multiple discussions helps to align a teacher’s individual vision with the broader vision of the teacher’s workplace. Such collaborative activities also reinforce a sense of teacher teamwork, as collaboration establishes coherence in values, practices, and long-range vision (Sergiovanni, 1984). Inspired by the vision the teachers have helped create, we all believed in their ability to carry it out. Working with this premise, teacher

assessments completed by the assessor and a rotating peer teacher became part of building the ideals of an academic community, as opposed to being perceived as a method of judging an individual instructor's competence (Goodson, 2002).

As a team, we decided that our vision and statement of ethics means we not only aim to teach values, but also—and more importantly—to teach with values. We sought the Cambridge definition of ethics, which states: the study of what is morally right and wrong, or a set of beliefs about what is morally right and wrong (“Ethics,” 2016). As educators, we acknowledged all our actions can carry harmful or beneficial consequences for ourselves and those with whom we interact. We agreed that our ethics should revolve around the principles and practices to help us all to act in ways that help rather than harm.

Certainly, given today's emphasis on creating national standards, supervisors and teachers both have ethical responsibilities. Sadly, American K-12 teachers are often evaluated on students' test results (Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley & Rothstein, 2012)—not on their ethical principles. Yet supervisors model ethical values for teachers, who in turn model them to students (Oser, 1994). Educators have the opportunity to show students how to live decently, treat others respectfully, and act justly. Our shared vision thus impacts the most vulnerable and valuable population: our students.

Although our institution is faith based, we feel that our ethics are built upon a system that draws upon basic human values and can appeal to everyone, religious or non-religious alike. At the heart of this approach is the cultivation of genuine compassion for others. We believe that positive reinforcement is more effective than criticism and that coaching is more effective than evaluating. We acknowledge that everyone lives on this planet together, so we must be mindful of the interdependence of life and employ kindness over harsh words. As a group, we agreed to gravitate towards others with compassion and positive emotions; consequently, a certain sense of endearment was generated,

which in turn generated insightful learning and positive change. Instead of suspicion, we want to feel empathy. Instead of fear, we want to feel trust. Instead of compliance, we want to create growth. In order to align our personal visions of excellence as teachers with the professional vision of the institute to promote excellence where we work, teachers and trainers developed the following guidelines for those who assess:

1. Competence:

As a coach/assessor I will, together with the peer teacher observer, maintain high standards of competence by keeping up with educational literature, reading about methodologies that support teachers, and keeping myself healthy and alert so that I can observe and perceive to the best of my abilities.

2. Integrity:

As a coach/assessor I will, together with the peer teacher observer, represent ourselves in an honest and fair manner, being knowledgeable about our competencies and limitations in regard to teaching, education, and observation. We will strive to be aware of our personal belief systems, values, needs, and limitations and the effect of these on our observation practices. We will clarify the roles we perform, emphasizing our duty to support and promote the teacher being observed, and adhere to our student-facing rubric.

3. Professional Responsibility:

As a coach/assessor I will, together with the peer teacher observer, uphold standards of ethical conduct that reflect well on us as educators conducting observations as well as the teaching profession at large.

4. Respect for People's Rights and Dignity:

As a coach/assessor I will, together with the peer teacher observer, treat the teacher being observed as well as anyone present in the classroom with dignity and respect. We will remain aware of cultural differences, cultural background and biases, and the teacher's and students' right to autonomy, privacy, and confidentiality. As educators, we accord appropriate respect to the fundamental rights, dignity, and worth of all teachers and students. We seek to learn more about cultural, individual, and role differences, including those due to age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status. Finally, as educators and assessors, we strive to eliminate any bias based on those factors, to fully support the professional development of the teacher being observed.

Our vision aligns with our statement of ethics. Simply put, we do not want so much to assess or teach ethical values as to assess and teach *with* ethical values. As teachers and as teacher trainers, we committed ourselves to supporting each other's ongoing practice and knowledge. We agreed to do this through teaching, face-to-face meetings, and our own efforts as educators. As teachers and teacher trainers, we are committed to honoring the trust of those we observe, respecting the student-teacher relationship, and transmitting education, knowledge, and compassion to our students and each other.

Not only teachers but also public administration scholars advocate that, in any business, educational or otherwise, leaders must inspire (Hallinger & Heck, 2002). As noted, vision and ethics set by management filters down the ranks (Litzky, Eddleston, & Kidder, 2006). Furthermore, competent ESL supervisors must also demonstrate pedagogical expertise to assess, support, and coach teachers. They must also believe their instructors are competent and willing to collaborate. As educators, we know that high expectations generate the most productive and creative learning outcomes for our students (Bain, 2011);

as a supervisor/assessor, I know this to be true for my teachers as well. In choosing ways to be assessed, we agreed as a group that Dan Willingham's 2009 book, *Why Don't Students Like School?*, could provide basis not only for our conceptual framework of teaching but also for conducting assessments. Willingham offers two premises: first, that memory is the residue of thought; the more one thinks about something, the likelier it is he or she will retain and grasp it; and second, that learning is memory in disguise. Thus, effective assessments and effective instruction mean that skills and concepts are committed to memory. Particularly because teachers and students are constantly multitasking, we strive to find ways to enhance learning by focusing on just one or two key points at a time. Doing so allows teachers to reflect more deeply upon the teaching points, then practice and incorporate these moves into long term memory—in other words, this generates authentic learning. In addition, we agreed upon the following student-centered rubric² (Table 1) for teacher assessment because our vision focuses on serving students.

By discussing and agreeing upon these components together, the teachers and the assessors became one team. Everyone understood and aligned with the paired criteria of vision and ethics, and expertise and collaborative skills. Visionary leadership and shared ethical standards helped us all to focus on the most important element of our work: serving our students and helping them learn. Significantly, teachers agreed that our rubric was non-threatening and promoted learning. Additionally, these observers had a standard outlining their responsibilities: they were not to simply play “nice” and say everything was great. With this coherent vision and set of ethical values, teachers could holistically serve their students (Maher, 2000); likewise, assessors could constantly support teachers.

² This rubric is based upon the Match Education model, an education program we greatly admire. <http://www.matcheducation.org>

Table One: Student-centered rubric for teacher assessment

	<i>Ideal Situation:</i>	<i>Observer Watches for:</i>
<i>Environment / Behavioral</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Misbehavior noted and addressed efficiently ▪ Students do not take offense, bounce back ▪ During correction other students stay focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do students know teacher is watching? ▪ Do students think teacher cares? ▪ Do students bounce back when reprimanded? ▪ Is pacing/timing of lesson uninterrupted?
<i>Task Mastery / Cognitive</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timing and rigor of task suits all students ▪ Materials adapted so everyone gets maximum learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does material challenge each student? ▪ Was context set/background built?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tasks clear, timed, and logically ordered ▪ All four skills used, all tasks designed for mastery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are all students challenged? ▪ Does the material fit the task? ▪ Did students have enough time to process?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sufficient repetition in all four skills ▪ Sufficient variety of tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do students have enough time for practice? ▪ Is there variety in practice? a chance to practice both accuracy and fluency?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Genuine feedback to groups and individuals; concise, measurable ▪ Error correction not directed at one student and clear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does feedback help students progress and show Interest? ▪ Is error correction valid and targeted?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSMENT

Our theoretical framework for collaborative assessment is based upon the Hersey-Blanchard Leadership Model (Bolden, Gosling, Marturano & Dennon, 2003), which takes a situational perspective of leadership. This sociocultural, management-based theory has three components: task behavior, relationship behavior and individual behavior. Task behavior means that assessors have the responsibility to offer clear directives to implement positive teaching. Relationship behavior means that as assessors have the responsibility to engage in two- or multi-way communications that facilitate socio-emotional support and support both parties as they work toward enhancing teacher behavior. Finally, the individual behavior component means that each teacher

is unique in her ability to accomplish a task; the assessor and teacher observer should therefore be mindful of the needs and abilities of the observed teacher.

According to the Hersey-Blanchard Leadership Model, assessor behaviors fall along a continuum ranging from being directive to being supportive. This means the assessor has four roles to negotiate, each dependent upon the needs of the observed teacher. The assessor should direct, coach, support, and delegate. When directing, the assessor offers clear, precise instruction and advice. When coaching, the assessor engages in a two-way communication—including active listening—that aims to build confidence and motivation. When being supportive, the assessor shares decision-making with the observed teacher on the implementation of a new teaching strategy. When delegating, the assessor allows the

observed teacher to state whether she considers herself ready and competent to carry out a previously un-tried teaching move.

EXPERTISE AND COLLABORATION

In addition to vision and ethics, educators need pedagogical expertise and the ability to collaborate with each other. These attributes are important because they help transform teacher assessment into a creative learning event, as opposed to a critical judgment. Moreover, when teachers and supervisors validate each other's expertise and collaborative skills, mutual respect and trust are gained, thereby creating an environment of expanded learning in all directions. We forge critical relationships through our collaborations.

Instructors with a master's degree in TESOL often have extensive knowledge of second language acquisition theories, as well as comprehension of communicative language techniques. Exceptional instructors constantly hone and adjust their classroom teaching to meet the unique needs of each student and each class. Therefore, focus areas for teaching praxis include the following: time management, classroom discipline, lesson presentation, conferencing with students, and/or the effective use of classroom spaces and resources.

Because teachers, like students, bring a unique background and expertise, each teacher has pedagogical assets that can be shared in collaborative formats, such as workshops, peer-to-peer sharing, and peer assessment. By combining expertise, teacher assessment becomes a communal activity. Assessment also transforms into effective information sharing. While my task as supervisor is to discover the strengths and weaknesses of each instructor, my duties as a leader are twofold: to support my teachers using my pedagogical strengths, and to facilitate collaborative assessment among my instructors.

Research has shown that students can learn effectively from their peers (Swain, Brooks, & Tocalli-

Beller, 2002). Likewise, when teachers recognize a colleague – whether supervisor or peer – as an expert in some teaching strategy, they are usually open to suggestions. Evaluations transform into positive interactions. Moreover, power dynamics become more equitable when we foster collaborative mindsets for teacher evaluations.

If done well, collaborative teacher assessment allows ESL instructors to become part of a team. Sports coaches well understand this. Team members know their strengths and are aware of weaknesses to improve. Team players help each other; this builds esprit de corps. Likewise, I want my teachers to develop team spirit and a sense of community regarding ongoing professional development. The result is teachers who will be loyal to our school, and students who will learn more in a stable, positive environment.

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING ASSESSMENTS

Much information exists on assessing students (Klesmer, 1994) and on building rubrics to assess students (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010); however, less consensus exists about assessing ESL teachers at work in their classrooms (Pennington & Young, 1989). IEP instructors are often judged by their student evaluations. Yet a standardized assessment rubric can be applied to ESL (and content) teachers at any level; research has found that the SIOP model successfully works in this capacity (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004). The challenge is not only finding a rubric but also using it in a compassionate format. While many teachers know both their content and how to effectively present materials to students in ways that challenge and stimulate interest (Bain, 2004), becoming an exceptional teacher requires practice and monitoring.

Teacher assessment should therefore support instructors towards excellence. Bain (2004) categorizes outstanding teachers as having knowledge about

teaching, knowledge about students, and knowledge about learning. Most MA TESOL programs offer courses on theory and methods, which encourage teachers to become familiar with their students in order to motivate them to learn. Yet ESL instructors, like painters and sculptors, must learn the *art* of teaching by receiving input from others.

Thus, collaborative assessment becomes invaluable because it promotes an upward spiral of teaching excellence. Becoming a master teacher takes time (Bain, 2004). Recently, researching and implementing new types of innovative teacher professional development has become a growing and innovative field for TESOL educators (Bailey, 2001). One significant model is the peer-assistance and review model in Toledo, Ohio (Darling-Hammond, 2013).

Specifically, we perceive collaborative assessment as having three parts. Initially, the assessor gathers information from her perspective as an observer to note the need for change (directive). Second, she actively listens to the teacher's perspective and input (coaching/supportive), and thirdly, she incorporates a peer perspective from a fellow teacher (delegative). ESL instructors participate in one required observation per semester, but each teacher observed receives two assessments: his/her peer's and mine. This dual feedback provides a more detailed picture of what happens in the classroom.

Our evaluation meets SIOP standards, in that it is worded positively. As observers, we feel obligated to uphold and enhance, not criticize, the teacher under observation. The peer teacher and I identify ways to help the observed teacher excel, ideally after the teacher has elicited her own challenges.

After the observation, assessment protocol is as follows: we discuss the previous teaching and the present lesson together. We actively listen to what the observed teacher says, and then we agree upon a suggested improvement concerning one specific aspect of her teaching. This improvement has three facets: 1) we all agree it is useful; 2) it can be observed; and 3) it can be measured. For example, a suggested improvement might be to focus on reduc-

ing teacher talk because 1) doing so will allow students more communicable opportunities; 2) teacher talk can be observed by the speaker and the listener; and 3) a recording of the lesson could be made for word counts. If the teacher confirms this suggestion, we script out teaching strategies together. For example, in terms of teacher talk we might agree that the teacher: 1) use more visuals and fewer words; 2) ask students to check with partners for answers and put answers on a screen rather than reading them out; and 3) ask the teacher not to add unnecessary information to an answer, but ask instead, "What else can you tell me about that?" Later, I will conduct a shorter follow-up observation, and if the teaching maneuver is working, we will focus on another aspect in the future.

This kind of collaborative assessment procedure resembles coaching and has political, psychological, and practical aspects. Observing teachers more as a coach changes the power dynamics by making assessment less threatening. Moreover, having a peer teacher beside the supervisor as a sort of "assistant coach" encourages parity, since the observed teacher knows she will also play that role with her peers. Additionally, with the shift in power comes a more positive psychological climate. Instead of being viewed as the boss with hire and fire capacities, as a coach I become a resource—a guide, motivator, and supporter. Finally, just as coaches are pragmatic and seek ways to help players improve, my coaching rubric (see Appendix) is student-centered, addressing both behavior and learning.

As an example of this coaching assessment, the peer teacher and I might want to know during an observation whether students are on task—are the students doing what the teacher wants them to do during class? We might also watch for smooth, efficient transitions from activity to activity that keep students on task. If students wander from the task or misbehave, we watch to see whether the teacher notices and, if so, is able to redirect in successful and non-disruptive ways.

Regarding student learning, we can target task mastery using four areas: task rigor, thinking tasks, practice time, and teacher feedback. In accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, we want teachers to offer linguistic tasks that challenge students without overwhelming them. This is not easy considering differences in students and student learning, but it is possible—especially when students can work collaboratively. In terms of thinking tasks, we might consider if directions are clear, if tasks are sequential, and if the broad learning objective aligns to the activities. Regarding practice time, we would examine whether students have the opportunity to practice the task in terms of both accuracy and fluency. Finally, regarding teacher feedback, we would ask whether the teacher gives meaningful feedback and error correction to individual students and the group as a whole. To be precise, meaningful feedback means that the teacher has monitored students' communicative production and offered positive opinions toward the end of class. For example, "This group mentioned weather conditions as well as cost in debating about vacation spots. Do you all also think it should be in the top five categories for choice?" Error correction means that the teacher has listened carefully and elicits corrections in the last five minutes of class. For example, "What is wrong with this sentence I heard during class: 'I go to school yesterday'."

After offering our suggestions, we ask the teacher being observed for her input. To reinforce past learning, we first review the previous 'takeaway'—the advice and scripted suggestions we had made during the previous observation— then we add an additional suggestion if the previous takeaway appears well incorporated into the teacher's memory. An example post-observation discussion might proceed as follows:

Reina: So how do you think you did?

Teacher: In terms of slowing my speech down, yeah. Well, I think I remembered the majority of the time.

Reina: Yes, I agree. I only heard you speaking rapidly towards the last ten minutes of class; maybe you wanted to make sure all the information was conveyed?

Teacher: Yes, I felt rushed. I could, I guess, have said things slowly, and more simply?

Peer Teacher: I feel the same; there is never enough time...

Teacher: Yes.

Reina: Yes. Overall, I'm quite happy with your progress. Be mindful, please, of your speaking speed. Let's move on to another concept: timing. It has to do with speed, too, but in terms of balancing how long each activity lasts to hold students' attention. So, can you tell me how many activities you used today?

Peer Teacher: And let's talk about why we vary activities...

Teacher: Ok

Reina: You used three main activities in today's lesson...

CONCLUSION

For decades, before accepting my current IEP administrative post, I taught a variety of ESL courses, both domestically and abroad. Sometimes, when I was teaching, supervisors periodically assessed me. I remember feeling evaluation anxiety: would I pass the assessment in order to qualify to teach yet another semester? At times I wondered why the supervisor, with similar qualifications to mine, had the power to determine whether I was competent.

When I worked as an administrator for an IEP, and now as a teacher trainer at university, I therefore try to break the power barrier as much as possible. Rather than critique, I observe. I invite another teacher to share in this process and offer peer input. As an assessor, the questions I pose are designed to elicit responses from the observed teacher: What did you think of the lesson? How could the activities be

more effective? How did you check for comprehension? Moreover, the peer teacher in the observation also learns to ask strategy questions: Why did you decide to do that? Does this activity work for other learning points?

Ultimately, the goal is to guide teachers to construct their own knowledge. To build relationships, teachers are encouraged to observe and coach their peers. Thus, together and collaboratively, we decide how to better our teaching practices while at the same time supporting each other. My role as “assessor” is no longer authoritarian.

Many may wonder why this method is better than current or traditional approaches to teacher assessment. We find the question problematic because

it is based upon a compare and compete mentality—a paradigm that diametrically opposes our ethics and values. We would further respond by saying that our assessment rubric is clear, pragmatic, and student-centered. We also have standards of conduct for those who conduct assessments. While our model can and will continue to be improved, those undergoing assessment understand how rubric expectations and assessor standards link to the university’s vision and mission. In such a model, each person involved can perceive assessment as compassionate rather than coercive. By acknowledging our humanity through compassionate assessment, we welcome and enhance learning in the classroom—for both students and teachers.

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