

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, AND RESEARCHER'S NOTE

This chapter is the culmination of the process used to analyze interview questions and some interview practices used by seven of the eight middle school principals in the large suburban school division studied. Results of the study are presented in this chapter, which is divided into the following sections: Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendations for Practice, Implications for Further Research, and Researcher's Note.

Summary

This qualitative study was conducted to provide an in-depth portrait of the building-level interviews conducted by middle school principals to select teachers for their respective buildings. This study is primarily qualitative, although some quantitative data, namely frequencies, have been included. The following are the findings that resulted from this comprehensive study. Included also are the researcher's observations about these findings.

Finding Number 1

With regard to consistency of questions being asked in all content areas, no principal covered all areas with each interviewee, although there was more variance across principals' interviews than within individual interviews. Omitted content areas where no questions were asked ranged from two to six areas.

Observation About Finding Number 1

While it appears that principals followed a structured list of interview questions, there were some instances where an interviewee was asked additional questions not asked of the other interviewees. Consistency of questions is an important component of a structured interview, for it is the basis for equal footing for all interviewees. Research has shown that consistency in questions asked ensures that the assessment of the interviewee is based on job requirements and not another interviewee (Castallo, 1992; Castetter, 1981; Drake, 1982; Fear, 1984; Hammons, 1992; Jones/Walters, 1994; Rebore, 1991; Watts, 1993). With regard to variance, the majority of the 844 questions asked were factual knowledge questions, illustrating that principals asked more questions from that category than any other single category. However, there was great variance in the questions asked from the other five categories. For instance, Principal A asked Professional Opinion questions equal to 27% of her total questions, whereas Principal B's questions for this category equaled 5%.

Finding Number 2

At least two principals asked questions that verged on being improper according to Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) guidelines. One principal asked an interviewee what her ethnicity was, while both principals asked interviewees to tell the year of their graduations from either high school or college or both. One principal asked at least one interviewee where he resided.

Observation About Finding Number 2

This information can be taken from the interviewee's application or resume; therefore, questions like the above should not be asked during the interview because they could be the basis for a legal challenge, particularly if the interviewee does not get the job. Therefore, the safest way to get this information (if it is necessary) is from the application or resume.

Finding Number 3

Interviewees hired were asked an average of four questions more than those not hired. Interestingly, more questions were asked in just a few seconds more of those hired than those not hired, since hired interviewees averaged 22.87 minutes per interview as compared to an average of 22.13 minutes devoted to those not hired.

Observation(s) About Finding Number 3

While the reason for the slight variation in time is not known, the researcher can speculate that perhaps more time was spent listening to and recording responses of those not hired, since fewer questions were asked of this group. Perhaps this was necessary to document more clearly why that person was not selected. Another speculation is that interviewees selected for the position might have responded more quickly and with more favorable responses than those not hired, thus allowing the interviewer to ask more questions in just a few seconds more. However, this may just be a phenomenon of this study at this time. Perhaps a different study under the same circumstances might produce different results.

Finding Number 4

Demographic attributes of principals were not determinants of the content or category of questions asked in this study.

Observation About Finding Number 4

Questions asked might be the result of individual styles and preferences. Comparisons made with regard to experience, age, race, and gender produced no dramatic differences. What a person asked was probably dependent on what that particular person was seeking or saw as important (see Tables 19-26).

Finding Number 5

Factual knowledge questions comprised the largest percentage of questions asked by principals. Of the 844 questions asked, 43% were from this category. Few principals centered questions around the past experiences of interviewees as a means of predicting future behavior.

Observation About Finding Number 5

While factual knowledge questions may be good questions for starting the interview, they should be used to put the interviewee at ease and abandoned quickly enough to allow adequate time for more specific or revealing questions. Perhaps more questions of a situational nature (role play or problem-solving) might provide more insight into the interviewee's personality and cognitive ability. This would prove to be particularly useful for the principals who feel that discerning important aspects about the interviewee's personality is important. Rather than asking questions about college preparation (some questions might be used to put the interviewee at ease), interviewers should focus more on

experiences interviewees have already had. Questions that ask the interviewee to tell about past experiences could be posed as hypothetical situational or role play questions. Asking questions of these types also allows the interviewer to make assessments of the respondent's personality as well. For example, a more traditional question might be, "What is your philosophy on the use of technology in core (academic) classes?" A question which addresses the interviewee's past behavior and also encompasses the idea of one's philosophy on the use of technology in the classroom might be, "Please describe to me how you used technology to teach a poetry unit" (or whatever lesson the interviewee might have taught).

Finding Number 6

There was very little consistency among principals with regard to interview practices.

Observation About Number 6

No interview process should be formalized to the extent where all principals conduct themselves in the same way using the same set of questions. However, some components of the interview need to be standardized. For example, each interviewee needs to be told how the interview will be conducted, i.e., purpose of interview, interviewer practices to be used during the interview, (e.g., note taking, use of rating sheets, time to be devoted to interviewer's questions, etc.) Of major concern to this researcher is the fact that interview times varied so greatly. Is it really possible to adequately assess one's capabilities in eight or nine minutes, as was the case in two of a principal's three interviews? Interestingly, the third interviewee was actually selected for

the position after completing a twenty-five minute interview. What is also interesting is the person selected was the first person to be interviewed by this principal. Could there have been a subconscious decision made even before the other two persons were interviewed?

Finding Number 7

Five of the seven principals asked a total of 42 (5% of 844 questions asked by all principals) closed questions. Of this number, 22 (2.6%) did not lead to follow-up questions or comments by either the interviewer or the interviewee.

Observation About Finding Number 7

Training would provide principals with the opportunity to learn how to phrase interview questions so that both the interviewer and the interviewee are clear on what is being asked. While there were not many closed questions asked, training in questioning techniques might help principals learn how to phrase questions that are succinct and provide enough information to eliminate the need for follow-up questions, particularly if the questions have to come from the interviewee and are asked for clarification.

Finding Number 8

Four principals did not include others in their respective interviews. When asked why others had not been included in their interviews, some principals said that time constraints prevented others from participating, while one principal said he wanted to be sure the same criteria were applied to each interview.

Observation About Finding Number 9

Principals who did not include others in their interviews and even those who did may benefit from training in consensus ratings or the process involved in using multiple

raters. Assistant principals, particularly, should participate in structured interview training since they, too, will interface with the selected employee. Using multiple raters who have been trained increases interview validity (Campion, Pursell, & Brown, 1988; Pulakos, 1995, 1996).

Discussion

Teacher selection is one of the most important responsibilities a principal has, for a teacher's competence and performance largely determine the quality of a school's and/or a school district's educational program (Jensen, 1987). As mentioned earlier in this study, mistakes made in personnel selection are indeed costly and have immeasurable long-term effects.

After a thorough analysis of the data gathered from this study, the results were compared to the research on interviewing that was presented throughout this paper. The literature review cited several writers whose views about interviewing are in contrast to what the data analysis showed. For example, in this study, interviewers sometimes: ask unchallenging questions (Castallo, 1992; Castetter, 1981; Drake, 1982; Fear, 1984; Goldstein, 1977; Jones & Walters, 1994; Seyfarth, 1991); do not follow up on information provided by the interviewee (Castallo, 1992; Castetter, 1981; Jensen, 1987; Ober, 1992); do not set specific times in which to conduct the interview (Castallo, 1992; Drake, 1982; Fear, 1984; Hammons, 1992; Jones & Walters, 1994; Rebore, 1991; Seyfarth, 1991); and are not consistent about asking all interviewees the same questions (Castallo, 1992; Castetter, 1981; Drake, 1982; Fear, 1984; Hammons, 1992; Jones & Walters, 1994; Rebore, 1991; Watts, 1993).

Do principals ask the “right” questions to collect relevant data to make a selection decision? The answer, based upon the results of this study, is “yes” and “no.” Yes, some principals are asking the right questions, but perhaps not enough principals are doing this. In addition, those who are asking the right questions may not be asking enough questions. Jensen (1987) found that three conditions make hiring a qualified teachers a challenge: complexity of teaching function, insufficient attention to hiring and inadequate selection techniques. For some principals this may present a challenge greater than they may realize. While there is little control that principals can exercise over someone else’s teaching, they (principals) can learn strategies that would enable them to hone their skills in teacher selection interviews. Castetter (1981) says standardization for the school division could involve the development of a structured interview with questions that probe the following categories: personal qualities, academic preparation, position-related experience, interpersonal competence, and career orientation.

Also from the data analysis, it was shown that more than half of all interview questions asked were categorized as factual knowledge questions. Questions of this type do not provide an opportunity for interviewees to reveal qualities or attributes about themselves in a meaningful way, which, incidentally, is what principals said they were trying to uncover during their interviews. When asked why they formulated the questions they asked, or when asked what qualities they were looking for in a prospective teacher, principals’ responses were not always reflected in the kinds of questions they asked. Consequently, it seems that what principals are actually asking during their interviews and what they think their questions will reveal are quite different.

There were some interview practices used and questions asked by some principals that indicated they had some knowledge of how to conduct a structured interview. Support of this can be cited by those principals who opened the interview with small talk to put the interviewee at ease, explained the position for which the person was interviewing, told the interviewee that s/he was conducting a structured interview and for that reason the interviewer would be taking notes, and ended the interview by asking the interviewee if there were any questions for the interviewer. Additionally, a question asked of the interviewees by five of the seven principals in this study was, "Why should I hire you?" According to Faux (1985) the interviewer who asks this question is probing four qualities: (1) interviewee's readiness for the job, (2) his/her ability to handle it, (3) interviewee's willingness to work hard, and (4) interviewee's fit for the job.

Conclusion

In response to the E-mailed questionnaire, principals stated that they had not received any formalized training. Evidence of this lack of training has been documented in this study because the researcher found that principals: were not always consistent with asking the same questions of all interviewees, asked some questions that violated EEO guidelines, did not set a specific time in which to conduct the interviews, did not include others during the interview, and as already mentioned, asked primarily factual knowledge questions as opposed to questions of a situational or problem-solving nature. For these reasons, a strong case can be made for principal training, particularly in the areas of questioning and assessing the candidates based on their responses to the interview questions.

Herein lies the purpose of the entire interview process. It is not enough to ascertain one's academic preparation, for a quality teacher needs to offer more. As Rosenholtz (1985) wrote, "The importance of careful selection procedures cannot be overemphasized. If principals fail in their efforts to attract good teachers and keep them, they become trapped in a cycle of high turnover and low school productivity" (362).

If school divisions like the one used for this study believe hiring quality employees is important, and if the responsibility for selection is left with building principals, then these school divisions must assume more leadership responsibility to ensure that principals have been provided the training they need.

Recommendations for Practice

This study has raised some issues that warrant attention by those responsible for personnel selections. Some actions that could be put into practice immediately by the school division are:

1. Work more closely with colleges/universities which offer principal preparation programs. The school division, after a needs assessment, could work with institutions of higher learning to design programs that specifically address the needs of principals, particularly addressing interviewing techniques and skills.
2. Find companies or individuals knowledgeable in school personnel and personnel selection, particularly with regard to effective interviewing. Allow these persons to train, monitor and evaluate principals' interview skills on a regular basis. Principals could attend workshops or simulations aimed at helping them to either learn or remain current in effective interviewing techniques. These trainers could also offer individualized help to

principals whenever needed. This training should not be limited to learning about changes that occur in the law, although knowing which questions are illegal is important so as to lessen the likelihood of legal action being taken against the school system because of a principal's inability to conduct a legal interview.

3. Include assistant principals in the training since some of them may one day become principals. In addition, since they will also interface with the teacher on a daily basis, these assistants should have a say in who is selected. And as already cited in the literature, panel interviews produce more consistency in results.

4. Encourage principals to tape their interviews, even as they take notes. Of course, this should be done with the interviewee's knowledge. Taping allows the interviewer to go back to review what was *actually* said as opposed to what the interviewer *thinks* was said. Taping also allows the interviewer to compare each interviewee on his/her own merits, not those of the person who interviewed before or after the interviewee. Have principals write a final summary of each interview, including the principal's impressions of the interviewee. This summary can then be used to compare candidate assessment with the job requirements as well as for use in the event the candidate alleges discrimination complaints.

5. Find ways for the school division to survey those teachers selected as well as those not selected to get their feedback on how their interviews were conducted.

6. Develop a division wide written policy on the way the school division wants its interviews to be conducted. This is not meant to remove the autonomy that principals have in conducting their interviews; instead, this suggestion is meant to provide some

consistency in what the system's principals are now doing. Perhaps interviews could be preceded with the interviewee's resume and/or a philosophy statement. Each interviewee could be asked to submit these materials to the interviewer prior to the building-level interview.

7. Make sample interview questions available (based on the job description) to principals to be used as a guide in helping them to develop their own interview questions.

8. Put into the school division budget the cost of training. If central office administrators do not want to pay the cost associated with selecting and maintaining poor teachers, then they must be willing to extend themselves financially to guarantee that they have provided the best training possible to assist principals with the selection process.

Implications for Further Research

Based on the previous recommendations for practice, the following implications for further study are suggested:

1. Track the teachers selected for hire by principals for at least five years. Review these teachers' observations/evaluations to determine how they have performed. Find measures to gauge these teachers' involvement in the operation of the school as well as their scores on "people person" assessment indicators.

2. Conduct a study of other levels (i.e., elementary and high) to determine the selection processes used by these principals. Use the results to make changes, if necessary, to the current processes. Then, use that information to conduct seminars for new principals or assistant principals or for any principals who wish to hone their interviewing skills.

3. Collect more data on the interviewees. No demographic information was collected on the interviewees, since this was not necessary for the scope of this study. If this study were to be replicated, it might be helpful to note if questions or interview practices differed based on who was being interviewed. In this study, comparisons in questions were made without regard to the demographics of the interviewee (e.g., race, gender, experience), but rather in the fact that the interviewee was simply another person being interviewed.

4. Investigate research which looks at biases (e.g., mood of the interviewer, halo effect, confirmatory questioning, etc.) when selections are made. Specifically, research could focus on the differences in the results of interviews conducted by men and women.

5. Investigate the kinds of questions that result when principals have engaged in prestructuring their interviews. Prestructuring might mean the principal received from the interviewee a resume or any other written material (i.e., philosophy statement, lesson plans, etc.) that could be used to formulate interview questions before the actual interview.

Researcher's Note

This extensive study investigated fully the interview questions and some practices used by the interviewers included in this study. Through a careful, documented analysis, the result is that all principals included in this study could benefit from a formalized program of interviewer training. School divisions should periodically conduct a procedures analysis to determine if their current practices are in line with current research; otherwise, the selection of teachers may rest with little more than the “gut feelings” of the interviewer.