

Effective Instructional Leadership: How to CRAFT Meaningful Evaluations for Administrators and Educators

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We are three administrators who serve in diverse school populations and agree that there is a need for an effective evaluation tool that clearly spells out the expectations of our job. We feel that, without clear expectations, we are on a blind journey. The blind journey comes from the pursuit in raising student achievement, while at the same time trying to understand the multitude of factors that will be used in assessing and/or evaluating our performance. The article will walk you through a process that we believe will yield dividends for those charged with creating a laser-like focus to improve student achievement. We will use the rest of this article to share how we have implemented CRAFT into our evaluation process to answer a critical question: "How can we effectively design our evaluations so that the focus is on raising student achievement?"

Administrators working on their CRAFT need little to no direction in order to be successful at improving the lives of boys and girls, according to Harvey Silver of Silver Strong and Associates. He explained, "CRAFT is not only necessary when little to no direction has been provided, but essential for those seeking a compass to raise student achievement (Silver, 2007)." We believe in CRAFT which stands for ones ability to:

1. **C**ollaborate with key stakeholders (community and staff) in order to build trusting relationships and buy-in;
2. **R**eject on the strengths within an organization and recognize its weaknesses as potential successes to celebrate;
3. **A**dapt to change without blaming, shaming, or making excuses as to improvements needed;
4. **F**ocus on results that use data in driving key decisions; and provide
5. **T**houghtful and timely, teaching and learning practices in a meaningful manner to others, in their quest to address and/or change instructional practices for higher student achievement.

We were introduced to CRAFT throughout the 2006-2007 school year as part of on-going professional

development workshop in Columbus, Ohio. As collegial conversations continued after the workshop, we discussed implications of CRAFT in our schools and on the administrative evaluation process. We questioned how we could improve our schools through investigation and implementation of innovative practices that might raise student achievement, yet would allow

us to be fairly evaluated. A question that surfaced was, "How could we be evaluated so that the process had meaning and provided opportunities for continual growth?"

Collaborate = We believe that evidence of collaboration should be a key indicator in any effective administrative evaluation. The notion of collaboration is supported by Rick DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Bob Eaker in their research and numerous books that address the idea of creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in order to raise student achievement. This collaborative process has helped schools close the achievement gap, making academic progress toward meeting State Benchmarks and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Professional Learning Communities are not limited to school building personnel. We belong to a self-established group of African-American school administrators seeking to enhance the instructional quality provided to the students in our respective communities. Our group works collaboratively on a focal issue of instructional "Best Bet" practices for superior learning outcomes. We are constantly engaged in dialogue pertaining to innovative best practice research, community outreach development, and community engagement. We meet once per month for breakfast and have engaging agenda items for discussions. We trouble shoot various instructional practice issues and learn how other communities are functioning cohesively.

Reflect = Dennis Sparks stated it best when he said, "Listen deeply, use data from the positive deviants within your organization to lead. Focus conversations around instruction and the positive deviants will assist you in creating, planning, and implementing ideas toward making extraordinary gains in adverse situations, as answers to your problems are within your school's control (Sparks, 2004)."

Randall Sampson utilizes a reflective practice called 2+2 feedback (Allen and Allen, 1999). Randall states, "The 2+2

feedback tool requires that he reflect on two positive attributes pertaining to his practice and two areas that need improvement. He goes on to say that the reflective practice has propelled him into action regarding his professional growth." We all agree that reflective practices should be utilized as a component of the evaluation process that will assist the administrator in his/her professional growth.

Adapt = We believe that being adaptable and willing to change to meet daily situations is key to administrative success. Our experiences have led us to this understanding when meeting with staff. We should provide guidance that clearly states what the current challenges are and provide as much research and background knowledge as possible for staff clarity. We believe this should be the same charge for those evaluating administrators.

In Zoraba Ross's "sub"-urban junior high school over 1,000 reprimands, excluding verbal warnings, were issued to seventh graders by administrators in the 2006 academic year. During the course of the year, data (i.e., infractions, race, grade level, referring teacher, etc.) was being collected with the goal of using the data as a guide to alter specific behavior of both student and teachers in the upcoming year.

Clarity of information provided an understanding as to why a change in direction was necessary, as well as, provided insights into the mission, vision, and purpose without being accusatory or defensive.

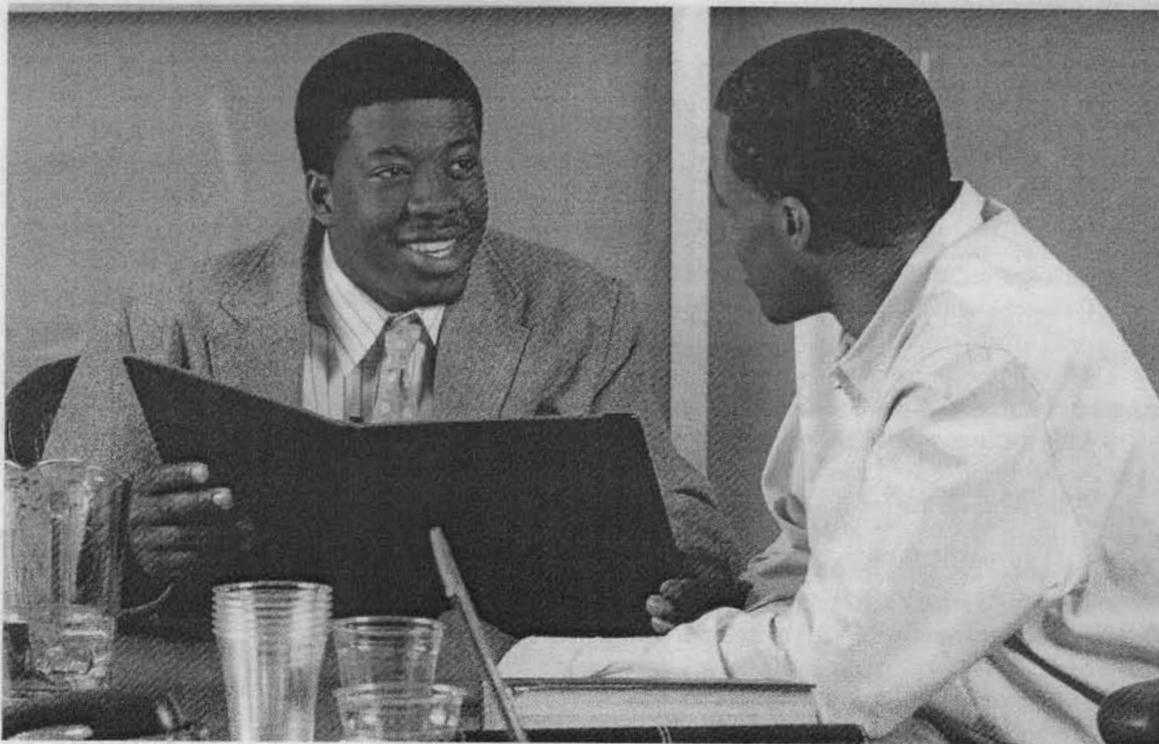
Focus = We have learned that we must keep a focus on what was changed, as what is measured and monitored gets

results. Tyrone Olverson, having worked under Superintendent Dr. Richard Ross of Reynoldsburg City Schools, a suburb east of Columbus, explains focus as a clear mission and vision with relentless pursuit of expectations and an unwavering inspection to the cause(s) of raising student achievement—in a nutshell, making the invisible very visible to all stakeholders. Tyrone states that on every occasion when seeing the superintendent, other central office supervisors, and citizens of the community in public and/or private events, the first question asked was, "How are your math scores and how do you know?"

We agree that this type of focus and inspection should be encouraged, supported, fostered, and assessed in an administrative tool, as it keeps all eyes on the challenge at hand and produces results (raising student performance). The teachers at Reynoldsburg Junior High School have met this challenge and were awarded the Battelle for Kids SOAR Award for 2007 for significantly raising math and reading scores over a three-year period.

Thoughtful and Timely, Teaching and Learning = We agree that teachers often receive a disjointed message from administration regarding professional development around teaching and learning.

Ronald F. Ferguson, Co-Chair of Harvard University's Achievement Gap Initiative and founder of The Tripod Project, identified five variables teachers self-report as reason for professional development programs not working in their learning communities; these same tenants can apply to administrators' perceptions of their



professional development. The five challenges to achieving and sustaining social and intellectual engagement in implementing professional development for school improvement are (Ferguson, 2006):

1. Introducing new activities in ways that inspire buy-in;
 2. Balancing control and autonomy;
 3. Committing to ambitious goals;
 4. Maintaining industriousness in pursuit of those goals;
- and
5. Effectively harvesting and sustaining the gains.

Why would the three compare their past administrative evaluation tools to a blind journey? Their blind journey comparison comes from the standpoint that many administrators, after accepting an administrative position, receive mixed messages as to their focus. Their focus or lack of focus creates a change that is either perceived as a positive or negative force from those that they are to lead. Many administrators lacking clear guidance and expectations take off on wondering journeys. Those without focus become overwhelmed and are helpless in their quest to improve student achievement. This is why the authors would prescribe to a fair administrative evaluative tool that allows administrators the opportunity to practice their "CRAFT" and SAIL onward.

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