

# TEACHER SELECTION: GETTING THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS\*

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## Abstract

This simulation is used in a class titled The Principalship, an introductory class in the graduate level principal preparation program. The simulation focuses on the importance and process of selecting high quality teachers. The educational leadership students will identify the skills and abilities that define high quality teachers, develop interview questions that will target the identified skills and abilities, develop a rubric to evaluate teacher candidates, plan the interview process and conduct simulated interviews with teacher education candidates. Practicing educational leaders from local public schools serve as observers of the process to ensure authenticity.



NOTE: This Instructional Module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content Commons, this module is published in the International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, <sup>1</sup> Volume 5, Number 2 (April - June, 2010). The Instructional Module is catalogued in the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC) Digital Library. Formatted and edited in Connexions by Theodore Creighton, Virginia Tech and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University.

NOTE: This simulation received the Innovative Teaching Award from the College of Education and Health Professions and the Outstanding Teaching Award from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for 2009 at the University of Arkansas. A major factor in the simulations selection was the collaboration between the teacher education program, educational leadership program, and the active involvement of educational leadership practitioners.

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## 1 Introduction

The selection of high quality teachers may be one of the most important decisions a school site administrator will make. According to Young (2008), the selection of staff, specifically teachers, affords a school district a great opportunity to improve the operation and reap benefits beyond the time of the initial hire. Getting "the right people on the bus" was identified by Collins (2001) as one of the most critical factors in turning a good organization into a great organization. Whether teaching positions come open due to retirement, transfer, de-selection, or personal choice, the ability to hire new teachers affords a site administrator the opportunity to improve instruction and reshape the culture of the school. Although many may find the interview process to have inherent weaknesses in selecting teachers, Polansky and Semmel (2006) believe that even a short ten minute screening interview will identify the best teachers. A structured, panel interview is preferable to an unstructured interview conducted by a single interviewer (Young, 2008). Webb and Norton (2009) stated, "The employment interview is a process of gathering of information about an applicant relative to the predetermined selection criteria" (p. 127). A clear understanding of the selection and interview process provides the educational leadership student with a clear perspective on the qualities and characteristics they desire in a new teacher. Familiarity with all elements and foundations of the selection process allows the educational leadership student to make decisions based upon pre-established selection criteria and an awareness of the type of school culture the new hire will help create. This module is designed to ensure that the candidate will be fully aware and immersed in the teacher selection process through a hands-on, practical experience.

## 2 Goal

To insure the educational leadership student has a clear understanding of all elements of the interview and teacher selection process and can organize, structure, and conduct an efficacious procedure to ensure the selection of high quality teachers.

## 3 Over-View of the Module

The module is currently utilized in a class entitled The Principalship, which is designed for entry level educational leadership students. The class is designed to acquaint the educational leadership students with the roles and responsibilities of the job of school site principal. The instructional methodologies utilized in the class include simulations, case studies, selected readings, field based activities, instructor led presentations, and guest speakers. This module is one of the simulations used in the class. It should also be noted that this module could easily be adapted to an on-line format through the use of the Elluminate Live software which allows all students to be on an interactive screen with the instructor. The software has the capacity to break the total class into small groups for discussion, with the instructor having the capacity to monitor or "wander" from group to group, observe, and listen into the interactive discussion. Even though this technology may not have the warmth of human interaction, the software has proven effective for interviews and could effectively be utilized in this module.

This simulation is broken into a four week preparatory series (classes ordinarily held once a week for three hours) followed by a mock interview process that simulates the actual procedures utilized by most school districts. A follow-up session is utilized to provide for reflection and assessment. Each preparatory activity takes approximately one hour or less of the three hour time block and culminates in an extended class of four hours of interview simulation during the fifth session. All activities could be addressed in one continuous work session, however, the activities are spread over time to allow the educational leadership students an opportunity to reflect, analyze, and then revisit their work products with a collaborative group. It is through reflection and the collaboration process that a more comprehensive and refined understanding is reached.

## 4 Activities

### 4.1 Week/Session 1

The educational leadership students are divided into groups of 4 students which will serve as the on-going work group and ultimately the interview team. The work groups are asked to brainstorm the personal qualities and teaching skills that are possessed by outstanding teachers. Following completion of this work group brainstorming activity, the work groups come together as a total class to share the personal qualities and teaching skills with the entire class. Upon completion of this sharing activity the class is sent back into their work groups to add any new items that were brought up by the class. The work groups are then directed to determine categories of personal qualities and teaching skills. These groupings may be categories such as; personal qualities, professional preparation, knowledge of the teaching process, classroom management, student relations, or any other category defined by the group. The educational leadership students then reflect on this list until the next class session. They are also instructed to give each other their e-mail addresses and share their reflections and thoughts with their work group members prior to the next class.

Instructor Responsibility: To prepare for the simulation activity in Week/Session 5, the instructor meets with teacher education students who are involved in the student teaching process at the university. The teacher education students are told that they will have an opportunity to interview in a "real life" simulation with the educational leadership students. The teacher education students are told that interviewing is a skill and that participating will improve their skill set for an actual job interview. Volunteering teacher education students will provide the instructor with their e-mail address and are directed to e-mail their resume to the instructor. It should be noted that prior to volunteering the teacher education students must make a complete and total commitment to be present at the interviews in Week/Session 5. During the first application of this module several teacher education students did not show up. During subsequent meetings the student teacher supervisor's emphasized commitment and the issue was resolved.

The non-participating teacher education students in the teacher education program are invited to attend the interviews and sit in the back of the room to observe the interview process.

The instructor will also contact practitioners who are invited to observe the interview process and provide feedback to all the participants. Selected principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents are invited to observe. One practitioner is assigned to each room to observe and provide feedback to the interview team made up of educational leadership students and the teacher education students who are being interviewed.

### 4.2 Week/Session 2

The educational leadership students meet in a total class configuration and each work group shares the categories they developed and presents a short rationale for the identification of the categories. The class then breaks into the work groups to review their categories and make any modifications felt needed based upon the input of the total class. The work groups are then directed to take the personal qualities and the teaching skills they identified and place them under the categories that they have agree on. Under each category the educational leadership students will look for commonalities and consolidate those elements that are similar to reduce the total list. When the personal qualities and skills have been consolidated the educational leadership students will then prioritized the qualities and skills to identify the three that are most important in each area. The educational leadership students are now given the task of reflecting on these high valued elements in each category until the next class session. The reflection will focus on the question, "What interview questions could I develop that would provide me with the needed information to judge a teacher candidate on each category?"

### 4.3 Week/Session 3

The educational leadership students will meet in their work groups to develop interview questions that will address the categories and characteristics they identified. The group will be charged with developing no less

than 12 and no more than 15 interview questions. Once this task is completed, the educational leadership students will share their questions with the total class. The instructor will assess the appropriateness of the questions, ask for clarification, and guide the students in refining the quality of the questions. This also allows the instructor to discuss the legality of the interview questions. The educational leadership students then return to their work groups to determine if they want to modify or change their questions. The educational leadership students will then be instructed to develop a rubric that they will use to score and evaluate the teacher candidate as they ask their interview questions. The educational leadership students are also directed to determine how they want to weight each question based on their priorities. For example, an opening question that familiarizes the interview team with a teacher candidate's background may not be seen as important as a question that addresses instructional methodology or classroom management. The rubric will be designed to provide a total score for each teacher candidate interviewed.

#### 4.4 Week/Session 4

The group will share their rubric with the total class group and then move into their work groups. The work groups will then review their rubric and make any adjustments needed based upon ideas presented by the other work groups. The work groups will then be given a room assignment which in Week/Session 5 will serve as the location in which they will conduct teacher candidate interviews with the teacher education students. The work groups will determine how the room will be arranged and clearly define all logistical issues which include, but are not limited to: who will escort the teacher candidate into the room; how will they greet the teacher candidate as they enter the room; how will they introduce themselves; how will the questions be asked and by whom; will they have water for the teacher candidate; and who will escort the candidate out of the room after the interview is concluded? Finishing touches are also made to the interview questions and the evaluation rubric.

Instructor Responsibility: The instructor will assign teacher education students and a practitioner to each interview work group. A schedule of interviews will be made. Experience has revealed that student teachers take far less time than experienced teachers to answer interview questions. Therefore, only 30 minutes is scheduled for each teacher education student interview with between 12-15 questions. The instructor will also make interview packets with the student teacher resumes which are given to the interview teams/work groups.

#### 4.5 Week/Session 5

Each work group will arrive thirty minutes prior to the first interview to set up the room and review their procedures. Practitioners will arrive and be assigned to each room with the charge to observe and take notes to provide feedback to the work groups and the teacher education students after the conclusion of the interviews. The practitioners will sit behind the teacher education student during the interviews to minimize distractions and reduce the teacher education student's anxiety. There will also be chairs in the back of the room for other teacher education students who are not being interviewed to observe the process. The chairs will be arranged so the teacher education student being interviewed will have their back to the observers, again, to reduce distractions.

Following the interviews the work groups will meet privately with the practitioner present to assess the teacher education students. This assessment process will be private and confidential. The work groups will then provide a 5 minute debriefing with each teacher education student and identify at least three things they felt were well done during the interview and one thing they felt the teacher education student could do to improve their interview skills. Subsequent follow-up evaluations from the teacher education students found that this debriefing was the most valued and appreciated aspect of the activity.

The entire group including the teacher education students (both observers and interviewees), Educational leadership students, and the practitioners will meet with the instructor in a large room. The practitioners will then provide feedback on what they observed during the interviews. The feedback will include what the work groups/interview teams did well and what could have been done differently as well as their assessment as

to how well the activity approximated a real interview. A rubric to assist the practitioners in evaluating the interview process was developed and is attached to the end of this module. The practitioners will then form a panel to give feedback on things they observed from the teacher education students during the interviews. The educational leadership students and the teacher education students will then be able to ask in-depth questions.

NOTE: This activity will extend beyond a normal evening class time block. In the three years this activity has been utilized, no one has wanted to leave early or voiced a concern about the time.

#### **4.6 Week/Session 6**

The educational leadership students will meet as a total class to discuss what they learned during the interviews and subsequent debriefing. The educational leadership students will have reflected on the process during the time since the interviews were concluded and will have numerous observations. Past comments from the educational leadership students have focused on observations about: the wording, clarity and type of questions asked; questions they wished they would have asked; how they would reorganize the room or conducted the interview; and how brief the answers were from the teacher education students.

#### **Interview Scoring Rubric for Professor and Practitioner Evaluation of Educational**

### Leadership Candidate Interview Process

Category		1	3	5
Interview Setting		The candidates arranged the room in a manner that was not supportive of good communication.	The candidates had the room organized in a manner and conducive to good communication.	The candidates organized the room in a manner that was supportive and stimulated effective two way communication.
Greeting and Initiating the Interview		The candidates initiated the interview by having the student enter the room.	The candidates initiated the initiative by having a candidate escort the interviewee into the room and introducing the interviewee to the candidates on the interview team.	The candidates initiated the initiative by having a candidate escort the interviewee into the room and introducing the interviewee to the candidates on the interview team and there was a warmth to the introductions that made the interviewee appear relaxed.
Question Content		The questions were appropriate to the content area and grade level of the job opening, however, the interviewee had to ask for clarification.	The questions were appropriate to the content area and grade level of the job opening.	The questions were very clear, understandable, and had a very direct focus on the subject content or grade level of the job opening.
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Questioning Techniques		The candidates asked the questions in a very mechanical manner with little emotion.	The candidates asked the questions with a level of professionalism which allowed for warmth and humor.	The candidates asked questions with a level of professionalism which allowed for warmth and humor and regularly followed-up with clarifying questions to elicit and increased understanding of the Interviewee's knowledge and abilities.
Closure		The candidates brought closure to the interview in an abrupt manner.	The candidates transitioned from interviewing and allowed the interviewee to ask questions of the interview team to gain clarification about the position.	The candidates transitioned from interviewing and allowed the interviewee to ask questions of the interview team to gain clarification about the position and concluded the interview with information about the timeline and details about how the selection would be made.
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Overall Tone of the Interview		The interview was conducted in a highly professional, but unemotional, manner with little affect evident.	The interview was conducted in a highly professional manner with good human interaction between the candidates and the interviewee.	The interview was conducted in a highly professional manner with good human interaction between the candidates and the interviewee and there was an intangible connection, or warmth, between the candidates and the interviewee that made the interviewee leave feeling they would definitely want to work at the school.
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Table 1

Point Total \_\_\_\_\_

Observer/Professor/Practitioner Comments:

## 5 References

Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

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Young, I.P. (2008). *The resource function in educational administration*. Columbus, Ohio: Pearson.