CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What is effective teaching? What kinds of behaviors contribute to success (or the
lack of it) in teaching? How does one discern these behaviors in an employment interview?
These are the questions which might need to be answered by principals as they interview
prospective teachers. Writers such as Castetter (1992); Erickson and Shinn (1977); Jensen
(1987); Lipsett, Rogers, and Kentner (1972); Renner (1985); Schneider (1976); and
Webb, Montello, and Norton (1994) have all cited the significant positive relationships
between staffing and school effectiveness, especially as it relates to teachers. Erickson and
Shinn (1977) cite poor staffing decisions as a poor use of public funds and the cause of
irretrievable damage to children when they are deprived of the best teachers available.
Indeed, Kuhlman (1992) noted, "The greatest barrier to middle level success [of students]
may very well be teachers . . ." (p. 19).

Importance of Selecting Teachers

This study was conducted to analyze the interview questions and some practices
used by middle school principals in a large suburban city in southeastern Virginia. As those
responsible for staffing their buildings with quality employees, these principals, like many
others, make staffing decisions which have serious ramifications, particularly for students.
Staff quality was a concern as early as 1882 as evidenced by a report to the governor
given by J. M. Blass, Superintendent of Public Instruction in the state of Indiana, in which
he wrote:

Our children must be taught by competent teachers . . . . If it be the good teacher

who makes the good school, and this is undoubtedly true, it must follow that if we

are to have better schools in Indiana we must have better teachers. (Webb et al.,

1994, p. 150)

In response to a 1991 Gallup Poll on public education, 85% of the respondents

listed the quality of the teaching staff as a factor that they would consider in selecting a

public school for their children. The difficulty in hiring good teachers has been cited as the

biggest problem facing schools today (Webb et al., 1994).

The focus of this study was on the interview questions asked and some of the

interview practices used when the principals in this school district interviewed prospective

teachers. An important administrative task in any school district is staffing or selecting

new employees to fill vacant teaching positions (Vann, 1994). Staffing can be defined as

the process involved in identifying, assessing, placing, evaluating, and developing

individuals at work (Schneider, 1976). Castetter (1992) described the staffing process as

including recruitment, selection, induction, and development.

In the school district studied, building principals must interview and recommend

for hire those persons who should fill teaching vacancies in their buildings. To fill these

vacancies, considerations may be made for racial balance or representation, gender

balance, role models, etc. As is the case in other school districts as well as the one being

studied, "Principals . . . often involve themselves directly in teacher selection, using

program needs as guidelines" (ERS, 1983, p. 28). According to Wynne (1981), some of

these principals used job interviews as opportunities to spell out school goals and

expectations to potential employees. The interview, therefore, presents an opportunity for the principal to balance the school staff while also selecting those who can meet the school's other needs.

Selection of teachers can be a formidable challenge for principals. Because there are so many different definitions of effective teaching, it is difficult to define and measure effective teacher competencies. As a result, teacher selection becomes a mammoth task. Indeed, Ornstein (1993) found that distinguishing between "good" and "bad" or "effective" and "ineffective" teachers is so difficult that even the experts have trouble defining and measuring teacher competencies. Jensen (1987) wrote:

> The task of improving teacher selection is complicated by the fact that research on the prediction of teacher performance fails to provide any definite answers . . . . Researchers . . . have investigated the relationship between what they term successful teaching and a variety of measures—GPA, personality tests, National Teacher Examination scores, self-concept surveys, attitudinal inventories, and vocational interest batteries, and academic achievement tests. (p. 15)

The results of such studies have been generally inconsistent, because researchers have concluded that no one measure or test can assess a candidate's potential as a teacher (Jensen, 1987). The importance of the above measurements for identifying or predicting teacher effectiveness should not be discounted; all are prescreening criteria which should be given careful consideration. However, according to Jensen (1987), "The problem . . . in American schools is administrators often fail to gather enough information about candidates [and] decisions to hire teachers may be based on inadequate selection

procedures" (p. 16). Further, she found the [selection] interview "is the single most influential technique used in hiring decisions" (p. 28). However, Jensen (1987) found that most of the nation's school districts do not have policies for the selection of employees and that most administrators lack training in processes that would increase their chances of choosing the best candidate.

The Role of Some Principals in Teacher Selection

For some principals, the job of identifying a teacher from an interview who might have the capabilities to be an effective teacher may not be a simple task. How does a principal begin? The interview, while only one piece of data to be considered, is critically important. What is the nature of the questions which principals (in this study, middle school principals) ask during the interview? Do they ask the "right" questions to collect data relevant to making a selection decision? Do they ask questions related to the job teachers must perform in and out of the classroom? Do they ask questions related to essential teacher behaviors? Do their questions help them to discriminate the best from the worst prospects? Answering these questions is perhaps an important first step for principals to make before formulating their interview questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the content, category, and type of interview questions asked and investigate some practices used by middle school principals in this suburban school district during their individual teacher interviews. The information gathered was used to critique the quality of principal interviews, focusing on areas of strengths and weaknesses. By way of this study, the researcher examined the questions

and practices that the seven middle school principals used when they interviewed prospective teachers for positions in their buildings.

<div align="center">Significance of the Study</div>

Teaching is a complex act which requires a teacher to possess a number of competencies and skills. Thus, the quality of any educational program is largely determined by the competence and performance of its teachers. According to Jensen (1987), "The quality of any school district depends more upon the quality of its staff than upon any other factor. Each time a teacher is hired, the local school and its district have an opportunity to improve instructional programs" (p. 5). Accordingly, selecting teachers is of supreme importance because mistakes made in personnel selection are costly and have long-term effects.

This study analyzed the questions (i.e., content, category, and type) that middle school principals in the district asked prospective teachers during the teacher interview. Specifically, this study focused on the content (meaning of questions); categories (classifications as based on the kind of response the question dictates); and type (open-ended or closed) of questions asked and the variables associated with differences in principals' questions. Some interview practices that relate specifically to the questioning were also examined. This study is of significance to the school division as an evaluation of current interview practices used within the district as compared to current literature on effective interview questions and practices.

Results of this study will be shared with this school division's assistant superintendent for personnel, director of personnel, and the middle school principals

included in the study, and could be benchmarks for directing any follow-up research or

training if either is deemed necessary by those responsible for the ongoing staff

development training of principals.

Table 1

Definitions of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following definitions are applicable:

CONCEPTS	CONSTITUTIVE	OPERATIONAL
1. content of questions	This term refers to the area of meaning embedded in the interview question used by the middle school principals in this study.	Content of questions refers to the actual questions asked by the principal during the interview (see Appendix D).
2. categories of questions	This term refers to the broad classifications of questions asked during the principal interview.	Questions are classified according to the type of response the content question requires. For example, does the content question require the interviewee to give factual information, demonstrate cognitive ability, role play, solve a problem, synthesize, or state a professional opinion? (See Appendix D.)

(table continues)

Table 1 (<u>continued</u>)

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CONCEPTS	CONSTITUTIVE	OPERATIONAL
3. open-ended/closed questions	Ober (1992) defined open questions as those that "allow the interviewee flexibility in responding, whereas closed questions limit the subject matter of the response" (p. 342).	For this study, interview questions that limit the interviewee's response to one word, i.e., "yes" or "no" are considered closed. Those questions that allow the interviewee to express his/her priorities as they relate to the question are considered open-ended.
4. building-level interview questions	This term refers to those questions devised and asked by the principal or assistant principal or both for the purpose of identifying a teacher to fill a vacancy within that principal's school.	This refers to the content, category, and level of questions asked of each interviewee by the principal or assistant principal or both.
5. teacher effectiveness characteristics	The effect that the teacher's performance has on students (Costa, Garmston, and Lambert, 1988).	This refers to the characteristics of effective teachers/teaching as identified in the literature review.
7. practices of effective interviewers	This refers to interview practices or techniques used by experts in personnel management (see Table 2).	same as constitutive definition

Research Questions

This purpose of this study was to examine the interview questions and some practices used by middle school principals in this district when these principals interviewed prospective teachers. Specifically, the major research question in this study was: What are the questioning procedures used by the principals, and why do they ask certain questions? To answer this question, the following research questions were used as the basis for data collection and analysis:

1. What is the content (meaning) of the interview questions asked, and are these questions open-ended or closed?

2. What categories (classifications) of questions are asked?

3. Do principals in this study consistently ask the same questions of all interviewees?

4. Why do principals ask the questions they ask during their building-level interviews?

5. What is the relationship between the number of interviewees and interview time?

6. Does the principal employ any interview practices deemed effective by personnel experts?

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to middle school principals in a district located in a large suburban city in southeastern Virginia. This study included seven of the eight middle school principals employed by the school district and those candidates selected as interviewees.

The results of this descriptive study are not to be generalized beyond this population because the data are idiosyncratic to the principals studied. Also, the selection method used in this district is not a formalized process and may differ from processes used in other school districts. Only the criteria surrounding teachers actually interviewed by the principal, as well as those recommended for hire, were studied. Only the taped interview questions and those interview practices that could be discerned from listening to the tapes were considered. Tape recording principals as they interviewed may pose a threat to reliability, since principals and interviewees may behave differently when they are not being taped. The fact the principals knew they were being studied may have affected principals' actions, thus influencing the outcomes.

Methodology

The methodology encompassed data collection and data analysis. Subjects for the study included seven of the eight middle school principals in the school district. Interviewees were not considered subjects because they were not being studied. In this district, interviewees generally are selected for a building-level interview if they have a combined score of 4.5 or higher on a scale of 0 (poor) to 5 (excellent) on the application pre-screening and initial interview (see Appendix E), meet the necessary certification requirements, and meet the specific needs of the school. Principals and a personnel administrator collaborate on deciding on the number of interviewees each principal will interview. Typically, three to five interviewees are interviewed by a principal for each position.

Data Collection

Data were collected in two phases: audio tapes of each principal's interviews and a follow-up questionnaire that was sent to each principal by the researcher. The first phase, audio taping, occurred as principals interviewed each interviewee. The second phase of the data collection, the researcher's follow-up questionnaire, was sent via electronic mail (E-mail) to each principal following the completion of all teacher interviews (see Appendix C). The primary purpose of Phase II was to ascertain from the principal's perspective why certain questions were asked during the interview. In addition, from this questionnaire, the researcher analyzed specific aspects on each principal's interview to determine if there were commonalities among the principals with regard to practices used or questions asked. In addition, Phase II also provided the vehicle for gathering demographic information about each principal.

Data Analysis

Each principal's interview questions were analyzed for content, category and type. Content refers to the actual interview questions and the areas of meaning embedded in them. For instance, content might include questions about the teacher's past experiences, personal interests, professional interests, class management, planning and any other questions that might emerge during the principal's interview. Category refers to the interview questions but classifies the questions based of the type of response the content question requires. For example, did the content question require the interviewee to give factual information, demonstrate cognitive ability, role play, solve a problem, synthesize, or state a professional opinion? (see Tables, Chapter 4). In addition, questions were also

analyzed to determine if they were open-ended or closed and whether there were follow-up questions used.

Matrices were used to display the content and category groupings of each principal's interview questions and the relationship of these questions to variables such as the principal's experience as principal, age, gender,and race.The interview questions were also analyzed to see if there was consistency across interviewees. More detailed information pertaining to the Methodology is found in Chapter 3.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the Introduction, Purpose Statement, Significance of the Study, Definitions of Terms, Research Questions, Limitations of the Study, Methodology (data collection and data analysis), and Organization of the Study. Chapter 2 is a review of the current literature and begins with an Introduction. Other chapter subheadings include: Importance of Selection Interviews, Interview Characteristics, Interviewer Training, Interviewer Propensity for Prejudging Interviewees, Demographic Characteristics (sex, race, and age) and the Selection Interview, Elements of Effective Interviews, Elements of Effective Teaching, and Summary. Chapter 3 includes a detailed description of the methodology and strategy for collecting data with a plan for analysis. Briefly, the collection of the data on the interview questions was done via the use of audio tapes (for each interviewee for one position only) and the researcher's questionnaire that was sent to each principal via E-mail at the conclusion of the principal's last teacher interview. The analysis of the data is found in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 subheadings include: Summary, Discussion, Conclusion,

Recommendations for Practice, Implications for Further Research, and Researcher's

Notes.