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ABSTRACT

Little research has been done to discover the process of selection of teachers by principals. This paper reports the results of a small study in which 29 principals in 11 districts in Tennessee were interviewed to determine the process used to hire a teacher, with the results analyzed for instructional leadership and rational decision making. If the results of this study are representative of most principals, the process leaves much to be desired. Most of the study's principals admitted to making the decision to hire a teacher in the first few minutes of an interview, evidently based on the candidate's resemblance to a mental picture of how a successful teacher should appear. Gut instinct was a phrase often mentioned. A major concern for the principals was whether the new hire would fit in with the current staff. Minimally, this might imply keeping things as they are, rather than perceiving a newly hired teacher as a chance to move in new directions. If a candidate has much to offer but does not project the appearance, personality, or mannerisms of other staff members or of a stereotypical teacher template, a chance for positive change may be lost. (Contains 38 references.) (RKJ)

Blind Man's Bluff: Instructional Leadership, Teacher Selection and Rational Decision-making

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Of the many concepts of leadership afloat in the literature, few are as ubiquitous as instructional leadership (Leithwood and Duke, 1998). The idea of the building level principal as an instructional leader has assumed the imprimatur of a "given." Although hardly their only role (Greenfield, 1985), few would dispute the proposition that principals *ought to be* instructional leaders. Indeed, instructional leadership has been inextricably linked to school effectiveness (cf: Duke, 1987; Greenfield, 1987; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Persell & Cookson, 1982; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Defined most broadly as "those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning" (DeBevoise, 1984, 15), there is considerable agreement about the behavioral correlates of instructional leadership (Sheppard, 1996), and their fit within Hallinger & Murphy's conceptual categorization of the functional dimensions of instructional leadership: defining the mission, managing the instructional program and promoting the school climate (1985, 221). In comparing lists of behavioral correlates, while almost every researcher has identified instructional supervision, only three (Dwyer, 1986; Duke, 1987; Bartell, 1990) have identified staffing, a clear antecedent to instructional supervision, as an instructional leadership behavior.

That staffing, particularly teacher selection, is a critical instructional leadership behavior is a reasoned proposition, notwithstanding its scarce identification. Duke (1987) argues:

Since public school leaders generally have little control over the students they serve, how they recruit, select, and assign teachers may be one of their most crucial resource-management functions. However well conceived or implemented, no system of teacher development, supervision, or evaluation is likely to compensate fully for poor judgment in the hiring and placement of teachers (205-6).

Jensen (1989) echoes and extends Duke's argument. "Recruiting and selecting teachers may be the most critical task school administrators face. Each time a teacher is hired, the local school and its district have an opportunity to improve instructional programs" (225). And Donaldson (1990) ties teacher selection even more directly to the principal's instructional leadership behavior:

...the best opportunity a principal has to improve teaching and learning in a school is when a teacher is hired. Compared to the long, often arduous task of weeding out through evaluation or improving through supervision, hiring the best possible teacher for the position is a rare and precious opportunity (1)

The practical realities of this instructional role are starkly, perhaps startlingly, illustrated in Mullen and Patrick's (2000) case study of a principal who significantly changed an at-

risk urban school. They reported that the principal “precipitated” staff changes so she could put in teachers who shared her vision, values and approaches to teaching and discipline. This would seem to coincide with the very essence of instructional leadership.

It is not just the literature on instructional leadership that has tended to overlook teacher selection; the process itself has been the focus of surprisingly little research. “Compared with other areas of educational research, studies of hiring practices are few, validation of procedures is minimal ...(and) advice is scarce” (Jensen, 1989, 229-230). Ellis (1987) concluded that “While administrators generally agree that hiring teachers is one of their most important functions, they do not typically devote a significant amount of time, energy, and funds to recruit and select the most capable candidates (6).” And Jensen (1989) reasoned that “most administrators lack training in systems that would increase their chances of choosing the best candidate...(and) fail to gather enough information about candidates (229-230).

Common sense would suggest that the goal of the hiring process is to select the best person for the job from among the pool of applicants available, the person who “best fit(s) the needs” of the school (Duke, 1987, 206) and “will succeed on the job” (Rebore, 1982, 102). However, what is known about teacher selection by principals raises questions about whether and/or to what extent principals choose applicants who fit the needs of the school or who will succeed on the job, about what principals see as fitting the needs of the school and necessary for success in the job, about the process(es) they use in selecting teachers and what is possible to know about applicants as a result of using those processes (Johanson & Gips, 1992; Jensen, 1989; Ellis, 1987; Browne & Rankin, 1986; Perry, 1981; Weaver, 1979).

The paucity of empirical data about how principals select teachers to serve their schools makes it difficult to assess any claims made about the process. Little is known about what they do, why, with what results, at least from their perspective. How do they go about the process? Why do they do the things they do? How do they think about the vacancy to be filled, or do they? What information do they seek and use in making their hiring decisions, and how do they get it? How do they make the decision? How satisfied are they that the process they use allows them to make a “good” decision? And from the perspective of the field, what is the relationship between the decision-making process they use and instructional leadership?

Learning more about how principals select teachers would provide valuable information and insight into critical processes not currently available. Further, such information might help inform principals about what they are doing with what effect; at the very least, provide them with “food for thought.” In addition, learning more about the teacher selection would allow for informed discussion about the relationship between the process

used and instructional leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to describe how principals go about the process of choosing teachers *from their perspective*, and to consider the process used in relation to instructional leadership and decision-making.

The research questions guiding the study were:

1. How do principals report they go about the process of selecting teachers for their schools?
2. What is the relationship between how the principals selected teachers for their schools and instructional leadership and decision-making?

Conceptual Framework

The dual concepts of instructional leadership and decision-making provided the conceptual framework for the study. As identified earlier in the paper, instructional leadership revolves around the three foci of articulating and communicating an educational vision, managing the instructional program, with all of the attendant actions and activities, and establishing and maintaining a school climate that facilitates learning and the achievement of the vision. It was also argued that teacher selection is a critical, aspect of instructional leadership; that it not only underlies, but relates directly to the management of the instructional program. Choosing teachers to direct and deliver the instructional program is a fundamental task. What it is principals do in the name of this task speaks volumes about what is important to them, about how they view their role as instructional leaders, and/or perhaps, about what they know about instructional leadership

The difference between more effective and less effective school leaders may boil down to two factors: More effective leaders (1) possess—and are able to articulate—a vision of effective schooling, and (2) allocate their time in ways that increase the likelihood of realizing that vision (Duke, 1987, 3).

What would we expect to find if principals are exercising instructional leadership in the teacher selection process? While these expectations are inextricably linked to the decision-making process, we would expect to find the principals articulating their vision of and for the school and seeking information from the candidate that would allow them to determine if the candidate fit with that vision. Further, we would expect to find that principals sought ways to assess the candidates' knowledge and competencies in relation

to that vision, and to the particular needs of the school and the position.

While a number of models of decision-making are articulated in the literature (cf: Sergiovanni, 1980; Hallinger, Leithwood & Murphy, 1993), a so-called “rational model” has long been identified with and recommended in educational administration. Administrators are told they *ought* to use a rational model of decision-making (cf: Griffiths, 1959; Knezevitch, 1975; Gorton, 1987; Barge, 1994; Yukl, 1994; Hoy & Tarter, 1995; Green, 2001), and textbooks used in the field “teach” a rational model of decision-making. In a textbook widely used in administrator preparation, Ubben, Hughes & Norris (2001) contend that “a rational problem solving/decision-making (process serves) whether the problem is complex...or relatively simple.. (since).the intellectual process is the same (48). Indeed, they extol a rational decision-making model and link it to effectiveness.

Even if nonrational behavior, or even apparently irrational behavior, can be explained by the garbage-can model, better ways are at the disposal of the principal who wants the school to be a high-performing organization...The school did not become what it is overnight and it won't become better overnight and it won't become better *ever* unless problems are correctly identified, issues defined, and solutions generated that focus on what it is that is getting in the way. Rational processes are required (65).

A rational decision-making process in relation to teacher selection would seem to involve a careful job analysis and the determination of selection criteria before proceeding to recruit and consider applicants; the collection of sufficient, pertinent information about candidates from multiple sources, including from interviews guided by a standardized, structured interview protocol used with all candidates for a particular position; the weighing and ranking of candidates against the pre-determined criteria; and the choosing of the best candidate, the one that best matches the job and fits the criteria; more or less in that order (Donaldson, 1990).

In framing the study and analyzing the data, questions about the nature of the process, how principals thought about the process and what they did in the name of the process were *figural*. Instructional leadership and the rational decision-making model were seen and used as *ground*, to see whether and to what extent they were a part of the process.

Methods

Given the purpose of the study, principals were chosen to be interviewed about what they did in selecting teachers. In this way, the “truest” (versus socially acceptable)

perspectives of principals were sought. While interviewing does not ensure that interviewees will respond honestly, it does allow for trying to establish a context and conditions in which respondents might feel reasonably comfortable and be more likely to be honest.

A convenience sample of 29 principals constituted the population for the study. The principals represented 11 different school districts and 29 different schools. By design, the sample was fairly evenly distributed among levels of schooling: 11 elementary, 7 middle and 11 high school level principals. The principals included 18 males and 11 females. They had served an average of 12.7 years as administrators (range: 1-35 years), and taught an average of 10.9 years (range:3-25 years) before becoming administrators.

Interviews were held with principals in their schools, using a standardized protocol developed for the study. The interviews yielded “rich” descriptions and explanations of the teacher selection process grounded in the experience and perspectives of the principals interviewed, “sexy data” in the words of Miles and Huberman (1994,1). The researchers took seriously Harre and Secord’s directive that “the things people say about themselves and other people should be taken seriously as reports of data relevant to phenomena that really exist and which are relevant to the explanation of behavior” (1972, 7).

The data were transcribed and analyzed first in terms of the protocol questions and then in terms of decision-making and instructional leadership, the conceptual frames. At each step in the conceptual analysis, the data were read and reread to identify the emergent “repetitive refrains, the persistent themes” (Lightfoot,1983,15) in the data.

How Principals Report they Select Teachers

As might be expected, the procedures and approaches used by the principals in selecting teachers were remarkably similar, allowing for differences in detail and school system. Interviews were an omnipresent feature of the process and principals expressed great confidence in the interview process as a way of getting the information needed to make a good decision. Despite what is generally known about the relatively low reliability and validity of interviews (Arvey & Campion, 1982), 24 principals found them to be an excellent way to get information about the candidate, and four more found them to be “mostly excellent” “You generally get a pretty good idea of the person. But sometimes you can be fooled. Only one principal expressed uncertainty about their value for getting the information needed. Interestingly enough, one of the “mostly excellent” respondents issued a standard disclaimer before affirming the value of the interview, “I don’t know if you ever feel you have all the information you would like to be 100% sure.” However, that would seem to be more about the respondent than the process. While the nature of

their responses suggested that principals had great confidence in the process itself, it is possible that it was a response to what else was available to them to use to get information. "The interview is...the most single important part of the process. It tells me much more than their resume or application ever could."

In terms of the information principals had about the candidates before meeting them, (either received from central office or required of the candidate), a little less than half (14) received the application form with standard information about education, experience, and educational philosophy (5), or a resume (4), or both (5). However, a little more than half (15) had *no* information about the candidate prior to the interview. Only one principal asked candidates to bring something additional to the interview, "something that reflects your work." All of the school systems pre-screened applicants in the sense that application forms were filed with the central office which then directed applicants (from one to three at a time, depending on the number available) to the principals, usually from a list (within system teachers requesting a transfer first; outside of district applicants next). Only two systems used a pre-screening process which involved more than paper arranging. In one case the results were available to the principals; in the other, which used a highly formal research-based telephone interview, the results were not available to the principals.

Interviews were reported to have lasted from 15 minutes to an hour and a half, with 30 minutes being the average and most frequently reported response. While the principal was a constant, and was the "decider" in all but three cases, the majority of interviews involved someone besides the principal, if available. Only four principals reported being the sole person involved in the interviewing. The principal and an assistant principal were often joined by a department head (high school), team leader (elementary and middle school, if such existed), or a teacher. Interestingly enough, the teacher that was leaving was cited as a participant in a couple of cases. All of the principals save the three noted above, said that they listened to the "other people's views about the candidate," and then made the decision. In those three cases, the principal said the decision was made by consensus, although one admitted he tried to sway the group if he thought they were making a mistake.

With respect to the use of teams to conduct interviews, an important caveat was frequently raised — availability. Many of the principals found themselves interviewing candidates during the summer or right before school opened, when others were not available. Further, they cited school district practices which often necessitated interviewing multiple people in a short time frame. Many of the districts do not require teachers who are leaving to officially notify central office until the end of April. Since schools close in early June in this part of the country, it may be the end of May and into June, a very busy time in schools, before candidates are "dispersed" to schools. Often,

principals do not get around to interviewing for staffing until teachers are “off-contract.” Principals were hesitant to call teachers back to be involved in interviews, even though the choice would affect them.

All but nine of the principals reported having specific questions they asked of the candidates. One of the nine reported, “I do a lot of interviewing by my gut, allowing my interactions and feelings about the person to dictate where I go.” Among those who used specific questions, the majority (18) used the same questions with all candidates, and a minority (2) chose questions from amongst a list that they had. One principal among the majority, revealed that since she was a first year principal, she had called three other principals with more experience and asked them what they asked of candidates. She then compiled a list for herself of the questions that were common to their lists. What was perhaps most interesting in the principals responses was that they reported asking the same questions of all teaching candidates, irrespective of the position to be filled. That is not to say that they did not refer to the specific teaching position. Indeed, the interview was all about filling a particular position. Yet beyond a cursory inclusion of a reference to the specific subject to be taught for secondary teachers, and questions framed in terms of “students of the age” served by the school or the “kind of students we have” in this school, it was not clear that the questions related to a specific position in a particular school.

While the particular questions asked by principals differed, the questions were, overall, fairly similar. Among the questions most often asked were some version of: Tell us about your teaching experience? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Why did you choose education? Why do you want to work in this school? What is your best instructional strategy? What is your philosophy of discipline/ your approach to classroom management (sometimes asked in terms of what would you do with irate parents, students, teachers)? Are you a team player (sometimes asked in terms of would you rather work alone or with a group)? Somewhat less frequently asked was some version of: What is your philosophy of education? How would you teach (a certain activity or lesson)? “What methods would you use to create enthusiasm and motivate students?” What kind of extracurricular activities have you been involved in (might you like to be involved in)? What contribution will you make to this school (“How hard are you willing to work for the staff in this school,” one principal asks)? What is the latest class, conference or workshop you attended? In terms of questions that differed from this list and close variations: one principal asked about computer skills. Another, at the end of the interview, asked, “Why should I entrust my children to you?” Only one principal asked about the candidates grades and said he was looking for candidates with high GPA’s.

It is interesting to consider these questions in light of the principals’ confidence in the interview process for providing the information they need to choose a good teacher. The

questions tend to be general, familiar (the kinds of questions that have been asked for years, therefore are known to candidates), and highly susceptible to socially acceptable answers. And depending on how they are asked, interviewers are notorious for signaling the answers they seek. Further, the questions are not merely removed from the reality of doing, an unfortunate concomitant of asking about something rather than seeing it, but would appear to be at some remove from the specifics of a particular position in a particular school. Is the position the same across grade levels and subject matters, with modest variation? Does the school and the particular position play little role in what one seeks to learn about a candidate?

Probing what the principals sought to learn about the candidates from the specific questions asked, a wide range of responses was elicited. Examples from different principals provide a sense of their responses: "classroom management skills," "their philosophy concerning discipline," "discipline and classroom management;" "honesty and sincerity," "a sense of the total person, their values and ethics;" their "flexibility," "ability to think on their feet," "enthusiasm and thoughtfulness," whether they were "passionate about teaching," "a kid magnet," "their temperament," "the personality and presence that allows them to take charge;" "ability to get along with the staff," "a team player," "motivated, self-directed go getters who have similar interests, perspectives and ideas so that they fit in," "I want to know if they have a philosophy of education similar to mine." The two most prominent themes to emerge from the responses, in terms of frequency of mention, were "fitting in" and handling classroom management. Principals appeared to be most concerned with whether the person would fit in with the school *as it was*, and with the staff *as it was*, and wanted to feel comfortable that the candidate could "handle the classroom" if s/he got the job.

If none of the candidates were satisfactory, the principals said they would "ask personnel if there were any other candidates," and at least two said they would beat the bushes to try to find someone else. However, in the end, the vast majority echoed the sentiment of one principal, "While it should never be a question of just a warm body in the classroom, every classroom must have some body in it as a teacher."

The confidence principals had in the interview process led to asking them how soon in the process they knew whether or not the person was right for the job. Sixteen of the principals said "immediately" or almost immediately, and another eleven said some variation of "quickly, well before the interview was over," although three of them said they tempered their decision by doing some checking (references) of the candidate they favored. One principal said, "First impressions mean a great deal. I usually know within 30 seconds, right, wrong or indifferent. "A clean presentable person who speaks up and is polite makes a good impression." Another, "I have a feeling rather early in the

interview for whether I like the person or not, ...(although) it's much quicker if you don't like them." Only three principals said that they stood back from the process, looked at everything they had and thought about the candidates, sometimes waiting a day or two before deciding. However, one of them said, "Sometimes I want to stand up and jump up and down when I know that this is the right fit. More often, I take a step back and think about two or three candidates."

The speed with which the principals "knew" the right person for the job was interesting, particularly when viewed from the perspective of how they said they made the decision. Overwhelmingly, even among those who said they took a little time to think about the candidates, the principals directly or indirectly said they made the decision on "gut feeling." "I can tell whether a candidate is what we are looking for or not. It is generally a gut feeling." "By the time the applicant answers my first two questions I have already made my decision about whether I want them or not." "If they can't express themselves or they are not enthusiastic, I know immediately that I will not hire them." "I would say it is a lot of intuition. You know when you have the right person." The idea of using one's gut feeling to make the decision was sanctioned from principal to principal. As one principal reported, "I was told by an experience administrator that you would just know when you have the right person." Another echoed, "When I talked with other principals...they said, 'You will know when you have found the right one.' This was true in my first interview. I think this is an intuitive thing." Even where the decision was made by consensus of the group, gut feeling was the basis. "They discuss their gut feeling...if they were wowed by the candidate and if they (sic) fit with the philosophy of the school and can function effectively with a team."

There is nothing inherently wrong or irrational about gut feeling, and it will be argued below that it may well serve the goals the principal has for and in selecting teachers, however it is interesting that it is both recognized and glorified by the principals. Indeed, most saw it as a matter of great pride that they knew what they were looking for and could recognize it quickly. "I am not looking for the highest GPA. I am looking for someone with common sense that can get down on the proper level to teach students," said one principal, and was pleased at his ability to sense that quickly. Another, "I like it when they arrive on time, dressed for the interview, and speak clearly and concisely. I rate their likeability. (sic)" And yet another, "I'm looking more for how they handle the interview than what they actually say...I guess you could say it's a gut feeling."

In terms of making the selection decision, "fit" was the overwhelming theme to emerge from the data, and in combination with "gut feeling," constituted the *what* and *how* of the process. In one way or another, almost every principal spoke about "fit" as the primary criterion for selection. When probed about what they meant by fit, the principals often reverted back to "knowing when you found it," i.e., gut feeling, rather than some clear

behavioral description of what constituted fit. In grappling with the question of what fit meant, they suggested that they knew what they wanted--- and what they were looking for—and that the process focused on finding that match between candidate and what they were looking for. One principal spoke about interviewing a candidate who had been a substitute teacher in his school. He said his gut instinct told him she would not be a good choice for the position despite the fact that “she is well-liked, and she does a good job as a substitute.” However, he concluded, “she just did not feel right for the classroom position.”

While fit appeared to relate to fit *with* the existing staff and *in* the school, (“I consider the fit into the situation. I have to consider not only their professional ability but the people with whom they will be working. Can they work well together?”), fit was ultimately a decision made by the principal resting on her/his notions of what fit meant (“I determine if the applicant has a personality or presence about them that will enable them to go into a classroom and take charge.”). The principals seemed to have a mental model of what they were looking for, of what a good “fit” was that allowed them to know when they had the right person, allowed their “gut” to tell them. And they appeared to measure applicants against this mental picture.

After I have asked the first two questions (about involvement in school and personal history) I’ve already made my decision about whether I want them or not. And if I like the candidate and they don’t have all of the qualifications...I would make an exception and ‘bend the rules,’ if possible.

The mental model that guided the principals in determining fit was not entirely clear. However, it appeared to owe more to personal values and beliefs than educational philosophy, vision or what research suggests about best practice for teaching and learning; to maintaining what is and how it is than achieving some vision of what might be. “After years of experience I’ve become quite good at identifying educators that will make effective middle school teachers. In the interview, I must get the feeling that the person is a middle school person.” Fit appeared to relate directly to the principals’ notions of how it is and how I want my people to be, what *they* wanted, and it was not apparent that it had any clear relation to examined need, a particular position or student learning. “I have to hire the teacher who best fits the position, our faculty, and our school,” said one principal. However, when pressed about what was most important, fit with the faculty and school or fit with him, he replied unabashedly, “me.” Indeed, from the questions asked, student learning and the candidate’s potential to engender it, while not unimportant, were only modestly considered, if at all. Even where questions about teaching technique were asked, what the principals were looking for (why they asked the question, what they sought to learn) had more to do with assessing whether the candidate

shared their beliefs and values. And what the candidate said seemed to be less important than how they handled themselves. One principal shared, "First impressions mean a great deal. A clean, presentable person who speaks up and is polite makes a good impression...visual and body language can make a deep impression...I usually know who I am going to hire in 30 seconds." Another,

The two main things I am looking for is (sic) courtesy and professionalism. If they interrupt me while I'm asking a question, that really has a negative impact. Likewise, if they run down or insult students, administrators or other people they've worked with...that demonstrates lack of professionalism that I just don't want on my staff. I also study their mannerisms because sometimes it's what they don't say that catches my attention.

In all of the discussions of fit, only one principal spoke about fit in terms of some vision for the school and where the principal wanted the school to go. She said she shared her vision for the school with the candidate and tried to "find people that share that vision. The majority of principals appeared to seek candidates who fit in, as they defined it, and part of the implicit model of fitting in seemed to be related to maintaining what is and the way things are. There seemed to be little desire to choose people who might change things or do things differently. "If it ain't broke, don't fix in," appeared to characterize the principals' approach to teacher selection, and they did not perceive anything was broken.

Instructional Leadership, Decision-making and Teacher Selection

One of the purposes of the study was to look at the relationship between teacher selection on the one hand and instructional leadership and rational decision-making on the other. Among the questions considered were: Do principals use a rational decision-making model in the teacher selection process? How is the decision-making process that they use related to instructional leadership? Did the principals studied demonstrate an understanding and commitment to instructional leadership in the teacher selection process?

One of the proposal reviewers asked if making an irrational decision (which the reviewer appeared to equate with making the decision by gut feeling) was the same as making a bad decision. That is a good question, to which the best answer may be, not necessarily. In fact, depending on what the goal of hiring is, it may well be a good decision. Certainly, the principals interviewed felt they had, on the whole, made good decisions. They believed they got the information they needed to make the decision from the interview,

and seemed inordinately pleased with their ability to discern the decision on the basis of “gut feeling.” It appeared that the process the principals used served their purposes quite well, justifying their pride in gut feeling. The question may be, however, what are their purposes? They appeared to choose prospective teachers who fit a preconception of what they were looking for, a conception that may have less to do with a particular school, position or educational philosophy, and more to do with a mental model of what a good teacher should be like. In choosing a candidate that appears to fit this conception, the principal is making a good decision, at least from her/his perspective. Is it the best candidate for the job or the school? Who can say. The decision does not appear to relate to those grounds. Rather, it appears to rest on whether it is the best candidate for the principal.

One might still ask if the process used followed an irrational or rational decision-making model as defined and advocated in the literature. A rational decision-making model would seem to require that the principals have a clear and present vision of what they want their school to be or to become, establishing the needs of and in the job (in light of that vision and the needs of the school) before beginning the search, the crafting of questions designed to address the job analyzed, and the choosing of candidates based on how closely they match the predetermined criteria. In terms of the extent to which the processes used by the principals studied matched such a model, they did not, save in one instance. At least as reported, none of the others analyzed the needs of the school or the job, established or used questions specific to the job for which they were interviewing, or made judgements about candidates in terms of predetermined criteria. Indeed, one principal, speaking about the team approach they used, said “we developed rubrics after interviewing all of the candidates.”

One principal came as close to following this rational model as one could find in the data. She said that she “spent a lot of time thinking about and deciding beforehand what each grade level needs, where I want to take the school and the grade levels, and the type of person I would like to have in the space.” Then, while she did tend to ask questions similar to other principals, she indicated that she shared her vision with each candidate, something no other principal reported doing, and asked them whether they shared it. When it came to making a decision, she was one of the few persons who spoke about taking some time to think about the candidates, not rushing to make a decision, of checking other sources of information, and trying to choose someone who matched her vision.

This is not to say that other principals in the study did not follow a rational model of decision-making, just not one like that specified above, or that a rational model would have to follow the explicit pattern identified above. It may be that while not made explicit, the principals followed an internally rational process of decision-making. They

appeared to know what they wanted for their schools, whether the knowing was based on any careful analysis of whether what they wanted was directly related to educational goals as we know them or to the needs of the school as we might identify them, and that what they wanted to know could be discerned from asking basically the same questions to all candidates, almost irrespective of job opening. When looked at in those terms, the process looks rational.

Whatever form it takes, a rational approach to teacher selection process would seem to require awareness of what you are looking for and the deliberate selection and use of procedures designed to realize that awareness. It is not entirely clear whether or to what extent the principals in the study were aware of precisely what they were looking for, or that what they said they were looking for (espoused) was consonant with what they sought (expressed). Nevertheless, their overwhelming reliance on and confidence in the interview process and in their ability to learn what they needed from the interview process, gives one pause. The ways in which principals went about the process – the kinds of questions they asked, the relative ambiguity of the questions in relation to the position to be filled, the relative lack of information about the candidates accumulated, the length of the interview, the rapidity with which decisions were made, before the interview was even over, and in some cases, barely after it had begun --- raise questions about how rational and how effective the process was, irrespective of purpose.

In their review of research on interviewing, Arvey and Campion (1982) identified a number of factors that contributed to the relatively low reliability and validity of interviews. The process had been found to be highly susceptible to bias and distortion: the form the questions take significantly affects the answers given; interviewers tend to do the most talking; and interviewers "attitudes" profoundly affect the interpretation they give to the responses they get. Interestingly enough, albeit an aside, Arvey and Campion report that "interviews can validly and reliably assess intelligence...but not other traits (1982, 285)." However, that is not something most of the principals in the study appeared to be consciously interested in. Interviewers are known to rely heavily on first impressions, nonverbal behavior, and personal feelings (Arvey & Campion, 1982; Ellis, 1987), and to discount disconfirming evidence. "We seek out information that supports our existing instinct or point of view while avoiding information that contradicts it (Hammond, Keeney & Raiffa, 1998)." And perhaps most pointedly, interviewers have been found to like and evaluate more positively, those who are similar to them (Greenberg & Baron, 1993). Ellis (1987) concluded

The average interview is conducted by untrained personnel and stands little chance of being...an accurate measure of teacher competence. Typically, the interview is unstructured, lasts less than an hour, and is highly influenced by first impressions, appearance, nonverbal behavior, and

conversational skills. Such unstructured interviews allow the applicant to offer a fictionalized version of himself or herself, (and) to respond in socially desirable ways to cues in the interviewers questions or manner (6).

There is nothing to suggest that the interviews conducted by the principals differed in significant ways from those on which the research on interviewing has been based. Indeed, there is much to suggest that in the way they conducted interviews, the principals were as prone to fall into “the hidden traps” (Hammond, Keeney, Raiffa, 1998) as any other interviewers. This makes the principals’ overweening confidence in the process seem to be a conundrum. How can they be so satisfied with the process? How can they perceive that they get the information they need to make a sound decision from the interview process they use? One possible answer is, of course, self-delusion. They may believe they get what they want and need or credit themselves with greater abilities of discernment and judgement than are warranted. It is widely reported that interviewers perceive themselves to be more skillful at interviewing and better able to make sound judgments than they are perceived to be (Edinborough, 1996; Hammond, Keeney & Raiffa, 1998). Or, it may be that principals are able to discern what they are interested in knowing *because of* the process they use, with all of its biases and distortions. The data allow for this possibility. Research on interviewing suggests that “interviewers possess stereotypes of idealized successful applicants against which real applicants are judged (Arvey & Campion, 1982).” This is seen as one of the pitfalls of interviews. However, for the principals, this might allow them to select the applicant that “fits” with their mental model. The process might then be implicitly rational, but explicitly irrational, if viewed from the perspective of choosing the best person for the job rather than the best person for the principal.

What difference does it make, then, if the process is rational or irrational, explicitly or implicitly rational? For the principal, maybe nothing. For the schools, maybe a lot. The difference may rest in the ends sought, and in who and what is served. In making decisions, school leaders reveal their preferences for particular values, interests and beliefs (Barge, 1994). The way principals reported making the decisions about teacher selection appeared to owe more to social reproduction than instructional leadership. Social systems theory speaks to the interaction between the personality and needs’ dispositions of individuals and organizationally defined roles and expectations (Getzels & Guba, 1957; Getzels, Lipham & Campbell, 1968), and posits the tendency for organizational culture to prevail over time. The culture exerts a powerful influence on the individual to “influence the reconciliation of the teacher to the organization...The teacher engages his personality with the construed role that the school holds for him and the teacher role and teacher personality become realigned to facilitate...organizational homeostasis” (Wiggins, 1975, 355). The principal is a major figure in the socialization process (Mertz & McNeely, 2000), and it may well be that the teacher selection process

is the starting point for that socialization. It is conceivable that the process principals use, with all of its inherent limitations, perhaps because of its limitations, allows the principals to choose applicants who more closely fit the established organizational culture of their schools and its norms, or are more likely to be amenable to the socialization process that will mold them to that culture. And in serving this purpose, the process “produces an orientation toward keeping things as they are” (Cuban, 1988).

Keeping things as they are would seem to be antithetical to the goals of instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is about moving schools from where they are to where they *could be*, guided by a clear vision of what that could be is and how to get there. And instructional leadership is focused on “school processes that are directly linked to student learning” (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 37). There is little in the process used by the majority of principals studied that would suggest that they were aware of or used the teacher selection process as a means of exercising instructional leadership. With one exception, the process was not guided by a vision of what the principals wanted their schools to become. On the contrary, they appeared to want their schools to remain the same. The questions they asked were not borne of a vision of what might be, but of what was. And the questions they asked and used to make their decisions focused less on students and learning than on classroom management and fitting in. They gave relatively little forethought to the process and used basically the same questions for all teacher applicants. Duke (1987) has argued that “given the scarcity of talented teachers, school leaders concerned with instructional quality must devote considerably energy to recruit and select staff members...and great care should be taken in the selection process” (206). There is little to suggest that these principals followed his mandate. Indeed, the process they used leaves serious questions about whether or not the majority of principals saw themselves as, or even sought to be, instructional leaders. If it is true that “it is one’s disposition that influences leadership behavior (Green, 2001, 51),” the disposition of the principals studied was other than toward instructional leadership.

Concluding Thoughts

The study sought to learn something about how principals select teachers for their schools, and the relationship between that selection process and instructional leadership and decision-making. Given the modest number of subjects, the results of the study are clearly limited to the principals studied and can not reasonably be generalized to principals as a group without further research. In relation to the group of principals studied, if teacher selection is as important as Duke (1987), Jensen (1989), and Donaldson (1990) argue (as quoted at the beginning of the manuscript), the process the principals used leaves much to be desired in terms of instructional leadership. Metaphorically, it is a game not unlike Blind Man’s Bluff, with social reproduction

triumphing over instructional leadership and an internally rational decision-making process used to serve personal preference rather than the development of more effective schools.

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